

**MANAGING SERVICE QUALITY: A STUDY  
IN THE UK ROADSIDE LODGE SECTOR**

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## **Abstract**

Service quality is increasingly becoming an important issue for organisations to consider when attempting to satisfy customers and remain competitive in the marketplace. Delivering consistent service quality though appears to present difficulties for many organisations, but this can largely be attributed to the poor understanding of services and the poor understanding of the service quality concept.

This thesis has illustrated how services and service quality can be better understood by its review of the literature and by discussing alternative perspectives. Service quality is considered to be a subjective, multi-faceted concept which exists in the mind of each and every individual in a unique way, but which may be partly controlled by understanding customers' separate expectations and their separate perceptions of the service as they pass through the service delivery system.

The control and improvement of this service process is considered to be highly dependent upon the organisation's ability to keep customers' expectations within achievable parameters, and upon the service employees' ability to control the customers' perceptions as they pass through the service delivery system. Both the organisation's managers and employees though need to have a good understanding of customers' expectations and perceptions to ensure the consistent delivery of service quality.

Several well established research techniques were used to collect empirical data to achieve the research aim in showing how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience. This study illustrated how perceptual gap analysis, service blueprinting, and the soft systems methodology can be combined to explore both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience. This resulted in the development of a new research technique which has been called 'perceptual blueprinting'.

The study was carried out with the collaboration of one organisation in the UK roadside lodge sector where the consistent delivery of service quality is particularly crucial to its continued success. The results from the study have raised some important methodological and substantive issues surrounding the identification and control of service quality in both the roadside lodge sector and service industries in general, and subsequently should provide some value to both academics and practitioners alike.

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## **Introduction**

### **Importance of Service Quality**

## **A) Background to the research study**

This study was funded by the National Advisory Board to look into the services provided by the low-cost hotel and catering sectors of the UK hospitality industry. The low-cost sectors have been experiencing particularly fast growth rates due to the increasing demand for value-for-money and utilitarian products and services. These sectors are able to keep their prices and tariffs low by operating within certain parameters, such as by offering few (but carefully designed) services and facilities, by employing few members of staff, and by operating within tight financial controls. Due to the adherence of these parameters, the low-cost sectors tend to operate in sharp contrast to much of the traditional hotel and catering industry which has often been associated with extensive and luxury services and facilities, high staff/customer ratios, greater financial margins, and higher costs. The management and operating requirements of low-cost hotel and catering organisations therefore tend to require a different understanding and philosophy from that used in the higher-cost, traditional sectors.

Although the services offered by the low-cost sectors are fewer and less luxurious than those offered by the high-cost sectors, the standard of these services must still reach a certain level to ensure customer satisfaction. The customer of a low-cost service does not necessarily expect luxury, but the customer will have a minimum standard which must be met (or exceeded). Furthermore this standard is not fixed but will be relative to the customer's understanding of similar services and prices in the marketplace. To operate successfully and compete effectively in the marketplace, low-cost organisations have to remain attractive to the consumer by providing services to acceptable standards of quality, whilst at the same time keeping their costs and tariffs low. The provision of low-cost services may require different managerial and operating philosophies than the provision of high-cost services, but the principle of service quality remains the same: if customers are to remain satisfied they must be provided with the standard of service that they expect, whatever the price level.

The concept of service quality has received a considerable amount of attention in the academic literature for some time, and due to the rapidly changing commercial environments, service quality is now receiving greater attention within the marketplace itself. The concept though tends to be poorly understood and subsequently appears to present some organisations with a difficulty in delivering good service quality on a consistent basis. This study investigates the service quality concept in an attempt to help understand these difficulties, and furthermore provide guidance which will enable organisations to provide good service quality on a more consistent basis. The study will focus on a small sector of the hotel and catering industry which is relatively new to the UK marketplace and which has received very little attention in the academic literature, especially with reference to service quality. This particular sector, the roadside lodge sector, has to date achieved a

relatively low market penetration with little information available on customers' experiences of the services these lodges provide. However since service quality is considered to be an important concept for all organisations, including those operating in the low-cost sectors, management and employees within the roadside lodge sector may require a greater understanding of the service quality concept to ensure its successful and repeated delivery.

To investigate service quality in the roadside lodge sector, this study will identify customers' perceptions of the services provided by a sample of roadside lodges. The results from this investigation will provide an indication of the level of customer satisfaction being achieved within this sector, and hence may provide management with some understanding of their customers' preferences for some services over others. However since the successful delivery of consistent service quality is partly influenced by the actions of the service employee, an understanding of the employees' perceptions of the service they have delivered, as well as an understanding of the customers' perceptions, may be required. This additional understanding may help identify the causes of poor service quality delivery by assessing service delivery from a different angle, and furthermore may indicate areas where employees can be used in the correction of service quality failure. Finally this study should also be able to provide opportunities for transferring the principles of consistent service quality delivery from the roadside lodge sector to other service environments.

## **B) Service quality in industry**

As with many other western societies, the United Kingdom has moved from an economy based on manufacturing to an economy based predominantly on services [Armistead et al 1986; Gronroos 1988]. The growth of the service economy has been particularly rapid during the 1980s with a considerable number of service suppliers now competing against each other in various sectors. Recent deregulation and privatisation in the UK, and increasing globalisation has provided more choice to the consumer with the marketplace becoming bigger and more international.

Organisations are now finding themselves competing against foreign imports and foreign-based organisations on their own territory at increasing levels, as well as competing against their usual domestic competitors. Furthermore deregulation and reduced funding to traditionally non profit-making organisations, such as public transport, the utility services, and the health services, is also forcing them to compete on a commercial basis against commercial organisations, with a greater emphasis on service quality.

The literature has documented several advantages for producing higher quality products and services: productivity and the rates of return for an organisation may improve [Leonard and Sasser 1982]; the cost of error correction and customer dissatisfaction can be avoided [Hummel and Savitt

1988]; premium prices for quality products and services may be charged to generate more revenue; the product or service may become less vulnerable to price elasticity [Peters and Austin 1984; Webster 1986]; customer loyalty may be engendered [Gronroos 1989]; repeat purchases may be gained; and market share may increase [Coyle, Brotherton and Page 1991; Parasuraman et al 1986]. Conversely, low quality producers may suffer in a variety of other ways: bad word of mouth communications may result [Clutterbuck 1988; Lewis and Morris 1987; Sasser and Barbee 1989]; long-term detrimental effects may affect a company's image and its other service outlets [Akhter et al 1987; Assael 1987; Buttle 1986; Evardsson and Gustavsson 1988; Zeithaml et al 1985]; market share may be lost ; and low rates of return may ultimately be achieved [Luchs 1986].

The advantages of providing quality products and services may appear clear, but understanding how quality products and services can be provided on a consistent basis may prove to be extremely difficult. Much of the problem with delivering consistently good products and services arises from the poor understanding of the characteristics which make up quality in products and services. Product quality has traditionally been concerned with the tangible characteristics of physical products, whereas service quality is often concerned with the intangible characteristics of service packages and intangible characteristics of the service delivery. The concept of product or tangible quality though has received the most attention since the tangible characteristics in physical products are easier to identify and measure than the intangible characteristics in the service packages and service deliveries [Glover 1987; Parasuraman et al 1985]. However the competitive nature of manufacturing industries and the growth of the service industries has shifted a greater emphasis on ensuring that the delivery of both physical products and largely intangible service packages are delivered more effectively to the customer.

Although the concept of service quality has received more attention in recent years, many manufacturing and service industries have attempted to interpret the quality of the intangible service they provide in the same way as the quality of their tangible products they produce and deliver [Johnston 1987; Sayle 1986]. This approach though has not been particularly successful since there are considerable differences between the tangible quality characteristics of many products and the intangible quality characteristics of the service delivery and many service packages [Evardsson and Gustavsson 1988; Haywood-Farmer 1988; Rees 1989; Zeithaml et al 1988]. However the differences between these two and the fact that they are not easily transferable are now being widely recognised. Many manufacturing organisations are now attempting to differentiate themselves in the marketplace by offering both a recognisable quality product and a recognisable quality service delivery [Drucker 1990; McKenna 1988], whilst many service organisations, such as airlines, banks and retail outlets are now emphasising the differences between themselves by focusing on the quality of the whole service package they are providing, which includes both tangibles and

intangibles [Hummel and Savitt 1988].

### **C) The UK hospitality industry and roadside lodge sector**

The UK hospitality industry is another service sector which has seen the value of providing both product and service quality, but much of the industry still finds the concept of delivering consistently good service quality fairly difficult. The hospitality industry represents a disparate range of hotel and catering businesses in the UK, with the consumer being offered a wide range of products from luxury to simple, and a wide range of service offerings from extensive to limited. Service quality has often been associated with the premium end of the marketplace whereby the higher tariffs charged can cover the costs of high staff/customer ratios and range of facilities being offered, whereas little attention has traditionally been given to the price-sensitive end of the marketplace where the service levels are extremely limited. The rapid and successful growth of the international and national fast food restaurant chains though has shown that both product and service quality can be provided at the lower and price-sensitive end of the marketplace, and not just at the premium end.

The principles of the fast food chains, where products are often simple and service levels are often limited, are now being applied to the accommodation sectors. Accommodation products are being developed to meet the needs of customers more precisely. In response to the lack of a large supply of consistently good standard accommodation being available at low prices in the UK, hotels and lodges are now being built to provide overnight customers with simple but comfortable overnight accommodation facilities, supported by limited but efficient service levels. These particular accommodation units are generally referred to as 'budget hotels' and the development of this sector in the UK represents a fairly recent event in comparison to similar developments in the United States, and to a lesser extent in France [Gilbert and Lockwood 1990; Lucas and Laycock 1991]. The first budget hotel was introduced to the UK in 1985, whereas in the USA and France, it was 1963 and 1974 respectively [Senior and Akehurst 1988].

An extension of the budget hotel sector is the 'roadside lodge' sector which represents those accommodation units that have been strategically located alongside motorways and trunk roads, and have been specifically designed for short-stay travellers on a restricted time and financial budgets [English Tourist Board 1988]. With their limited facilities and services, these roadside lodges can operate with lower costs and thereby offer lower tariffs than many other establishments offering similar standard bedrooms [Daniele 1986; Moyle 1989]. Several companies are now operating roadside lodges in the UK with most planning on establishing a large network of 'branded' outlets across the country [McGuffrie 1987; Tarpey 1989]. Since the end of 1985 this sector has grown from 2 units to over 150 in five years, with several hundred planned for the next decade. This kind

of growth suggests that there is either (or both) a proven definite consumer demand for this type of accommodation [Travel and Tourism Gazette 1989], or that the financial opportunities for the operators are extremely attractive, irrespective of the level of consumer demand [Caterer and Hotelkeeper 1989].

If the present growth of roadside lodges continues in the UK then there is a likelihood that supply will eventually exceed demand at particular locations [Roper and Carmouche 1989; Senior and Akehurst 1988]. An oversupply will lead to depressed occupancy levels which in turn will lead to reduced profitability. This predicted pattern will then become a mirror image of the lodge sector in the USA where oversupply has led to intense competition amongst operators during the last few years with the consequent reduction in occupancies and profits [Daniele 1986; Ichniowski 1987; Leonard 1987]. Many operators in the USA have responded to declining occupancies by either holding tariffs artificially low, or they have added more facilities and services as an incentive to customers. Both strategies have had short-lived success since they reduce profit margins and can be easily copied by the competitors [Danielson 1987; Grinyer et al 1988; Guerrier and Lockwood 1989; Hart 1988; Zeithaml 1988]. Furthermore some lodge operators have added so many facilities and services that they have had to raise tariffs to a level which then puts them in direct competition with the full-service sector where competition is equally as intense [Schneider and Feiler 1987].

Although it would be incorrect to assume that the UK lodge sector will copy the US lodge sector, several similarities between these two markets have shown that the UK developments are following a similar pattern to the US experience. If the UK operators respond to the increased competition by adding more services and facilities, or by holding tariffs low, then they are likely to experience the same difficulties facing many of the US operators. One of the largest lodge operators in the USA though is attempting to circumvent this problem by carrying out extensive customer interviews to identify unmet and unsatisfied needs, and by improving the communication channels with its employees and franchisees to ensure both good product and service quality are delivered more consistently [DeLucca 1988]. The same attention given to service quality in the UK roadside lodge sector may provide considerable scope for organisations to respond to customers' changing needs and operate profitably for longer periods. However the concept of service quality and good service quality delivery may still to be a difficult concept for lodge operators to pursue, especially if they unsure of its precise definition.

#### **D) The control of service quality delivery**

The control of service quality delivery is dependent upon organisations and its members fully understanding the service quality concept. Although many definitions of the concept are provided by the marketing and customer satisfaction literature, much of the recent literature has proposed that



its delivery can be improved by focusing on two specific dimensions, namely customers' expectations and customers' perceptions [Brown and Swartz 1989; Evardsson and Gustavsson 1988; Gronroos 1984; Haywood-Farmer 1988; Johnston 1987]. If a customer receives the level of service they expect then their expectations are confirmed; if they receive more than they expect, then their expectations are positively disconfirmed; if they receive less than they expect, then their expectations are negatively disconfirmed [Webster 1991]. An acceptable or good level of service quality is said to be delivered when the customer's expectations are confirmed or positively disconfirmed, whilst a poor level of service quality is said to be delivered when the customer's expectations are negatively disconfirmed.

The literature in this area further indicates that service quality may refer to either the quality of the service encounter between the employee and the customer, or it may refer to the quality of the overall service package which includes both tangible products and intangible experiences [Parasuraman et al 1986]. Although the service encounter is crucial to achieving high customer satisfaction, the quality of the overall service package is likely to be even more important. A complete understanding of service quality from the customer's perspective could therefore include an evaluation of the total service package on offer which, in the roadside lodge sector, would include the quality of the accommodation product and its associated facilities, and the quality of the actual delivery of the product as the customer passes through the service delivery system.

Since service quality could refer to the whole service package, quality control needs to relate to the total experience perceived by customers as they pass through the complete service delivery system. This suggests therefore that service quality needs to consider the service experience as a 'process' which needs to be assessed and controlled from a 'holistic' or 'systems' perspective. Several researchers have in fact considered that a service is a process, and that service quality can be controlled by process quality, and although there has been little empirical work available suggesting that this approach has been widely adopted in the past, the systems perspective appears to have gained more favour in recent times [Collier 1989; Cousins and Foskett 1989; Johnston 1987; Huete and Roth 1988].

A further consideration which has been associated with the control of consistently good service quality is the impact of the employee on the customers' experiences, and the differences between employees' and customers' perceptions [Brown & Swartz 1989; Nightingale 1983; Parasuraman et al 1986; Schneider et al 1980]. This is a particular area which has received some attention in the literature, but only little empirical study in the hospitality industry. Nightingale (1983) carried out a study into the varying perceptions of customers of hospitality services and compared them with the perceptions of the service employees, and he found considerable differences in perceptions between customers and employees, and even more differences between the management and staff

themselves. However Schneider et al (1980), in their study of retail banking, found high correlations between employees' perceptions of the service procedures and customers' perceptions of the service experience.

The identification of low correlations between employees' and customers' perceptions suggests that employees may not understand customers' requirements sufficiently well enough to deliver consistently good service quality without strict control or supervision. This may indicate that employees require further education of customers' requirements and further training in delivering effective services. The identification of high correlations between employees' and customers' perceptions suggests that employees may be holders of valuable information. This information may be obtained through quality assurance programmes which may subsequently guide management in designing and implementing more customer-oriented policies. Ignorance and neglect of this information may lead to the loss of valuable information, increased employee frustration, and even to employees relating more to their customers at the expense of organisational objectives [ibid].

Quality assurance programmes have received considerable attention in many industries, with mixed reactions [Bendall 1990; DTI 1991], but their application has not been widely reported in the hospitality industry. Orly (1988) though has reported the success of one of the largest hotel and catering chains in the world which has been experimenting with quality assurance and 'self-management' approaches, such as quality circles. The value of such approaches can be widespread, not least that management receive inexpensive market research through the employees, employees can put forward service improvement and cost-saving ideas, and employees become more loyal to the organisation simply through becoming recognised as part of the service management team. In essence it can transform poor service, expensive and inefficient systems, and poor employee morale into a highly effective organisation for meeting the needs of both customers and employees [Ibid].

### **E) Research aim and propositions**

This Introduction has provided a brief resume of the importance of good service quality in manufacturing industries, in service industries, and in the roadside lodge sector. It has illustrated the difficulties surrounding its delivery which can largely be attributed to definitional problems. The Introduction also discussed the value of treating service quality as the difference between customers' initial expectations and their subsequent perceptions as they pass through the delivery system, and viewing services as holistic processes or systems. Furthermore, this section has also stressed the value of identifying employees' perceptions to either guide education and training activities or guide quality assurance initiatives in improving service quality.

This research is intending to follow the work of other researchers, such as Nightingale (1983) in the hospitality industry, and Schneider et al (1980) in the banking industry, by identifying both customers' and employees' perceptions to help understand how consistently good service quality can be delivered more effectively. The research aim for this study is therefore:

'To show how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience',

To execute this research aim it has been considered necessary to state three propositions to guide the study, i.e.:

**P1.** Service quality represents the customer's assessment of a transactional experience, which may include any permutation of tangible and intangible elements;

**P2.** The delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding customers' separate expectations and their separate perceptions; and

**P3.** The delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding employees' perceptions of their customers' experiences.

## **F) Structure of the thesis**

Chapter I of this thesis will review the literature on services and service quality and discuss the difficulties associated with delivering consistently good service quality. Chapter II will discuss the value of viewing services from a process or systems perspective, discuss the contribution of the employee in the delivery of service quality, and discuss the role and responsibility of management in service quality control. Chapter III, IV and V will discuss the three data collections stages which are proposed for the study. Following the approach adopted by Dickens (1987, p.29), these three stages are:

1. A qualitative study to identify the attributes which are important to hotel and lodge consumers.
2. A quantitative survey to identify the importance and performance of those attributes from both customers' and employees' perspectives.
3. A qualitative study to assess the value of using a systems tool to collect and compare customers' and employees' perceptions.

It is anticipated that the dual research approach of using both customers' and employees' perceptions, and the dual approach of conducting a quantitative and a qualitative study, will contribute beneficially to the validity and reliability of the findings. Chapter VI will discuss the results from the quantitative study whilst Chapter VII will discuss the results from the last qualitative study. Chapter VIII will expand on the development of a new research technique for organisational use in controlling the delivery of service quality. Finally Chapter IX will discuss the methodological issues surrounding the techniques used, followed by a discussion on the managerial issues which have arisen from the study. The chapter will also assess how well the study has achieved the aim and propositions outlined, and offer some recommendations for further research opportunities.

### **G) Research collaboration and access**

To carry out the proposed study and collect empirical data, it was necessary to obtain access to customers and employees in a service sector. After a period of consultation with several organisations in the hospitality industry one organisation in the roadside lodge sector agreed to collaborate with the study. This particular organisation assured virtually unlimited access to their lodge guests and members of staff, but emphasised that the study should be based on the voluntary participation of both customers and employees. Although this collaboration provided the researcher with 'organisational' access, it was recognised that it was still necessary to obtain 'branch' access, i.e. cooperation and support from local management and staff as well as head office [Schneider et al 1980].

## **Chapter I**

### **Understanding Service Quality**

## **1.1. Introduction**

The Introduction to this thesis stated that service quality is becoming more important due to consumers demanding higher quality products and services, and due to the competitive nature of both service and manufacturing industries. The delivery of service quality though appears to present difficulties for many organisations because there is not a clear understanding of service quality. This lack of understanding has resulted in a considerable amount being written in the marketing and service quality literature on how 'services', and hence 'service quality', can be usefully described to enhance peoples' understanding. However the literature has only been making incremental, and sometimes circuitous, steps in providing a thorough comprehension. This chapter will critically assess some of the issues in an attempt to clarify the service quality concept with the use of models. Since an understanding of service quality though depends upon an understanding of a 'service', this chapter will first consider the issues surrounding the definition of services.

## **1.2. Definition of services**

### **1.2.1. Characteristics of services**

Although much of the literature displays some overlap in the definitions of services and service quality, there are still some fundamental differences between many of the authors' opinions surrounding these concepts. Some of these differences arise due to the diverse disciplines of the contributing authors, and subsequently due to the diverse perspectives that have been adopted. The literature has presented a prolonged debate on how a service should be defined and has tended to focus on what characteristics distinguish 'services', 'products', and 'goods' from each other [Blois 1983; Shams and Hales 1989]. Several authors have attempted to extract the essential characteristics of a service and use these as the definitive parameters between a service, product and good. However as Foxall (1984a) reports, these characteristics may be untenable when applied to real-life service transactions.

Zeithaml et al (1985) report that three basic assumptions influence the literature on services marketing: (i) services and service marketing have a unique number of characteristics; (ii) these characteristics do not apply to goods marketing; and (iii) service marketing requires service marketing solutions. Most of the authors tend to agree with the first assumption that services do have a number of characteristics by definition, but whether these characteristics are unique to services and services marketing still remains a contentious issue. Several attempts have been made in the marketing literature to define services and classify them by applying these characteristics, but these attempts have not received universal support largely due to the varying backgrounds and

perspectives of the authors. The most commonly cited characteristics that have been attributed to services though are: intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, perishability, and lack of ownership. The alleged nature of these characteristics will be first considered and then critically assessed to identify how valuable they are in promoting an understanding of all services. Although these characteristics are inextricably linked with each other, it is worth considering them individually to highlight their distinguishing features and to review other researchers' views.

Intangibility - Zeithaml et al (1985) and Rushton and Carson (1989) say that the intangibility of services is the fundamental difference most commonly cited between services and goods, simply because services cannot be sensed (seen, felt, tasted or touched) in the same way as goods [Middleton 1983; Shams and Hales 1989]. Britton et al (1989), Rushton and Carson (1989) reinforce this by stating that services are intangible whilst goods are tangible, and de Brentani (1991) comments that 'services are more intangible than tangible', even though they may have associated physical elements. Rushton and Carson (1989) further say that services are mentally intangible, whilst Shostack (1984) mentions that although services have impact, they have no form. Shostack (1987) adds that services are not objects, but are processes. Czepiel (1980) states that services are impalpable.

Inseparability - Britton et al (1989), Zeithaml et al (1985) and Kotler (1991) state that the inseparable aspect of a service is that production and consumption occur simultaneously with each other, whilst Shams and Hales (1989) emphasise that a [service] product cannot be divorced from its source. Teboul (1988) says that delivering a service is essentially an interaction between provider and consumer, and the service is made up of the the inseparable production and consumption phases at the interface, which is partly supported by de Brentani (1991). Shams and Hales (1989), Teboul (1988) and Middleton (1983) add that because production and consumption are inseparable, the customer usually has to be present on the producer's premises, and therefore there may be geographical limits on where a service business can locate itself.

Heterogeneity - Britton et al (1989) and de Bentani (1991) consider that each 'unit' of service sold will be different due to the large dependence on individual service personnel delivering the service, and the varying perceptions and behaviours of customers. Zeithaml et al (1985), Shams and Hales (1989), Rushton and Carson (1989) and Kotler (1991) add that this heterogenous element will result in the high variability of service performances, which is particularly problematic in labour intensive services. Parasuraman et al (1985) believe that because of the heterogenous nature of services, the customer will re-evaluate his expectations of the service on each occasion. Shams and Hales (1989) even go as far to say that because products cannot be standardised, quality cannot be guaranteed, and Middleton (1983) adds that this heterogenous nature means that [service] product quality control methods are impossible to achieve.

Perishability - Zeithaml et al (1985), Shams and Hales (1989), de Bentani (1991) and Kotler (1991) state that because services cannot be saved, stored or inventoried, problems arise when trying to synchronize supply and demand, and Middleton (1983) says that periods of no demand place special emphasis on demand management. Britton et al (1989) comment that services are destroyed in the process of their consumption, and therefore stocks cannot be held in anticipation of future demand. Rushton and Carson (1989) remark that if there is no demand for the service, then service capacity is wasted, whilst Shams and Hales (1989) emphasise that no demand means that the transactional value is lost for ever.

Lack of ownership - 'Lack of ownership' is one of the less frequently mentioned characteristics, but this has been emphasised by Shams and Hales (1989) who say that a service involves the customer buying access to the use of or hire of something, and after the transaction the customer does not physically 'own' anything.

### 1.2.2. Summary of characteristics

Although services have repeatedly been attributed with these characteristics, it is necessary to summarise their features from the previous discussion and evaluate their ability in effectively representing all services. For instance, services are said to be intangible and cannot be seen and touched in the same way as physical items can be. A service is considered to be a vague, amorphous activity which is usually carried out by people for people, and although the service may have tangible manifestations, the actual service itself is not a material item. This characteristic may be valid if a service is referring to either the 'performance' of the service provider (man or machine) interacting with the customer, or if a service is referring to the 'offer' of providing a product and a performance. Service performances are intangible but they usually have tangible manifestations, e.g. a restaurant waiter 'serves' or 'performs' with service equipment. Service offers are also intangible but they usually include tangible products or tangible manifestations, e.g. retail stores offer to sell physical products, whilst insurance companies offer to sell intangible agreements represented by tangible policies.

It is said that a service is inseparable and cannot be divided into separate production and consumption phases. Unlike most physical items which are produced and consumed in separate sequential order, services are actually consumed during their production. This characteristic may be valid if a service is considered to be a performance, since the activity of 'serving' is consumed as it is being produced. However if a service refers to the offer of providing something, then the offer may be formulated sometime before it becomes available. Furthermore the tangible elements or manifestations of the service offer may also be produced and consumed in separate phases.



Some authors have suggested that services are always heterogenous, unique and different, and can never be reproduced in the same standardised way in which tangible products can be reproduced. This characteristic is a function of the service's intangibility and inseparability in that it cannot be seen or touched, and is dependent on the unique and highly variable interaction between the provider and customer. Although the performance of a service provider may be highly variable, many service encounters may be extremely limited and require the minimum of contact between the provider and the customer, such as with the purchase of a cinema ticket from a box office vendor or a drink from a vending machine. In both of these cases the simplicity of the service may enable each transaction to be virtually identical. The heterogenous nature of these services may only become evident if the performance deviates by an amount which becomes perceptably noticeable. If a service refers to the offer though, a service may or may not be heterogenous depending upon if the provider wishes to target separate market segments or individual customers. Furthermore this characteristic cannot be unique to services since many tangible products can be heterogenous, e.g. apparel are often tailoured according to customers' unique specifications.

Services are considered to be perishable, which is essentially a function of its inseparability. Because a service is only produced when there is a demand, a period of no demand means that the service is not produced since it cannot be stored in anticipation of future demand. A service performance, a service facility for hire, or a service offer not in demand may therefore all be correctly perceived as being perishable, since no demand means lost selling opportunity. However as with the characteristic of heterogeneity, perishability is not exclusive to intangibles or so called services since many tangible products are perishable, e.g. food.

Finally it has been considered that services are experiences and cannot be owned - only the memory of it can be retained. However many service transactions involve the purchase and delivery of tangible items which become the property of the owner, e.g. any retail item. Therefore the lack of ownership characteristic must refer purely to the performance between the provider and customer, or refer purely to the service offer without referring to the exchange of any tangibles.

In summary these characteristics appear to be relevant to services only in some instances, and do not appear to be exclusive to services in other instances. When discussing these characteristics some of the authors would appear to be referring to the service performance between a provider and a customer, whilst others appear to be referring to the service offer, or possibly products of service industries. As soon as the service performance includes the production and delivery of tangibles, and the service offer includes tangible manifestations, these characteristics are not exclusively tenable. Before assigning a list of definitive characteristics to a service, it is therefore necessary to first have a clear conception of what is meant by a 'service'. A clear conception though does not always appear to be apparent in the literature but a few authors have attempted to resolve the

service-product-good debate by adopting alternative perspectives of viewing services.

### 1.2.3. Alternative perspectives

Many authors have considered that the debate on the differences between services, products and goods does not lead to conclusions that are helpful to practitioners. Instead of trying to identify differences between these three concepts, more attention should be directed towards finding a perspective which guides providers in satisfying customers. Levitt (1981), Zeithaml et al (1985) and Van Dierdonk and Brandt (1988) believe that the practice of distinguishing companies between service producers and goods producers has limited utility since there are just as many differences amongst service firms as there are between goods and service firms. For example a fast food restaurant (service firm) may be more similar to a food manufacturer (goods firm) than an insurance company (service firm). Van Dierdonk and Brandt (1988) further consider that the various functions within an organisation should to be categorised separately rather than separating whole organisations as either goods and service producers. Both manufacturing and service firms are likely to have back-room production activities which support the front-room service activities, a distinction which may be more practical division than distinguishing between service and goods firms.

Quinn et al (1990) comment that management need to change their perspective of manufacturing and services as being two separate and distinctive entities, rather they suggest that most product manufacturers and service providers are in fact service organisations. Foxall (1984a) considers that everything is a service and that the term 'service' should be accepted as the generic concept for all market transactions. Gronroos (1988) supports these perspectives when he says that the old definitions of services are no longer applicable in today's society where everybody in the Western World is operating in a service economy.

Shams and Hales (1989) and Oberoi (1989) consider that the categories of 'goods' and 'services' is arbitrary and unsustainable, but at the same time treating all products as homogenous and undifferentiated ignores important differences within products. Products can be in fact differentiated in terms of relative proportions of physical commodities on the one hand and performed activities on the other. Levitt (1981) considers that a useful distinction can be made between tangibles and intangibles, and that everybody sells intangibles in the marketplace no matter what is produced in the factory. Rushton and Carson (1989) believe that virtually all products have tangibles and intangibles, and it is the relative proportion of tangibles and intangibles that is important. Soloman et al (1985) and Shams and Hales (1989) conclude that most attempts at differentiating products and services results in a continuum, with products at one end, services at the other, and considerable overlap in the middle. However Foxall (1984a) and Middleton (1983)

believe that it is more useful to focus on the 'benefits' that the customer and marketer are concerned with rather than focusing on tangibles and intangibles, since it is ultimately benefits that the customer is purchasing whatever the physical composition.

The dissatisfaction with a distinction between goods and services also extends into the marketing literature. Middleton (1983), Lovelock (1983), Buttle (1986) and McKenna (1988) believe that the 'goods/service' dichotomy is conceptually invalid and unhelpful when considering the marketing of goods and services. They considered that a single unifying body of theory which transcends the service-good-product discrimination would be more helpful to practitioners. Zeithaml et al (1985) further consider that we need service marketing concepts that transcend specific industries that avoid focusing narrowly within service industries.

In line with some of these authors, this author considers that although there may be differences between manufacturing industries and service industries, these differences are not sufficiently large enough to distinguish the outputs of these industries as two separately exclusive concepts when considering customer satisfaction. In many cases differences amongst service firms are greater than the differences between service and manufacturing firms, but recognising differences within the service or manufacturing firm may be important when considering quality control. However it is ultimately the benefits of the purchase which the customer is seeking, however permanent or ephemeral the product or service [Lewis 1984]. Furthermore the term 'services' is more appropriately employed as the umbrella term for all transactions in the marketplace since most organisations, whether they are operating in the manufacturing or service industries, are in essence providing a service to the customer.

### **1.3. Definitions of service quality**

#### **1.3.1. Understanding service quality**

The definition of service quality has been widely debated in the literature, and as with the definition of a service, there does not appear to be a consensus on a particular definition. Paradoxically though, there is virtually universal agreement on the importance of good service quality in satisfying customers. Delivering consistently good service quality to the customer is considered to provide long term benefits to organisations in competitive environments<sup>1</sup>, yet the literature has repeatedly commented on how difficult it is to deliver on a reliable basis. Service quality is said to be complex [Czepiel 1980] and difficult to understand and control [Chase 1978; Parasuraman et al 1985], especially those with high customer contact. Due to the characteristics of intangibility and variability, precise quality specifications for services are difficult to establish and enforce in an organisation [Rees 1989; Zeithaml et al 1988], which results in customers being unable to assess

quality before purchase [Britton et al 1989; Rushton and Carson 1989; Shams and Hales 1989]. Instead customers have to rely on other assurance criteria, such as the reputation of the firm, the suitability of the physical facilities, or the appearance and behaviour of the personnel [Parasuraman et al 1985].

Understanding and controlling the consistent delivery of service quality may be especially difficult if providers are unsure of the definition and composition of service quality. If services are considered to represent purely the intangible performance between the provider and customer, then the intangibility and variability characteristics may make it particularly difficult to specify precise quality specifications, and services with high customer contact may make it difficult for customers to identify reliable assurance criteria. If services are considered to represent the whole offer available for customer purchase, then this may include the same difficulties as having been associated with the service performance, but may also include tangible products which are standardised and can be specified by precise quality assurance, and can provide customers with opportunities for quality inspection before purchase. In other words, these difficulties only apply in particular circumstances depending upon the definition of a service.

Aside from the difficulties of providing consistently good service quality and defining it, most writers agree that the quality of a service can only be looked at from the customer's perspective since he is the judge of quality in the marketplace [Baker 1989; Bernard 1988; Parkinson 1989; Trippier 1987; Watkins 1988]. Furthermore the writers consider that this perspective is based on the difference between customers' initial expectations for a service and their subsequent perceptions of the service experience. Parasuraman et al (1986), for example, comment that: '...service quality, as perceived by consumers, stems from a comparison of their expectations of the services they will receive with their perceptions of the performance of firms providing the services.' Churchill (1979, p.67) comments: 'If actual consequences equal or exceed expected consequences, the consumer is satisfied, but if actual consequences fall short of expected consequences, the consumer is dissatisfied'. This particular view has been supported by Brown and Swartz (1989), Churchill (1979), Evardsson and Gustavsson (1988), Gronroos (1984), Haywood-Farmer (1988), Johnston (1987), Sasser et al (1978), and Webster (1991), which places the definition of quality in the eyes of the customer rather than with the provider.

If quality is considered to be in the eyes of the customer and is a function of customers' expectations and perceptions, then firstly customers' expectations have to become the quality criteria with which providers have to meet, or possibly exceed, to produce customer satisfaction, and secondly the quality of service delivered is perceived and evaluated by the customer and not the provider. In summary it may be stated that:

'Service quality refers to the difference between the customers' initial expectations for a service and their subsequent perceptions during and after the service experience. Good service quality is achieved when the customers' expectations are either met or exceeded, whereas poor service quality results when the customer perceives that their expectations have not been reached'

However if this postulate of good and poor service quality is accepted as being realistic and workable, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of 'expectations' and 'perceptions'.

### 1.3.2. Expectations

Essentially 'expectations' can refer to one of two things. The term may refer to an individual's prediction of an outcome, which may be desirable or undesirable [Brown and Swartz 1989; Johnston 1987], or the term may refer to an individual's desired outcome, which the individual expects as a minimum standard to be satisfied [Parasuraman et al 1986]. Both types of expectations may be affected by a variety of sources such as the individual's past experiences, word of mouth communications, promotional messages communicated by organisations to the marketplace [Buchanan 1985; Parasuraman et al 1985; Webster 1991], or from any contextual cues the individual may collect en route. The first definition though does not symbolize the service quality concept particularly well since on occasions it may indicate that poor service quality could be expected, i.e. predicted or anticipated. The second definition, that expectations represent the desired outcome, embodies the service quality concept more appropriately since consumers will be seeking a service that at least matches their expectations<sup>2</sup>. In the context of service quality then, expectations are defined as the performance required or desired by the individual customer.

### 1.3.3. Perceptions

The term 'perceptions' has received very little attention in the service quality literature, but it has received considerably more attention in the psychology literature. In simplistic terms perception has been defined as the process of selective attention, categorising and interpreting of incoming sensory stimuli into a useable mental representation of the world, which then enables a person to define reality from their perspective [Buchanan 1985; Hilgard et al 1975; Hollander 1981; Lewis 1984]. By selecting particular stimuli from the vast amount of sensory stimuli that individuals are constantly exposed to, perceptions allow an individual to efficiently focus on some stimuli for processing, whilst blocking out other stimuli not considered to be important at that particular moment, i.e. to prevent cognitive overload. Familiar experiences and messages which are actively selected, or even passively assimilated, are placed into existing categories which are holding similar experiences and messages from previous occasions. Unfamiliar experiences and messages which

cannot be stored in existing categories are used to create new categories where they can be stored with subsequent experiences and messages of a similar nature. These selective and categorising activities then enable an individual to interpret incoming stimuli according to previously assimilated experiences and messages [Gross 1987; Hilgard et al 1975; Hollander 1981].

The way that an individual selects, categorises and interprets experiences and messages is unique to each person's life experiences. This means that each person will build up their own repertoire of cognitive storage categories, which in turn means they will interpret incoming stimuli different from other people. Since people's perceptual processes have been built on different experiences, individuals may form different expectations for future events, and may also form different perceptions of shared experiences. In the context of service quality, this implies that individuals may quite easily form different expectations for a service and form different perceptions of the service experienced [Akhter et al 1987; Lewis 1984]. Service quality, as a concept measured on the differences between an individual's expectations and perceptions, may be quite different for each customer. The concept of good or poor service quality therefore is a matter of personal and subjective judgement.

Although expectations and perceptions may be different for different people, this does not necessarily mean that they will always be different [Buchanan 1985]. A sample of various individuals may actually reveal similar expectations and perceptions because they share similar wants and interpretations. Furthermore an individual's view of a situation can easily be influenced by others, especially where the outcome or consequences are not particularly important or where the individual is attempting to share the views of favoured individuals or groups. This shared view forms the concept of 'social reality', and social reality itself may bring together a group of people's expectations and perceptions of what constitutes good or poor service quality [Gross 1987; Hilgard et al 1975; Hollander 1981].

In summary the service quality literature has shown that there is a fairly wide consensus that service quality is the difference between customers' desired expectations for a service and their subsequent perceptions of the service experienced. This may be interpreted that each customer could have individual or shared expectations for a service, and each customer could have individual or shared perceptions of the service experienced.

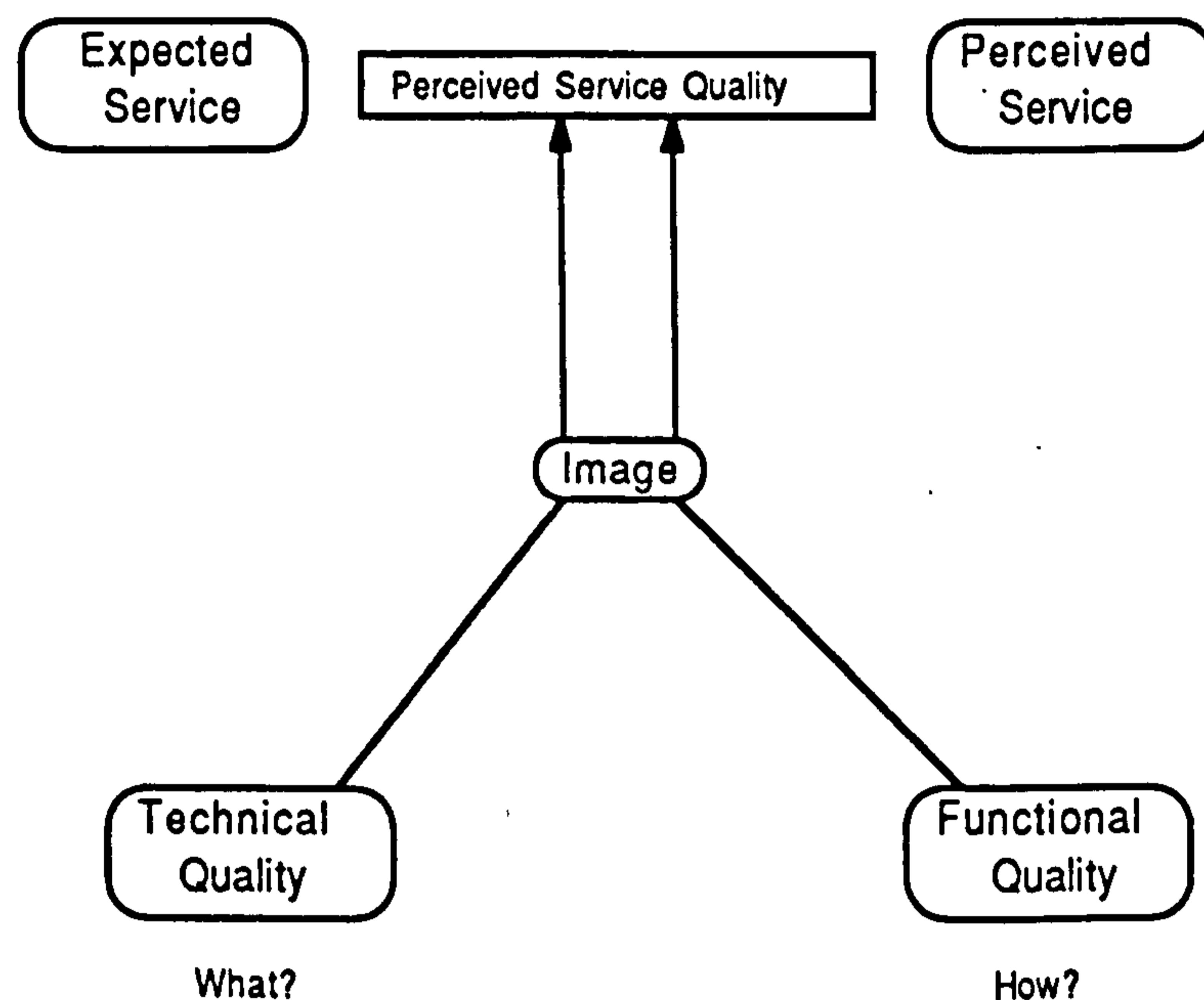
The literature has also produced a range of models to help clarify the service quality concept and it is now intended that a handful of these models are briefly reviewed to identify their similarities and dissimilarities with the use of a more comprehensive model.

## 1.4. Service quality models

### 1.4.1. Various models

Gronroos (1984) considers that the customer will evaluate a service against various variables, which include the customer's initial expectations, the customer's subsequent perceptions, the actual service experience, and the outcome of that experience. Apart from identifying expectations and perceptions, Gronroos further distinguished service quality between the 'functional' aspects of the service, which is about how the service is delivered, and the 'technical' aspects, which is about what is delivered. Both of these are considered important to overall service quality, together with a third aspect, 'image', which is the customers' view of the company. Gronroos has produced a relatively simple model which neatly includes these three quality aspects together with the customer's expectations and perceptions. Figure 1-1 shows how Gronroos has related these concepts with each other.

Figure 1-1: Gronroos's Service Quality Model

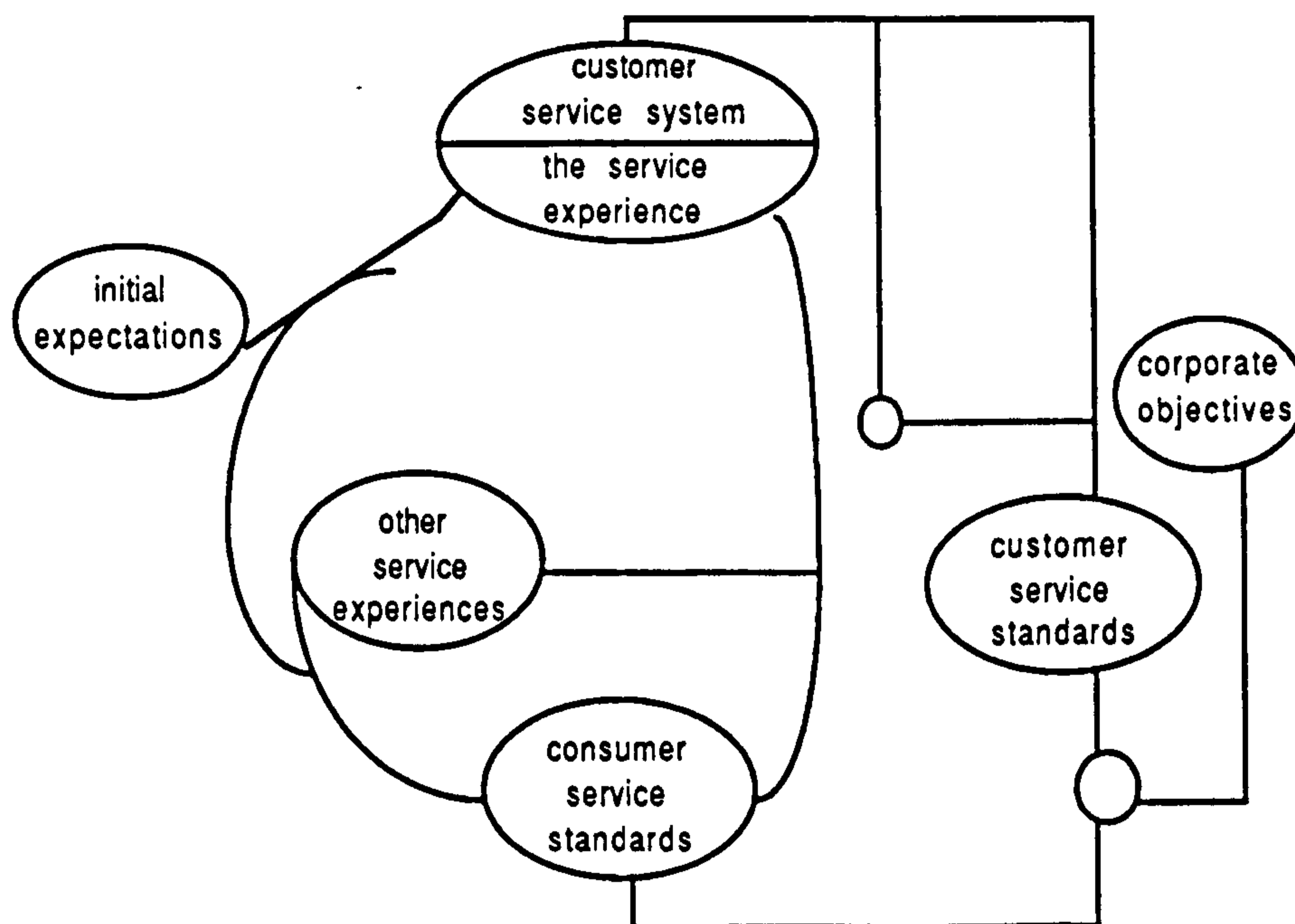


Source: Gronroos 1984

This relatively simple model shows that a customer will evaluate the quality of a service by comparing their initial expectations against their perceptions of both the physical features and the performance features of the service package, which is further influenced by the image of the organisation. However the model is quite simple since customers' expectations and perceptions are likely to be influenced by various factors, such as personal experiences and communication sources.

Nightingale (1986) identified the customers' expectations and perceptions of both physical and psychological aspects as being important to service quality. He further considered that the psychological aspects are frequently the decisive factors in choosing between alternative service offerings. Nightingale produced a service quality model called 'The Service Process', which illustrates how the consumers' perceptions of the service will feed back to the provider, who in turn will formulate the service. Figure 1-2 shows how Nightingale considered these concepts were related to each other.

Figure 1-2: Nightingale's Service Process Model



Source: Nightingale 1983

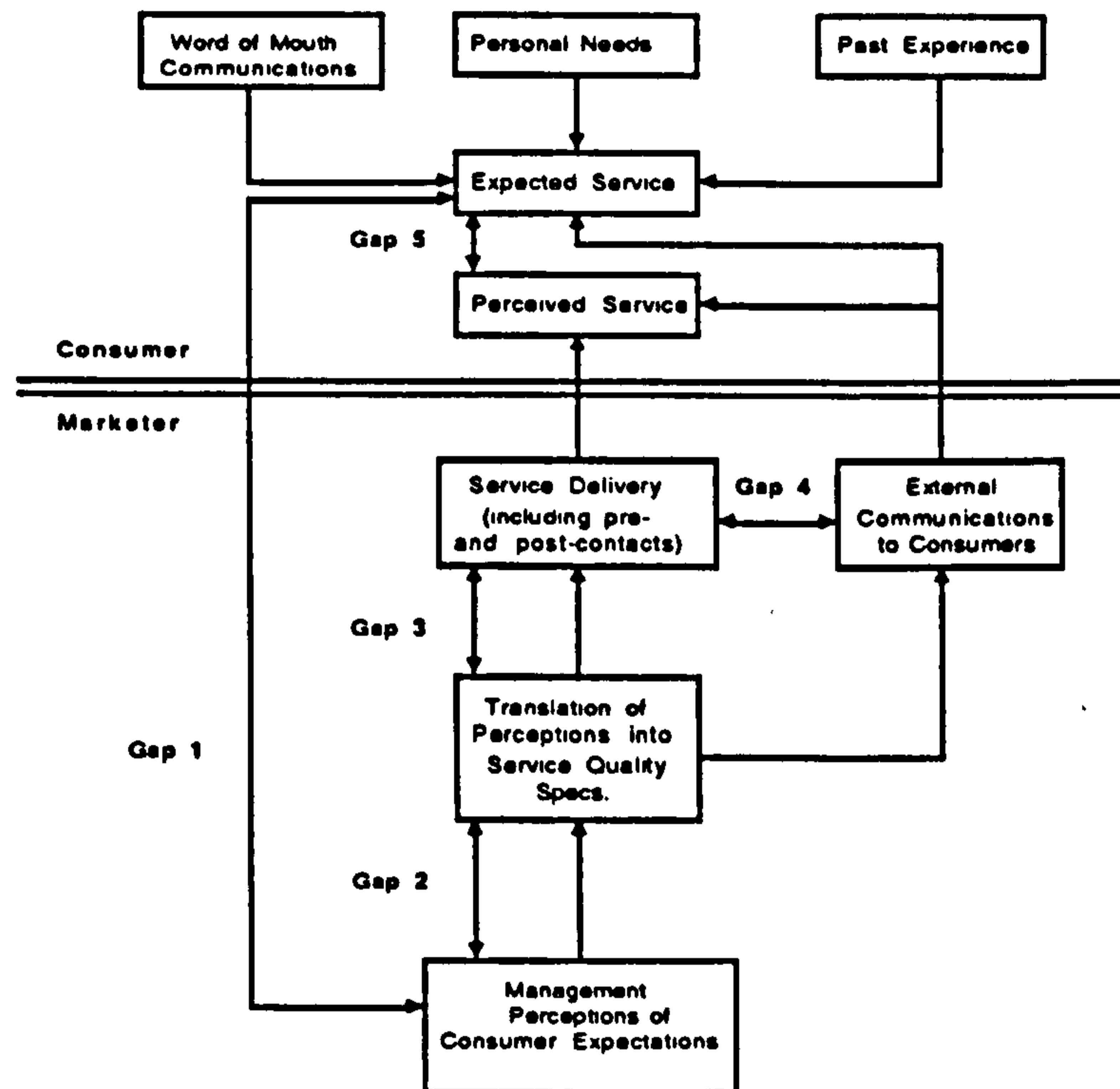
The model shows that senior management's objectives (Corporate Objectives), which are influenced partly by management's perceptions, are translated into organisational policies (Customer Service Standards). These policies then lead to the development of the service offering (Customer Service System) which includes the physical facilities and the service delivery. During and after delivery the individual customer compares their perception of the service process and service outcome (The Service Experience) against their desired expectations (Initial Expectations). Feedback from several customers (Consumer Service Standards) is then used to develop organisational policies with managements' perceptions. This model is a little more comprehensive than the Gronroos model and takes account of shared customer experiences and multiple perceptions.

Parasuraman et al (1985) produced a service quality model which, like Nightingale, gave attention



to both the provider and the consumer of the service. The model was developed after carrying out a comprehensive study into providers' and consumers' perceptions of service quality, which established that service quality often fails due to a variety of gaps occurring on the providers' side. If management were to use the model as a tool and recognise the four gaps they must control, then the gap between what the customer expects and what the customer perceives (has been provided), would subsequently disappear.

Figure 1-3: Parasuraman et al Service Quality Model



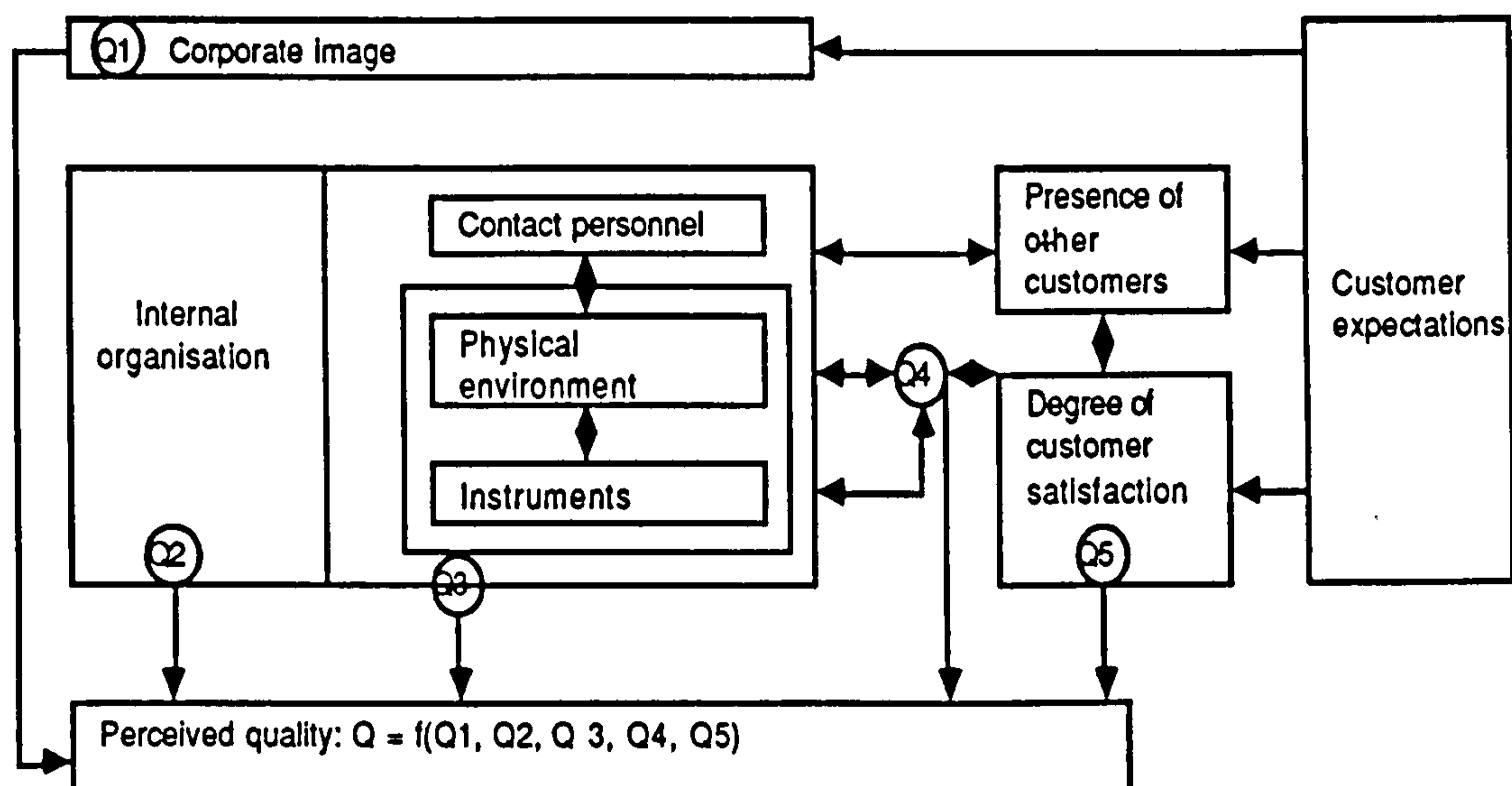
Source: Parasuraman et al (1985)

Apart from showing some critical gaps between what the customer wants and what the customer eventually receives, the Parasuraman model illustrates how customer expectations are influenced by external communications, word of mouth communications, personal needs and past experiences, and how customer perceptions are influenced by external communications and the actual service. The model also shows how customer expectations lead to management perceptions which in turn influence the development of the service package. The model though appears to lack a critical relationship. It shows how management perceptions of customer expectations leads into service quality specifications but takes no account of management perceptions of customers' perceptions which are equally as important.

LeBlanc and Nguyen (1988) have produced a model called 'A Conceptual Model of Service

Quality' after reviewing many of the other service quality models. It is one of the most comprehensive models produced and covers many of the aspects discussed in this thesis. Their objective was to explain perceived quality in financial institutions by developing a model which illustrates five quality characteristics which determine the final perceived quality. These five quality characteristics which are shown in Figure 1-4 are: (i) the corporate image, (ii) the internal organisation, (iii) the physical environment, (iv) the contact personnel, (v) the degree of customer satisfaction.

Figure 1-4: LeBlanc and Ngyuens' Conceptual Model of Service Quality



Source: LeBlanc and Ngyuen (1988)

LeBlanc and Ngyuen have amalgamated many of the service quality issues discussed by other authors into their own model. Although they have subjected the model to an empirical test for validation, they have concluded that more empirical knowledge was needed concerning the customer's evaluative process with regards to service quality.

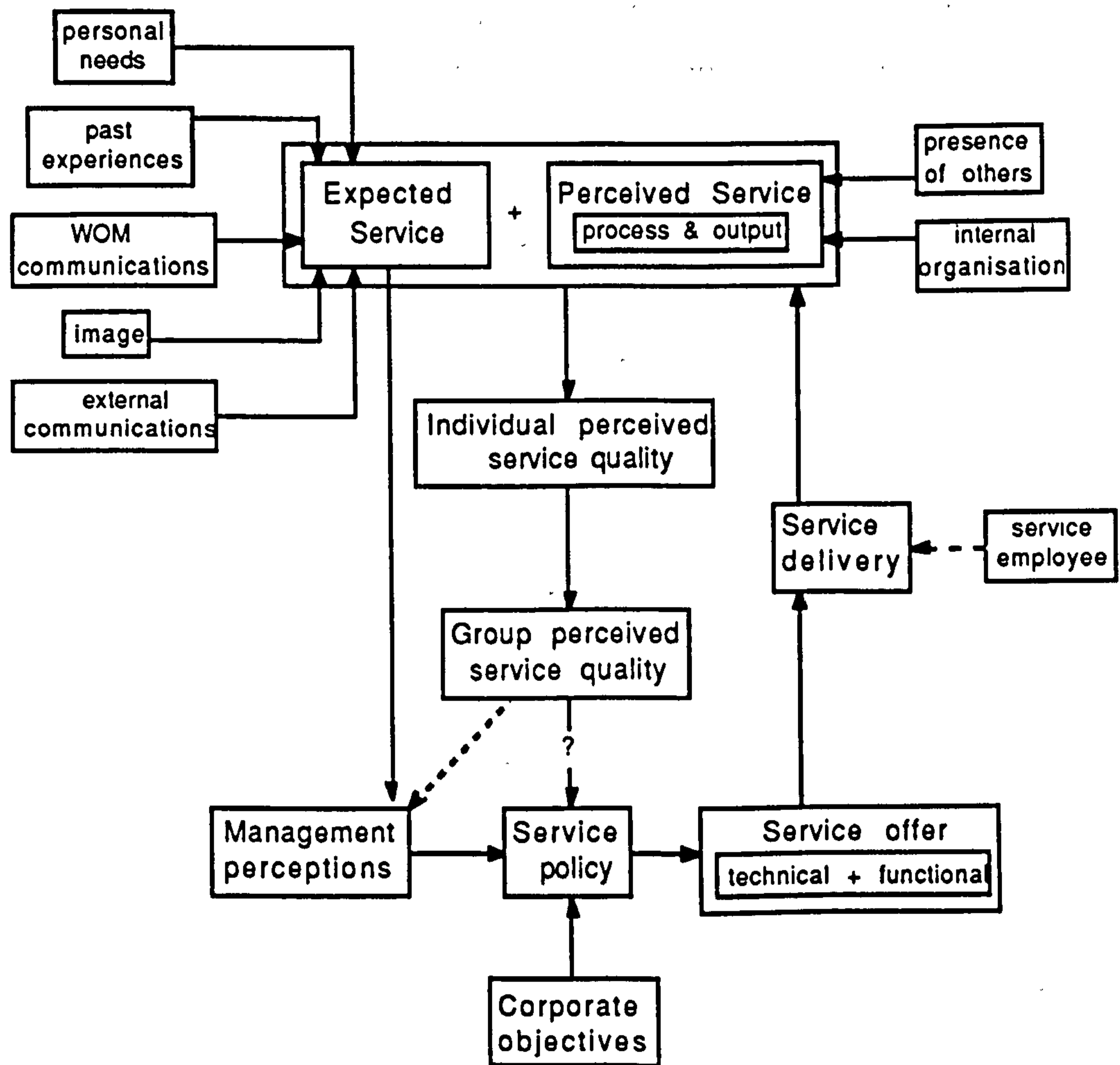
Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1985) also discussed the concept of service quality with the use of two approaches, rather than models, one which has three-dimensions and one which has two-dimensions. The three-dimensional approach covers: (i) the 'physical quality' representing the physical product and the physical facilities, (ii) the 'interactive quality' representing interactive persons and interactive equipments, and (iii) the 'corporate quality' representing the customer's prior quality image of the company. Their two-dimensional approach covers: (i) 'process quality' which can only be appreciated by the individual experiencing the service delivery, and (ii) 'output quality' which is the result of the transaction and can be appreciated by other individuals on

inspection. As with the model by Gronroos though, these approaches are rather simple and, apart from identifying process and output quality, the models have not included any important features that were not shown in the previous models.

#### 1.4.2. Service quality model

The service quality models and approaches discussed here have shown some differences and some similarities. The differences do not necessarily mean that the models are incomplete since they may reflect the different emphases of the authors. However it is possible to build a much more comprehensive model using the different concepts provided by the various models to identify a wider range of issues impacting on service quality delivery. Figure 1-5 attempts to assimilate the different concepts discussed by the various authors and display them in a single model.

Figure 1-5: Service quality model



Key:

- > Model links
- - - -> Proposed links

Since this model is intending to provide a comprehensive representation of the factors which impinge upon service quality delivery, the combination of a series of concepts from five sets of authors may not be sufficiently balanced or complete. For example, the model shows that the customer's expected service is interpreted by management perceptions before being used for the service policy, and yet customers' perceptions feed directly into the service policy. In reality both will be equally interpreted by management perceptions. As reflected by the arrows in the model the corporate objectives may be less open to interpretation. Furthermore the service delivery is likely to be influenced by the presence and actions of the employees, which again has been shown in the model by the additional concept.

Although this model may still be considered unbalanced or incomplete, it does provide a comprehensive perspective of the factors important to service quality delivery (albeit as perceived by a small selection of service quality authors), and it does display the issues which are of particular interest to this study in relationship to other issues (some of which will be discussed in subsequent sections of this thesis). Furthermore the contribution from the various authors has supported part of the earlier proposition that service quality is the difference between customers' desired expectations and their subsequent perceptions of a service experience and includes tangible and intangible elements. Since the model includes technical or tangible features and functional or intangible features, the model is also able to represent most, if not all, service packages and transactions in the marketplace.

## **1.5. Summary definition of services and service quality**

### **1.5.1. Composition of services**

This section intends to consolidate the concepts and theories that have been presented in this chapter on the definition of services, which will then lead to a discussion on the definition of service quality. From the literature review, discussion and models presented so far in this chapter, several issues and concepts have emerged on more than one occasion. For example, a service is considered to represent all transactions in the marketplace, which includes any permutation of tangibles and intangibles, and although the customer is likely to be more interested in the benefits that the service provides rather than the distinction between tangibles and intangibles, it is still necessary to understand the characteristics of these tangibles and intangibles to enable providers to deliver the benefits customers seek. Much of the debate in the literature appeared to confuse the concept of a service as either representing products from service industries, representing intangible performances between service providers and customers, or representing the whole service offer which includes tangibles and intangibles. As indicated beforehand, this study supports the view of the last definition which has been graphically illustrated in Figure 1-6.

Figure 1-6: Service Offer Model

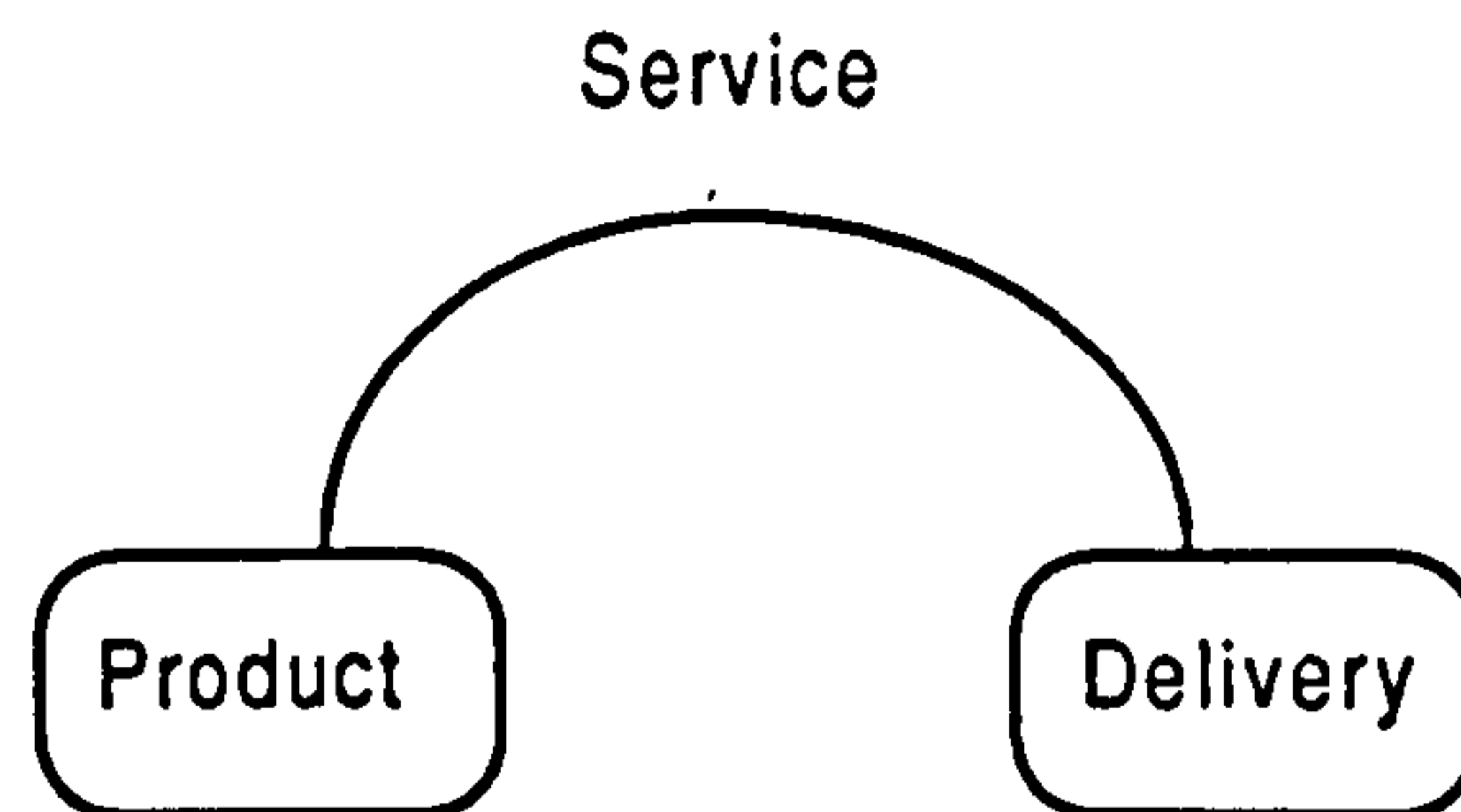


Figure 1-6 shows that a service includes a product and a delivery component. The product component can be any permutation of tangible products or intangibles products, whilst the delivery is essentially an intangible activity representing the encounters between the provider and consumer. The literature often refers to tangible and intangible products but it is not always clear on whether the intangibles refer to intangible products or the intangible delivery process. Figure 1-6 though shows clearly that products, whether tangible or intangible, need to be considered separately from the actual delivery element. An example of the differences between tangible and intangible products has been shown in Figure 1-7:

Figure 1-7: Examples of tangible and intangible products

<u>Tangibles</u>	<u>Intangibles</u>
motor car	insurance
clothes	haircut
food	hotel room

The use of a motor car, the wearing of clothes and the consumption of food clearly involves tangible products, but the reason why insurance, a haircut, and a hotel room are considered to be intangible products may not be so obvious. The reasons proposed here are best illustrated in Figure 1-8. which shows that although there are tangible manifestations of these products, the products themselves are in essence intangible:

Figure 1-8: Features of intangible products

<u>Product</u>	<u>Intangible features</u>	<u>Tangible manifestation</u>
Insurance	the term/agreement	policy, money, etc.
Haircut	the cutting	shorter hair, the cut or style, scissors, etc.
Hotel room	the hire/use	walls, furniture, etc.

Unlike the tangible manifestations, the intangible features cannot be grasped, but only mentally

visualised, but the customer is paying for the benefits that these intangibles provide. A hotel room for example is very tangible, but the customer pays for the benefits that the hire of the room bestows upon him such as shelter, warmth and comfort. As Shostack (1987, p.34) says... 'We say 'hotel' when we mean 'lodging rental'. We do not buy the hotel or the hotel room, but we use it by agreeing the terms of the rental - the actual agreement to use the room is intangible.

### 1.5.2. Composition of service quality

Since a service has now been defined as including any permutation of tangible and intangible products, together with a service delivery, service quality is therefore considered to refer to the quality of products and their associated delivery. Several writers have discussed service quality with implicit references to either the quality of the total service offer or the quality of the service delivery, but few have consciously expressed the two as being two separate quality issues, i.e. does service quality refer to the whole service package or does it refer to just the service delivery? Figure 1-9 shows how service quality and its component parts are considered in this study:

Figure 1-9: Service Quality Offer Model

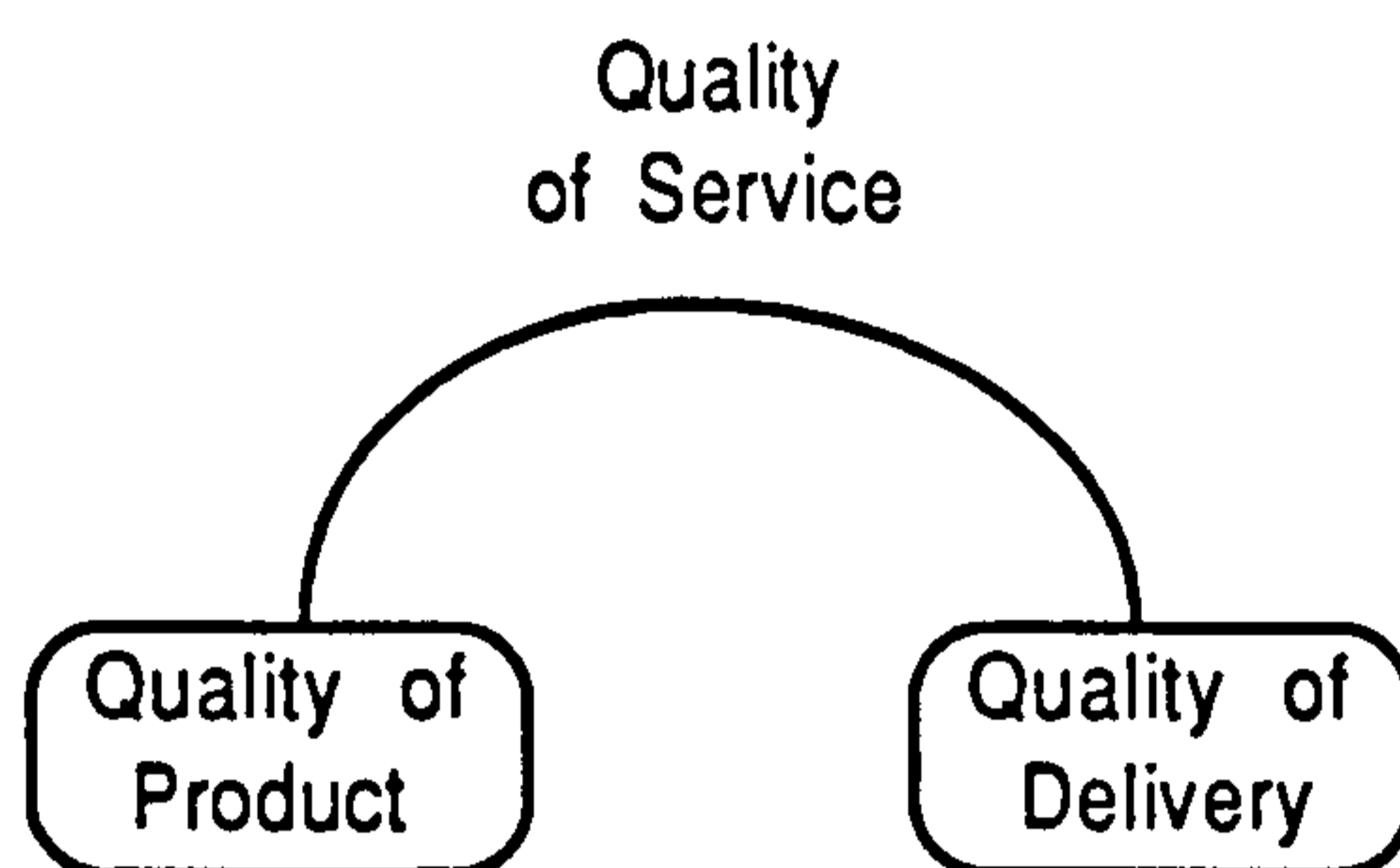


Figure 1-9 shows that service quality in this study refers to the total service package which includes all products and their delivery. This view appears to reflect that of Gronroos (1984) with his technical and functional quality, and Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1985) with their physical and interactive quality. Furthermore since it was earlier stated that service quality is a subjective assessment by a customer comparing their expectations of a service with their perceptions, it is necessary to show how the concepts in Figure 1-9 link up with expectations and perceptions of a service, and subsequently perceptions of service quality. Figure 1-10 shows these concepts and their relationships.

Figure 1-10: Service Quality Delivery Circle

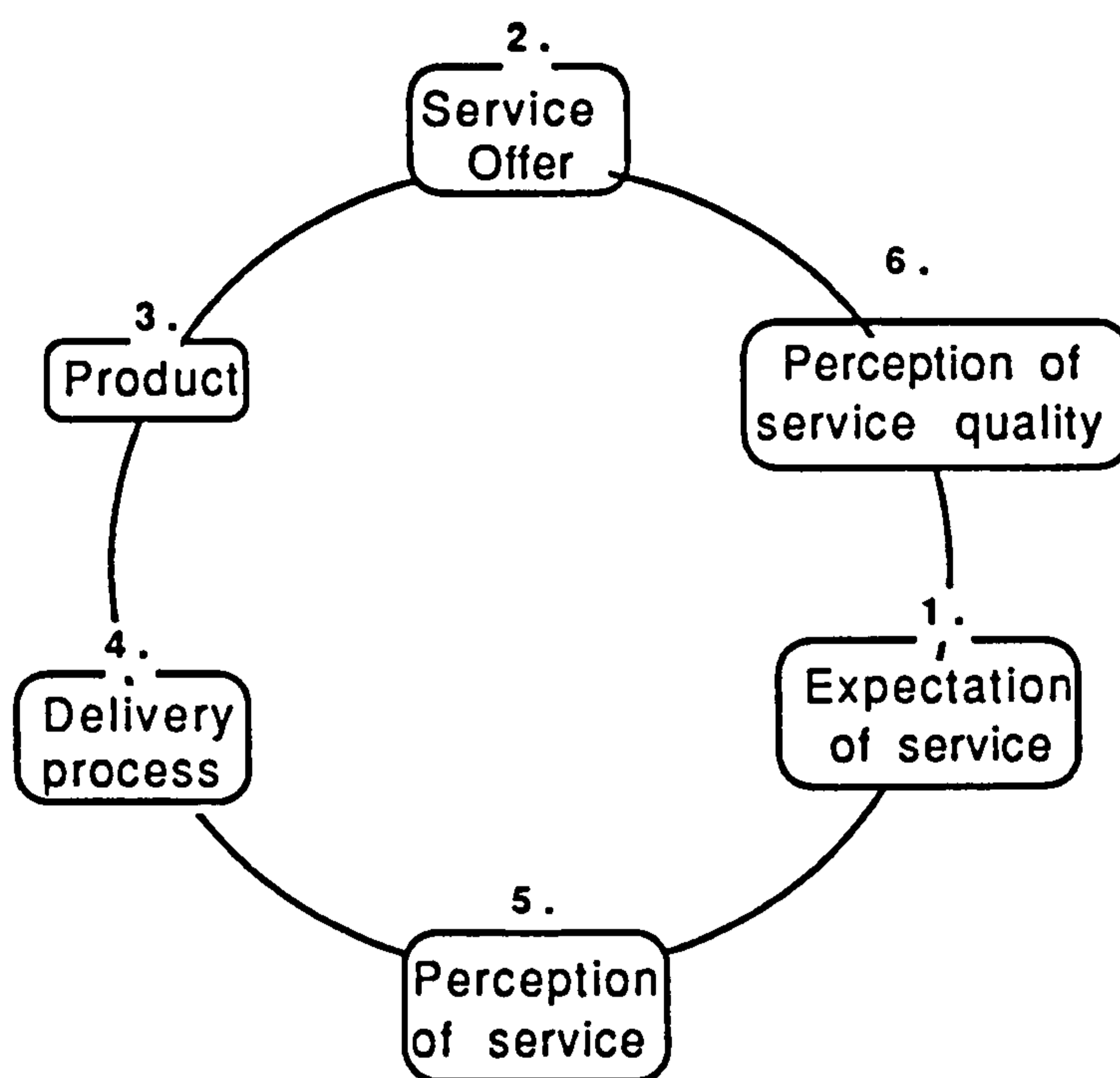


Figure 1-10 shows the six key concepts which represent the broad areas with which service quality is most concerned, and is an attempt to show how good service quality can be understood and could be subsequently controlled. These key concepts are discussed in a little more detail here to highlight their characteristics.

### 1. Expectation of service

Establishing the customer's expectations is the first priority in any marketing-oriented organisation [Baker 1989; Bernard 1988; Lewis 1984; Trippier 1987; Webster 1986]. Essentially the literature states that the provider has to consider what is it that the customer expects from the marketplace, and then make every attempt to deliver it at the price they wish to pay. A customer's expectations may well be influenced by previous experiences, word of mouth communication, advertising, image, personal needs etc. [Buchanan 1985], but in this study it still represents what the customer thinks should be provided.

### 2. Service Offer

Once the customers' expectations have been identified, the supplier has to consider if and how they can be provided for. The product has to be designed and the delivery process has to be planned to meet the customers' expectations and to ensure the successful delivery of service quality [LeBlanc and Nguyen 1988].

### 3. Product

The product must now be produced with the correct balance of features that the customer expects, and at the same time, be consistent with the original offer within the abilities of the organisation. For a tangible product, such as a motor car, it may be relatively easy for the manufacturer to design and produce the product according to the customer's expectations, because at all stages the product can be examined and modified before the delivery to the customer. However for an intangible product, such as a haircut, the product can be 'theoretically' designed to the correct requirements, but its quality cannot be assessed until the intangible product has been delivered and possibly 'experienced'.

### 4. Delivery process

The delivery process must be planned to complement the product, and to maximise customer satisfaction within the abilities of the organisation. This delivery may be brief, as with the transaction during the purchase of a newspaper from a newsagent, or the delivery may be extended, as with a flight on an aeroplane. Although the delivery process has not received the greatest attention in the past from manufacturing firms, as with non-manufacturing firms, they are now recognising the value of providing a service delivery which matches the quality of their products.

### 5. Perception of service

The process of perceiving the service, which includes the product and its delivery, may be a passive process with low-involvement or routine purchases, or it may be quite an active process with high-involvement or non-routine purchases, or where there is a variance to the expected outcome [Fletcher 1987; Kotler 1991]. This perceptual process though is not carried out without intention, but is a response to a conscious action, i.e. the intention to buy a product accompanied by a delivery process. This means that the individual may have desired expectations in familiar situations or may just have anticipated expectations in completely new situations. The perceptual process though is focused since it is (consciously or sub-consciously) comparing perceptions of stimuli with desired or anticipated expectations.

### 6. Perception of service quality

Although the perceptions will be compared against expectations, a perception of service quality arises not through a comparison with anticipated expectations, but through a comparison with desired expectations. Although the customer's expectations may be unrealistically high or the



customer's perception may not actually reflect the 'real' quality of the product, it is the customer's perceptions, when compared against these expectations, that will result in a perception of service quality. However correct or erroneous this perception is, it may have a significant influence on a customer's attitude towards the service provider, and hence could have a negative effect on any future purchasing behaviour [Lewis 1985; Marr 1986].

## **1.6. Service quality and consumer behaviour**

The relationship between a customers' evaluation of service quality and their subsequent behaviour has received very little attention in the service quality literature, but there is an implicit assumption that good service quality will result in continued patronage, repeat purchases, referral trade and positive word of mouth communications. Webster (1991, p.5) comments: '...consumer satisfaction has a definite impact on attitude change, repeat purchase, and brand loyalty...', and Kotler (1991, p.178) comments: 'Attitudes lead people to behave in a fairly consistent way toward similar objects'. Image, which is a concept included in several service quality models, has also been associated with behaviour. Akhter et al (1987, p.68) states that the marketing and consumer behaviour literature have established that brands and retail outlets have images which influence consumers' evaluations and subsequent decision and patronage behaviour. However the relationship between good service quality and favourable behaviour is not clear and may not be as tenable as implied by the service quality and marketing literature.

Although the concept of attitudes has received little attention in the service quality literature, attitudes have been discussed extensively in the psychology literature. The psychology literature has documented various studies on the relationship between attitudes and subsequent behaviour, and many of the results have shown that there is not a direct correlation between these two concepts [Gross 1990; Tuck 1976]. Since attitudes and behaviour are not necessarily directly correlated, it is questionable whether good or poor service quality has a direct effect on subsequent consumer behaviour. As defined earlier in this thesis, good service quality means that a customer's perceptions of a delivered service matches or exceeds their initial expectations. However the discussion did not relate expectations and perceptions of good or poor service quality with consumer behaviour, or identify how these concepts were related to attitudes.

Although the psychology literature has provided many definitions of attitudes, without a single definition being supported by all writers, it is possible to provide a summary definition as illustrated by Gross (1990). An attitude may be considered a mental state, a learned orientation and a disposition to act in a certain way. An attitude refers to positive or negative beliefs about persons, things or events which may be developed over time to prepare the individual to respond to future events. Attitudes are often, but not always, considered to have three components, i.e. a cognitive

component, an affective component and an action component. The cognitive component is a belief or disbelief and is based on what we have learned through either direct or vicarious experiences, or through a communication medium. The affective component is a like or dislike and is based on an emotion and how we feel about a belief. The action component is a readiness to respond and behave in relation to the cognitive and affective components.

In the context of service quality a customer may develop an attitude over a period of time that some services are good whilst other services are poor. This attitude may then prepare the individual to anticipate and assess future service experiences by forming expectations of how a service should perform, and subsequently prepare the individual to focus their perceptual processes on particular aspects of the service being delivered. An evaluation of good service quality may then provide the individual with a positive disposition to using the service again or disseminating positive word of mouth communications, whilst an evaluation of poor service quality may provide the individual with a negative disposition to using the service again and disseminate negative word of mouth communications. However even this relationship is subject to some discrepancies. Since an individual's expectations and perceptions are usually selective, their evaluation of service quality may have been disproportionately influenced by a prior experience or prior communication, which may then result in an evaluation of service quality which is not necessarily objective or balanced, or be consistent with past or future evaluations.

The service quality literature has not produced any models which show the relationship between customers' attitudes, expectations, perceptions and behaviour, but there may be a connection between these four concepts. It is recognised that many studies in psychology have shown that attitudes are not directly correlated with behaviour [Barwise and Ehrenberg 1985; Foxall 1984b; Wells 1985], due to the presence of many intervening factors. For instance, an individual may have more than one attitude towards a situation which may confound a direct correlation with subsequent behaviour, e.g. their subjective norm or attitude towards their role may be more influential than their attitude towards a particular behaviour; their attitude towards an alternative action may be more positive than their attitude towards the behaviour in question; their circumstances or particular situational factors may actually prevent them from behaving according to their attitudes or intentions [Dhir 1987; Gross 1990; Hollander 1981; Tuck 1976]. Not only are attitudes a poor predictor of behaviour (unless the measurements are so tightly controlled that the situational factors are excluded), attitudes may possibly be influenced by other factors other than behaviour, such as word of mouth communications, advertising or other promotional material.

In the context of service quality, customers' attitudes, which may have been partly formed by previous experiences, will contribute towards forming expectations for a service offering and

subsequently direct their perceptions of a service being experienced. The differences between these expectations and perceptions will provide an evaluation of the service experienced which may then reinforce or change the original attitudes, with or without other information sources. Although these attitudes may then influence future behaviour, it is unlikely that there will be a direct correlation between these two due to the intervening influences of situational factors. Good service quality therefore will not necessarily result in favourable physical or verbal consumer behaviour.

Although this study is intending to identify customers' perception of service quality in roadside lodges by identifying their separate expectations and perceptions of services, it is not the aim to predict behaviour through perceptions of service quality, through attitudes, or through behavioural intentions. The link between these concepts and behaviour is complex and may never be successfully identified for all service transactions. The study is merely attempting to show how service quality is perceived by customers, what service quality involves, and demonstrate the usefulness of identifying service employees' perceptions of customers' expectations and perceptions.

## **1.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has briefly reviewed the literature on services, service quality, attitudes and behaviour. The characteristics of intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, perishability and lack of ownership are not considered to be tenable when applied exclusively to services. The term 'service' is considered to represent all transactions in the marketplace whatever their physical composition, and 'service quality' is considered to be the customers' evaluation of whether a service has reached their expectations. Good service quality though is a subjective judgement: expectations and perceptions of service quality may be shared amongst groups of consumers, or they may be unique to individual consumers. Although it is largely assumed by the service quality literature that good service quality results in favourable physical and verbal consumer behaviour, it is very difficult to prove a direct correlation between attitudes or perceptions and behaviour due to the influence of situational factors. However in an indirect way, perceptions of good service quality are ultimately likely to be more favourable than perceptions of poor service quality.

## **Footnotes to Chapter I**

1. A discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of delivering service quality was presented in the Introduction.

2. Further definitions of expectations are presented in Chapter IV when the measurement of expectations are discussed.

## **Chapter II**

### **Providing service quality**

## **2.1. Introduction**

The delivery of consistently good service quality is dependent on several factors. Some of these factors may be under the control of either service providers, customers, external suppliers, or environmental factors. This chapter will consider three of the more critical factors under the control of service providers, i.e. the quality of the service delivery system, the quality of service employees, and the quality of management. Although these three are initially considered separately, the interactive relationship they have with each other will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

## **2.2. The service process**

### **2.2.1. Services as processes**

Several authors in the service quality literature have considered that service quality delivery can be controlled more consistently by treating services as processes. The process perspective has traditionally been associated with manufacturing where factory production lines are documented on flow-charts to aid systems design, analysis and change. However many references have been made to the similarities and differences between factory production-lines and service production-lines [Chase 1978; Levitt 1972], and several authors have commented that with a service the customer is essentially entering the service 'factory' [Armistead et al 1986; Chase and Garvin 1989; Collier 1989; Haywood-Farmer 1988; Levitt 1972; Lovelock 1983].

Some researchers have attempted to show the value of using a process or systems approach to documenting and designing services. Cutcliff and Strank (1971) used this approach for viewing catering operations, Kreck (1978) used it for analysing and designing hotel operations, and Cousins and Foskett (1989) have shown how the teaching of food production can be enhanced with a systems approach. Shostack (1984, 1987) has demonstrated a systems approach called 'service blueprinting' in several service sectors, whilst Huete and Roth (1988) have presented a study on the design of service delivery systems in the retail banking sector. Levitt (1972) and Jones (1988) comment that the early success of the McDonalds burger chain is a prime example of the value of using a systems approach in service-type industries.

The systems or process approach for viewing services is said to offer advantages in providing clarity of exposition during the analysis stages and flexibility during the design stages [Cutcliffe and Strank 1971; Levitt 1972; Kreck 1978; Sasser et al 1982]. The approach has been considered useful in illustrating whole service delivery systems which can emphasise their interactive components on flow-charts [Pickworth 1988] and provide individuals with a greater understanding

of service processes enabling them to become more creative in improving service operations [Cousins and Foskett 1989]. Furthermore the process perspective enables a systems analyst to identify, highlight and pay particular attention to significant points and activities in a service system that can impact on service quality [Dotchin and Oakland 1991; Johnston 1987; Shostack 1984].

Although the systems perspective has been considered valuable in service analysis and design, its application cannot be applied to services with the same degree of rigour and precision as with manufacturing processes [Collier 1989]. Services are more complex than production lines in that they are affected by the actions of customers and employees during the process. The researchers that have used systems approaches for services have generally recognised this limitation and have subsequently attempted different ways of representing services with flow-charts which recognise the critical variables in service process control.

Many of the systems approaches though are not particularly customer-oriented. The flow-chart methods employed by Cutcliff and Strank (1971), Kreck (1978), Shostack (1984, 1987), and Cousins and Foskett (1989) focus more on the operational aspects of the service and not on customer movements. The 'customer process operation' method by Johnston (1987) is more customer-oriented but is too simplistic to be sufficiently representative of a service. The flow-chart method by Sasser et al (1982) is more comprehensive but it is too rigid for accommodating the contingency actions of customers and employees that occur in a typical service process. The 'service quality process mapping' technique by Collier (1991) is more sensitive to customer perceptions and service variabilities, but it does not display service processes in an illustrative way which is helpful to managers and it requires an understanding of statistical calculations which managers may not always have. Furthermore although Levitt (1972) discusses the advantages of treating services similar to factory production lines, he does not actually offer a method for achieving this.

### 2.2.2. The service delivery system

The initial idea of treating services as processes led to the development of the 'service delivery system' (SDS) concept by Sasser et al (1978) [Huete and Roth 1988; Jones 1988; Pickworth 1988]. The SDS concept is an attempt to graphically structure and display a service operation so it can be analysed and designed to achieve balance and consistency in its operations and customer interactions. Even though the SDS concept may be too simple to effectively represent anything but the most simple service, it does provide a graphical display of the activities and passage of time that the customer is being 'serviced' or 'processed' by organisations within most service operations. Instead of processing raw materials into finished goods, the intention of the SDS representation is to illustrate the processing of people with an unsatisfied need into people with a satisfied need

[Johnston and Morris 1984]. The method used by Sasser et al (1982) attempts to capture some or all of the common activities a customer will carry out during their period in a service system. These activities can represent the customer moving through the system, they can represent customer interactions with service employees, or they can represent the movement of physical items. The SDS concept could therefore be used to display tangible and intangible elements of a service and its delivery in whatever level of resolution is required for an analysis. Since the concept represents services, then it can also feasibly (within its known limitations discussed) represent all service transactions in the marketplace whatever their physical composition.

If services can be represented by the SDS concept, then the quality of a service could be related to the quality of the service delivery system. Service quality was defined as a function of customers' expectations and perceptions, therefore service quality is related to customers' expectations and perceptions as they pass through the service delivery system [Gronroos 1984; Pickworth 1988]. A customer forms initial expectations about a service offering before they enter a service delivery system from various sources, such as those shown in Figure 1-5, and during their 'journey' through the system the customer will assess the service experience by comparing their expectations against the ongoing perceptions of the service process and experience. After the service has been completed, the customer will again compare the initial expectations against the final perceptions (which is an accumulation of the ongoing perceptions) to provide a final evaluation of the service offering [LeBlanc and Nguyen 1988; Swartz and Brown 1988]. The emphasis of two types of perceptions, ongoing and final, reflects the proposition put forward by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1985) who distinguish between 'process' quality, which is the ongoing perceptions, and 'outcome' quality, which is the accumulated final perceptions.

Gronroos (1984) discusses 'functional' quality which is about how the service is delivered and 'technical' quality which is about what is delivered. Depending on the type of service and product being bought, the functional and technical elements may have varying influences on the customers' overall assessment, but essentially both will be important, and on occasions the functional elements may be more important [Gronroos 1984; McKenna 1988; Nightingale 1986; Teboul 1988; Yesawich 1987]. This discussion supports the notion that the customer is buying a package of benefits, and the complete experience, from initial entry into the service delivery system through to completion of the service, will be assessed and be bundled into an overall quality perception [McKenna 1988; Parasuraman et al 1986; Parkinson 1989]. It can be argued therefore that the delivery of good service quality depends partly upon the organisation ensuring that the customers' expectations do not exceed the organisation's ability to deliver, and partly upon ensuring that the service delivered is perceived by the customer as meeting their expectations as they pass through the service delivery system [Johnston 1987; LeBlanc and Nguyen 1988; Watchell 1984]. The design of the SDS therefore needs to reflect the organisation's ability to provide the service they



have promised.

### 2.2.3. Designing service delivery systems

Since the SDS must reflect the operating strategy of the organisation [George 1990], during the design of the SDS every aspect of the service needs to be considered to ensure that the whole service production and delivery is carefully integrated as a chain of coordinated events. Although a well designed service delivery system may not automatically result in continued and growing customer patronage, a poorly designed system is likely to create customer dissatisfaction, create unnecessary stress and conflict for the employees, and consequently have an adverse affect on employee motivation [Berry et al 1988; Cravens et al 1988; Czepiel 1980; Lewis 1989; Orly 1988; Schneider et al 1980]. Although employees may be able to overcome some of the deficiencies of a poorly designed system [Pickworth 1988], such as anticipating and attempting to circumvent potential failures, or responding quickly to actual service failures, there are limits to their abilities to do so [Sasser et al 1982]. The design of an SDS is therefore a crucial factor in facilitating the delivery of consistently good service quality.

When a production line in a factory is considered for design or re-design, management can draw upon a variety of techniques to assist them. Some of the more common techniques used in manufacturing operations are 'systems' tools, with many falling within the domain of operational research (OR). These techniques are particularly useful for calculating the best design using a range of precise statistical measurements to incorporate strict mechanical controls to ensure the consistent production of quality goods. Although several other authors have used systems approaches for service analysis purposes, and others have likened service quality with process quality [Gronroos 1984; LeBlanc and Nguyen 1988; Lehtinen and Lehtinen 1985; Lewis 1989; Teboul 1988], few of these can be used with the same precision as OR techniques can be used for factory production-lines. Service delivery systems are largely concerned with documenting human behaviour and experiences which cannot be subjected to the same kind of statistical and mechanical manipulation as production-line goods [Collier 1989; Lewis 1989].

One of the more recent examples of using a systems approach for service processes has been provided by Shostack's (1987) service blueprinting technique. Unlike many of the other techniques discussed, the service blueprinting technique gives attention to both the operational aspects and the customer experiences, which Shostack calls 'below the line activities' and 'above the line activities' respectively. These two areas are synonymous, but not identical, with the front-room activities (visible to the customer) and back-room activities (not visible to the customer) of an organisation. Shostack's technique enables a service delivery system to be documented in more detail, for quality purposes, than many of the other techniques available by detailing the most

common and critical employee and customer activities. However the technique is more production-oriented in detailing mainly employee activities with occasional customer activities grafted on. This lack of customer-orientation therefore places the primary analysis on operations and not perceived service quality.

Huete and Roth (1988) comment that more attention should be paid to the front-room activities where the customer-employee interaction takes place and where managers need to integrate many functions such as marketing, operations and personnel. However Armistead et al (1986) consider that these front-room activities of a service are more difficult to control than the back-room activities due to the presence of the customer and need to integrate so many functions at critical times. Cousins and Foskett (1989) comment that process design should focus primarily on the customer process so that any modifications to a service will consider the effect on the customer experience first, rather than with many other systems methods which give primacy to operations over perceived service quality.

Bitner et al (1990) comment that the service encounter between the customer and employee is frequently the 'service' from the customer's point of view. This is certainly the case when the service discussion is related to the narrower definition of a service<sup>1</sup>, and where the employee may strongly influence the customer's perception of the service experience. Although the service encounter has been widely discussed by the literature, most of the references have been towards the physical interaction between individuals. However similar consistency and quality difficulties may occur with service interactions over the telephone, and possibly to a lesser, by letter. Since some of these interactions between employees and customers may be difficult to standardise and control, the design of the SDS must be particularly sensitive to the front-room (or pre-entry) activities where these encounters typically occur. Shostack (1987) recognised the value of paying more attention to the people aspects of service systems and believes that management should take control of all human behaviour when considering process design, change, and operating quality. This of course is difficult if not impossible to achieve, but certain 'operating tolerances' may be achievable.

## **2.3. Service employees**

### **2.3.1. Perceptions of employees**

Apart from having a quality service delivery system, the employees operating within that system need to be of a 'quality' nature, i.e. be able and willing to serve the needs of customers, since the people who are constantly in contact with customers may have a large influence on the success of an operation [Scholl-Poesngen 1983]. George (1990) considers that the skills, customer orientation, and service mindeness of employees are of critical importance to customers'

perceptions and their subsequent patronage behaviour. However it may be difficult for organisations to guarantee that every service interaction will be of a quality nature, since in many situations most of the control is in the hands of the employee and customer [Buttle 1986; Levitt 1981; Lewis 1989; Reid 1986; Shostack 1987; Teboul 1988; Zeithaml et al 1988]. Czepiel (1980), Levitt (1976) and Parasuraman et al (1985) comment that service firms have difficulty in controlling services since they depend so much upon people as the prime determinant of that experience, a factor which is not conducive to ensuring standardisation and quality control. Because of the limited control management can exercise over these service interactions, things can go wrong [Berry et al 1988], such as employees misinterpreting customer requirements which can then lead to creating a negative and lasting effect on the perceptions of the customer [Czepiel 1980; Lehtinen and Lehtinen 1985].

The control of a service does not necessarily mean that the employee must be controlled by rules and procedures, but employees may be partly controlled by ensuring that their perceptions of service quality match those of the customers'. Although perceptions do not necessarily lead directly to specific behaviour, perceptions of employees may have an influence on how they react to customers. Furthermore by making the employee aware of what good service means to an individual customer and stressing the importance of satisfied customers, it may be possible to sensitise the employee's perceptions to what constitutes good and poor service in subsequent service encounters. Both employees' and customers' perceptions could therefore have an influence on the quality of the service delivery [Lockwood and Jones 1989].

A few studies have been carried out to identify employees' perceptions and the correlation they have with their customers' perceptions. Schneider et al (1980) carried out a study in retail banking using the customers' perceptions of the service they received, and the employees' perceptions of the service being delivered. The authors found that employee perceptions of branch practices and procedures in relation to customer service were strongly related with customer perceptions of service practices and quality. Schneider et al concluded that some service organisations, such as those in retail banking, should provide greater support to employees by allowing them more flexibility in their handling of customers. With insufficient support and too much rigidity employees are likely to suffer from 'ambiguity and stress' associated with their jobs, by not being sure whether they should be loyal to the organisation or loyal to the customer. The Schneider study though did not identify what customers expected and drew their correlations from two different perspectives, i.e. customer perceptions of the service and employees' perceptions of branch practices.

Nightingale (1986) carried out a number of studies of service quality in a variety of hotel and catering organisations over several years, and he generally found considerable differences in

perceptions between customers and providers, and amongst providers themselves. The researcher was critical of management's role in not properly identifying customer requirements, and subsequently not being able to train staff and build a customer-oriented organisation. However the literature in the hotel and catering industry has highlighted the substantial difficulties organisations have in recruiting and training employees in an industry that has much seasonal and part-time work, many ethnic workers, and large employee turnovers. Nightingale though did not identify the degree of differences between customers and providers.

Dunlap et al (1988) conducted a study into the customer-orientation of real-estate brokers. Their objective was to determine the degree to which brokers rate themselves as being customer-oriented, as well as the degree to which consumers of residential real-estate rate brokers as being customer-oriented. Their findings suggested that brokers considered themselves more customer-oriented than their customers did. The authors acknowledged that training in real-estate broking can be rigorous, but there appears to be a poor understanding of the importance of the social and marketing aspects at the expense of the technical and production aspects. Dunlap et al though did not generate their own list of attributes but used a generic list which had been compiled from previous sales studies. Using attributes from one context for another context may question the validity of the selected attributes.

Brown and Swartz (1989) carried out a study between physicians and their client-patients to identify perceptual gaps between the two parties on the service quality delivered and received respectively. The authors considered that this was one of the first studies to examine perceptions of service encounter quality from both parties in the dyadic exchange. The providers were asked to respond to the same items the way they believed their clients would respond, to enable a direct comparison to be made between the two. Brown and Swartz concluded that although client assessments are important, service marketers should also include the professionals' view in service quality evaluation to identify perceptual gaps, which can provide additional insight into areas where change is needed. The elimination of these gaps and the subsequent match between providers' and clients' perceptions will have a positive effect on developing consistency between clients' expectations and experiences. Brown and Schwartz though obtained some results which were not consistent with each other or could be rationally explained, and concluded that their scales required further refinements.

Parasuraman et al (1985) conducted a study across several business sectors and found that considerable discrepancies existed between customers and service executives. From their studies the authors developed a service quality model (Figure 1-3) illustrating the occurrence of four gaps on the providers' side, which then leads to a fifth gap occurring on the consumers' side. Although the researchers identified gaps which may occur in an organisation, their model only focuses on

one gap which directly compares providers' perceptions with consumers' expectations (gap 1), and does not focus on the difference between providers' perceptions with consumers' perceptions, i.e. the model attempts to identify if managers understand what customers want before a service experience, but it does not attempt to identify if managers understand if customers have received the service they wanted afterwards.

These various studies have all attempted to identify the customer-orientation of service providers in various industries, and with the knowledge of their limitations, these studies may provide a greater understanding on how customer-orientations can be identified and developed in organisations to facilitate the delivery of consistently good service quality. Three areas which have received particular attention within the area of human resource management (HRM) are recruitment, training, and communications [Evardsson and Gustavsson 1988; Johnston 1987; King 1986; Lewis 1990; Lockwood and Jones 1989; Shostack 1984].

### 2.3.2. Recruitment

Drucker (1987) says that employee selection is one of the most critical aspects leading to a successful organisation, yet it is one of the most neglected. In many transactions, such as restaurant experiences, the employee is considered to be part of the service product, and therefore the employee is an integral part of the service package [Chase 1978; Surprenant et al 1987]. The recruitment policy of an organisation therefore should be directed towards employing individuals which potentially have the ability and willingness to relate to and serve customers' needs within organisational parameters [King 1986]. Czepiel (1980) discusses the possibility of selecting employees that have internal standards which match the organisation's requirements, such as with performing arts, but admits that in many situations this may not always be possible. Voss (1990)<sup>2</sup> takes a joint personnel and marketing viewpoint by commenting that the success of the delivery system is based on 'people selection', that is ensuring that the organisation selects the most appropriate employees and only attracts customers of the target market. Most of these writers though have not expanded on how the most suitable employees can be identified and recruited. Although there is a large body of literature available on employee recruitment and personality tests, it is not the intention to expand on these areas in this study.

### 2.3.3. Training

Once the organisation has recruited the most appropriate staff, there is a necessity to ensure that they are trained to a level that satisfies customers within organisational parameters [Czepiel 1980; Haywood-Farmer 1988; Parasuraman et al 1985]. Appropriate training procedures are required to develop the skills of the employee to facilitate effective service delivery, and this may include

developing technical skills, social skills and other skills which may improve employees' ability to perform to customer and organisational requirements. Training policies for contact-employees though are often designed towards developing mainly technical skills, yet since the interaction between an employee and a customer is essentially a social performance [Glover 1987], which may in itself be a critical 'differentiating' factor in a competitive marketplace [George 1990], training should focus on social skills as well as technical skills [Berry et al 1988; Clutterbuck 1988; King 1984; Riley 1986; Schneider et al 1980; Shostack 1984; Surprenant et al 1987]. Lockwood and Jones (1989) highlight the value of social skills by suggesting that interactions between people skilled in a social interaction will be far different from interactions between less socially competent individuals, and therefore employees trained in social skills may offer the competitive advantage many organisations seek.

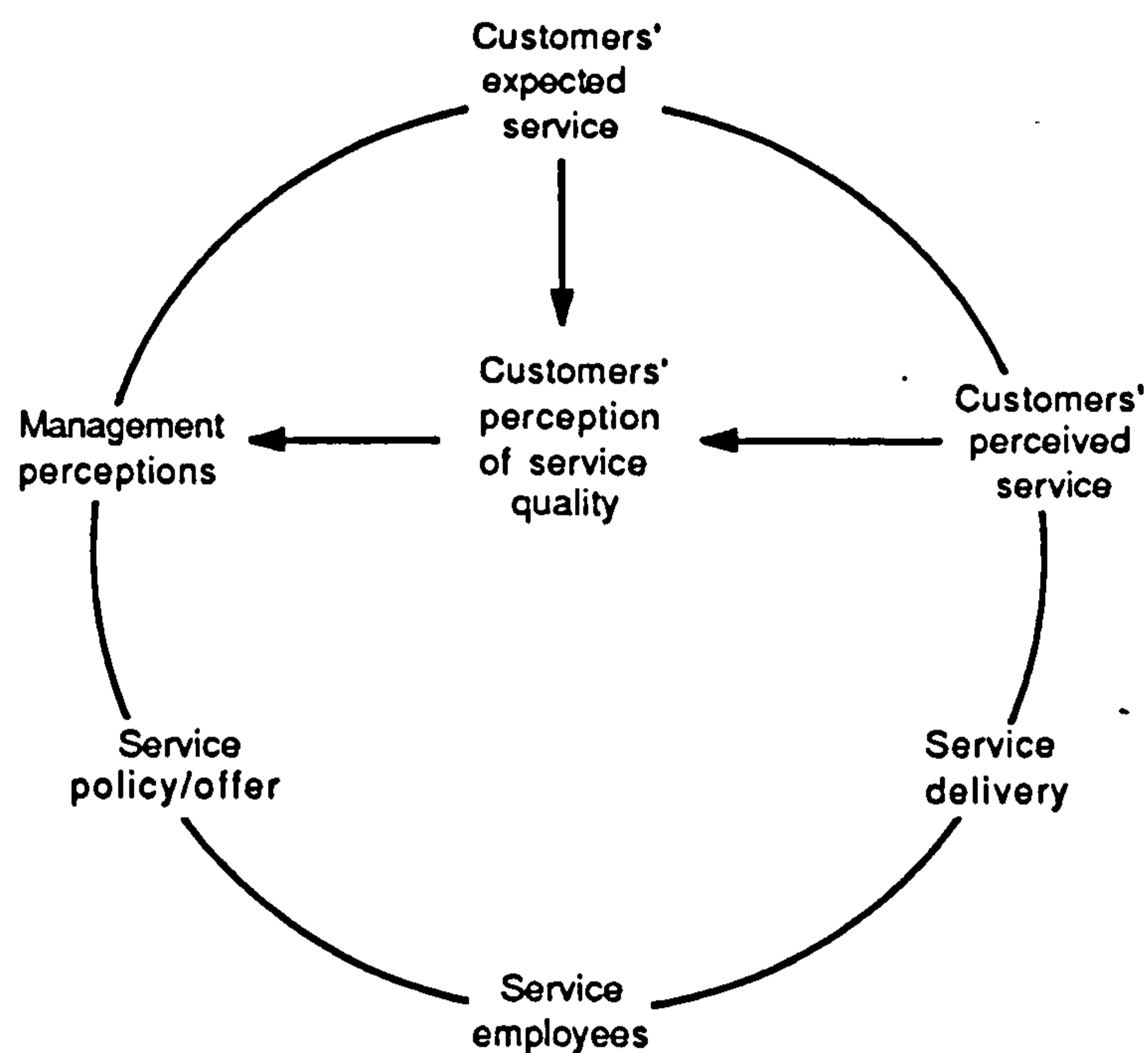
However training employees in both social and technical skills requires a further consideration. Berry et al (1988) report on their study in which they identified bank employees suffering from 'role conflict', that is maintaining the system as well as trying to serve the customer. To overcome role conflict, Chase (1978), Czepiel (1980), Cornish (1988), and Lockwood and Jones (1989) discuss the possibility of allowing employees with strong interpersonal skills to be freed from support services to enable them to serve the customer effectively, and allow those employees with strong technical skills to provide the support function. This approach reduces the stress caused by individuals carrying out a range of jobs which can sometimes compromise each other, i.e. attempting to serve the customers' needs which may be hindered by technical activities, or attempting to carry out technical activities which may be hindered by the presence of customers. Training in social and technical skills therefore may have to be selective according to the orientation of the employee, but at the same time it is widely recognised that an understanding of customers' needs and satisfaction levels is a necessity for most, if not all, employees in an organisation [Dotchin and Oakland 1991; George 1990].

#### 2.3.4. Communications

Several writers have strongly advocated the case for good communications in organisations [Greenwood 1989; Johnston 1987; Nightingale 1986; Riley 1986], and several benefits for good communications have been put forward. It is said that commitment from employees can be developed and fostered by keeping them more informed [Chase 1978; Glover 1987; Orly 1988; Reid 1986; Tideman 1983]; valuable information on quality issues can be identified by employees and subsequently be relayed back to management [Schneider et al 1980]; and managers and employees can develop a shared belief in their concept of service quality [Horovitz and Cudennec-Poon 1990]. Good communications in an organisation though is not a uni-dimensional concept between managers and employees, but a multi-dimensional concept, i.e. communications

can be generated between and amongst management and employees, and to and from customers. Figure 2-1 shows the most basic communications channels in an organisation that would facilitate the identification and monitoring of good service quality.

Figure 2-1: Basic communication circle



The steps shown in Figure 2-1 were taken from those displayed in the service quality model in Figure 1-5. The figure shows that the customers' expectations are initially identified, perhaps through market research, and subsequently conveyed to the organisation's management to form the basis of the company's service offering. The management then translate the customers' expectations into the service policy/offer which is then communicated to the employees, who then deliver the service. The customers then evaluate the quality of the service by comparing their perceptions with their expectations, which is then relayed back to management.

The sequence shown in the figure is theoretically quite simple, but in practice it is possible that the communications circle will not operate so efficiently for a variety of reasons. For example: it may not be feasible for organisations to provide exactly what the customer requires due to lack of ability or cost constraints; the longer the period between identifying customers' expectations and providing the service, the greater the potential for the customer to alter his initial expectations; and information on customers' requirements may become distorted as it travels through the communication pathway, especially where there are several layers of management [Clutterbuck 1988; Gronroos 1988; Zeithaml et al 1988].

To ensure that organisations only provide what they are able to within their cost constraints, and to ensure that customers' expectations do not alter significantly, it may be necessary for organisations

to keep reminding customers of their known capabilities [Czepiel 1980; Horovitz and Cudennec-Poon 1990; Parasuraman et al 1985]. However to prevent information on customers' requirements becoming distorted as it travels through the communication pathway, it is important that management receive and translate customers' requirements into the service policy/offer faithfully, and that employees understand the required service and are able to deliver it to customers' expectations [Parasuraman et al 1985].

In a new business it is perhaps only possible to carry out pre-purchase market research into consumers' expectations, but after a period of trading it is possible to conduct post-purchase market research to identify and monitor customers' perceptions to compare against the customers' initial expectations. This was the approach that was advocated in the previous chapter on the measurement of service quality, i.e. management can measure both customers' expectations and customers' perceptions to monitor the delivery of effective service quality. However an analysis of the model in Figure 2-1 shows that there is yet another pathway that can be used to channel consumer information back to the management, i.e. through the service employees. Figure 2-2 shows this third communication pathway.

Figure 2-2: Advanced communication circle

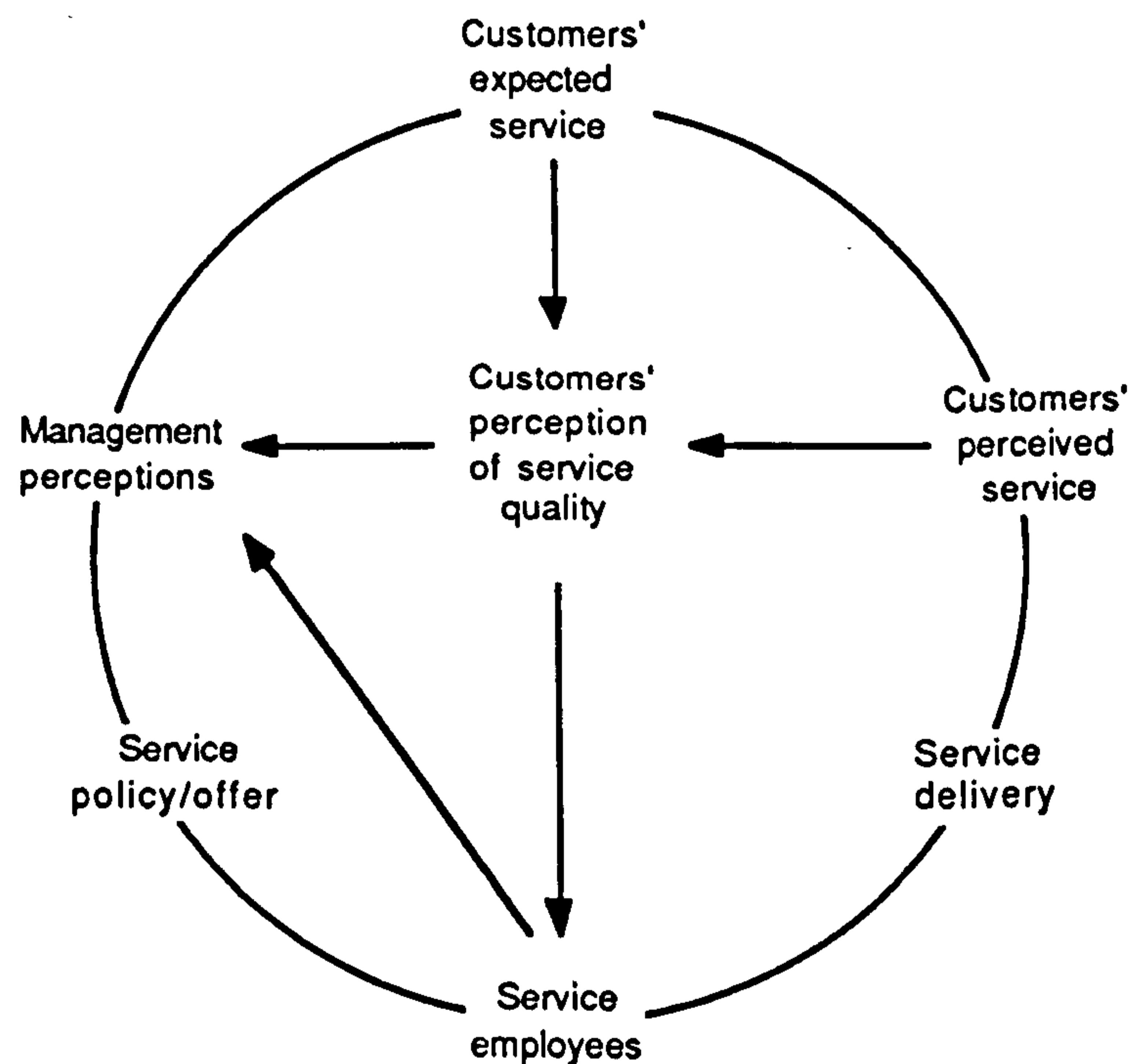


Figure 2-2 shows that the organisations' management have three pathways in which information on customers' expectations and perceptions can be obtained. All three sources are subject to communications distortion, and they may be difficult and expensive to collect and collate, but the combined three sources can offer several advantages over single sources, such as:



(a) Collecting both customers' expectations and customers' perceptions provides far greater diagnostic and synergistic value than collecting data from one of these sources alone [Parasuraman et al 1986]. The identification of expectations provides a measure of how important an attribute is considered by customers, and the identification of perceptions of service quality provides a measure of how well the organisation has met customers' expectations for those attributes. Many consumer studies focus just on identifying customers' perceptions of service quality, but this does not provide a measure of what level of service is expected.

(b) Collecting perceptions from customers and employees may be more valid and reliable than collecting perceptions from one source [Schneider et al 1980]. If the same service quality difficulties are raised by both parties, this may indicate that the service experience problems for customers are the same as the operational problems for employees, and thereby validate the existence of a problem in the SDS. By addressing the commonly perceived problem areas, both customer service experiences and employee work experiences may be improved jointly together.

(c) Collecting perceptions from customers and employees may identify whether employees have a high or low level of empathy for their customers. If employees are found to have high empathy for their customers, then this may indicate that: (i) perceptions of service quality issues are shared by both customers and employees; (ii) service failures are not a result of poor perceptions but of some other cause, such as a poorly designed service delivery system; and (iii) employees could be used for organisational diagnoses [Ibid] and thereby contribute to the design of effective service delivery systems. However if management do not recognise the high correlation between employees and customers on service quality difficulties, there is a real possibility that the employees will become frustrated with these difficulties and subsequently become more loyal to the customer than to the organisation [Ibid].

If employees are found to have low empathy for their customers, then this might indicate that either the organisation's (i) recruitment policies are inappropriate, (ii) training policies are inappropriate, or (iii) communication channels are ineffective. These three problems may indicate that the HRM policy in an organisation is operating in isolation from the marketing and operating functions. Since human behaviour and perceptions may on occasions be related, management need to ensure that their employees develop customer-oriented perceptions in an attempt to influence appropriate behaviour towards their customers. In all businesses service quality is the responsibility of every individual in the organisation [Johnston 1987; Leonard and Sasser 1982], which means that HRM, the marketing function, and the operating function are all inextricably linked [Despande and Webster 1989; George 1990; Pickworth 1988; Rees 1989; Schneider et al 1980].

Although the marketing and personnel functions are often regarded as two distinct areas in an

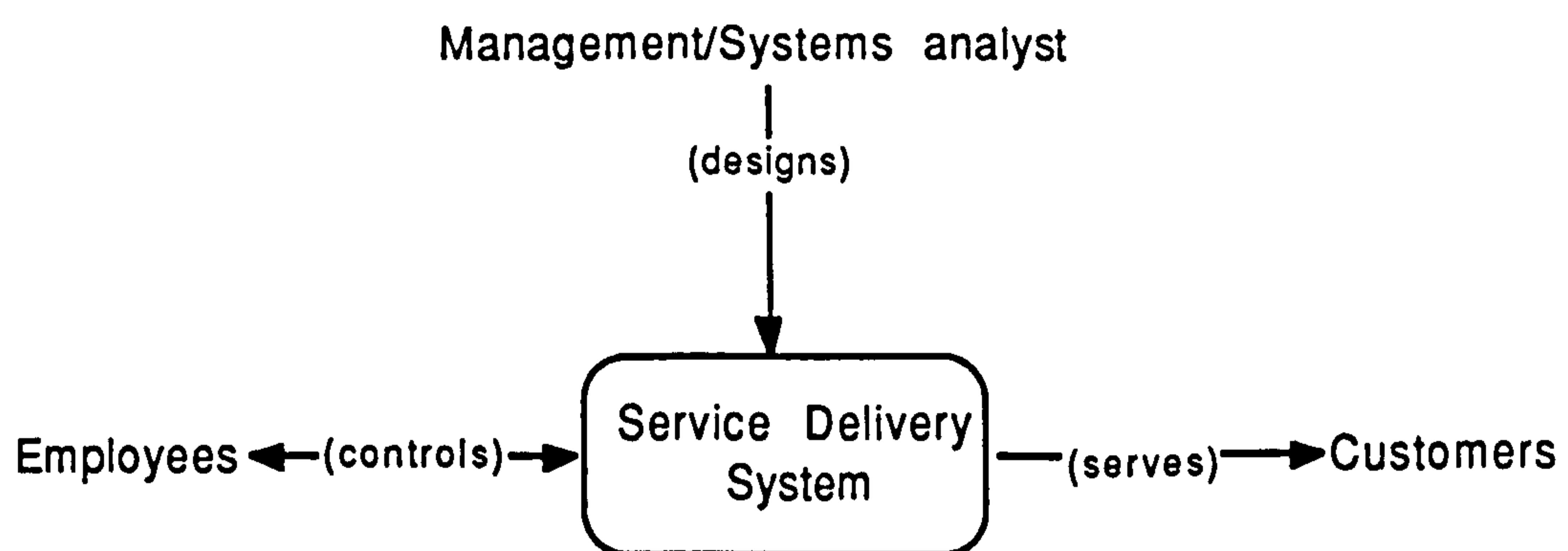
organisation, many writers have stressed that for personnel to become more customer and service-oriented, these two functions should become more coordinated [Czepiel 1980; George 1990; Lewis 1989; Zeithaml et al 1985]. Dunlap et al (1988, p.185) neatly encapsulate this when they say: 'In essence, the objective of customer-oriented selling is to operationalise the marketing concept at the level of the individual salesperson and the customer.' If the employee-workforce is either not correctly selected, not thoroughly trained, nor adequately communicated to, then management are unlikely to build a customer-oriented organisation. However if the employee-workforce is correctly selected, trained and communicated to, it is possible that they may be able to contribute to the design and operation of effective service delivery systems.

## 2.4. The service process and service employees

### 2.4.1. Designing customer-oriented service delivery systems

Shostack (1987) suggests that employees and customers can and should become involved in the design of service delivery systems. However it is important to have an understanding of employees' attitudes and skills before being assured of the value of their involvement [George 1990]. This idea has not been widely discussed by the literature, but the traditional approach of designing service delivery systems gives most of the design responsibility to the management and/or a systems analyst, as illustrated in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-3: Traditional approach to SDS design



With the approach in Figure 2-3 it is the management and/or the systems analyst which determine the design of the SDS (based on their perceptions) [Brown and Swartz 1989], yet it is the employee which has to operate it within controlled parameters laid down by the management/analyst. Furthermore it is the customer which is 'serviced' by the system, and ultimately, is the final judge of its effectiveness in providing service quality. Many commentators have remarked on delivery systems being designed for the benefit of the organisational efficiency without sufficient attention being given to the users, i.e. the service employees and the customers. These points have been

taken up by Berry (1990)<sup>2</sup> when he stressed the importance of designing services that assist employees in delivering the required service, and by Burstein (1990)<sup>2</sup> when she commented that SDSs should be designed to be more responsive to customer needs.

The involvement of employees was further advocated by Chase and Garvin (1989) who believe that the future success of manufacturing organisations will depend upon a greater amount of direct communication between the factory employee and the customer, so that they can understand the critical success factors of a system and subsequently contribute to the design stages of services, products and factory processes [Chase 1990]<sup>2</sup>. Dotchin and Oakland (1991) further commented that improvements in service processes can only be achieved by involving people who have detailed knowledge of the process, i.e. employees providing the service. Service delivery systems can therefore be designed to 'theoretically' correct specifications using the knowledge and skills of systems analysts, and with the professional know-how of management, but the system may operate more successfully if the involvement of employees and feedback from customers receives a higher profile in the actual analysis and design. The involvement of employees would be dependent upon their degree of customer-orientation, but if the organisation has a communication network that keeps managers and employees aware of customer expectations and perceptions, then employees with high levels of customer-orientation can be selected for involvement. George (1990) supports this when he comments that quality of the exchanges between the organisation and its employees will have an effect on the quality of the exchanges between employees and the organisation's customers.

Following the reasoning of these authors, a suggested approach over Figure 2-3 would be the participative method illustrated in Figure 2-4.

Figure 2-4: Participative approach to SDS design

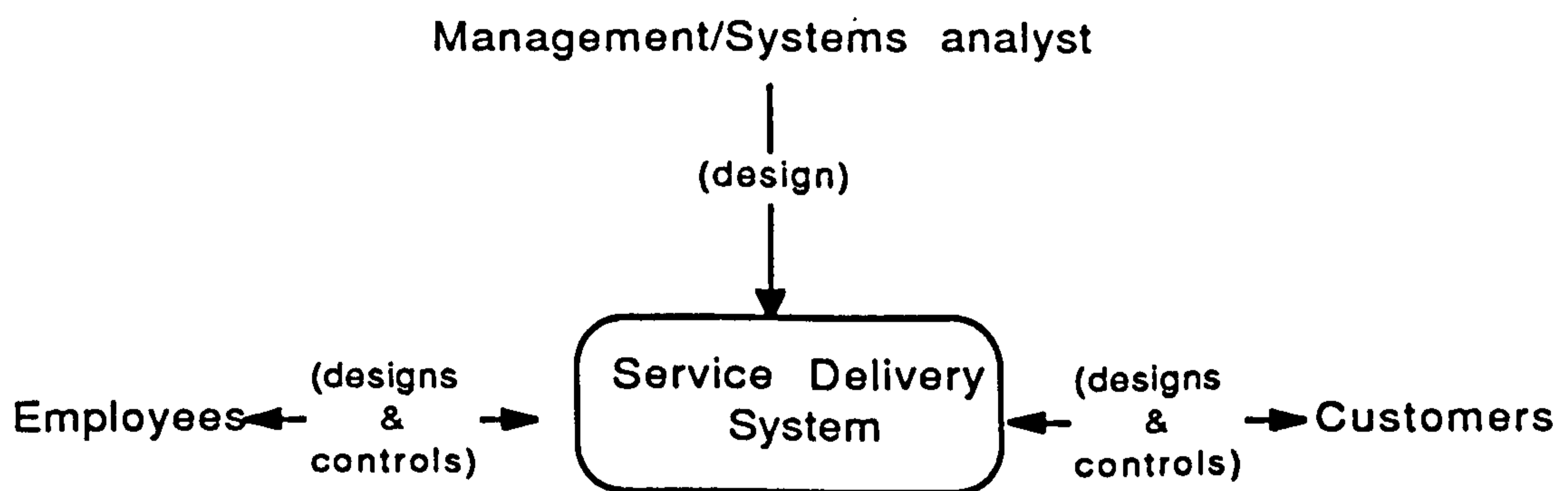


Figure 2-4 shows that although the SDS controls both customers and employees, the design of the SDS can involve the employee and customer, as well as the management/analyst. Customer perceptions can be identified through market research and accommodated at the design stages

[Czepiel 1980], whilst employees themselves can become actively involved through quality assurance activities, such as quality circles. This participative approach may highlight vulnerable aspects of the SDS from the service and operational perspectives of which management or the analyst were unaware. By identifying these vulnerable aspects before designing or re-designing an SDS, the service experience should become more acceptable to the customer and the work experience should become more acceptable to the employee [Lockwood and Jones 1989].

Apart from using employees' perceptions in contributing to the design of service delivery systems, their involvement may enhance their degree of interest and commitment to the organisation and to serving the needs of customers. Communication audits have been shown that staff often feel inadequately informed [Smith and Lewis 1989]. Recognising and using the capacity and willingness of employees to help in organisational analysis and change is simply a way of releasing part of their often untapped potential into the workplace which is often reserved purely for their non-work activities [Dotchin and Oakland 1991]. Furthermore since systems can often be viewed as repressive methods for controlling employees rather than as subordinate aids to delivering service quality [ibid], employee involvement could facilitate the acceptance and success of customer-oriented changes in service systems [Smith and Lewis 1989].

#### 2.4.2. Management

Much of the discussion in this chapter has focused on the need for employees to be customer oriented, and for employees to be correctly selected, trained and communicated to. However since management control the resources in an organisation and management are ultimately responsible for the performance of organisations, then it is necessary that the management are at least equally as customer oriented [George 1990; Leonard and Sasser 1982; Parkinson 1989; Reid 1986], and are equally as selected, trained and communicated to as the employees [Deming 1986; Juran 1988; Ishikawa 1985]. Albrecht (1990)<sup>2</sup>, Sayle (1986) and Shostack (1984) comment that the design of a process, the success of a service, and the quality of an organisation are all dependent upon the quality of senior management, and Deming (1986), Juran (1988) and Crosby (1979) have emphasised the need for management to adopt structured, systematic and rigorous approaches to quality control as part of their daily activities.

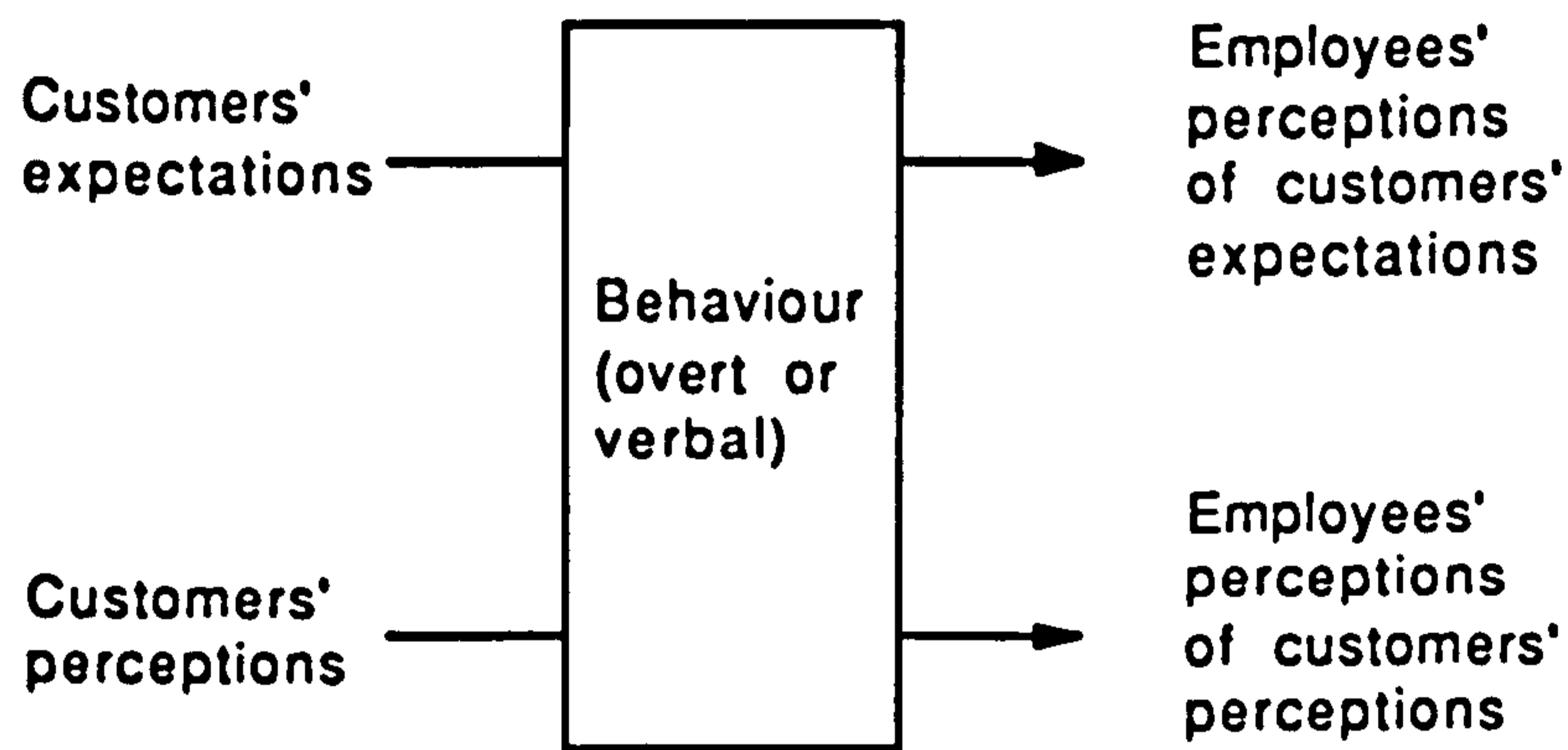
Dotchin and Oakland (1991) and Crosby (1979) though have said that management are responsible for most of the problems in organisations, and several studies by researchers have shown that many managers have a poor understanding of their customers' requirements and a poor perception of their customers' perceptions [Brown and Swartz 1989; Czepiel 1980; Nightingale 1983; Parasuraman et al 1985; Pottruck 1988; Schneider et al 1980]. This suggests that management are not always being correctly selected, trained and communicated to, and some of the principles

discussed in this chapter are highly pertinent to improving the customer orientation (and possibly employee orientation) of management. It follows therefore that the success of any quality initiative, such as the one discussed in this chapter involving customer feedback and employees in the design of service delivery systems, is highly dependent upon the 'quality' of the management.

## 2.5. Customers' behaviour and employees' perceptions

It was stated in Chapter I (section 1.6.) that the link between attitudes/perceptions and behavior was not clear and could not be accepted as a one-to-one relationship. If this is the case then this must raise the question of how employees could empathise with their customers? If the employee shares the same value system as the customer, then the employee may simply express their perceptions as being a reliable proxy of their customers' perceptions (or expectations or attitudes). However if the employee does not share the same value system, then the customers' perceptions would have to be inferred through some other means, such as their behaviour, as illustrated in Figure 2-5 below:

Figure 2-5: Customer behaviour and employee perceptions



The Figure shows that customers' expectations and perceptions will reach the employee through some form of behaviour, such as overt actions or verbal communication. This may be either through direct observation by the employee or vicariously through another person. If behaviour though is not an accurate representation of customers' perceptions (or expectations or attitudes), how does the employee interpret the behaviour?

As with the discussion in Chapter I on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, how employees' successfully interpret customers' perceptions is not intended to be an objective of this study, mainly due to its complexity. The importance of this issue though is recognised, and it will be referred to occasionally in this study, but perhaps more significantly it could become the focus of future studies.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

**This chapter has discussed the benefits of viewing services as processes and has argued that the successful delivery of service quality is influenced by the design of the SDS, by the level of technical ability and customer-orientation of the employees, and by the communication network between and amongst managers, employees and customers. For any of these to be successful though, organisations need to have quality management and effective human resource policies which focus on improving both the service experience for customers and the work experience for employees.**

## Footnotes to Chapter II

1. The differences between service definitions were discussed in section 1.2. in Chapter I.
2. These contributors were addressing the QUIS II conference in Norwalk, New York, in July 1990.

## **Chapter III**

### **Service quality attributes**



### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter continues with the proposition that service quality includes tangible and intangible elements by collecting a list of tangible and intangible attributes which appear to be important to hotel and lodge guests. The literature is first reviewed to summarise the various ways in which attributes can be elicited for hotel studies, together with some of their limitations, and then discuss the method which has been selected for this study. Finally the attributes that have been generated in this study will be summarised and compared with attributes which have been collected and presented in other studies of a similar nature.

### 3.2. Data collection techniques

#### 3.2.1. Common methods in hotel studies

Lewis (1983) and Yesawich (1987) comment that the hospitality industry has lagged behind many other industries in applying rigorous market research techniques and has tended to rely too much upon intuition and past practice to aid their marketing decisions. Lewis further comments that much of the research that is carried out is based on descriptive data which does not identify the real reasons consumers behave as they do and make decisions they make. The researcher believes it is perceptions coupled with important attributes which determine why an individual will choose one establishment over another. However as mentioned in earlier chapters this relationship is unlikely to be so tenable. Perceptions coupled with important attributes may influence choice behaviour, but it is unlikely to determine behaviour.

Many hotel studies have been documented in the literature but few of them have provided a comprehensive and valid list of attributes which can be used for this study. Differences arise due to some studies having different objectives and thus different ranges of attributes, and others having used methods that do not provide sufficient assurance of the validity of the attributes [Atkinson 1988; Cadotte and Turgeon 1988; Cornwell Self Associates 1988; The Institute of Sales and Marketing Managers 1986; Knutson 1988]. Other studies though include those that have used the repertory grid technique [Nightingale 1983]; those that have used interviews with open-ended questions with customers [Lewis 1988]; those that have used in-depth interviews with customers [Oberoi 1989]; and those that have used unstructured interviews with industry personnel [Wilensky and Buttle 1988]. Although some of these methods may be useful for generating attributes for this study, there are a number of other methods which the literature has discussed. Most of the methods that are available though tend to fall into four broad areas:

- (i) attributes are selected by researchers using their own perceptions;

- (ii) attributes are extracted from previous studies;
- (iii) attributes are identified through interviews with industry personnel; or
- (iv) attributes are provided by customers directly.

(i) Self-selecting attributes

Several writers have been particularly critical of researchers selecting their own attributes without reference to the consumers' own framework. The primary criticism for this approach is that the researcher will have his own perceptions of which attributes are important which are not necessarily representative of the consumer in general [Buttle 1985; Frost and Braine 1967; Lewis 1988].

(ii) Literature surveys

Churchill (1979) and Sekarin (1984) comment on the value of using the literature to generate variables for further investigation, but equally warn that readers should be aware of how variables are generated in documented studies before using them. As indicated earlier, there are various studies which have provided lists of attributes, but many do not provide sufficient assurance on the validity and reliability of the measures used.

(iii) Industry surveys

Churchill (1979) advocates the use of 'experience surveys' which involves discussions with informed individuals within the subject area, such as industry personnel and corporate executives. This method has been employed by other researchers [Brown and Swartz 1989; Lewis 1984; Parasuraman et al 1985; Wilensky and Buttle 1988]. Caution must be exercised when using this approach though since these 'informed' individuals may be biased and may not share the same perceptions as consumers on identifying important attributes.

(iv) Consumer surveys

Asking the customers themselves is the final method, and although it is perhaps one of the most difficult, most time-consuming, and most expensive [Hart 1989], it is considered to be the best source by many researchers due to its ability to elicit objectively derived attributes as perceived by the customer. Methods which do not use actual consumers when generating attributes may result in questionnaires being designed with an inappropriate selection of researcher-biased variables.

In summary: (i) selecting the attributes by the researcher is methodologically unsound and biased, and therefore is not suitable; (ii) reviewing the literature can provide a very wide selection of

attributes, but due to the unknown sources and different foci used by the researchers, this method is not entirely satisfactory; (iii) interviews with industry personnel may be unreliable since many studies have shown that industry personnel may be biased and are not always aware of consumers' choice decisions; (iv) generating attributes from customers is considered to be the best method if an appropriate technique can be found which will be free from bias and can be carried out within the time and cost constraints of the study.

### **3.2.2. Qualitative and quantitative methods**

Much debate has been given to the advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative or quantitative approaches in research studies. It appears that both methods are valuable for particular stages and that both methods can be employed in isolation or together. Many researchers consider that the qualitative approaches are particularly valuable for the exploratory stages of studies since they are able to 'generate' ideas rather than just 'test' ideas as with the quantitative approaches [Crimp 1985; Dickens 1987]. Some of the characteristics attributed to qualitative approaches include:

- As the interviewer's role is that of listener, and not that of a question-asker [Crimp 1985], the flow of the interview is partly governed by the respondent [Dickens 1987; Jones 1985]. This leaves the interviewer free to listen to those factors which he may not have considered beforehand and prevents him from 'pre-judging' or 'leading' the respondent;
- This approach provides a greater understanding through its ability to search for depth and detail behind a wide range of underlying attitudes [Dickens 1987; Jones 1985; Seymour 1988]. This 'searching' phase is particularly important in providing insight into consumer motivation, since most human social behaviour involves a complex structure of variables which cannot be easily identified through the pre-determined questioning used in quantitative approaches;
- Since the language used is partly governed by the respondent, the interviewer should be able to identify the terminology consumers use in the product field of interest [Jones 1985; Schneider et al 1980]; and
- The interviewer is able to include a wide range of non-verbal data in his interpretation, such as facial expressions and body language signals, to provide indications to deeper feelings of the respondents [Jones 1985; Mostyn 1985].

However there are certain characteristics of qualitative approaches which prevent its use in many studies. Some of these are:

- Due to the expense and time required, they usually involve relatively small samples, typically less than thirty respondents [Dickens 1987; Lewis 1984];
- The unstructured method of data collection does not allow for easy aggregation and quantification [Dickens 1987; Rose 1982]; and
- The data is subject to wide interpretations and its effectiveness is particularly prone to the quality of the techniques used and of the ability of the interviewer [Churchill 1979; Colwell 1990; Ryan 1980].

This last point about 'wide interpretations' is perhaps the largest criticism of qualitative approaches. It brings into question the validity and reliability of the results produced. Bainbridge (1985, p.202) comments that validity is a problem '...because the underlying thought processes are not available to conscious access or are not in verbal form, so that the thoughts are distorted in translating from one medium to another', and Gummesson (1988, p.146) asks about reliability: 'If the investigation has been carried out by someone other than the researcher, using his methods, would the same results have been obtained?' Clearly two different results from a single survey would bring validity and reliability into question.

Some of the advantages and disadvantages for using qualitative techniques can be reversed when applied to quantitative techniques, and several writers have offered their own distinctions between the two. Quantitative techniques are said to be useful for providing frequencies, volumes and tabulation of behaviour and consumption, and for demonstrating statistical relationships between variables and dispersions, whilst qualitative techniques are said to provide 'understanding of the mental processes' and 'real meaning'. Quantitative techniques are said to emphasise reliability whilst qualitative techniques are said to emphasise validity [Frost and Braine 1967; Gummesson 1988; Mostyn 1985].

Most of these authors though would recognise that both the qualitative and quantitative approaches have a place in research, and both can be used in isolation or to complement each other. It is just simply a matter of defining the research objectives before selecting one approach over the other. Since the objective of this part of the study is to 'identify' attributes, rather than 'test' attributes, the qualitative approach would be more appropriate. The disadvantages of the qualitative approach, such as small samples, can be partly overcome by conducting a much larger follow-on study using quantitative approaches.

The qualitative research field offers a wide range of techniques, often based on interviewing methods, which can range from those which are completely qualitative and unstructured, to others

which are partly qualitative and semi-structured. Interviews can be conducted either on a one-to-one basis (respondent-interviewer) or in focus groups (several respondents-one interviewer) [Assael 1987]. The qualitative interview is often partly structured to prevent the dialogue from drifting off into unrelated areas, but at the same time, it is partly unstructured to allow respondents to express themselves freely.

Since this study is concerned with attributes that are important to hotel guests, it is necessary to have some structure to keep the interviews within the parameters of the lodging experience, but at the same time allow some respondent-freedom to enable some of the less obvious attributes to be identified. As opposed to the focus-group method, the one-to-one interview technique appears preferable to enable the interviewer to pursue some of the more in-depth issues of why an individual customer would consider an attribute important [Dickens 1987].

### 3.2.3. Research criteria

Following the previous discussion it was decided to find a technique which would generate a battery of attributes within the following criteria:

- To be objective and as free as possible from interviewer-bias;
- To be able to generate data that is valid and reliable;
- To have a sound methodological foundation;
- To be conducted on a respondent-interviewer basis;
- To be partly structured to retain some control, and partly unstructured to allow for respondent freedom;
- To allow the interviewer the opportunity to search and explore for underlying attributes; and
- To allow for some aggregation of data to enable attributes to be 'bundled' and tested in the next data collection stage.

### **3.3. Repertory Grid Technique**

#### **3.3.1. Background to the repertory grid technique**

One research technique which has emerged from reviewing previous consumer studies, and which satisfied most of the criteria, was the 'repertory grid technique' developed by a psychotherapist, George Kelly (1955, 1963). This technique was designed to investigate the 'personal construct theory', or cognitive make-up, of his patients. Although it was developed in clinical psychology, the technique has been employed quite successfully in several hotel and retail studies to elicit attributes which are important to consumers. Nightingale (1983) applied it to hotel and catering services, whilst Hudson (1974), Timmermans et al (1982), Coshall (1984), and Buttle (1985) all applied it to the retail environment. Frost and Braine (1967) have provided a useful description of its applications, and Hallsworth (1988) provides a comprehensive review of previous studies that have used the technique. Most of these authors have concluded that the repertory technique offers considerable potential in market research due its ability to generate relevant variables for further investigation..

Kelly explains the personal construct theory through eleven corollaries, which attempts to explain an individual's behaviour by studying the constructs they hold in their mind [Vyakarnam 1989]. A construct is simply a mental dimension with which an individual will employ when he needs to assess current situations, experiences and stimuli, and if these shows similar patterns to previous ones, then the individual will employ existing constructs to accommodate these situations, experiences and stimuli. If they are completely new to the individual though, he may generate a new construct to accommodate the new data, and add the new construct to his existing framework of constructs. Sometimes though the individual may have difficulty with accommodating new data which contradicts existing constructs, and this may require him to demolish old constructs which were previously considered as fairly stable. It is by getting to understand how the individual handles incoming data and getting to understand the individual's framework of personal constructs that the psychotherapist can treat his patient by helping him to re-construct his self-concept and life through building a new framework of constructs.

Several authors have commented on the usefulness of the technique when applied to consumer research [Frost and Braine 1967; Hallsworth 1988; Hudson 1974]. However to understand its applicability in consumer research, the technique requires further elaboration. A construct has been referred to as 'an open channel of movement' with which the individual can mentally move along to enable him to discriminate between various elements. Kelly explains this through his fundamental postulate by stating that: 'A person's processes are psychologically channelised by the ways in which he anticipates events'. A construct therefore is an evaluative dimension, or spectrum, which

has two diametrically opposing ends representing the extremes of that construct (a bi-polar phenomenon), and the individual can choose any position on that dimension with which to construe a stimulus. A construct is usually represented by the use of adjectives, which are themselves discriminations, and if something is described with the use of a construct, then it is saying what it is, and by definition, what it is not.

Through life an individual will build up a catalogue of these constructs which provides a 'network of action pathways' which he can use for evaluating new experiences, and use them to anticipate future experiences in an attempt to control them. This catalogue is essentially a framework of constructs which mesh with each other to provide the individual with his own mental construction. The constructs are hierarchically arranged so that some constructs will subsume subordinate constructs, and in turn will be subsumed themselves by superordinate constructs. As the individual gains life experiences, he will build up his own strictly personal construction system of viewing the world to accommodate familiar and unfamiliar situations [Frost and Braine 1967].

The hierarchical framework which forms a person's structure of personal constructs is said to represent that individual's personality. Exploring the personal construct system therefore provides a way of understanding 'his stance towards the world' [Buttle 1985; Coshall 1985; Fransella and Bannister 1977; Hallsworth 1988; Kelly 1955; Oppenheim 1966]. However, since people in the same social gathering share similar perceptions of stimuli, there will be many constructs which are common to a particular social grouping, and identifying these common constructs provides a way to identify common perceptions of situations, such as those in market research. The repertory grid technique therefore can be used to explore attributes important to individual consumers, or groups of consumers.

Much of the literature on the repertory grid technique used in consumer research tends to make an implicit link between an individual's construct system and their behaviour [Vyakarnam 1989]. Although behaviour may be explained after the event in clinical psychology, and may on occasions predict behaviour, it would be a dangerous assumption to state that understanding consumers' personal construct system leads to predicting their behaviour. As discussed in Chapter I, it is virtually impossible to predict consumer behaviour with any degree of accuracy. There are too many situational factors which could, and are likely, to intervene between an individual's intentions to behave and actually behave. The best that using the repertory grid technique can do is to explore individual consumers' construct system to gain an understanding of their attitudes towards events and stimuli.

### 3.3.2. The technique

The repertory grid technique, which has six variations, is simply the operationalisation of the personal construct theory [Coshall 1985]. The variation that is most commonly used in consumer studies is the 'Triad System of the Minimum Context Card Form'. This variation asks respondents to evaluate three objects (elements) at a time, and identify on what feature does one of them differ from the other two. In other words the respondent is forced to make a discrimination by using one of his personal constructs to categorise the objects and differentiate one of them from the other two on a particular aspect, i.e. by using a point on the adjective spectrum [Assael 1987; Frost and Braine 1967; Kelly 1963]. This comparison technique is a way of attempting to capture the framework with which the respondent uses in life when making sense of observations, simply by asking a series of questions designed to elicit spontaneous associations that are meaningful to the respondent [Buttle 1985; Fountain et al 1987; Hallsworth 1988].

In market research studies, the elements (observations, objects or stimuli) that are used for the discrimination tests usually consist of brand names, test products, trial packs, store names, advertisements etc., and the responses that the consumer-respondent provides are constructs or attitude dimensions relating to the differences or similarities between them [Buttle 1985]. The list of elements used for the study would optimally comprise between 10-30 items [Frost and Braine 1967], but the respondents would only be asked to consider those stimuli that they are familiar with and could comment on [Hallsworth 1988].

When the respondent gives a discriminative response, the interviewer identifies the construct being employed by establishing the 'similarity' between two of the elements, which is situated at one end of the spectrum, and the 'contrast', which represents the other element and is situated at the other end of the spectrum. The construct is then recorded on the repertory 'grid' itself (see Appendix A1) [Fransella and Bannister 1977]. An individual respondent may be tempted to repeat the same construct more than once as the comparisons continue, but the respondent is encouraged to use new constructs for each comparison so that a wide range are elicited. It is not necessary to record the amount of times each respondent repeats a construct, because the repertory grid technique is not a frequency test in that sense [Coshall 1985; Hallsworth 1988]. As Lewis (1984, p.31) comments that: 'The frequency of consumers' naming an attribute does not necessarily indicate its relative determinance in the choice process.' To avoid respondents continually repeating the same constructs, Nightingale (1983) terminated his interviews if the constructs were repeated 'frequently', whilst Coshall (1985) terminated his interviews if the respondent mentioned the same construct three times.

In a typical interview session a respondent would normally provide between 4 and 40 responses



[Kelly 1955], and to collect a wide enough range of constructs, ideally some twenty or more interviews would have to be carried out. After about forty interviews though, it is unlikely that any new constructs will be elicited with the exception of those which are highly specific to the individual respondent [Buttle 1985; Frost and Braine 1967]. Several interviews will usually identify a collection of constructs which are repeated more regularly than others, and these are likely to be those which are firmly held by the population, and can be taken to be an indication of their value to that respondent population within the subject area being investigated [Hallsworth 1988].

Once the constructs have been collected, they can then be subjected to content analysis. This will enable similar constructs to be grouped together, and reduce the number of variables to a parsimonious list of attributes. These attributes can then be tested amongst a larger sample of consumers using a more structured approach, such as questionnaires. Buttle (1985), and Frost and Braine (1967) have said that one of the most useful applications for the repertory grid technique is as a preliminary operation in the development of semantic differentials, basically because of its bi-polarity. This was the technique employed by Buttle and Hallsworth (1988). As with some of these previous studies, this study will be building the elicited attributes into a structured questionnaire amongst a larger sample. The repertory grid technique therefore does appear to offer a useful preliminary to this research programme.

The repertory grid technique is said to offer several benefits when used in consumer interviews. Some of these are:

- It allows for a free-flow dialogue to be built up between respondent and interviewer [Hallsworth 1988], with the minimum of directional guidance from the interviewer [Frost and Braine 1967];
- The discriminations used in the repertory grid test can form the basis for understanding consumer choice and behaviour [Coshall 1985];
- The respondent uses his own terminology [Frost and Braine 1967; Timmermans et al 1982];
- It is exhaustive in being able to elicit a very wide range of attributes across a reasonable sample size [Frost and Braine 1967];
- It is partly structured for control and for consistent data to be collected and aggregated. It is partly unstructured to allow for respondent freedom [Hallsworth 1988], whilst at the same

time providing the flexibility to check for misunderstanding [Timmermans et al 1982];

- Attributes are not specified on an a priori basis, and therefore it is relatively objective and free from researcher-bias, and has high validity because of its strict stimulus response nature [Coshall 1985; Frost and Braine 1967; Hallsworth 1988; Kelly 1955; Nightingale 1986; Timmermans et al 1982];
- The data elicited can be subjected to a wide variety of content analysis and statistical manipulation [Buttle 1985; Fransella and Bannister 1977]; and
- Because there are several variations, it can be adapted to a wide range of consumer-type studies [Oppenheim 1966; Timmermans et al 1982]. It has been used widely as a precursor to structured questionnaires for which it is particularly suitable [Buttle 1985; Coshall 1985; Frost and Braine 1967].

As with many other qualitative approaches though, reliability presents a problem due to the unique exercise of taking an individual through the test, which, in itself, can be very exhausting, and is virtually impossible to replicate [Frost and Braine 1967; Mostyn 1985]. However the test itself when properly conducted is considered to generate valid variables, which are subsequently confirmed by quantitative methods.

Additionally although some writers have indicated a link between constructs and consumer behaviour [Coshall 1985], this linkage is not direct, i.e. identifying specific constructs or construct systems cannot predict behaviour, but they may help to understand behaviour. Kelly (1955, p.270) did consider that the repertory grid had potentially many applications, but he was '...sceptical about the value of copying ready-made theories which were designed for other foci of convenience' (1963, pp.22-23). In many consumer research studies the personal construct theory and the repertory grid technique have not been used in their original form, but have been used in different ways which are more appropriate to their research aims. It is therefore acknowledged that using the repertory grid technique in this study is not an attempt to predict behaviour, but merely an attempt to generate a battery of attributes which may be important to consumers of hotel and lodge services. The next section will discuss how the repertory grid technique was designed and used in this study during a series of interviews with guests staying overnight at a selection of roadside lodges.

### **3.4. The consumer study**

For the first data collection stage of the study, three lodges were selected across the UK: one in the

North, one in the Midlands, and one in the South. The receptionist and managerial staff at each lodge were briefed by head office on the purpose of the study, and this briefing was followed up by the researcher who explained the assistance required to carry out a series of customer interviews. The researcher also answered any other questions the staff presented, and tried to involve them in the study to gain maximum commitment from them.

The interviews were carried out on a dyadic basis: the researcher and the respondent. Each guest that checked into the lodge was asked by the receptionist if they had time and would be interested in spending approximately twenty minutes<sup>1</sup> with a market researcher sometime during their stay at the lodge. An explanatory letter from head office was also left in the lodge bedrooms to further encourage guest participation. This two-pronged approach was considered to be necessary to encourage the maximum amount of interest. The receptionist in the lodges acted as a 'primer' (sometimes very effectively due to their ability to relate to their guests), and the in-room letter was considered the 'right time' for guests to be approached (Hurst 1987) commented, enroute travellers are best approached when the individual is enjoying the comfort and security of his accommodation).

The purpose of the study (reason given to guests) was to find out how satisfied guests were with the lodges and associated services. The guest was encouraged to make an appointment at reception to arrange an interview during their current stay, and after the interview, they would each be rewarded with a money voucher which would be redeemable in the service area. Although it was acknowledged beforehand that twenty minutes may not be sufficient to complete the interviews properly, especially since the repertory grid technique is a lengthy procedure [Hallsworth 1988], the researcher made every attempt to keep them as short as possible. Hallsworth (1988) reported that Opacic and Potter (1985) kept their interview presentations to a maximum of forty minutes, whereas Hallsworth himself required up to 2 hours to complete some interviews, whilst Hudson (1980) reported another that took 8 hours.

A special room in the lodge, with comfortable chairs and a table to work on, was set aside for the interviews. The purpose of the study and the interview sequence was explained to each respondent, and with prior permission, each interview was tape-recorded. The interviews were designed to be carried out in three sequential parts:

- (a) Kelly's Repertory Grid Test;
- (b) In-depth interviews; and
- (c) Self-completion questionnaires

### 3.4.1. Kelly's Repertory Grid

This part was based on Kelly's Triad System of the Minimum Context Card Form technique. The respondent was given a set of white cards, similar to playing cards, and printed on each card was a name of a hotel company or hotel brand. There were some forty cards in total, the list being selected by the researcher from his research of the largest and most prominent hotels and hotel companies (including lodges) in the UK. The researcher then carried out a set procedure with each respondent. Similar to the study by Coshall (1985), it was recognised that each respondent could only legitimately discuss a hotel with which he had had direct experience. A technique was therefore required to isolate and extract those name-cards that the respondent could relate to from previous experiences. To achieve this, each respondent was asked:

- (1) To look through the cards and make two piles from them: one pile comprising all those names he had heard of, and the second pile with all those he had never heard of before;
- (2) To pick up the pile of cards he was familiar with and sort the cards into another two piles: those he had used for overnight accommodation before, and those he had never used for overnight accommodation; and
- (3) To write out a new card for any other hotels he had stayed in the last 12 months, and introduce them to the pile of hotels the respondent had recently used.

This set of instructions provided a pack of hotel names and brand-names that the respondent could comment on by drawing on their past experiences. This pack also included the name of the collaborating lodge.

- (4) Three cards were then selected from the top of the pile, and were placed on the table in front of the respondent. The respondent was then asked:

'Can you think of any attribute that you might associate with one of these establishments, but not with the other two. This attribute can be either a positive or negative characteristic that applies to one only, and not the other two?'

The question was asked to try and elicit the characteristic that the individual might associate with one (or two) of the names, and getting them to 'think aloud' [Bainbridge 1985], without the interviewer actually 'leading' the respondent [Frost and Braine 1967; Hallsworth 1988]. This association may be a result of either a pleasing experience or a disappointing experience with that establishment, and therefore may represent an important attribute-construct that the individual may

use for selecting or not selecting a hotel in the future. The construct would be represented by the characteristic that the respondent verbalises, and would subsequently be recorded on the grid against the element (hotel) being assessed<sup>2</sup>.

Three more cards were then drawn from the top of the pack and placed in front of the respondent, and the same question and exercise was repeated. This continued until the interviewer had collected sufficient characteristics, or that the respondent had exhausted their most accessible ones. If the cards ran out sooner, then they were re-shuffled and re-presented.

Several factors were considered during the test situation:

- The characteristics have to be recorded strictly against the specific triads used in the evaluation and interpreted in the context of those particular test names [Churchill 1979];
- Although the exact wording was recorded, the actual wording may not represent the construct that the respondent was trying to verbalise. This may be because the respondent was not articulate enough to isolate the most appropriate word at that particular time [Fransella and Bannister 1977]; and
- Because people have different life experiences, and are exposed to varying social backgrounds, individuals will have developed their own idiosyncratic ways of verbally expressing situations and meanings [Buttle 1985]. It is quite likely therefore that some individuals will use a different vocabulary to mean the same thing, and others will use the same vocabulary to mean different things [Frost and Braine 1967; Hallsworth 1988; Jones 1985; Timmermans et al 1982]. Because each construct may take on its own meaning, it was necessary to employ a technique which could elicit the exact interpretation. This was achieved by carrying out the second phase, the in-depth interview.

### 3.4.2. In-depth interviews

The interviewer used the repertory grid as a reference point and took each respondent systematically through the characteristics they provided, to tease out their specific interpretations [Jones 1985]. The respondent was asked what was meant by their choice of wording they used when discussing particular hotels, and at the same time, identify the respondent's meaning of the construct spectrum they had employed. This was achieved by getting the respondent to explain the contrast (or characteristic) they had used, and at the same time, identify the construct underlying their use of words. Understanding both the contrast and construct is important in this exercise so that the meaning is fully understood [Kelly 1955]. This questioning initiated a discussion on particular

hotels and on the respondent's experience, but throughout the exercise, the interviewer ensured that the focus remained on the respondent and not on the product (hotel). The interview technique provided a picture of how that respondent uses certain words when talking about pleasing or disappointing aspects of a hotel stay, which then gave an insight to what was important to a satisfactory lodging experience for that respondent.

The interviewer made notes on their explanations whilst observing and noting their non-verbal behaviour, such as facial expressions and reactions. The respondent was encouraged to continue to elaborate on certain aspects, and at times, the respondent was probed a little more in depth to clarify ambiguous definitions. As soon as the optimal value had been extracted from the interview, considering the time constraints, the respondent was asked to move onto the questionnaire.

### **3.4.3. Self-completion questionnaires**

The questionnaire was structured to obtain classificatory information, i.e., demographic and purpose of trip information, on each of the respondents. Although this could have provided the opportunity for identifying correlations between classificatory data with the various constructs and the attributes given, this was not within the parameters of this part of the study. This first part was merely to generate a list of attributes for further quantification, but the classificatory data was collected for comparisons at a later stage between the different respondent stages.

As soon as the questionnaire was completed the interview was terminated.

## **3.5. Data collection and analysis**

### **3.5.1. Data collection**

After conducting a pilot survey with seven respondents, a further forty-seven guests were interviewed for the main survey. During the interview periods at the three lodges, a considerable number of guests showed an interest in participating in the study, but due to logistical difficulties, the researcher was only able to interview those that could be conveniently slotted in. However it was felt that this did not have a detrimental effect on the sample of respondents selected and interviewed. Although the collaborating organisation considered that the interviews should be kept as short as possible, it was eventually found that the shortest interview took thirty minutes, the norm was forty minutes, and some took ninety minutes to complete. None of the guests complained about the time taken and the researcher found that in many instances it was difficult to stop the interviews due to respondents' enthusiasm!

The forty-seven interviews produced 564 independent responses (shown in Appendix A3). 'Independent' here means that each wording was only represented once by each respondent, but may have been repeated more than once within the respondent-population. Each respondent produced a mean of 12 'independent' responses, with a range of 6-19. This response rate compares similarly with some of the other previous repertory grid studies as shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Responses from repertory grid studies

	<u>resp.</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>range</u>
Hudson (1980)	26	11.5	7-17
Timmermans et al (1982)	20	11.8	8-16
Buttle (1985)	30	7.1	-
Coshall (1985)	50	14.9	4-18
Opacic and Potter (1985)	40	5.3	3-9
Senior (1988)	47	12.0	6-19

### 3.5.2. Data analysis

As with other similar studies, the responses were then content analysed. Bainbridge (1985) comments that there are many styles of analysis called content analysis, and the method used here bore some similarity to those recommended by Bainbridge (1985), Jones (1985), Krippendorff (1980), Martin and Turner (1986), Mostyn (1985), and Reynolds and Gutman (1988).

As outlined earlier in the chapter, qualitative analysis, such as content analysis, is subject to considerable criticism due to the wide interpretations that are possible. Many qualitative researchers acknowledge these limitations, but also recognise the need for such an approach. Some of the many criticisms consider that qualitative analysis is a highly personal activity and involves subjective selectivity by the analyst; it is not bound by definitive rules; it can be interpreted from numerous perspectives; words, which are merely symbols of a deeper phenomenon, can be taken too literally; and the analysis can be governed too much by the a priori parameters of the research, the actual objective the qualitative approach was attempting to avoid.

However in some cases a qualitative approach is necessary to empathise or understand the world of the research participants, and to understand some of the concepts which may influence their future behaviour. The process of qualitative analysis therefore is about interpretation and making sense through identifying common characteristics, abstracting and defining superordinate concepts, and establishing a structure in the data. Krippendorff (1980) asks: 'Does the data obtained in the research provide a trustworthy basis for drawing inferences, making recommendations and supporting decisions?'. Although the rigour of the interpretation may be questioned, it is assumed

that if the results are similar results to those obtained by other studies, then the validity of this approach may be confirmed.

The method of analysis chosen for this study took these criticisms into consideration and focused clearly on the objective of this part of the study, i.e. to identify service quality attributes important to consumers/hotel guests. The approach, analysis, and inferences were related to existing theories. The analysis was kept in the context of the respondents' world [Krippendorff 1980]. Both verbal and non-verbal data was used to gain an understanding of the participants' own frame of reference. It is possible therefore that some key concepts will not become verbalised [Bainbridge 1985], but by carrying out thirty or more of interviews, it is assumed that most of the key concepts will be identified.

The sequence chosen to analyse the data, which is a hybrid of various recommendations proposed by other authors [Bainbridge 1985; Jones 1985; Krippendorff 1980; Martin and Turner 1986; Mostyn 1985; Reynolds and Gutman 1988], has been described below and shown in Appendix A4:

- (1) Each interview was 're-lived' by listening to the tape-recordings and analysing the written material - this enabled the researcher to gain a general feel for the data and to analyse it in a new objective light;
- (2) The raw data on the grids was supplemented with further data that could be extracted from the notes and recordings. The data was then assessed to establish if it was informative or not in the context of the study , i.e. providing attributes that may be important to overnight guests;
- (3) Broad conceptual categories which emerged from the data were identified, within the a priori objectives of the study - these categories provided 'pigeonholes' in which similar responses could be placed;
- (4) Each response was considered in relation to its contextual background to capture the actual construct, and placed its relevant category - since words are too complex to be taken for their face value, each response was carefully considered against the backdrop of other information elicited during the interview;
- (5) When all the responses had been categorised, the categories were assessed for exclusivity. To provide a range of mutually exclusive categories, some were further split and others were amalgamated with each other, and finally each one was provided with a label.



(6) Each category was then assessed if there was a pattern of key concepts which could be extracted from the separate categories, using a method similar to Jones' (1985) cognitive mapping. This activity was not as rigorous as cognitive mapping but was merely a diagrammatic exercise carried out by the researcher to facilitate an understanding of the constructs and categories, and their relationships with each other.

The remaining part of the 'content analysis framework' in Appendix A4 was not used for this section, but has been included for future reference.

Other authors using the repertory grid technique for eliciting constructs have employed a variety of analysis techniques, ranging from content analysis to factor analysis [Bainbridge 1985; Brenner et al 1985]. Considering the nature of this part of the study it was decided that no single technique was appropriate, but each study provided a part in the design of the analysis. The analysis which has been outlined above involved several iterative steps of listening to the tape-recordings, analysing the written notes and grids, re-classifying the categories, and abstracting and concretising the issues where necessary. The mapping technique was employed several times to identify and illustrate the ordinal relationships between the categories.

### 3.5.3. Results from the repertory grid

The content analysis reduced the 564 responses to 40 labelled categories, as shown in Table 3-2 and Appendix A3.

Table 3-2: Categories representing 564 responses

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Access to and from motorway             | 21. Quick check-in/check-out                    |
| 2. Access to tourist/beauty spot           | 22. Quietness                                   |
| 3. Access to town/city centre              | 23. Range of bedroom facilities                 |
| 4. Bar with liquor licence                 | 24. Range of facilities and services in hotel   |
| 5. Bedroom spaciousness                    | 25. Reception staff                             |
| 6. Character of building and rooms         | 26. Restaurant management                       |
| 7. Cleanliness                             | 27. Restaurant staff attitudes and friendliness |
| 8. Consistent quality of service           | 28. Room price                                  |
| 9. Consistent standard                     | 29. Room temperature                            |
| 10. Facilities for children                | 30. Security                                    |
| 11. Geographical/location availability     | 31. Standards of accommodation                  |
| 12. Hotel staff attitudes and friendliness | 32. Standards of catering                       |
| 13. Inviting/welcoming hotel               | 33. Standard of service in hotel                |

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 14. Leisure facilities       | 34. Standard of service in restaurant   |
| 15. Level of comfort         | 35. Standard of maintenance/decorations |
| 16. Hotel management         | 36. Telephone in bedroom                |
| 17. Name/brand-name of hotel | 37. Toiletries in bathroom              |
| 18. Overall standard         | 38. Type of catering facilities         |
| 19. Personal touch           | 39. Type of hotel                       |
| 20. Quality/standard of food | 40. Value-for-money                     |

The list of categories in Table 3-2 were then sorted into rank order, which is shown in Table 3-3. The list shows the first 25 categories which represents 92% of the responses. As mentioned by Frost and Braine (1967), some categories, in this case the remaining 15 representing the last 8% of the responses, are considered too specific to be included for further analysis.

Table 3-3: Reduced list of categories

<u>Category</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>% cum</u>
value for money	13.6	13.6
overall standard	7.1	20.7
cleanliness	6.9	27.6
friendliness	6.7	34.3
food quality	5.8	40.1
style of hotel	5.4	45.5
service quality	4.4	49.9
decorations/maintenance	3.5	53.4
lodge concept	3.5	56.9
comfort	3.3	60.2
location	3.1	63.3
restaurant style	3.1	66.4
leisure facilities	3.0	69.4
in-room facilities	3.0	72.4
market level	2.4	74.8
telephone	2.0	76.8
temperature	2.0	78.8
management	2.0	80.8
childrens' facilities	1.8	82.6
consistency/assurance	1.8	84.4
bar	1.8	86.2
bathroom	1.6	87.8

noise	1.6	89.4
social interaction	1.5	90.9
security	1.1	92.0

For purposes of convenience, these categories will now subsequently be referred to as the quality attributes, or quality criteria, that are important to hotel and lodge guests. It is accepted that other researchers performing the same study may have come up with slightly different constructs, categories or attributes, but it is argued here that the list in Table 3-3 presents a realistic picture of those quality attributes that are potentially important to hotel or lodge users. These attributes could have been subjected to factor analysis to reduce them even further and provide a battery of factor categories. The researcher believes though that the strength of some of the more concrete attributes, such as food quality, should be tested as independent attributes, whilst some of the more abstract categories, such as 'value for money', had to remain at a high ordinal level due to the difficulty in 'concretising' them.

The beginning of this chapter considered the opportunity to use other hotel studies to generate the attributes for this study, but this idea was rejected due to the different foci and unknown sources of their attributes. However it would seem appropriate to compare this list of attributes now with other studies to identify if there are any similarities or differences between them, and make an attempt to validate the list. The next section will consider these comparisons.

### **3.6. Service quality attributes**

#### **3.6.1. Repertory studies**

If this study had been carried out in the retail trade then there would have been sufficient studies available with which this one could have been compared. However it appears that only one repertory grid study has been carried out in the hotel and catering industry, which was carried out by Nightingale (1983). This researcher used the technique to identify activities which were important to hotel guests rather than attributes, which makes direct comparisons difficult. From a sample of fourteen people he identified 'having a night's sleep' as being the most important, followed by 'having breakfast', 'using telephone', 'having bath, shower, wash', 'having a snack', 'having dinner', 'having drink', etc. These first activities are clearly all associated with the primary needs of the guest, i.e. rest and recuperation, and refreshments. However due to the nature of the attributes generated in this study it is not easy to make useful comparisons.

To illustrate the difficulties with making direct comparisons with the retail studies, one only has to consider the most important attribute-category which has been identified in this study. Table 3-3

shows that the most prominent attribute was 'value-for-money'; yet in the repertory studies carried out by Hudson (1974), Coshall (1985), Opacic and Potter (1985), 'price' rather than 'value for money' predominated. 'Price' could therefore be an important or salient attribute. It is suggested here that the difference between this and other studies is that price is more appropriate to some of the activities that respondents are participating in, such as shoe-shopping, and value-for-money is more appropriate to lodging experiences. The rationale behind this proposal is that 'price' is a pre-consumption assessment whilst 'value-for-money' is a post-consumption assessment. A customer using the term value-for-money is making a global assessment, taking various factors into consideration, sometime after the completion of the purchase, e.g. the hotel stay. However with shoe shopping, the concept of 'value-for-money' cannot become evident until the shoes have been worn to their maximum satisfactory life, which can be some considerable time after the purchase. As Dotchin and Oakland (1991, p.4) comment: 'For many products, judgements [of quality] must be made over their useful life...'. In many cases, the actual price will have been forgotten and the consumer will simply replace them by buying another pair at a certain price within their expected range. The concept of 'value-for-money' therefore is difficult to evaluate for an item such as shoes due to this time-scale, but it may be easier for such things as hotel stays due to the shorter time-scale.

### 3.6.2. Hotel studies

Due to the limited value in making comparisons with other repertory studies, it would perhaps be more productive to make comparisons with other hotel studies in general. However further difficulties arise because many of the studies have been directed by different foci and therefore have not produced a convenient list of attributes for comparison. Some of the more useful studies though include those by:

- The Institute of Sales and Marketing Management (1988) which carried out a postal survey with their members which included questions on the level of importance of pre-determined attributes. They found that: bedroom facilities, excepting mini-bar, were extremely important; a swimming pool was the most important leisure facility, followed by sauna; late night restaurant facilities; early breakfast; and room service. However this list may not be very representative of hotel or lodge guests in general since, they refer only to sales and marketing people, and the list deals with specific facilities and not quality criteria, such as cleanliness. Furthermore the Institute used a pre-determined list of attributes which may not have accurately reflected the full range of attributes experienced by consumers.
- Atkinson (1988) carried out a study with guests in a budget hotel chain in the USA. They concluded with a list of twenty attributes which were considered to be important to their guests.

Although their list is not directly comparable, due to the different wording used, their list compares similarly with Table 3-3 and Appendix A3, and has been shown in Appendix A5;

- Wilensky and Buttle (1988) conducted a study at a Heathrow hotel and identified a list of attributes which were perceived to be important to guests. Unfortunately though the authors have only presented the three top attributes which restricts the comparison. However these three were: room and bath cleanliness, professionalism of staff, and friendliness and courtesy of staff, and they compare similarly with the attributes in Table 3-3;

- Cornwell Self (1988) carried out a small study into the UK roadside lodge industry, but their study was extremely limited in its use of evaluative attributes. Of the 13 questions asked, only one question asked respondents to assess five attributes: size of bedroom, comfort of bed, cleanliness, bathroom, and other room facilities, but the study did not identify the importance of attributes;

- Knutson (1988) conducted a postal survey with regular hotel users and generated a list of attributes which were considered important to hotel guests in three separate price categories. They concluded that the most salient considerations were: clean, comfortable, well-maintained rooms; convenient location; prompt and courteous service; safe and secure environment; friendly and courteous staff. These considerations also compare similarly with Table 3-3;

- Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) carried out a study into frequent complaints and compliments across a large sample of hotels, and since this study was based on negative and positive characteristics to generate attributes, there should be some overlap. The three highest complaints were: prices, speed of service, and quality of service. The three highest compliments were: helpful attitude of employees, cleanliness, and neatness of establishment. These were similar to Table 3-3; and

- Oberoi (1989) carried out a study into service quality in the conference hotel market, and through in-depth interviews, she identified a list of 54 attributes which were considered to be important. The first twenty attributes included various permutations on staff ability, helpfulness and politeness, with others such as cleanliness, comfort and quality of food. Again this shows some similarity with Table 3-3.

From this brief review of other hotel studies, it appears that where comparisons can be made, the list generated in this study does provide a basis for further evaluation. However one must be mindful of the comments provided by other researchers on the validity of hotel findings. Lewis has been particularly critical of market research studies in the hotel and catering industry. The author (1988, p.12) commented about a study which: '...'proved' that the most important characteristic in selecting a hotel was a clean, comfortable room, as every similar study had 'proven'.' This

comment would question the validity of the hotel studies cited, including this one, but the attribute 'cleanliness' does continuously appear to be an attribute which displays some importance in many lodging surveys, and therefore is considered to be of some importance in this study. Some research findings do sound like common sense; but it is still surprising that guests are complaining about these very things [Knutson 1988]. This may be partly related to hoteliers not recognising, and therefore not keeping up with the speed with which consumers' needs are changing [Atkinson 1988; Cadotte and Turgeon 1988].

### 3.6.3. Attribute categories

Lewis (1984) cautioned researchers about confusing 'determinant', 'important' and 'salient' attributes. These three are said to represent three different concepts which needs to be recognised for an effective understanding of consumer choice. These three concepts have been briefly summarised below:

<u>attribute</u>	<u>features</u>
determinant	cause consumers to buy
important	absence causes dissatisfaction
salient	easily activated or 'top of the mind'

'Determinant' attributes are those which customers look for in a purchase, those that prompt purchase behaviour, and subsequently are those which are of particular importance to marketing management. The 'important' attributes, such as hotel safety and security, are simply expected to be provided. Their presence will not necessarily be noticed but their absence is likely to cause customer dissatisfaction. Some determinant attributes, such as a colour TV in each hotel bedroom, may change into important attributes over time if every establishment starts providing them as a basic facility. Lewis adds that 'salient' attributes are those which customers may think of first when choosing a hotel, and likewise may be the first and most frequently mentioned attributes that are identified in hotel surveys. The list of attributes generated for this study were considered to be those which provided pleasing or dissatisfying experiences. It is not clear whether they fall neatly into any of these three categories, but due to the in-depth nature of the repertory grid method employed in this study, it is assumed that they are more critical than just salient attributes.

Other authors have produced categories similar to Lewis. Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) in their studies of customer complaints and compliments identified four groups in which their attributes tend to fall into, i.e.,

<u>group</u>	<u>features</u>
dissatisfiers	cause dissatisfaction when absent
satisfiers	cause satisfaction when present
criticals	can cause both satisfaction and dissatisfaction
neutrals	not salient

The 'dissatisfiers' will earn complaints, but not compliments, e.g. car parking. Minimum performance in these areas must therefore be maintained, but high performance may result in negligible recognition. The 'satisfiers' are those attributes which elicit compliments, but will not necessarily create negative feelings if they are absent, such as hanging plants. These attributes are enhancers and can always be used to yield favourable reactions. 'Criticals', such as service quality and cleanliness, need exceptional control since their performance can be volatile and potentially threatening. Criticals are dependent upon the personnel and are likely to create the most work for management. 'Neutrals' generally speaking are fairly inert attributes.

Czepiel (1980) discussed two broad categories of service offerings, i.e.,

<u>characteristics</u>	<u>features</u>
maintainers	cause dissatisfaction
satisfiers	create satisfaction

'Maintainers' are those basic features of the service that are expected on every occasion, and their absence will result in customer dissatisfaction. Although they are the core of the service offering, they are unlikely to create high satisfaction. 'Satisfiers' are secondary service features which build on the maintainers. These are said to create positive satisfaction, and include interpersonal relations, ambience, facilities, and other aspects of the service delivery system.

There appears to be some overlap between the categories that these three authors are discussing, and the significance of recognising the separate categories is that there may be a tendency for hotel studies to identify the 'salient' attributes, when they should be identifying the 'determinant' attributes. Atkinson (1988) talks about key 'determinants' and 'important' attributes; Knutson (1988) talks about 'salient' and 'important' considerations; and Wilensky and Buttle (1988) discuss 'important' attributes. However, as with many other researchers, Wilensky and Buttle acknowledge that the customer does not buy attributes, they buy the benefits that those attributes bestow.

In this study the researcher has simply tried to identify the most frequently-mentioned quality

criteria identified in the customer interviews to provide a building block for the quantitative stage, and therefore will not attempt to place these criteria into the categories proposed by these authors. However the value of this categorisation has not been ignored. Further distinctions have been made in the literature between 'tangibles' and 'intangibles', which relates closely to the first proposition of this study. The list of attributes that have been identified in Table 3-3 can fairly easily be divided into these two categories, but this issue is better addressed after the criteria have been tested amongst a larger sample.

In summary it appears that the repertory grid technique has generated a valuable list of quality categories that can be subjected to further testing. It is acknowledged that the technique used in this study differed in some ways to the original design, and that it differed from other researchers' use of the method, but due to the objectives of this study several modifications had to be made. However the technique used here appears to satisfy the three basic requirements of scientific data analysis as laid down by Holsti (1969) in Mostyn (1985), i.e.:

- (i) Objectivity (e.g. freedom from analyst bias) - this is considered to be one of the virtues of the technique used here since the respondents' wordings have been maintained in their original form, even though they have been placed into 'contextual' categories;
- (ii) Systematic (the analysis must be designed to secure data relevant to the scientific problem, the propositions) - the objective was to identify service quality attributes important to hotel consumers. The list of attributes generated would appear to satisfy this criterion; and
- (ii) Generality (the results must have sufficient general application; therefore the sample must be representative of some relevant universe). Gummesson (1985) relates 'generalisation' closely with 'validity', and poses the question: 'Does the evidence really reflect the reality under examination?'. Frost and Braine (1967, p.162) remark that: '...the validity of generalisation can only be established in the light of more or less complete understanding of the variability...' of the population of interest. It would appear that the repertory grid has generated a list of service quality attributes that are important to hotel guests in general, since the focus was on respondents' previous hotel experiences.

Whether these quality attributes are relevant to a study into roadside lodge accommodation in the UK still requires validation. As Oberoi (1989) found in her study, attributes generated in one context are not always transferable to another context. The roadside lodge is a new concept to the UK hospitality industry and it is unlikely that the general lodging public would have built-up a considerable experience of using this product/service when this study was conducted. Roadside lodge guests may still be judging roadside lodges with the same attributes as they used for judging



traditional hotels, even though the two types of lodging establishments are different. Furthermore, as with the discussion in the first two chapters, how valid are respondents' responses (verbal behaviour) if the link between attitudes/perceptions and behaviour is not clear? It is assumed for the purpose of this study though that the list of quality attributes generated will be suitable for further investigation of the service quality concept in the roadside lodge sector with a larger sample of respondents.

### **3.7. Conclusions**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on qualitative and quantitative research techniques used for investigating attributes considered important by hotel and lodge consumers. Several criteria were considered before a technique was chosen for the investigation. This led to the repertory grid technique being selected which was used as a framework to interview lodge guests on their hotel and lodge experiences, and subsequently to generate a list of service quality attributes for further quantification. This exploratory stage has provided data which concurs with the results from other lodging studies, and has provided some evidence to support the first proposition, i.e. customers' perceptions of service quality includes the quality of both tangible and intangible elements. The next chapter discusses how these attributes can be built into a structured questionnaire to provide further support for the proposition.

## Footnotes to Chapter III

1. So as not to inconvenience their guests, the organisation considered that the interviews should be restricted to twenty minutes, unless the guest showed particular interest in participating longer. A pilot study was carried out with seven lodge guests at one location. The pilot worked well, but due to the time constraints imposed on the interviews by the organisation, an abridged version of the proposed technique had to be employed.

2. Technically speaking the characteristic that the respondent verbalises is the 'contrast' if it refers to one element, or 'similarity' if it refers to two elements. Whenever a discrimination is made with the triad method of the repertory grid, one element will always be represented by the contrast whilst the other two will always be represented by the similarity. A contrast, such as 'clean' or 'dirty', is the opposite to 'dirty' or 'clean' respectively, and as such are both part of the construct 'cleanliness'. Once a contrast is given, the interviewer attempts to get the respondent to articulate the opposing adjective to be sure that the proper construct has been captured, and both contrast and similarity are subsequently recorded on the grid against their respective elements. Appendix A2 though shows how the method had to be altered for this study. Only the contrasting adjective or whole response was recorded, and the construct which underlies the contrast and similarity was investigated in the second part of the interview.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Customer and Employee Survey**

## **4.1. Introduction**

Chapter III identified the quality attributes which appear to be important to consumers using overnight accommodation away from home, either in traditional hotels or at roadside lodges. Because the sample size used in the study in Chapter III was small, the quality attributes that were identified cannot be assumed to be representative of the population at large. This chapter will select a quantitative research technique which can be used to test the importance of these attributes amongst a larger sample, and therefore will provide a more reliable indication of the value of these attributes in the marketplace. The second part of this chapter will then discuss how this same technique can be administered to the employees to assess their perceptions of the service they are providing in roadside lodges, and establish their level of customer-orientation. This chapter is therefore focusing purely on the methodological issues surrounding the quantitative techniques used, and the results from these studies will be presented and discussed in Chapter VI.

## **4.2. Quantitative research methods**

The literature discusses quantitative research methods and the design of quantitative techniques, such as structured questionnaires, in some depth and provides examples of their use and success in previous consumer studies. The quantitative approach, as with the qualitative approach, offers certain advantages, but it also has disadvantages which have to be recognised and circumvented where possible.

### **4.2.1. Advantages of quantitative techniques**

Some of the characteristics which have been attributed to quantitative techniques are considered advantages when compared against qualitative techniques, and some of these are:

- They provide an opportunity to assess and test existing theories in a strict disciplined way and enable existing data to be refined [Dickens 1987; Mostyn 1985];
- They provide an opportunity to collect data from very large samples to establish how many people hold an opinion in a sample, which then enables findings to be generalised to the population at large [Dickens 1987; Mostyn 1985];
- They provide data which can be aggregated into clear-cut categories which can then be subjected to a wide range of statistical tests to find correlations between variables [Mostyn 1985; Seymour 1988];

- They provide a relatively fast and inexpensive method for data collection;
- They can be submitted to several sample types to assess the reliability of the study findings [Dickens 1987]; and
- They provide data which can be relatively impartial [Seymour 1988].

#### **4.2.2. Disadvantages of quantitative techniques**

Some of the main disadvantages of quantitative techniques when compared to qualitative techniques are:

- Since they are question-oriented and normally follow a set format, there are few opportunities for exploring issues in depth [Dickens 1987; Mostyn 1985]; and
- Since there is no latitude in answering and every respondent needs to understand and answer each question in the same way, the questions and wording must be carefully considered to ensure consistency in questioning and answering [Dickens 1987].

The qualitative approach used in the previous chapter served its purpose in eliciting a battery of quality attributes which are considered to be important to hotel and lodge guests, but it now requires a quantitative approach to assess if these attributes are representative of a larger sample, and by inference, if they are representative of the hotel and lodge consumer in general. The most appropriate technique to achieve this would be to select a structured instrument, such as a questionnaire. Although there is a considerable amount of literature on questionnaire design and administration, it is necessary to select a design which is related to the objectives of this study and is able to provide valid, reliable and unbiased results.

### **4.3. Customer questionnaire**

#### **4.3.1. Questionnaire selection**

Since a measure of service quality has been defined as a function of expectations and perceptions, this study requires a questionnaire which will identify customers' separate expectations and separate perceptions of attribute performance in roadside lodges. Furthermore since the study seeks to identify the empathy levels of the service employees for their customers, the questionnaire needs to be adaptable to identify employees' perceptions of customers' expectations and perceptions of those same attributes.

After reviewing the literature on questionnaire design, on previous studies, and on expectations and perceptions, few studies could be identified which measured both expectations and perceptions to obtain consumers' overall evaluation of service quality [Oberoi 1989]. Previous research studies appear to have focused primarily on identifying consumers' perceptions of services rather than identifying consumers' expectations. The two main contributions which have paralleled the objectives of this study were those by Parasuraman et al (1986) and Brown and Swartz (1989) for two reasons: (i) they developed instruments to measure both expectations and perceptions, and (ii) the instruments were suitable for identifying both consumers' and providers' perceptions. The double-scale technique used by these researchers offers considerable advantages over many of the single-scale techniques used in traditional questionnaire designs. In particular, these advantages are:

- An individual's evaluation of poor service quality can be identified as being the result of high expectations, or low perceptions, or both. This cannot be identified with single-scale instruments;
- The scaling range on two scales has a wider range than that on a single scale, e.g. a 1-7 dual scale offers a potential difference of -6 to +6 points providing 49 outcomes, whereas a single scale offers a difference of 6 points between the polar ends providing only 7 outcomes. This makes the double-scale instrument much more sensitive to respondents' opinions; and
- The separate measurements enable management to identify which attributes are expected to be high performers, and which do not need to be so high, and which attributes are actually performing well, and which are not performing well.

The disadvantages for this approach are:

- Identifying separate expectations and perceptions requires questions to be asked twice, which subsequently requires a much longer questionnaire;
- The expectation questions must be carefully worded to accurately reflect the attributes being assessed in the perception questions; and
- Respondents may consciously or subconsciously emphasise differences between the expectation and perception scores more than is necessary to reflect the real differences.

Some of these issues will be discussed in the design of the questionnaire later in this chapter.

#### 4.3.2. Selection and modification of SERVQUAL

Although both Parasuraman et al (1986) and Brown and Swartz (1989) used similar instruments, the SERVQUAL design developed by the Parasuraman research team was considered a better design for several reasons, not least Brown and Swartz's own recommendations to use the SERVQUAL method. These advantages were:

- Validity and reliability - The background work to the SERVQUAL instrument has been more thorough and rigorous. After carrying out several tests on the instrument and on the findings, the authors appeared satisfied that the SERVQUAL method is a reliable and valid measure of perceived service quality [Parasuraman et al 1986]. However it is considered here that the instrument should be subjected to a far greater number of tests to assess if it is a valid and reliable method of service quality, especially when applied to different situations.
- Empirical evidence - The SERVQUAL instrument has been empirically-tested by the researchers across four different service categories: retail banking, credit card, long distance telephoning, and product repair and maintenance, whereas Brown and Swartz only restricted their study to just one-to-one interactions between physicians and patients. Using the instrument at the aggregate level in the lodging sector should provide further empirical evidence of its usefulness.

Although the SERVQUAL method was selected as being more suitable, certain changes were considered necessary after reviewing some of the questionnaire design recommendations in the literature. The main characteristics of the SERVQUAL method, and some of the design aspects that were taken into account included:

- Bipolar-scales - The SERVQUAL instrument uses bipolar-scales which have been used and recommended by many researchers. However Buttle (1985) questions the value of bipolar-scaling because of the possibility of placing invalid constructions upon an individual's perception of an attribute. This perhaps is a fault of all scaling techniques which require human evaluations to be divided into rigid scalar measurements, but it is suggested here that the sensitivity of the SERVQUAL measurement, which is explained below, can provide a good indication of individuals' evaluations of service quality.
- Scale range - SERVQUAL uses a 7-point scale which is considered to provide satisfactory results in most cases. Extreme scales have shown a tendency to result in respondents providing less positive evaluations, whereas constricted scales have been shown to accentuate positive evaluations [Haley and Case 1979; Ursic and Hegelson 1989]. Haley

and Case further consider that a scale more than 7 would probably not produce any significant advantages, and a smaller scale may become subject to the criticisms of Buttle (1985) by placing invalid constructions on human assessments. The SERVQUAL technique offers the advantage of enabling respondents to score on a 1-7 point scale, yet the use of a separate scale for expectations, and a separate scale for perceptions, provides far greater sensitivity than a single 1-7 point scale.

- Agreement-with-Statement - The SERVQUAL instrument uses this format with 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree' at the scale endings. Haley and Case (1979) found that respondents tend to provide positive evaluations with such formats and subsequently score attributes more favourably than with other questionnaire designs. Haley and Case also found that the verbal labels on the scale endings encourage respondents to use extreme values, whereas if they are omitted, respondents tend to avoid the polar values. Perhaps the use of strongly-worded statements will reduce respondents tendency to over-rate.
- Positive and negative statements - Parasuraman et al used a random selection of positively- and negatively-worded statements as recommended by Churchill (1979) to prevent respondents from adopting a stylised answering technique. Haley and Case (1979) found that respondents became confused with trying to agree or disagree with positively-scaled statements, but it is not known what effect the negatively-scaled statements make.
- No opinion or Don't know boxes - The SERVQUAL design does not include an opportunity to indicate why respondents have skipped a question and thereby have not provided an answer. Poe et al (1988) in their studies consider that there is little value to be gained from providing 'No opinion' or 'Don't know' boxes. Their inclusion adds to the complexity of the questionnaire, and may provide respondents with an easy option which discourages them from providing evaluative responses. Buttle (1985) though considers that they should be provided, and respondents should be encouraged to use them where they are unable to answer a question. It is assumed though that the central value in the SERVQUAL instrument obviates the need for a separate 'No opinion' or 'Don't know' box in many cases.
- Specificity v. Generality - The statements used by Parasuraman et al addressed fairly specific aspects of the service operations, and both Trice and Layman (1984), and Ursic and Hegelman (1989) found that respondents preferred to answer questions on specific issues rather than general issues. This suggests that whilst respondents may have an overall perception of a service, they like to refer to the specific attributes which influence that overall evaluation. An important aspect of such studies must be to find out which specifics affect the global evaluation, but some researchers have not always found a particularly strong



correlation between the specific attributes and the overall evaluation [Lewis 1984; Parasuraman et al 1986].

- Question-order effect - Schroder (1985) found considerable differences between respondents' answers when the questions were placed in different contexts and in different orders, but her work focused primarily on opinions towards politicians. The question-order effect was not considered in great detail by the Parasuraman team, but to prevent stylised answering techniques, they presented their statements in a random order which does not accommodate the question-order effect. It is not known what effect a random arrangement will make on the respondents' answering techniques or responses, but this could be tested in future studies.
- Questionnaire length - The final questionnaire in the Parasuraman study resulted in being fairly long with twenty-six statements. Laurent (1972) considers that long questionnaires will be more informative and provide greater accuracy in the findings, whilst Trice and Layman (1984) considered that short questionnaires may convey an air of management indifference to customers' opinions. This suggests that questionnaires should be of a reasonable length. However, Ursic and Hegelson (1989) found that increasing the length of the questionnaire resulted in the respondent attempting to economise on time; and subsequently adopt less-evaluative and less-specific answering techniques. Clearly a balance between long and short questionnaires has to be achieved which is likely to be highly dependent on the context of the study.
- Open-ended questions - The SERVQUAL instrument did not have a section for open-ended questions, yet these questions may provide qualitative data to support the quantitative data. Although some authors have suggested that an individual's lack of articulation skills may discourage them from answering open-ended questions, and therefore distort the overall findings, Geer (1988) found that this was not necessarily the case since respondents will at least attempt to write something if they feel strongly enough about an issue.
- Respondent profile - The SERVQUAL designers do not appear to have provided a section for collecting demographic information for segmentation purposes, but they did suggest that the instrument can be used to segment customers into perceived-quality groups according to their scale ratings. Several researchers in fact have considered that market segments are better identified by benefit segmentation rather than demographic segmentation.
- Respondent experience - As Parasuraman et al (1986) advocated, the SERVQUAL instrument which measures perceptions of service quality, is only meaningful if respondents

have some knowledge or experience with the specific firm or service category being assessed. Since the intention of this study is to distribute the questionnaires as the individuals check into a lodge, and allow the respondents to complete the questionnaires during or after their stay, it is assumed that their perceptions will have been heightened by drawing their attention to the study, and will therefore even enable 'first-timers' to provide meaningful responses.

In summary, the literature has highlighted several aspects which needed to be considered before adopting the SERVQUAL design in its original form. Some modifications have been considered important before using this particular design for this study, and these have been discussed with the general characteristics of the SERVQUAL design under the following points:

- Statement and scale design;
- Attribute selection;
- Order of expectation and perception statements;
- Positive and negative polarity;
- Service quality dimensions; and
- Unstructured comments.

#### 4.3.3. Statement and scale design

- Each attribute from the first data collection stage was framed twice as attribute-statements: once to measure expectations and once to measure perceptions;
- Each statement was provided with a 7-point Likert-type rating scale for respondents to indicate their level of agreement, or disagreement; and
- To prevent the respondents from adopting a passive style of responding, and encouraging them to use the extreme values, the statements have been composed of strong wording.

Two hypothetical examples have been shown in Figure 4-1 and 4-2 to illustrate these aspects.

Figure 4-1: Example of measuring consumer expectations

**Q. Roadside lodges should offer superb catering facilities**

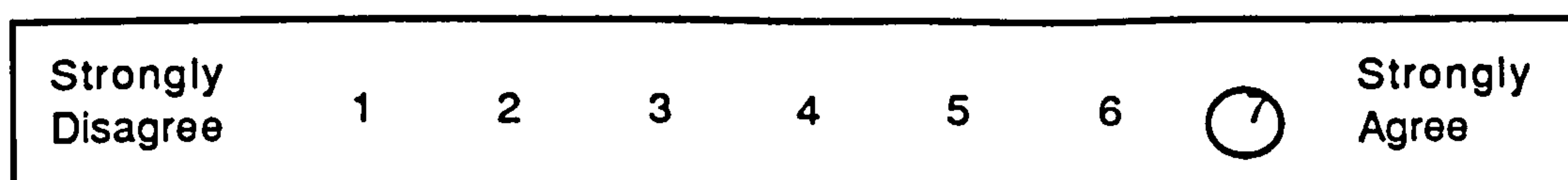
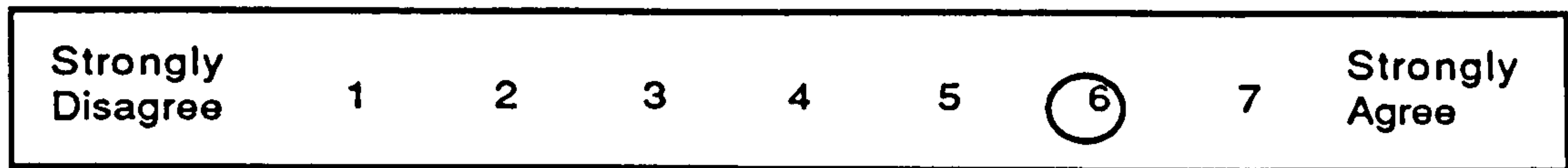


Figure 4-2: Example of measuring consumer perceptions

**Q. Quickchef lodges offer superb catering facilities**



In the above example, the respondent has marked '7' indicating that roadside lodges in general should clearly offer superb catering facilities, but 'Quickchef<sup>1</sup>' has been marked as '6' on the same scale which suggests that the organisation is performing just below this customer's expectations. Not only is the expectation score important, and the perception score important, but crucially there is a difference of 1 point between what the customer expects from the roadside lodge, and what he perceives the company 'Quickchef' has provided. A value of 1 point may not appear significant, but it does suggest there may be room for improvement. However a difference score of 2 or more may soon start to identify those attributes which are genuinely problematic.

**4.3.4. Attribute selection**

Several factors had to be considered surrounding the issue of attribute selection which determines the length of the questionnaire. The potential for producing a long instrument is high because: (a) of the number of attributes available; (b) of the fact that they had to be framed twice for expectations and perceptions; and (c) some are relevant to both the lodging facility and the restaurant facilities at each hotel. Furthermore the client-organisation was keen to add more attributes for their own in-company purposes. These four factors mean that the instrument could easily exceed 100 separate statements, spread over some 17 pages.

With the client-organisation's approval, a parsimonious number of attributes were carefully selected to produce a reasonable questionnaire length, whilst ensuring that the most important attributes are included in the questionnaire. From the list of attributes carried over from the previous chapter (Table 3-3), the first two-thirds (67%) of all the attributes were automatically chosen for inclusion, together with some provided by the client-organisation. Table 4-1 lists the 25 attributes carried over from the first stage, and illustrates (\*) those attributes that were finally selected.

Table 4-1: List of included and excluded attributes

<u>Topic</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>% cum</u>
value for money	13.6	13.6*
overall standard	7.1	20.7*
cleanliness	6.9	27.6*
friendliness	6.7	34.3*
food quality	5.8	40.1*

style of hotel	5.4	45.5*	
service quality	4.4	49.9*	
decorations/maintenance	3.5	53.4*	
lodge concept	3.5	56.9*	
comfort	3.3	60.2*	
location	3.1	63.3*	
restaurant style	3.1	66.4*	automatically selected
-----			
leisure facilities	3.0	69.4	client-selected and not selected
in-room facilities	3.0	72.4	
market level	2.4	74.8	
telephone	2.0	76.8*	
temperature	2.0	78.8	
management	2.0	80.8	
children's facilities	1.8	82.6*	
consistency/assurance	1.8	84.4	
bar	1.8	86.2*	
bathroom	1.6	87.8	
noise	1.6	89.4	
social interaction	1.5	90.9	
security	1.1	92.0	

\* Selected for inclusion.

The final list of attributes which were selected (some were assessed for both expectations and perceptions<sup>2</sup>) resulted in 48 separate statements being generated. The responses were kept at the same level of ordinality to ensure that they still reflected the issues provided by the repertory interviews as closely as possible. Appendix B1 shows the full list of statements used in the questionnaires. It is assumed that due to the limited operationalisation, construct validity has been maintained [Peter 1981].

#### 4.3.5. Order of expectation and perception statements

Parasuraman et al (1986) presented all their statements in two separate sections: the first for the expectation statements, and the second for the perception statements. Each attribute-statement was presented in a random order within each section to prevent respondents from stylised, and comparative responding. However this exact approach was not adopted for this study because it was considered that the random order may confuse respondents, and the separate expectation and perception questions would not allow for respondents to provide ratings which were consistent with each other for the same attributes. The approach used here was to present each attribute with its corresponding perception and expectation statements to enable respondents to provide their own direct comparisons between what they think should be provided and what they think has been provided.

Unlike the original SERVQUAL design, the perception statements in this study were presented

before the expectation statements. It was considered that respondents can relate better to their perceived value from their direct experiences rather than they could to an ideal value which was more of a vague concept. Conversely though once they provided their perception score they could then provide their relative expectation score for future expected service levels. Furthermore each dual attribute-statement was presented in a clear sequential order, with sub-headings, to highlight the systematic design of the questionnaire to the respondents, and thereby facilitating questionnaire completion.

#### **4.3.6. Positive and negative polarity**

As advocated by Churchill (1979), the Parasuraman team presented their statements in a random arrangement of positively-worded and negatively-worded statements to further prevent respondents from adopting a stylised pattern of responding. For the data analysis stage, the negative scores would simply be reversed to match the same polarity as the positive scores. This technique was also adopted for this study, but there was some concern that the negatively-worded statements would not be the exact converse of the positively-worded statements, due to the actual wording, or the respondents' interpretation of that wording.

To counter this potential problem a series of controls were built into the questionnaire. Two types of questionnaires were designed, one being the exact polar-converse of the other. The first questionnaire had a random arrangement of 16 (out of 48) positively-worded statements and 16 negatively-worded statements, and the second questionnaire simply had the reverse arrangement of the first questionnaire. The remaining 16 statements were controls, and comprised of a mixture of positively- and negatively-worded statements, but having the same polarity on each questionnaire.

To check the consistency between the positive and negative statements, the positives would simply be compared against the reversed negatives during data analysis. If the scores showed a significant difference, then the values may have been affected by either the polar-wording or the respondent base. To check which of these two affects the scoring, the control scores from the first questionnaire would be compared with the second questionnaire. If the controls show a difference, then it could indicate that the respondents were different; if the controls did not show a difference, then this could suggest that the polar-wording distorted the values. Appendix B1 shows the negative statements under each positive statement.

#### **4.3.7. Service quality dimensions**

After considerable refinement of the SERVQUAL instrument, the Parasuraman team established that the attributes for the four service firms they used in their study [Parasuraman et al 1986] could

be fitted into five service quality dimensions, i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Although these same dimensions have been acknowledged and used by other researchers [Brown and Swartz 1989], it was decided that these dimensions were not particularly helpful at this stage of the study due to the way in which the attributes have been generated.

#### **4.3.8. Unstructured comments**

Due to the highly structured approach of the questionnaire, and the objectives of this study to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on customers' perceptions, it was decided to include an unstructured section at the back of the instrument. An explanatory note at the back asked respondents to complete this section in their own words if they felt that the statement-questionnaire did not provide them with enough opportunities to express their feelings. Because this relates to the collection of qualitative data, this issue will be discussed in more in the next chapter. Appendix B2 shows the complete questionnaire.

This concludes this section on the design of the questionnaire. The next section will discuss the consumer study administration.

#### **4.4. Customer survey**

The administering of the consumer study requires careful consideration to ensure that a sufficiently large and representative response rate is achieved. However achieving a good response rate is subject to a wide range of intervening variables. These can range from customers not wishing to participate, respondents not completing the questionnaires correctly, poor distribution of the questionnaires, incomplete collection of the questionnaires etc. To overcome some of these difficulties, the following aspects were considered:

- Sample size;
- Questionnaire distribution; and
- Non-response.

To facilitate the design of the survey administration, some direct comparisons have been made with a handful of other recent hotel studies, and these have been summarised in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: Selection of hotel studies

<u>Reference</u>	<u>ISMM</u>	<u>Cornwell</u>	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>Knutson</u>	<u>Wilensky *</u>
properties	postal	1	51	postal	1
incentive	no	no	y+n	no	no
period	2 months	2 weeks	2 weeks	?	?
response n	825	45	2754	1853	130
response %	5	16	27	74	26

\* (Atkinson 1988; Cornwell 1988; ISMM 1988; Knutson 1988; Wilensky 1988)

#### 4.4.1. Sample size

As with all survey work, the sample size is a crucial aspect of the success of this study. Since it is not feasible to ask and expect every single lodge user in the country to participate in the survey, a smaller number of lodge users need to be selected which reflect the population's characteristics and responses. The size of this sample though is a balance between the accuracy needed to generalise the findings to the whole population, and the time and finances available to collect the data [Lewis 1984; Rose 1982].

The sample size required can be calculated through a variety of measures. For example, Lewis (1984) proposes using the following formula:

$$n = \left( \frac{Z \cdot ED}{e} \right)^2$$

Where: n = response size

Z = standardised value of the confidence level required

ED = estimated standard deviation of the population

e = acceptable margin of error

Using Lewis' calculations with a 95-percent confidence level and a (Z) of 1.96, a 5-percent margin of error (e), and an ED value of 1 (dividing the 7-point scale range by 6), it would be necessary to have a response of 1,537 questionnaires. If typical hotel studies range from 5% response rates to 74% response rates, as shown in Table 4-2, then it would be necessary to have a sampling frame of anything from 2,000 through to 30,000. Many researchers and authors have acknowledged the difficulties in selecting adequate sample sizes within cost and time constraints, and even for this study, a sampling frame of more than 2,000 would present some logistical, time and cost difficulties.

It was decided to select the sample size from an arbitrary calculation based on the number of hotels involved and the minimum number required from each. Fifteen hotels are operated by the organisation and a minimum of thirty responses would be expected from each unit [ibid]. Estimating that the response rate could be 40 percent, the difference between 5 and 74 percent shown in Table 4-2, then it would be necessary to have a response of 450 and a sampling frame of 1,125 individuals. Since hotel study response rates can fall as low as 5 percent, as shown in Table 4-2, or even as low as 1-2 percent as reported by Trice and Layman (1984), then it was acknowledged that the administration would have to be well-designed and rigorously controlled to ensure even a 40 percent response rate would be achieved.

#### 4.4.2. Questionnaire distribution

There appears to be two ways in which questionnaires can be distributed to hotel users, i.e. posted to their home address or given to guests staying at hotels. Table 4-2 shows that the Institute of Sales and Marketing Management (ISMM) (1988) and Knutson (1988) used the postal method, achieving a 5 percent and 74 percent respectively. Such a wide disparity does not provide a clear indication to which method is more suitable. However it was quickly decided that logistically it was not possible to use the postal method for this survey due to the client-organisation's unwillingness to release guests' addresses.

The other studies in Table 4-2 show that both Cornwell Self (1988) and Wilensky and Buttle (1988) carried out their surveys with one property each, whilst Atkinson (1988) used 51 properties. All three studies used the front-desk clerks to hand the questionnaires to guests as they checked-in rather than passive recruitment of leaving them in guests bedrooms. Passive recruitment has been criticised by several researchers as being unrepresentative, and as a suspect source of information, since the respondents are self-selecting and tend to represent a biased selection of hotel guests [Lewis 1985; Trice and Layman 1984; Yesawich 1987]. However since Hurst (1987) believed that a good time to approach guests was when they were in their room, it might be considered more appropriate to use a combination of check-in and in-room solicitation to encourage participation.

Trice and Layman (1984) report that active recruitment at the desk not only increases the rates of return, but also increases the quality of the responses: low response rates tend to be predominantly negative, whereas higher response rates provide a greater proportion of positive responses. Both Trice and Layman (1984) and Yesawich (1987) also advocate using check-out recruitment as well as check-in recruitment, which was used by Wilensky and Buttle (1988). Check-out recruitment though would be difficult to implement in the lodges due to the absence of a check-out procedure, but if it was possible it may prove to be a valuable way of



increasing response rates.

Further increases in response rates can also be gained by providing an incentive. Table 4-2 shows that Atkinson (1988) provided an incentive to respondents and achieved an overall 27 percent response rate. Further analysis of this study though shows that the survey involved some hotels providing a complimentary breakfast whilst others provided no incentive. The incentive hotels achieved a 34 percent return whilst the non-incentive hotels only achieved 7 percent. Trice and Layman (1984) also found that a financial incentive produced a 33.5 percent response, whilst the equivalent non-incentive survey produced only a 14 percent response. Although the incentive technique appears to provide significantly better response rates, the client-organisation in this study was unable to provide this facility.

Collecting the completed questionnaires can be achieved in two ways: respondents can return them to the desk, or they can mail them back to the research centre. The mail-back method is said to offer an advantage in preventing unit management from interfering with the responses, but the disadvantages include the possibility of children being encouraged to complete questionnaires when they are taken home, the extra time required for all questionnaires to be returned, and the expense of mailing-back [ibid]. It was decided to provide respondents with the choice of returning the questionnaires in labelled and pre-paid envelopes to the research centre, or if they wished, to return them to the front-desk in sealed envelopes.

#### 4.4.3. Non-response

The importance of increasing response rates was discussed earlier because high response rates can provide statistically greater confidence in the findings [ibid]. Even with a response rate of 40 percent, there is still a need though to find out if the non-respondents (the other 60 percent) differ in any way from the respondents [Rose 1982; Yesawich 1987]. This can be partly achieved by ensuring that every customer that checks into the hotel provides certain information (possibly on their background) by completing a form, and at a later stage, comparisons can then be made between respondents and non-respondents.

This decision necessitated the introduction of a second questionnaire to collect information on respondents, and this has been shown in Appendix B3. The first questionnaire, which has been called the 'customer profile questionnaire' or questionnaire 'A', would ask all in-coming guests to provide demographic and purpose-of-trip data. This would form the basis for comparison between respondents and non-respondents. After completing the profile questionnaire (questionnaire 'A'), the guests could then be asked if they would be prepared to complete a second questionnaire during their stay. This question was placed on the back of the profile questionnaire with a 'Yes' and 'No'

response facility. If the respondent was amenable then they simply provided a tick in the 'Yes' box, and would subsequently be given a 'service evaluation questionnaire' (questionnaire 'B') to complete; if the guest was not amenable, they simply ticked the 'No' box.

#### **4.4.4. Survey lodges and briefing<sup>3</sup>**

At the time of the survey the client-organisation was operating fifteen lodge hotels, and although all the lodges were similar in tariff and service they offered, it was agreed with head office that the whole network could be involved in the survey. Although the lodges were at different locations, the differences between the lodges themselves were not expected to be considerable due to the strict standardised and simplistic nature of the roadside lodge product. The differences between the respondents at each lodge was also not expected to be great due to mobility of the market it was targeting, i.e. predominantly business and some leisure motorists travelling from one site to another. However it was still considered necessary to assess whether there were any significant differences between the expectations and perceptions at each lodge.

Since there were fifteen lodges and a minimum of 1,125 questionnaires to be distributed, it was decided to issue each lodge with 100 questionnaires, bringing the total amount to 1,500. The researcher was invited to a management seminar in which each lodge manager was personally briefed on the purpose of the survey, and the method for its administration. The managers were also encouraged to comment on aspects they were unhappy with which enabled the researcher to make some modifications to the administration procedure. The briefing covered the following points:

- a) Each lodge was to be given 200 guest profile questionnaires ('A') each, and 100 guest evaluation questionnaires ('B') each. This allowed for 50 percent of incoming guests to complete both questionnaires, and 50 percent to complete just the profile questionnaire;
- b) Each guest that checked into the lodge should be encouraged to complete a profile questionnaire at the desk. If there were difficulties with this request though, guests could take the profile questionnaire to their bedrooms for completion;
- c) If the guest indicated 'Yes' on the back of the profile questionnaire, the questionnaire's serial number should be written by the desk-clerk in the provided space on the questionnaire 'B'. This questionnaire with a pre-paid addressed envelope would then be given to the guest to complete during their stay. They could then either post the questionnaire back to the research centre, or return it to reception before departing;

- d) If the guest indicated 'No' on the back of the form, the receptionist should simply take the the profile questionnaire and return it to the research centre at the end of the survey period;
- e) As with the surveys by Cornwell Self (1988) and Atkinson (1988), the survey should last for exactly 14 days, starting and ending on specified dates; and
- f) Each lodge manager should complete a 'survey record form' to confirm the details on how they administered the survey (Appendix B4).

This concludes the design of the customer questionnaire survey, and the results from this survey will be discussed in Chapter VI. The next section will discuss the details of the employee survey using a similar quantitative instrument to the customer survey.

## **4.5. Employee questionnaire**

### **4.5.1. Perceptual gap analysis**

The value of ensuring that employees develop a greater understanding of their customers' expectations and perceptions was discussed in Chapter II as being a way in which service quality can be influenced by the employees. This type of internal control can be more effective than external control, such as rules and procedures, especially in service environments where the employee's task is essentially a socially-interactive performance with the customer. This part of the chapter discusses the method chosen for identifying employees' perceptions of their customers' expectations and perceptions with a quantitative instrument, and comparing them against the customers' expectations and perceptions, i.e. perceptual gap analysis.

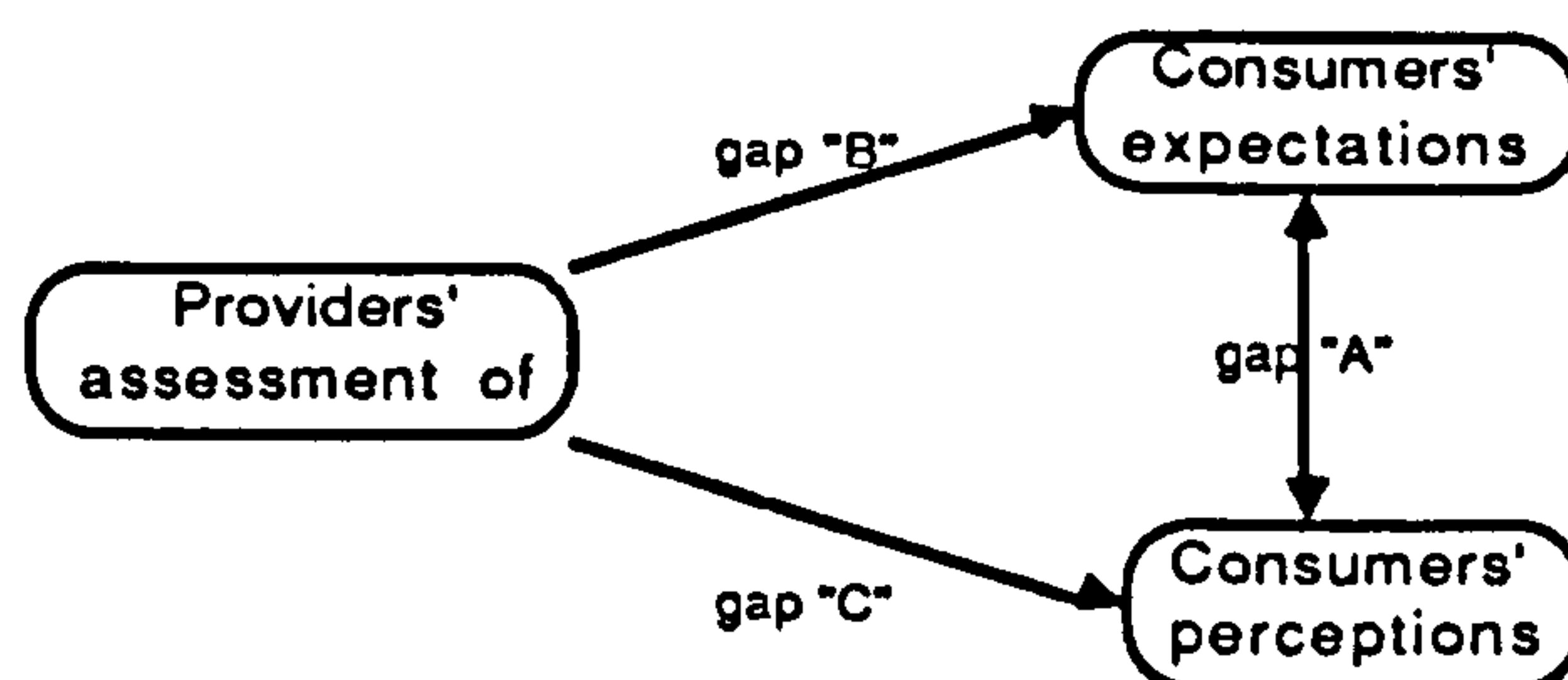
The model produced by Parasuraman et al (1985), which was shown in Figure 1-3, provides a good diagrammatic illustration of where perceptual gaps can lead to service quality failure. Their model emphasises the occurrence of four gaps on the providers' side which ultimately lead to a fifth gap occurring on the consumers' side. The four providers' gaps start off with: (1) management not correctly perceiving consumers' expectations; (2) management not correctly translating their perceptions into operating specifications; (3) the service delivery not being carried out according to specifications; and (4) the delivery not matching the external communications to consumers. The effect of any combination of these creates: (5) customers' perceptions of the delivery not matching their expectations.

Although the Parasuraman research team have identified the various gaps which may occur in an organisation, they have only focused on one gap which directly compares providers' perceptions

with consumers' expectations (gap 1), and have not considered comparing providers' perceptions with consumers' perceptions. Furthermore their fieldwork into gaps between management perceptions of customer expectations, and actual customer expectations, was based on qualitative and not quantitative techniques. Although the authors have not used their SERVQUAL technique to investigate gap 1, they have however advocated using it for this purpose [Zeithaml et al 1988].

Similar to the study Brown and Swartz (1989), this study is interested in identifying providers' perceptions of both consumers' expectations and perceptions using a quantitative instrument. The instrument that appears to be the most suitable for identifying the gaps between consumers and providers is the SERVQUAL-type statement-questionnaire that was used for the customer study. Figure 4-3 illustrates the objectives of the gap analysis approach in this study.

Figure 4-3: Perceptual gap analysis approach



Gap 'A' is the difference between consumers' expectations and perceptions investigated in the first part of this chapter. Gap 'B' is the difference between consumers' expectations and the providers' assessment of those consumer expectations. Gap 'C' is the difference between consumers' perceptions and providers' assessment of those consumer perceptions. As with gap 'A', the perceptual gaps 'B' and 'C' can also be identified using a SERVQUAL-type instrument to identify providers' assessments. The employee results can then simply be compared against the customer results.

#### 4.5.2. Questionnaire design

Since it has been decided to use the same statement-questionnaire design for identifying providers' assessments of consumers' expectations and perceptions, as that used in the consumer study, the existing questionnaire can be similar, but with a few modifications. There are three general areas in which the modifications have to be made: (i) the attributes to be assessed, (ii) the orientation of the statements, and (iii) the arrangement of the statements.

### (1) Attributes to be assessed

Appendix B5 shows the full list of questions which were used in the customer questionnaire. Since some of these were of more interest to the client-organisation, and were not considered to be of practical use for inclusion in the employee questionnaire, those in plain type have been omitted from this stage of the study. The remaining 19 attributes (in bold) were subsequently built into the employee questionnaire as two separate statements: once for employees' assessment of customers' expectations, and once for employees' assessment of customers' perceptions.

### (2) Orientation of the statements

Because the objective of this questionnaire was to assess customers' expectations and perceptions through the eyes of the employees, the statements had to be re-oriented for the employees to answer by re-phrasing the statements from their perspective [Dunlap et al 1989].

### (3) Arrangement of the statements

After reviewing the statement arrangement in the customer questionnaire, it was decided that the same arrangement could not be administered to the employees due to its length and complexity. It was essential that a high response rate would be achieved, but since the client head office wanted to keep the employee survey on an informal voluntary basis, the design had to be as simple and as short as possible to encourage participation. The arrangement of the questionnaire was changed in two main ways:

- (i) The 'expectation' statements were first grouped together followed by the 'perception' statements; and
- (ii) The statements were not repeated for each attribute, but were only given once for the expectations, and once for the perceptions.

These two modifications contributed significantly to reducing the length and complexity of the questionnaire for the employees. Appendix B6 shows the employee questionnaire in its complete form. It was not known at this stage whether the employee questionnaires are a perfect match with the customer questionnaires, but it is expected that the relative scoring of the attributes will provide a close correlation between the two parties.

#### **4.6. Employee survey<sup>4</sup>**

Due to the logistics of carrying out the employee study it was only possible to involve six sites and not the original fifteen that were involved in the customer survey. Head office sanctioned the survey by instructing each participating site to co-operate as much as possible. To ensure further commitment, the researcher liaised with each of the site management by telephone and mail. The site management were asked to participate in the study by distributing the questionnaires themselves, but to maintain some control over the distribution, the researcher encouraged that all grades of employees in various departments be involved. The management were also asked that each respondent be given time to complete the questionnaires properly, and on their own to prevent any form of collusion.

Each questionnaire came with a cover letter from head office encouraging the employee-respondents to complete the questionnaires as honestly as possible (Appendix B7), together with a sealable envelopes to ensure their anonymity. However respondents were asked to indicate their positions on the back of the questionnaire. To ensure that the researcher could maintain some control over the employee study, he personally delivered twenty questionnaires to each of the six sites (120 questionnaires in total), and remained in the vicinity for up to 24 hours to encourage management to distribute and return the questionnaires as quickly as possible. It is this personal involvement by the researcher which made it difficult to administer the survey to all fifteen lodges dispersed around the country

It is not known whether the sample of employees at six lodges would differ markedly from those at all fifteen lodges. However Schneider et al (1980) commented that there was sufficient research evidence to suggest that although individuals in the workplace may have varying perceptions according to their personalities, they are likely to share similar perceptions to work-related aspects, and towards the customers they are interacting with. This may therefore indicate that employee perceptions towards customer perceptions may be similar whichever location is chosen, especially when one considers the standard recruitment, training and communication processes employed by the organisation, and that lodge customers themselves could well be similar in their needs. The results from this employee study will be discussed with those of the customer study in Chapter VI.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the quantitative techniques available for measuring both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience, which led to the selection of the SERVQUAL instrument as being the most suitable tool to collect data. Because the SERVQUAL technique measures both expectations and perceptions it is far more sensitive to customers' opinions than

single scale instruments. The original SERVQUAL design though was not considered to be entirely satisfactory for this study which led to the questionnaire being modified in several small ways. The chapter also discussed the way in which the questionnaires would be administered for both the customer and employee surveys, the choice of sample size, and how to reduce the incidence on non-response. The next chapter will consider how similar data can be collected from customers and employees using a qualitative approach, which will be used to support (or challenge) the findings from the quantitative method.

## Footnotes to Chapter IV

1. The name 'Quickchef' was used in place of the actual client-organisation's name to protect their anonymity. The researcher does not know of any other organisation trading with it and believes that this name is not patented.
2. Some of the statements generated by the client-organisation could not usefully be framed as expectation and perception statements, but to maintain a dual consistency throughout the questionnaire, these were presented simply as two statements.
3. A pilot study was carried out at two lodges before launching the main study across the network of lodges. The pilot indicated that the questionnaire could be successful, but the commitment from one of the two sites was questionable. This lack of commitment resulted in head office adopting a higher profile in promoting the study, and communicating a more formal request for site co-operation.
4. A pilot study was conducted at one site with eight employee-respondents. This pilot encountered considerable opposition from the employees, even though the site management were co-operative. The questionnaires were completed in collusion, with several of the individuals scoring just 7s on the 1-7 point scale. Due to the poor experience with the pilot study, head office were informed so that they could instruct the site management and employees on the need for greater co-operation during the main study. The next section discusses the preparation and administration of this study.



## **Chapter V**

### **Collection of Customer and Employee Comments**

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the benefits of using qualitative research results to supplement the quantitative results from the previous chapter. A brief discussion will then be given on the method of analysis that will be used to interpret the qualitative data collected in the customer SERQUAL questionnaires discussed in Chapter IV. Since, as discussed in earlier chapters, that understanding employees' perceptions may be just as valuable as understanding customers' perceptions, this chapter will also explore the methodological opportunities for capturing employees' perceptions of the service they are delivering with the use of a systems approach. A systems approach appears to offer certain advantages which are discussed in depth in this chapter. The results from the actual methods used will be presented in Chapter VII.

## 5.2. Qualitative research methods

In the Introduction of this thesis, the three-step investigative approach for this study was outlined, i.e.

- (a) an initial exploratory qualitative stage;
- (b) a structured quantitative stage; and
- (c) a semi-structured qualitative stage.

This chapter will focus on this last qualitative stage. First the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative methods will be reviewed (which were partly covered in Chapter III), before selecting techniques for analysing the qualitative data.

Although quantitative techniques have considerable value in market research studies<sup>1</sup>, many researchers have lamented the rise of quantitative techniques at the expense of qualitative methods. Mostyn (1985, p.117) quotes Krippendorf (1980) as saying: 'The history of science shows a consistent trend to make more and more phenomenon subject to measurement and analysis', which has led to researchers, such as Gummesson (1988), in becoming particularly critical of academia for not using qualitative tools more often, and for placing too much reliance on quantitative techniques.

Geer (1988) commented on the limited ability of structured techniques to capture human attitudes. He illustrated the fact that people are constantly responding to open-ended questions in their daily lives, with which they have had considerable experience to enable them to respond in familiar ways. It is unlikely that individuals though could respond comfortably to such questions as: 'On a scale from 1 to 7 how do you feel about our new boss?' Dickens (1987, p.43) quotes Stephen King

when he says: '..people do not go around with ready packaged views on everything - they often need to talk a topic out to discover what they really think'. Ursic and Hegelson (1989) found in their studies that respondents processing questionnaires use more non-evaluative techniques, but when purchasing products they use evaluative techniques. The authors suggested that qualitative methods may be more effective than quantitative methods when attempting to decipher motives behind purchasing habits.

Several authors have espoused the ability of qualitative techniques to go beyond the surface of verbal labels and numbered scales, to probe into the depth of individuals, and to understand their meanings. Geer (1988) commented that there was enough support that open-ended questions are better able to measure salient concerns than close-ended questions. Mostyn (1985) acknowledges that open-ended questions require some form of inference, but the use of qualitative tools, such as content analysis, go beyond inference. They are concerned with treating the words as symbols, and interpreting a deeper meaning of the content of the message. The value of qualitative data gathering is the ability to identify key concepts and regularities in the flow of unstructured information, but at the same time, enable the analyst to remain open-minded and free from prejudices to capture unanticipated messages.

However the disadvantages with qualitative approaches have also been acknowledged. Dickens (1987), Hart (1989), and Jones (1985) comment on the difficulties with guaranteeing the validity and reliability of such data. The unique nature of qualitative data collection means that opportunities for repeating the same experiment or analysis more than once are virtually eliminated. Mostyn (1985) cites the frequent examples of several researchers interpreting the same data and coming up with substantially different findings. These examples certainly question the validity and reliability of qualitative techniques, and some commentators have even accused qualitative techniques of being 'impressionistic' [ibid].

Because of the unique performance between interviewer and interviewee, Jones (1985) comments that due to the interpersonal interaction between the two individuals, objectivity comes into question. Dickens (1987) comments that the personal skills of the qualitative researcher are crucial to the success of such projects, whilst Colwell (1990) discusses in-depth the problems and consequences with studies that use inexperienced researchers for qualitative studies. Hart (1989) and Mostyn (1985) discuss the personal characteristics the interviewer needs to be effective, whilst Gummesson (1988) adds that the personality of the researcher may be a decisive factor in the quality of the outcome.

Several advantages and disadvantages have been attributed to both approaches, and it may present a 'difficult dichotomy' in deciding which of the two approaches will lead to valid and reliable findings

[Seymour 1988]. But essentially it is dependent on whether one is trying to produce in-depth and valid meaning, or rigorous and reliable numbers. Perhaps the true difference between these two is simply between 'quality' or 'quantity'. Colwell (1990), Dickens (1987) and Seymour (1988) though comment on the unnecessary or oversimplified act of comparing these techniques with each other, as though one is more superior than the other. Seymour (1988) argues strongly that quantitative and qualitative methodology are not mutually exclusive, and he recommends that the two research methods should be used together in complementary ways.

Both quantitative research and qualitative research are in fact umbrella terms for a multitude of techniques which can be manipulated in a variety of fashions to produce a variety of complementary permutations. Colwell (1990, p.15) neatly illustrates the value of these two when he quotes Kirk and Miller (1986, p.9) by saying: 'Technically a qualitative observation identifies the presence or absence of something, in contrast to quantitative observation which involves the degree to which something is present'. In other words, first identify the phenomenon, and then measure it.

Seymour (1988) comments that many of the problems with research projects is that time and resources are limited which do not allow for long-term, multiple-method approaches. However since this study is based on a longer time period, and it was outlined earlier that this study is taking the qualitative - quantitative - qualitative route, then it appears that finishing this study with a qualitative approach would be prudent. Certainly this three-step approach provides opportunities for 'triangulation', a cross-research process which can provide corroborating results [ibid], as well as providing the opportunity to put depth and substance back into the quantitative data.

### **5.3. Customer questionnaire comments**

The method for obtaining qualitative data from customers using the SERVQUAL instrument was briefly discussed in the previous chapter, and the techniques for analysing qualitative data were first discussed in Chapter III. This section will briefly review the open-ended questions which were included at the back of the SERVQUAL instrument, and give a brief summary of how this data will be analysed.

Due to the open-ended nature of the questions presented, it is difficult to anticipate at this stage the exact nature of the responses, or how many responses will be received. Nevertheless it is possible to demonstrate how the responses will be handled using one of the replies from the pilot study<sup>2</sup>. This example has been shown in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1: Example response from open-ended questions

<p><b>Lodge</b> "Very good, good value. Shampoo in bathroom needed. Possible a phone and trouser press."</p> <p><b>Restaurant</b> "Stirling restaurant gave me the worst cooked meal I have ever had in 56 years but they did give me my money back. No manager on duty."</p> <p><b>Other</b> "Your breakfast in room at £2.25 is uneatable first thing in the morning. Very bad especially the Danish pastry and not good for your image at the Lodge."</p>
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As illustrated in Figure 5-1, and Appendix B2, the space provided for respondents' comments was divided into three areas: 'lodge', 'restaurant', and 'other'. The material presented in Figure 5-1 does not appear too complex or ambiguous, and the meaning appears fairly clear, but since there is no other data available to support this material, such as verbal recordings, the analysis is strictly limited to the written passage. Nevertheless the analysis requires a structured and disciplined approach to enable several responses to be handled; the analysis of more than one response soon indicates the difficulties with aggregating this kind of data.

There is a need therefore to subject this data to some form of content analysis, and with the guide of the study objectives, identify conceptual categories in which replicated responses can be placed. It is not just word counts from individual respondents that one should be interested in, since this may be biased towards the particular respondent's limited or over-usage of terminology, but the actual message that can be lifted from the comments. The repetition of the same message from more than one respondent though should be recorded as coming from two separate sources, and subsequently be weighted as such [Bainbridge 1985; Reynolds and Gutman 1988].

The analysis that will be performed on this data will follow the 'content analysis framework' outlined in Chapter III and displayed in Appendix A4. Unlike the analysis of the repertory grid data earlier, the analysis of this material will go beyond the stage of identifying and labelling categories. The material will be examined for patterns and relationships; key concepts or themes will be identified; interpretations of their meanings will be considered; and finally inferences will be made on their relevance and importance. These steps have been shown in sequential order in the content analysis framework. However the nature of this study is not to obtain an in-depth analysis of each individual customer, but to identify broad trends and key issues which are important to customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality, and then be able to compare them with the employee findings to identify the degree of empathy the employees have for their customers. A brief example

of the customer analysis, together with the comments in Figure 5-1, has been shown in Figure 5-2.

Figure 5-2: Example of content analysis

<u>Raw data</u>	<u>Informative?</u>	<u>Category label?</u>
"Very good, good value" (Lodge)	√	price/value for money
"Shampoo in bathroom needed"	√	in-room accessories
"Possible a phone..."	√	"
"...and a trouser press"	√	"
"...worst cooked breakfast I have ever had..."	√	food quality
"..did give me my money back"	√	failure response
"No manager on duty"	√	management visibility
"...breakfast...at £2.25 is uneatable..."	√	food value
"Very bad...Danish pastry..."	√	food quality
"...not good for your image at the Lodge"	√	image

The example in Figure 5-2 shows that a respondent's comments can be broken down into a listing of raw data segments. The value of these segments can be examined individually to assess their level of substance, i.e. whether they provide useful information or not for the purposes of the study. In this particular example, it appears that all of the respondent's comments have some meaning, and consequently are included for further analysis by first being placed into categories. As shown in the content analysis framework though, these categories must be related to the study objectives, be exhaustive, and be mutually exclusive.

Do the categories reflect the purpose of the research? 'Food quality' and 'value for money' certainly appear to be attributes which are important to hotel/lodge guests. Are the categories exhaustive? Certainly if all the data is considered informative, and is placed in a relevant category, then an exhaustive battery of categories can be built up. Are the categories mutually exclusive? This is where some difficulties may be encountered. Does 'food quality' belong with 'food value'? Does 'food value' belong with 'lodge value'? Does 'lodge value' belong with 'image'? Furthermore, if poor food quality leads to a poor image, as in this example, are these responses recorded as one response in one category, because one subsumes the other, or are they represented as two independent responses in two categories? Perhaps they reflect one category, and one of the responses should be put into a sub-category [Hart 1989]; but has the respondent withheld certain information which when combined with the perception of poor food, contributes jointly to a poor image perception? Besides placing the respondent's comments into relevant categories, there needs to be some indication to which way the comments swing, i.e. are they positive or are they negative? This last issue will receive more attention later.

For the purposes of this research study, the analysis of the customer data will follow a similar line just discussed. It is recognised that the data analysis could be carried out in far greater depth and complexity, with each case being examined in considerably more detail. However this study is not focusing on individual respondents, but is focusing on individual service quality issues in the roadside lodge sector. It is not so much concerned with an in-depth analysis of human cognitive activity, but is concerned with the comparison of a number of individuals across a range of topics to identify and compare group perceptions [ibid].

As far as non-response is concerned, Geer (1988) addressed the issue of respondents not answering open-ended questions through their inability to articulate themselves. The author notes that there appears to be evidence in the literature that articulate people will provide longer and more substantial responses to such questions, but whether they produce more responses was less conclusive. The author concluded though that the few individuals that do not respond were more likely to be uninterested in the specific issue rather than being unable to answer through poor articulation skills. He believed that if an individual is given the opportunity to comment, and they feel strongly enough about the issue, then they will do so. Perhaps this indicates the value of exploring service quality issues in depth when interviewing respondents to ensure that some of the less salient, yet major issues are uncovered.

It is anticipated that from the responses in the pilot study, sufficient qualitative data will be provided to satisfy the necessary criteria of this part of the study. The next section of this chapter will consider the method for collecting qualitative data from the employees.

#### **5.4. Employee interview comments**

This section discusses the search and selection of a research technique that is able to capture employees' perceptions of the service delivery system they are operating. The intention here is to bring together the concepts developed in earlier sections that the SDS concept is a valuable way of illustrating the delivery of services, and that employees can use the concept to suggest ways in which existing service delivery systems can be changed to improve service quality delivery. Although researchers has recognised the value of the SDS concept, and recognised the value of the employee in contributing to improving services, little attention has been given to bringing these two issues together. This section will therefore explore this area and develop a method which enables employees to contribute to the improvement of service delivery systems.

##### **5.4.1. The systems viewpoint**

The discussion in Chapter II showed that the SDS has clearly become a useful concept to employ in

studying service environments, and some authors have likened the SDS concept to the process flow chart used in manufacturing industries [Jones 1988]. The advantage of viewing services with the SDS concept or a process flow-chart is its ability to illustrate two essential characteristics of a service, i.e.:

- the 'process' elements; and
- the 'holistic' elements.

The process element is valuable because a service is essentially a process [Collier 1989; Gronroos 1988; Shostack 1987] which involves a series of logical sequential steps similar to those carried out in a factory [Haywood-Farmer 1988; Levitt 1972; Lovelock 1983]. This has been further emphasised with several authors discussing service quality in the context of process quality [Gronroos 1984; Lehtinen and Lehtinen 1985; Lewis 1989; Teboul 1988]. The holistic element is also valuable because a service needs to be looked at from a holistic perspective to capture its multitude of dimensions [Brown and Swartz 1989]. For this reason service quality is often encouraged to be looked at from the holistic perspective to ensure every aspect of it is captured [Armistead 1989; Evardsson and Gustavsson 1988; LeBlanc and Nguyen 1988].

Of the many approaches that have focused on the SDS concept, and on the process and holistic elements of services, several have been based on principles developed in the systems discipline. The systems discipline has been widely used in manufacturing and engineering with many of the approaches falling under the umbrella term of 'operational research' (OR). Although operational research is effective for graphically displaying factory production processes for analysis and manipulative purposes, their usefulness is limited when applied to service environments where the human element has a high profile. Most of the OR methods adopt a rigorous, mathematical approach to systems analysis to satisfy the objective for scientific and technical rationality, but these objective methods make no provision for people-rendered services. Since most services are people-intensive and human behaviour in service environments cannot be expected to conform to such mechanical consistency, the OR methods represent only fragmented views of a much more comprehensive phenomenon [Shostack 1987].

Cutcliffe and Strank (1971) and Kreck (1978) have used methods to analyse service production processes in the hotel and catering field using the basic principles of systems theory, and have shown the potential value for adopting a systems approach to service environment analysis. The systems approach is said to provide structure to investigating service processes by placing emphasis on the relationships between the various components. This approach is also valuable in providing clarification of thought which leads to a much improved understanding of a seemingly unstructured and 'messy' situation in a relatively short time.



Many of the earlier systems methods though have concentrated on the 'back-room' areas where the production activities are carried out, and have given little attention to the 'front-room' areas where the customer experiences and consumes services and products. Yet it is this front-room area which causes the most difficulties with service delivery and control [Armistead et al 1986], especially those with high contact between the employee and customer [Chase 1978].

Shostack (1984) developed the service blueprinting technique (SB) after recognising the inability of the early systems methods to accommodate the 'human element'. Service blueprinting documents two separate but interdependent sections of a service environment - one is referred to as 'above the line' which is where the customer experiences the service, and the other is 'below the line' which the customer does not usually see. These two are similar to the front-room and back-room areas discussed by other authors. Shostack also introduced the feature of 'failpoints', which are points in the system that are known to cause service quality failures, and which subsequently deserve close management attention.

The systems methods that have been reviewed so far can generally be regarded as those in the 'hard systems methodology', because they concentrate on 'actual' physical delivery systems as viewed by the systems analyst. These methods and approaches are all useful for providing valuable insights into the concept of production lines and service delivery systems, but most have been developed as objective tools for documenting the actual processes that are intended to occur in organisations. The majority of them require the researcher to take the role of 'systems analyst' in order that a better design can be proposed; but this is not the purpose of this study. This study is simply trying to capture the employees' perceptions of the customer experience as they pass through the SDS (as well as understanding service quality from the customers' viewpoint), and is not an attempt to actually re-design an SDS.

#### 5.4.2. Perceptions and systems

To achieve the intentions of this study the focus needs to shift away from the analysts' objective viewpoint of operational procedures to the employees' subjective perceptions of customers' experiences. The hard systems methods are too constraining and too mechanical to deal with situations that intend to capture this human element [Shostack 1984; Tait 1988], and therefore are inappropriate for capturing perceptions. Perceptions of a system though can be captured by employing techniques developed in the 'soft systems methodology'. This methodology moves the systems analysis from the sole responsibility of the analyst to the shared responsibilities of the organisational members. The 'problem framing', 'systems description' and the 'problem resolution' stages<sup>3</sup> are all carried out by organisational members with the help of the analyst. These methods are often used in action research projects whereby the analyst becomes a consultant to a

client-organisation, and both parties systematically work together on the area of interest. At all times though the perceptions of the individuals responsible for organisational activities (i.e. the client) are given the greatest prominence, because ultimately, it is their perceptions which are likely to have a significant effect on the success or failure of a project [Patching 1987; Tait 1988; Wilson 1984]. In summary the hard systems can be regarded as 'analyst-driven', and the soft systems as 'client-driven'.

The soft systems methodology (SSM) was developed by Checkland (1981) after he recognised the inability of traditional hard systems techniques to successfully 'cure' problems in the systems engineering world. These hard techniques are inappropriate for dealing with situations where human perceptions are influential to the success or failure of mechanically correct designs. Checkland (1988) has spent several years developing SSM, primarily for action research projects, and several other researchers have adopted the methodology and applied it in a variety of other situations. Some of these are:

- Developing problem solving skills to deal with complex, unstructured problems in organisations [McLoughlin 1986; Patching 1987 1989];
- As a tool for senior management to consider organisational issues in project management [Davies and Saunders 1988];
- Illustrating its use in the management and organisational issues surrounding information technology decisions [Ledington 1987];
- Used to overcome political objections to the implementation of information technology [Ritchie 1987].
- Integrating hard and soft methods to analyse 'politically sensitive' problems [Tait 1988]; and
- Integrating hard and soft methods to design decision aids for weapon systems on R.N. destroyers [Holt 1988].

From these various applications it can be seen that SSM is a useful and complementary tool to dealing with many organisational issues. SSM itself has seven separate stages, and although many researchers have drawn concepts from the methodology, they have not all used the original procedure proposed by Checkland. This study is also able to draw upon many of the concepts discussed and developed in SSM, but since this is not an action research project, it is not necessary

to adopt the full seven-step programme.

From the review of the literature so far it can be seen that traditional hard systems methodologies are useful in analysing and re-designing SDSs, and the soft systems methodologies are useful as action research tools. Since this study is not concerned with designing an actual SDS and is not an action research project, then neither of these two approaches are appropriate on their own. However they both offer valuable concepts for this study and can therefore be used in conjunction with each other. Ledington (1987), Holt (1988) and Tait (1988) have discussed the big advantage of the soft approach over the hard approach in many situations, but acknowledged that the soft on its own is often too abstract. Holt further adds that peoples' perceptions are often not reliable enough to be taken as a given since they may not have given enough thought to their viewpoints. Instead the author has used a hard and soft approach together, which subsequently provides an insight into how this study can benefit from such an approach. The next section will discuss how such a technique can be designed, using both hard and soft systems, to capture employees' perceptions of the service they are delivering to their customers.

### **5.5. A new systems technique**

The review of the literature has been valuable in providing insights into research possibilities, and although none of the methods identified are suitable as 'stand-alone' tools for this data collection stage, they have all contributed to the potential of developing a new research technique to capture employees' perceptions of an SDS. Checkland's SSM is ideal for capturing perceptions, but is too abstract to discuss concrete features of SDSs [Holt 1986; Ledington 1987]. Shostack's service blueprinting is ideal for illustrating SDSs, but it has not been designed to capture perceptions. Since both of these techniques had strengths and limitations for this study, it was decided to use them together as the framework for a new technique, simply by exploiting their strengths. Some of the systems concepts which have been considered as necessary features of the new technique include:

- customer orientation;
- process orientation;
- phenomenological perspective ;
- hierarchical structure; and
- holism

#### **5.5.1. Customer orientation**

A customer-orientation is essential since this study is focusing primarily on the 'customer

experience'. Cousins and Foskett (1989, p.2) commented on the benefits of taking a customer-orientation when looking at processes. They say that...'in considering modification to the service methods in various operations the effect on the customer process is considered first'.

Essentially for a service process to be effective, the analysis must take on the perspective of the customer, so that the organisation can base its activities on the needs and wants of customers [Czepiel 1980; Gronroos 1989; Hummel and Savitt 1988]. Ritchie (1987) comments that many systems designers concentrate so much on a technically valid design, that the needs of the users are often forgotten. It is ultimately 'benefits' to the customer, and not 'tasks' to be done, that matters [Levitt 1976].

### 5.5.2. Process orientation

Since services are considered as processes, which involves a series of functions which are often performed in some sequential order [George and Gibson 1988], the technique should capture the processes that make up the service delivery system. Unlike some of the other systems approaches which concentrate on the operational aspects of the SDS, this technique will focus on the customer activities. This customer-process-orientation focus means that the service has to be described in a language which emphasises the activities that the customer participates in whilst passing through the service delivery system. This description is therefore best expressed in words of action, such as verbs [Checkland 1981; Davies and Saunders 1988; Shostack 1987; Wilson 1984].

### 5.5.3. Phenomenological perspective

The technique has to adopt a phenomenological perspective to ensure that it is the employees' perceptions that are captured, and not the researcher's. However since it is the researcher that has to report the findings using his own subjective interpretations, then it is possible that some bias could affect the final interpretation [Checkland 1985; Kelly 1963; Wilson 1984]. Every effort though should be used to keep this intrusion at the lowest level to minimise researcher-bias.

The technique has to be designed to allow the actors<sup>4</sup> (employees) in the system to articulate their own unique perceptions of the system [Kelly 1955]. This is necessary since a complete understanding of a system needs to understand the perceptions of those operating the system. Because each individual will have their own perceptions, there is not necessarily any wrong or right perception, there are just multiple perceptions [Vickers 1983]. Every individual will also have a variety of perceptions which depend upon the context in which the investigation is addressing [Krippendorf 1980; Mostyn 1985; Patton 1980]. At all times the context must be stated that it is the customer experience that is required, and not operational, personnel or financial issues. To limit

interviewer-bias even further, the respondent should also be free to choose their own language to express their own perceptions [Checkland 1981].

#### 5.5.4. Hierarchical structure

Although it would be somewhat tenuous to propose that the world is made up of systems, systems thinking, like any other intellectual discipline, is simply a mental construct which has been designed to help bring order to the world we live in [Kelly 1955; Ritchie 1987], and to provide a better understanding of phenomena [Vickers 1983]. When using systems terminology though we have to recognise that systems are arranged in a hierarchical way, which means that all systems subsume smaller systems, but at the same time, are subsumed by larger systems themselves [Checkland 1981; Singleton 1981; Wilson 1984].

Related to the hierarchical nature of the systems world is the concept of systems boundaries. For each system there is a boundary which keeps it separate from other systems, but this boundary does not necessarily have to be physical, or even visible [Wilson 1984]. In the structured and physical world these boundaries may be clear-cut and uncontested, but in the unstructured human world these boundaries can become vague and questionable. Furthermore, most systems and boundaries, except those in controlled laboratory experiments, are open, and that whatever level of resolution is adopted, all systems components are influenced by, and influence, other components.

For an investigation the systems researcher has to decide which resolution level is most suitable for the analysis. An analysis may be done at a relatively high resolution level to capture the specifics of a situation, or an analysis may be done at a low resolution level to capture the global picture of a situation. To facilitate comprehension and stimulate flexibility, it is recommended to first look at a system from a holistic, abstract, and symbolic level, without giving too much attention to the functional aspects of perceived reality [Checkland 1981; McLoughlin 1986; Patching 1987; Singleton 1981]. The analysis then focuses on specific parts of interest, as with a reductionistic approach, and then returns to the holistic perspective. Knowledge is said to be gained 'dialectically' by attempting to bring the holistic, abstract model in congruence with the reductionistic, concrete setting [Susman 1979].

The iterative approach of bringing the holistic in congruence with the reductionistic view is necessary to explore for and capture 'emergent properties'. At every new level a system will provide emerging constraints or enablements, which are not evident at the detailed level [Vickers 1983]. These emergent properties are only meaningful at the level of the whole which shows the tangible or intangible connections or attributes that arise between systems components [Tait 1988]. A reductionistic approach is powerful for looking at complex situations in detail, but it will not

identify the problems that arise from the complexities themselves [Vickers 1983; Wilson 1989]. For this reason a systems approach requires starting at the holistic level to ensure that an analysis at the reductionistic level takes account of the emergent properties [Patching 1989; Shostack 1987; Singleton 1981]. Checkland (1981) considers that the most effective systems thinkers in fact work at different levels simultaneously to benefit from both the holistic and reductionistic perspectives.

#### **5.5.5. Holism**

George and Gibson (1988) commented that whole organisations can be viewed using Shostack's service blueprinting, but this is especially difficult because of the complexity and size of many organisations. If one was to consider the 'company' as the whole, then any hard systems approach would be deficient since they are unable to capture the 'phenomenological' perspective [Patton 1980; Shostack 1984]. However Patching (1987) comments that SSM overcomes this difficulty with its 'truly' holistic view. SSM is considered to be particularly good at looking at ambiguous and unstructured problems [Ritchie 1987] because it looks at 'problematical situations' rather than 'problems' themselves [McLoughlin 1986]. This approach abstracts from the problem situation and views it in systems terms which may expose recurring features common to problems and their sources [Optner 1965]. This approach remains precise enough to guide the investigation, but vague enough to avoid pre-judging the structure of the problem [Checkland 1981].

This holistic feature used in SSM provides management with a new way to thinking about problems [Davies and Saunders 1988]. Unlike hard systems which is concerned primarily with how technical aspects, soft systems are concerned with people issues as a precursor to understanding the technical issues can be resolved [Singleton 1981]. It shifts the emphasis from perfecting a physical situation to learning about how people make sense of it using the mental constructs of those involved [Checkland 1981; Holt 1987]. It encourages the observer to thoroughly analyse all the various perspectives of the situation before coming to a solution by exploring a wider range of options [Davies and Saunders 1988; Tait 1988]. This holistic feature is perhaps strongly related to the 'Gestalt' theories of psychology where it is considered that...'the nature of the parts is determined by, and secondary to, the whole' [Bullock and Stallybrass 1977].

#### **5.5.6. Summary of technique**

In summary, the new technique should be able:

- To capture the customers' activities by using a customer- and process-orientation;
- To capture employees' perceptions of those activities by adopting a phenomenological approach; and

- To identify the whole service package by concentrating on a holistic perspective.

Furthermore the technique required for this last data collection stage needs to comply with certain criteria to be considered methodologically sound. Since this is a qualitative phase, similar to the initial consumer interviews of this research programme, the technique can be developed using the same criteria selected for those consumer interviews, i.e.:

- To be conducted on a individual respondent-interviewer basis;
- To be partly structured to retain some control, and partly unstructured to allow for respondent freedom;
- To allow the interviewer the opportunity to search and explore for underlying attributes;
- To allow for some aggregation to enable group perceptions to be accommodated;
- To be objective and as free as possible from interviewer-bias;
- To have a sound methodological foundation; and
- To enable the data to be valid and reliable.

Additionally because this part of the study is investigating providers' perceptions of the service they are delivering, the technique would have to overcome any problems that could arise through respondents not wishing to reveal their true feelings which may expose either their ignorance of the system or lack of loyalty to the organisation. This provided a further criterion for consideration:

- It had to be 'user-friendly'

The meaning of 'user-friendly' in this context is that the technique had to overcome a respondent's reluctance and inhibitions to talk to an 'outsider' about the service they are offering, in an honest and straightforward way.

The next section of this chapter discusses how the proposed study would be carried out using the concepts reviewed in this section.

## **5.6. Employee study**

This section discusses how the proposed technique would be employed using the concepts discussed in the last section. The technique has been called 'Perceptual blueprinting' (PB) because of its similarities with SSM and service blueprinting. The aim of perceptual blueprinting in this study therefore is to investigate customers' perceptions of the service delivery system through the eyes of the employee, or as Checkland (1981, p.825) says..'define the human activity system'<sup>5</sup>

from the user-oriented point of view'.

To achieve this aim it is necessary to carry out the investigation in two phases to avoid actual customer activities becoming obscured with respondents' personal viewpoints of the virtues and problems of the system, i.e.:

- (1) identify the employees' perceptions of activities the customer participates in; and
- (2) identify the employees' perceptions of the SDS.

#### 5.6.1. Identify the employees' perceptions of customer activities

The technique starts off by carrying out individual face-to-face interviews with employees to enable them to provide their own personal account of how they see the customer passes through the SDS. Although the focus-group interview technique is useful for generating a wide range of attitudes [Dickens 1987], the individual interview technique was chosen since the former, with several people interacting, often complicates the analysis which would not be conducive to understanding the perceptions of the individual [Mostyn 1985].

Using the criteria used by Reynolds and Gutman (1988), the interview environment would be as non-threatening as possible. To encourage respondents to be introspective and honest, they would be told that there are no right or wrong answers and that their anonymity would be guaranteed; the purpose of the interview is simply for the employee, who is in a position of knowledge and expertise, to help the interviewer to understand the situation better. The interviewer maintains a position of 'vulnerability' and 'naivety' whilst gently probing the respondent for further information, and getting to discover his underlying perceptions of the situation. The interviewer has to cast aside internal prejudices, to remain perceptively-open, to adopt a phenomenological stance, i.e. to look through the respondent's eyes, and to faithfully record the information without giving any impression of judgement.

It would be explained to each respondent throughout the interview that the objective of the exercise would simply be to understand the typical activities a customer participates in at a roadside lodge site, so that the service package could be adjusted where it was deemed necessary. This explanation is intended to be fairly innocuous to help reduce any inhibitions the respondent may have, as well as helping the respondent to focus on the central issue of the discussion [Jones 1985; Reynolds and Gutman 1988], i.e. customer activities, and not operational activities (or even personnel issues).

As described by Patton (1980), a 'general interview guide' approach would be used followed by a



'standardised open-ended questioning' approach, i.e. outline the issues to be explored first before interviewing, and then question each respondent using the same sequence to minimise variation on the part of the researcher but allow for variation provided by respondents. This phase itself is 'double-edged' in that it is intended to capture both employees' perceptions and customer activities.

As with SSM, PB acknowledges that each individual will have their own perceptions or 'Weltanschauung'<sup>6</sup> of the customer activities, and these individual perceptions must be taken as a given since they may influence an individual's attitudes and behaviour [Checkland 1985; Patching 1987; Tait 1988].

For the first part, it is not the actual system that is required<sup>7</sup>, but perceptions of the [human activity] system [Wilson 1984]. Each respondent is likely to provide a different description reflecting that individual's perceptions which can then be used for analysis purposes [Singleton 1981]. For the second part, a description of the customer activities is required based on a consensus of all of the respondents to provide a realistic and possibly legitimate template of the SDS. Capturing multiple-perceptions in this way is characteristic of SSM which sets out to build the 'richest picture' possible of the situation to provide a comprehensive understanding for management and analytical purposes [Checkland 1981; McLoughlin 1986].

It would be explained to each respondent that a flow-diagram is required to illustrate the 'typical' activities a customer might participate in during an overnight stay at a roadside lodge. This is similar to 'perceptual scripting' explained by Assael (1987). To help reinforce this instruction, a flow-chart would be shown to them to illustrate a theoretical SDS in a restaurant (extracted from Cutcliffe and Strank 1971). Each flow-chart would have to be at the same resolution level to ensure that valid comparisons can be made, focusing on actual customer movements in a logical, sequential order.

The respondent would be asked to start off explaining the first activity arriving lodge guests would carry out as soon as they leave the road and drive into the service area. Whilst the respondent provides the sequence of activities, the interviewer would draw a flow-chart (and tape-record the conversation if there are no objections) and make notes where appropriate. Once all the activities have been given, the respondent would be shown the sequence of activities depicted on the flow-diagram and be asked to make any adjustments which are not accurate or have been omitted. This diagram exercise helps the respondent to view the whole service provided to the customer, and will sometimes force out vague and undefined areas not previously considered, even though the respondent may feel they are describing a familiar situation [Checkland 1985; McLoughlin 1986].

A master diagram would be made up at the end of the interviews from the individual charts. This

master should provide a reasonably accurate description of the activities the customer participates in whilst passing through the SDS. Although several individuals may repeat the same steps, the objective for the master blueprint is simply to document the various different steps. As with service blueprinting, the master can then be viewed from an objective vantage point, which is more precise and less prone to misinterpretation than verbal descriptions [George and Gibson 1988]. Unlike service blueprinting, the chart does not set out to engineer the SDS at the drawing board [Shostack 1984], but merely illustrates the system as perceived by the employee and customer to help guide human resource management policies in improving service quality.

### 5.6.2. Identify the employees' perceptions of the SDS

This phase of the interview has to be handled a little more sensitively since it is an attempt to capture the respondent's perceptions, or personal opinions, of the SDS, whilst at the same time ensuring that respondents maintain a high level of trust in the interviewer [Jones 1985]. Reynolds and Gutman (1988) comment that sensitive areas such as personal opinions may prompt respondents into feeling threatened, resulting in them avoiding introspection and providing only superficial responses. It is anticipated though that the previous phase of the interview would have relaxed the respondents and lowered their inhibitions, and drawn their attention away from themselves and onto simply recounting customer activities

To capture the respondent's true evaluative perceptions of the SDS, a method has to be selected which would be objective and can extract an unbiased perception from each respondent in the same way. To achieve this a technique has been selected from de Bono's (1982) 'thinking exercises', which is called the 'P.M.I.' method. This method is viewed as an 'attention-directing tool' because it is capable of directing an individual's attention in a disciplined and deliberate way towards the plus points (P) of an issue, then to the minus points (M), and finally to the interesting points (I). The technique is valuable because it forces a respondent (or the thinker) to consider the pluses and minuses of a situation before coming to a conclusion. It is especially useful when an individual has already formed strong pre-conceived notions about a situation, which he would normally verbalise first and then subsequently try and (stubbornly!) defend [Staw 1976]. By directing the individual to 'explore' the pluses first, and then 'explore' the minuses, a more balanced and unbiased opinion can usually be extracted.

For this study the 'P.M.I.' technique can be modified and re-labelled as the 'P.N.I.' technique, as shown below:

- 'P' is changed from plus to positive;
- 'N' is changed from minus to negative; and

'I' is changed from interesting to implementation.

After collecting a flow-diagram from a respondent, the P.N.I. method would then be employed in a strict sequential order:

(i) The respondent is first asked to list all the positive points about the service package being offered to the lodge guest. It would be explained that these points could be those that the company could use for selling or promotional purposes;

Asking for the positives first should avoid stirring up any inhibitions in the respondent and mentally prepare them for the next question:

(ii) The respondent is then asked to list all the negative points about the service package being offered to the lodge guest. It would be explained that these points could indicate to head office where changes should be made; and

(iii) The respondent is then asked to list all those things he would implement if he assumed immediate responsibility for the lodge service package. This last question simply 'mops' up loose aspects in the interview and provides a cross-check on the positives and negatives.

When the interviews have been completed, the individual flow-diagrams can be combined together to form a master perceptual blueprint, and the 'P.N.I.' points can be combined together, placed into categories, and used as reference points to identify strong and weak points on the service flow-diagrams.

This whole exercise is designed to get the respondent to think objectively about the service package, first in a complimentary way and then in a critical way, so that his range of perceptions can be explored. Mostyn (1985) considers that the method of getting respondents to draw (vicariously) a diagram of the customer activities as they perceive it, and encouraging them to explain their drawings, is an increasingly popular and useful technique in the qualitative research field. It is considered here that the perceptual blueprinting technique offers a novel, but rigorous, way in which employees' perceptions of the SDS can be captured<sup>8</sup>.

## 5.7. Conclusion

This chapter has briefly discussed the method of analysing the customer comments collected at the back of the SERVQUAL questionnaire. The success of the method though will not become evident until the data from the main survey has been collected and analysed. The development of a new

technique, called perceptual blueprinting, was discussed in depth which has been designed to collect employees' perceptions of a service delivery system as experienced by the customer, i.e. actual customer activities and perceptions of the effectiveness of the service in satisfying customers. The technique has borrowed many concepts from the systems discipline such as 'holism' and 'process orientation', but has incorporated a 'customer orientation' with a 'phenomenological perspective'. Unlike other systems approaches, the perceptual blueprinting technique shifts the emphasis from the objective viewpoint of the systems analyst to the subjective multiple perceptions of service employees, i.e. it is a 'user-driven' technique rather than an 'analyst-driven' technique. The success of the technique though will become apparent after it has been empirically tested and discussed in Chapter VII.

## Footnotes to Chapter V

1. The advantages of using quantitative techniques were reviewed at the beginning of Chapter IV.
2. The pilot study involved delivering two hundred 'A' questionnaires and one hundred 'B' questionnaires to two lodges. After a one week period seventy-two completed 'B' questionnaires were collected by the researcher from the two lodges. Of those completed, forty-seven of the questionnaires provided unstructured responses at the back of the instrument. These remarks ranged from simple comments, such as 'nice', through to more involved ones complimenting the staff, complaining about the catering facilities, and providing recommendations etc.
3. 'Problem framing' is merely assembling the perceived problem in its context to provide a better understanding of it; 'systems description' is the description of the problem and its context in systems terminology; and 'problem resolution' is the act of resolving the problem.
4. The term actor is used in soft systems methodology to refer to an individual which actually participates in the system.
5. A 'human activity system' is part of soft systems terminology where it is often abbreviated to 'h.a.s.'. It means a notional system: notional in that it is not real but merely an intellectual construct of an ideal system.
6. The German word Weltanschauung means 'world-view'. It is used extensively in soft systems methodology where it is sometimes abbreviated to just 'W'. In this context it is the unquestioned perspective of a human activity system held by an individual.
7. If the actual system was required then the analyst himself would draw it.
8. A pilot was conducted with three management/supervisory members at one of the lodges. The study highlighted several difficulties with the mapping technique, and the control of respondents' time. Due to the enthusiasm of one of the respondents, this particular interview was extremely difficult to keep within the frame of the conversation, and even more difficult to terminate! However the mapping technique and the necessary interview controls have been modified to circumvent these two problems.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Questionnaire Results and Findings**

## **6.1. Introduction**

Chapter IV discussed the questionnaire and survey design for a customer and employee survey, and this chapter will present the responses and results from the two surveys. The first section of the chapter will discuss the customer survey and how well service quality is being achieved in the surveyed lodges, the section will discuss the employee survey and the level of empathy employees have for their customers, and the last part of the chapter will consider the survey response and validity and reliability of the survey instruments.

## **6.2. Summary of analyses**

The quantitative data collected for this study has come from two sources:

- (i) Customer expectations and perceptions were obtained from structured statement-questions in a SERVQUAL-type instrument; and
- (ii) Employee perceptions of customer expectations and perceptions were obtained from structured statement-questions in a SERVQUAL-type instrument.

The four broad areas which were of interest to this study for analyses are<sup>1</sup>:

- (a) Customer responses;
- (b) Customer profiles;
- (c) Employee responses; and
- (d) Customer and employee responses.

## **6.3. Customer responses**

### **6.3.1. Customer response rate**

Of the fifteen lodges which were initially involved in the customer study, two of the units were unable to administer the survey due to local management difficulties<sup>2</sup>. Since these difficulties arose after the survey had begun, only 2,600 'A' questionnaires and 1,300 'B' questionnaires, from the original 3,000 and 1,500 questionnaires respectively, were available for distribution to lodge guests. The figures for the questionnaires that were returned to the research centre have been shown in Table 6-1. It can be seen that some of the lodges were able to encourage a large percentage of guests to participate in the survey, whilst others experienced some difficulties.

**Table 6-1: Customer survey response figures**

<u>Lodge code</u>	Q.'A'		Q.'B'	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
A	17	8.5	24	24.0
B	46	23.0	19	19.0
C	72	36.0	28	28.0
D	153	76.5	78	78.0
E	96	48.0	38	38.0
F	0	0.0	0	0.0
G	45	22.5	29	29.0
H	135	67.5	81	81.0
I	18	9.0	13	13.0
J	73	36.5	75	75.0
K	3	1.5	80	80.0
L	0	0.0	0	0.0
M	2	1.0	21	21.0
N	41	20.5	40	40.0
O	15	7.5	7	7.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>716</b>		<b>533</b>	

**Key:** Q. 'A' = completed guest profile questionnaires

Q. 'B' = completed evaluation questionnaires

n = number of questionnaires returned

% = percent each lodge returned from the amount they were given to distribute

Table 6-1 shows that 716 'A' questionnaires (27.5%) and 533 'B' questionnaires (41.0%) were returned correctly completed for analysis. A further 12 'A' questionnaires and 27 'B' questionnaires were also returned, but since these contained over one third of the questions with completion errors or missing scores (as recommended by Sekarin (1984)) they were rejected from the analyses<sup>3</sup>.

The study was designed so that a customer-respondent would first complete questionnaire 'A' (customer profile) followed by questionnaire 'B' (service evaluation). On distribution, the lodge receptionists would ensure that the 'B' questionnaires would be coded with the same number as the corresponding 'A' questionnaires to ensure that customer profiles could be matched with their service responses during data analysis. As expected, a number of respondents only completed



questionnaire 'A' without electing to complete 'B', resulting in more profile questionnaires than evaluation questionnaires.

The figures in Table 6-1 might suggest that 183 'A' questionnaires on their own were returned (i.e. 716 - 533 = 183), with a further 533 'A' questionnaires with matching 'B' questionnaires. However it appears that the lodge personnel administering the survey did not receive sufficient instructions from their unit management, and subsequently several 'A' and 'B' questionnaires were returned without a code and therefore could not be matched together. This resulted in three separate lots of questionnaires being returned, which have been shown in Table 6-2.

Table 6-2: Matching and unmatched questionnaires

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Questionnaire type</u>	<u>n</u>
1.	Unmatched 'A' questionnaires	348
2.	Matching 'A' and 'B' questionnaires	365
3.	Unmatched 'B' questionnaires	<u>168</u>
		<u>881</u> cases

This breakdown in the questionnaire distribution resulted in a far less number of cases being available for the analysis<sup>4</sup>. From the initial 2,600 'A' questionnaires and 1,300 'B' questionnaires distributed to the thirteen lodges, only 365 matching 'A' and 'B' (14.0% and 28.1%) questionnaires were returned. Because some 516 'A' and 'B' questionnaires could not be matched, they were all issued with a separate case number and treated differently from the matching 365 questionnaires. However it is possible to show if there are any differences between the matching and unmatched responses by comparing their mean values for all the variables. Appendix C2 shows the means and standard deviations for the 168 unmatched and 365 matched 'B' questionnaires for the questions which were required for this analysis (these are the same as those in Appendix B5 - Appendix C1 shows each question with their corresponding codes). The last column in the Appendix shows the standard error of difference between the values from the two samples<sup>5</sup>.

The comparison between the unmatched and matching 'B' questionnaires shows very small differences in their means and standard deviations. The two questions which have shown significant values are Q3b at 2.13 and Q11b at 1.98, but it is not clear why these two questions have shown these differences. Since there are only two variables which have generated significant differences, it could be suggested that overall the unmatched and matched results are very small. However because it is not certain how many of these unmatched questionnaires represent individuals who only completed one questionnaire, the main analyses for this study will be based

on the matching questionnaires only. Table 6-3 shows the frequency distribution of the lodges that have returned matching questionnaires.

Table 6-3: Frequency distribution of matching 'B' questionnaires

<u>Lodge code</u>	<u>Cases</u>	<u>%</u>
A	4	1.4
B	18	4.9
C	27	7.4
D	78	21.3
E	38	10.4
G	27	7.4
H	72	19.7
I	11	3.0
J	70	19.1
K	1	0.3
M	1	0.3
N	18	4.9
O	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	<u>365</u>	<u>100.0</u>

It can be seen from Table 6-3 that unit 'O' did not return any questionnaires which were matching, and therefore this lodge has been automatically eliminated from the main analysis. The 365 cases that will be analysed are now spread over just 12 lodges.

### 6.3.2. Reliability and consistency of questionnaires

To become familiarised with the data, as advocated by Sekarin (1984), the frequencies were displayed and examined for variances amongst the central tendency scores and dispersion values. Where the results had shown obscure or unexpected values, the data was scrutinised for possible errors in the coding input, and were subsequently corrected.

As recommended further by Sekarin (1984) and Churchill (1979), it is possible to test the reliability of the instrument through a variety of measures. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used on the evaluation interval-type data to assess their reliability. This produced an alpha of 0.8359 for the combined expectation and perception scores, 0.8658 for the perception scores, and 0.7412 for the expectation scores. These figures are similar to other studies that have reported strong measures of internal consistency [Dunlap et al 1988; Parasuraman et al 1986]. However it is acknowledged

that a strong internal consistency is a necessary, but not sufficient, test of construct validity. The validity of the results will be discussed later in this chapter.

Churchill (1979), Sekarin (1984), and Parasuraman et al (1986) discuss the handling of positively- and negatively-worded questions. The two types of questionnaires, '1' and '2', contained opposing negatively- and positively-worded statements, and for the analyses the negatively-poled scales were simply reversed before data input, but were recorded as having originally been negative. The returns from these two questionnaires have been shown in Table 6-4.

Table 6-4: Matching and unmatched questionnaires

<u>Questionnaire type</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Questionnaire 'B' No 1 =	192	52.6
Questionnaire 'B' No 2 =	<u>173</u>	<u>47.4</u>
	<u>365</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Again with these two types of questionnaires, a comparison can be carried out on their means to show if the statement polarities made a difference to the results, or if the respondent bases were different by comparing the control questions. Appendix C3 shows the means and standard deviations for these two types of questionnaires, and the respective standard errors of difference.

As expected the control questions have produced less variability than the non-control questions: Q15a though, which is a control question, shows a significant difference for an unknown reason. Q19a shows a small difference which could be due to the question wording whilst Q2a and Q2b show very large differences. It could be hypothesised that the large differences for Q2a and Q2b are the result of respondents initially experiencing difficulties with some of the negative questions (which Q1a and Q1b also showed, but were not part of this analysis), whilst the later questions show a more even pattern as respondents gain familiarity with the differently-poled questions. These figures therefore might suggest that the question wording had some influence on the responses, but for the purposes of this analysis, it is considered that they will not represent a significant bias in the results.

### 6.3.3. Expectation, perception and difference values for the total sample

The next step of the analysis was to identify the differences between expectations and perceptions for the total sample, which have been shown in Table 6-5. Some of the questions were excluded from this analysis since they were for the client-organisation's own purposes and were considered to have little value for this study. Q8, which was a client-initiated question, was included in this

analysis since it appeared to be addressing a particularly relevant issue to this study.

**Table 6-5: Customer-respondents' evaluation values**

	<u>Attributes</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>D</u>
Q2	Location of lodges	6.28	5.69	-0.59
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	6.80	6.50	-0.30
Q4	Comfort of lodges	6.57	6.22	-0.35
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	6.65	6.44	-0.21
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	4.23	4.24	+0.01
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	6.74	6.42	-0.22
Q10	Service in lodges	6.71	6.35	-0.36
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	6.78	6.43	-0.35
Q12	Value for money in lodges	6.74	6.29	-0.45
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	6.52	4.43	-2.09
Q15	Location of restaurants	6.60	5.84	-0.76
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	6.87	5.46	-1.41
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	6.58	4.96	-1.62
Q18	Decorations and maintenance of restaurants	6.39	5.25	-1.14
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	6.73	4.66	-2.07
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	6.71	5.23	-1.48
Q21	Service in restaurants	6.77	5.28	-1.49
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	6.77	5.22	-1.55
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	6.71	4.73	-1.98
		6.53	5.57	-0.96

Key: E = expectation score  
P = perception score  
D = difference score  
+ = perceptions exceed expectations  
- = expectations exceed perceptions

The two most important columns in Table 6-5 are those for 'expectations' and 'differences'. The expectation values are important since they indicate the attributes which are considered to be important by the respondents (appendix C4 shows the expectation scores in their relative order). However it is difficult to draw definite conclusions from this listing since many of the attributes are clustered together in the upper 6s, but their relative values do provide some indication to their level of importance, especially between those at the upper and lower ends of the scale, e.g. cleanliness

attributes compared to childrens' facilities. These values also show a similarity in the order of attributes with the construct categories displayed in Table 3-3 elicited from the repertory grid interviews, even though the interviews focused on both hotel and lodge attributes and the questionnaires focused on just lodge attributes.

Appendix C4 shows that 'cleanliness' occupies the two highest positions, which is similar to the results from other hotel studies [Atkinson 1988; Knutson 1988; Wilensky and Buttle 1988]. Since this construct often scores highly in hotel studies, and that the restaurant and lodge cleanliness attributes have both been scored highly in this study, it might be concluded that the measure has construct validity and is therefore representative of respondents' opinions. However because the SERVQUAL is a retrospective-evaluative instrument, the expectation scoring may be influenced quite significantly by the respondents' immediate experiences, and subsequently, the high scoring may be an underlying message indicating that restaurants and lodges could be cleaner.

Appendix C4 also shows that childrens' facilities have received the lowest score. Interestingly this particular attribute was not originally considered for inclusion in the questionnaire since the repertory grid interviews gave this a low scoring (see Table 3-3), but the attribute was included upon request of the client-organisation. The low importance it was given in both the customer interviews and the questionnaires may be a reflection of the client-base using this kind of accommodation: the lodges may be attracting less 'children-oriented' guests, e.g. single persons and business people.

The perception column in Table 6-5 is of the least importance amongst the three columns since it only indicates how particular attributes have performed without any indication of how they should have performed (appendix C5 shows the perception scores in their relative order). The dispersion of the evaluation scores and S.D. values are much wider with the perceptions than with the expectations, which is similar to the study by Parasuraman et al (1986). Perhaps most people share similar values according to what should be provided, but do not share similar perceptions to what is provided since their actual experiences are likely to be different and are likely to be perceived differently. The extreme scores on the perception dimension shows that cleanliness, decorations and maintenance, and overall standards received the highest values. These scores could be a reflection of the fact that most of the lodges are newly-built, and have not yet suffered the effects of time and heavy-usage. The lowest score goes to childrens' facilities again. This indicates that not only were the respondents unconcerned about the provision of childrens' facilities as displayed in the expectation column, but they also recognised that these facilities were not provided anyway as shown in the perception column.

As far as service quality is concerned the difference column is the most important since it shows

how well each attribute has performed for this sample (appendix C6 shows the difference scores in their relative order): if expectations exceed perceptions, then it is a negative evaluation; if perceptions equal or exceed expectations, then it is a positive evaluation. Table 6-5 shows that with eighteen out of the nineteen attributes, expectations exceeded perceptions, which is an indication of poor service quality. The nineteenth attribute though, childrens' facilities, actually exceeds expectations by 0.01. Overall it could be deduced that the respondent-population that provided these values were generally unconcerned about this particular attribute. However a glance at the S.D. value for expectations in Appendix C4 shows it has the highest at 1.56, which suggests that this attribute is represented by a wide range of strong opinions: its presence is very important to some individuals whilst its absence is very important to others. These figures probably reflect two different customer bases, i.e. families and business people respectively.

The second best performing attribute was decorations and maintenance of the lodges; the newness of the lodges probably had a bearing on the favourable score this attribute has attracted. The third best performing attribute was staff friendliness in the lodges. Although this attribute did not attract the highest scores on the expectation and perception scores, the small differences between them indicates that the friendliness levels in the lodges are considered to be sufficiently good. The largest negative scores are all related to the restaurant attributes, with the suitability of the restaurant attracting the biggest at -2.09. This might indicate that the restaurant part of the service package is of a much lower perceived standard than the lodge part. On a relative scale, the restaurant attributes have received 84.4 percent of the negative values, whilst the lodge has received the remaining 15.6 percent.

It is not certain though what size a gap between expectations and perceptions represents a problem area, an issue which does not appear to have been covered by the literature. Clearly those attributes which attract the largest negative gaps must be the most problematic but perhaps the only way of establishing the degree of dissatisfaction a particular gap causes is to correlate the gap findings with some other measure of customer dissatisfaction. However as reported in other studies, the relationship between the performance of groups of variables and overall performance results is not always reliable [Lewis 1986; Oberoi 1989].

Overall the nineteen attributes in Table 6-4 have produced a mean negative score of 0.97, with individual variances between -2.09 and +0.01 (2.10 spread). The mean variance compares similarly with those obtained by Parasuraman et al (1986), who achieved an overall mean negative score of 0.96, but with a much narrow range of individual variances between -1.50 and 0.32 (1.82 spread).

#### 6.3.4. Expectation, perception and difference values for the individual units

The expectation, perception and difference values that were presented in the last section represent the aggregate scores across twelve lodges, but it is possible that there are some differences between individual units which are not recognised if only the aggregate scores are analysed. Interpreting from the returns of individual units though requires a reasonably high response rate from each unit [Lewis 1984], but only three of the lodges can be considered as having returned sufficient numbers. These three have been shown in Table 6-6:

Table 6-6: Returns from three individual lodges

<u>Lodge code</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>% of returns</u>
D	78	21.4
H	72	19.7
J	<u>70</u>	<u>19.2</u>
Total	<u>220</u>	<u>60.3</u>

These three units represent 60.3 percent of all the questionnaires returned from the twelve lodges, and therefore should provide a useful basis for analysis. Appendix C7 shows the standard error of differences between each units' responses. The figures indicate that overall the responses between units 'D' and 'H' are similar with the lodges, and the responses between units 'H' and 'J' are similar with the restaurants. This suggests therefore that the lodging facilities at unit 'J' (which has lower mean values for its attributes) are generally considered to be less desirable than at the other two units, but since the reasons for this are not clear, it would be necessary to carry out further investigations into the causes. However further investigation into these causes is not considered critical for this analysis. The analysis also suggests that the restaurant facilities at unit 'D' (which has lower mean values for its attributes) are generally considered to be less desirable than at the other two units. The restaurant serving lodge 'D' is in fact a very large motorway-style restaurant that has a considerable throughput of volume, whereas lodges 'J' and 'H' are served by small roadside restaurants, which in comparison, are relatively quiet. It is possible that the motorway-style and the large volume of trade both have a negative affect on customers' perceptions, and therefore has resulted in the lower values for unit 'D'.

#### 6.3.5. Customer profiles

This analysis looks at the profiles of the respondents staying at the lodges. Appendix C8 lists the frequencies for lodges 'D', 'H', and 'J' in the first three columns, and all twelve lodges grouped together in the last column. Because of the small numbers involved it is difficult to be conclusive

about the differences between the individual lodges. The only discernible difference is that lodge 'J' appears to be used by more parties of two or more people, whom are in transit and only stay one night. Lodge 'J' has also received the lowest satisfaction scores amongst the three lodges which may have a correlation with why guests do not tend to stay so long.

Appendix C9 shows the differences in guest profiles between those individuals who completed questionnaire 'A' only, and those who completed both questionnaires 'A' and 'B'<sup>6</sup>. Those guests that are most likely to complete a second questionnaire appear to:

- stay longer;
- be visiting the area;
- be repeat guests;
- be staying alone;
- be on a business trip; and
- be over 34

This analysis suggests that guests staying longer (which is related to those visiting the area - see Appendix C10), guests staying alone (which could be related to those being on a business trip), and those individuals over 34 years old, all tend to represent people who would complete a second questionnaire. Employees in administrative and clerical positions appear to be less inclined to respond than those in other occupational groups. Why repeat guests are more likely to complete a second questionnaire is not so clear. Perhaps repeat guests have already formed a strong opinion about the product and have taken an interest in the hotel and subsequently are likely to return, whereas new guests have not yet formed an opinion and have not yet made a commitment to the hotel, or to completing questionnaires! Further research is required to establish if non-respondents do display particular demographic and purpose of trip characteristics. Perhaps this could be achieved by having a multi-stage approach capturing the most basic details from all incoming guests, and capturing increasing details of subsequent survey stages to identify if some characteristics correlate with the more tenacious respondent.

Several other permutations using cross-tabulations on respondents' profiles were carried out, but most of them have produced either very self-evident results, such as the lodges tend to attract single travellers during the week and groups at weekends, or that the data is spread amongst too many cells which do not lead to conclusive results, such as the number of respondents that arrive at each hotel on different days (7 days x 12 lodges = 84 potential cells representing 365 respondents). It is considered therefore that little more value can be extracted from just analysing respondent profiles.

Appendix C11 shows percentage differences between the profiles of respondents who were



involved in the initial 47 interviews and the 365 respondents who returned matching questionnaires. Although the interviews were conducted in the winter and the questionnaire survey was carried out in the summer, overall there are not significant differences between the two types of respondents in their demographic and trip profiles.

## 6.4. Employee responses

### 6.4.1. Employee response rate

Unlike the customer survey which was largely administered by the lodge personnel over a two week period, the employee survey at each lodge was intended to be completed within one day with the researcher delivering and collecting completed questionnaires within the same trip. A few difficulties were encountered when the sites were visited; unit management were unexpectedly away on the pre-arranged days and staff were 'too busy' to complete the questionnaires. In anticipation of some difficulties, the researcher provided each respondent with a self-addressed pre-paid envelope to use if they were unable to complete the questionnaires on time. Out of the six sites visited, only one site was able to ensure the complete set of questionnaires had been completed in time. The remaining five sites were left with the self-addressed and pre-paid envelopes<sup>7</sup>.

Only three of the five sites eventually returned questionnaires, and with the one batch that the researcher had collected himself, this meant that four sites in total participated in the survey<sup>8</sup>. These four sites returned 64 (80.0%) correctly completed questionnaires out of 80 left, with a further 3 which were unusable due to incompleteness and errors. The breakdown of the responses from the lodges has been shown in Table 6-7 and the breakdown of the employees that contributed to the survey have been shown in Table 6-8.

Table 6-7: Employee survey response figures for each lodge

<u>Lodge code</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
A	12	18.8
D	15	23.4
F	0	0.0
G	17	26.6
H	20	31.2
K	<u>0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	64	100.0

**Table 6-8: Profile of employee respondents**

<u>Position</u>	<u>n</u>
L. room maid	7
L. receptionist	7
L. supervisor	2
R. general assistant	29
R. section leader	7
R. shift manager	3
G. general management	2
G. other	7
	64

Key: L = lodge employee  
R = restaurant employee  
G = general

As with the customer questionnaires, the employee questionnaires were checked for reliability by running the values through Cronbach's coefficient alpha<sup>1</sup>. The scores were: 0.9415 for the total instrument; 0.9093 for the expectations; and 0.9171 for the perceptions. These figures suggest a high degree of internal consistency.

#### **6.4.2. Employees' assessment of customer evaluations**

Table 6-9 shows the the mean scores that the employees thought the customers would provide for the nineteen attributes.

**Table 6-9: Employees' assessment of customer evaluations**

<u>Code</u>	<u>Attributes</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>D</u>
Q2	Location of lodges	5.95	5.70	-0.25
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	6.64	6.41	-0.23
Q4	Comfort of lodges	6.22	6.23	+0.01
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	5.30	5.56	+0.26
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	4.39	3.81	-0.58
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	6.19	5.98	-0.21
Q10	Service in lodges	6.39	6.16	-0.23
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	6.30	6.27	-0.03
Q12	Value for money in lodges	5.98	5.72	-0.26

Q14	Suitability of restaurants	5.66	4.66	-1.00
Q15	Location of restaurants	5.52	4.83	-0.69
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	6.30	5.58	-0.72
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	5.91	5.20	-0.71
Q18	Decorations and maintenance of restaurants	5.44	5.34	-0.10
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	5.78	4.69	-1.09
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	6.23	5.48	-0.75
Q21	Service in restaurants	6.06	5.22	-0.84
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	6.27	5.48	-0.79
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	5.47	4.22	-1.25
	mean values	5.60	5.40	0.20

Key: E = expectation score  
P = perception score  
D = difference score  
+ = perceptions exceed expectations  
- = expectations exceed perceptions

The first column in Table 6-9 and Appendix C12 show the employees' assessment of customers' expectations. The employees consider that customers would rate cleanliness in the lodges as being the most important attribute, and overall they tend to believe that customers would rate employee-controlled attributes higher, such as service and friendliness, than company-controlled attributes, such as location and comfort. The S.D. values show that there was more agreement with the highly-rated attributes than the lower attributes.

The second column in Table 6-9 and Appendix C13 show the employees' assessment of customers' perceptions. The employees' consider that customers would rate cleanliness in the lodges as being the best performing attributes, and overall they tend to believe that customers would rate the lodge higher than the restaurants. The S.D. values again show that there was more agreement with the highly-rated attributes than the lower attributes.

The third column in Table 6-9 and Appendix C14 show where the employees perceived the largest service quality failures existed, i.e. expectations minus perceptions. Apart from decorations and maintenance in the restaurants, the restaurants were perceived to be underperforming the lodge on every attribute. Overall, the restaurant attracted 83.9 percent of the negative scoring, whilst the lodge, with the two positive scores, attracted the following 16.1 percent. This clearly shows that the employees perceived that they thought the customers would consider that the restaurants are

underperforming the lodges by a large magnitude.

It would now be constructive to identify if the various types of employees' represented different perceptions. Rather than splitting them into the eight job categories listed in Table 6-8, which would produce sub-sets which are too small for a valid analysis, they can be divided into three broad groups: one for the lodge staff, one for the restaurant staff, and one for the management and 'other' staff. These three groups have been shown with their mean values in Table 6-10 with the customers' values, and which have been expanded upon in Table 6-11.

Table 6-10: Customer and employee group values

	<u>Customers</u>	<u>Lodge staff</u>	<u>Rest. staff</u>	<u>Mgt./other</u>
Expectations	6.53	6.34	5.65	6.14
Perceptions	<u>5.57</u>	<u>5.87</u>	<u>5.12</u>	<u>5.77</u>
Gaps	0.96	0.47	0.53	0.37

Table 6-10 shows that all three employee groups generally underestimated the expectation values, and the gaps between expectations and perceptions. The lodge staff and management though overestimated customers' perceptions.

Table 6-11: Employee group differences

	<u>Lodge staff</u>	<u>Rest. staff</u>	<u>Mgt./other</u>
Expectations	0.19	0.88	0.39
Perceptions	<u>0.30</u>	<u>0.45</u>	<u>0.20</u>
Total	0.49	1.33	0.59

Table 6-11 shows that overall the lodge staff with a value of 0.49 displayed the closest understanding of customers' expectations and perceptions. Since these members of staff have more opportunities to get to know individual guests than the other two groups, it could be hypothesised that they would be able to relate to guests quite well through their more frequent encounters. The restaurant staff at 1.33 displayed the largest differences. It is possible that the restaurant staff do not get to know the lodge guests particularly well due to lodge guests representing only a small proportion of all of their customers. Table 6-12 shows where these three groups of employees and customers thought the largest service quality gaps occurred in the two main sections of the service package.

**Table 6-12: Group employees' and customers' service quality failure perceptions**

	<u>Customers</u>	<u>Lodge staff</u>	<u>Rest. staff</u>	<u>Mgt./other</u>
Lodge	15.4%	19.4%	30.4%	2.0%
Restaurant	84.6%	80.6%	69.6%	98.0%

Table 6-12 shows that all of the employees considered that the quality gaps with the service package were predominantly attributed to the restaurant facilities, but in varying amounts. The restaurant staff overestimated the performance mix of the restaurants by 15 percent, whilst the management overestimated the performance mix of the lodges by 13.4 percent. As with Table 6-11 the lodge staff showed the greatest empathy by underestimating the performance mix of the lodges by only 4 percent.

To assess how the employees' scoring matched with the customers' perceptions, the analysis will move onto the last stage. Although the employee groups showed varying perceptions towards the service package, due to the relatively small sample used, the employees' responses will remain grouped for further analyses.

## **6.5. Customer and employee responses**

### **6.5.1. Comparative ratings**

To assess the degree of empathy or customer-orientation the employee-respondents have displayed, it is necessary to compare the responses between employees and customers. Table 6-13 shows the differences in values between the customer and employee scores across the nineteen attributes, for separate and combined expectations and perceptions.

**Table 6-13: Match between employees and customers**

	<u>Attributes</u>	<u>Expec.</u>	<u>Perce.</u>	<u>E + P</u>
Q2	Location of lodges	-0.33	+0.01	0.34
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	-0.16	-0.09	0.25
Q4	Comfort of lodges	-0.35	+0.01	0.36
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	-1.35	-0.88	2.23
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	+0.16	-0.43	0.59
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	-0.55	-0.44	0.99
Q10	Service in lodges	-0.32	-0.19	0.51
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	-0.48	-0.16	0.64

Q12	Value for money in lodges	-0.76	-0.57	1.33
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	-0.86	+0.23	1.09
Q15	Location of restaurants	-1.08	-1.01	2.09
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	-0.57	+0.12	0.67
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	-0.67	+0.24	0.71
Q18	Decorations and maintenance of restaurants	-0.95	+0.09	1.04
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	-0.95	+0.03	0.98
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	-0.48	+0.25	0.71
Q21	Service in restaurants	-0.71	-0.06	0.77
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	-0.50	+0.26	0.76
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	-1.24	-0.51	1.75
	mean values	0.66	0.29	

Key: E = expectations  
P = perceptions  
E + P = expectations and perceptions  
+ = employees' overestimation  
- = employees' underestimation

It is acknowledged that since the customer and employee questionnaires were not identical in format, some differences may have occurred through the instrument design. This may suggest that the results are not a true reflection of the differences between customers and employees. However it is expected that since some of the attributes, such as cleanliness and childrens' facilities, have consistently shared similar rankings in both the customer and employee results, these comparisons will provide a reasonable measurement of employees' empathy levels for their customers

Table 6-13 shows that the employees have overestimated the perceptions for lodges by almost the same amount (mean = 0.030) as they have underestimated the perceptions for the restaurant attributes (mean = 0.036). The employees' assessment of customers' perceptions (0.29) is over twice as good as their assessment of customers' expectations (0.66), with the employees underestimating virtually all of the variables for expectations but with mixed estimations for perceptions. This suggests that employees understand customers' post-purchase perceptions much greater than customers' pre-purchase expectations. Since these values though have been calculated from the aggregate scores of the nineteen attributes, it is necessary to consider the individual scores of each variable before drawing definite conclusions.

The largest gaps between customers' expectations and employees' assessment of those

expectations are with: decorations and maintenance of the lodges (-1.35), value for money in the restaurants (-1.24), and location of the restaurants (-1.08), but it is difficult to discern a clear pattern with these three attributes. The smallest gaps are with: lodge cleanliness (-0.16) and childrens' facilities (+0.16), the two attributes which had the highest and lowest scores on the customer expectation and perception scores respectively. As with the customer scores, the S.D. values for lodge cleanliness have tended to be small, and the S.D. values for childrens' facilities tended to be large. These values show that there is a high level of congruence on these two attributes, but more so with cleanliness since it attracts much smaller S.D. values.

The largest gaps between customers' perceptions and employees' assessment of those perceptions are with: location of the restaurant (-1.01) and decorations and maintenance of the lodges (-0.88). Again it is not clear why these two should display such large differences, but perhaps it is because guests discuss these attributes less to employees or share different values regarding these attributes. The smallest gaps are with: location of the lodges (+0.01), comfort of the lodges (+0.01), food quality (-0.03), and service in the restaurants (-0.06). These differences are very small which suggests the employees have a high level of empathy for these attributes. The gaps on several of the other attributes are also quite small which reinforces the value of using employees for quality assurance programmes to estimate customers' post-purchase perceptions.

When the expectation and perception columns are combined together, it is possible to identify where employees have the greatest and least empathy for their customers. Decorations and maintenance of the lodges (2.23), location of the restaurant (2.09), and value for money in the restaurants (1.75) attract the highest combined scores, whilst the smallest are with cleanliness of the lodges (0.25), location of the lodges (0.34), and comfort of the lodges (0.36).

The value of identifying employees' assessment of customers' expectations and perceptions is increased when they are compared with customers' actual expectations and perceptions. Table 6-14 shows the values for customers' satisfaction (evaluation) levels and the values for the discrepancies (lack of empathy) between employees and customers.

Table 6-14: Customers' evaluation values and employees discrepancy values

	<u>Attributes</u>	<u>Customer satisfaction</u>	<u>Employee discrepancy</u>
Q2	Location of lodges	-0.59	0.34
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	-0.30	0.25
Q4	Comfort of lodges	-0.35	0.36
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	-0.21	2.23

Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	+0.01	0.59
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	-0.22	0.99
Q10	Service in lodges	-0.36	0.51
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	-0.35	0.64
Q12	Value for money in lodges	-0.45	1.33
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	-2.09	1.09
Q15	Location of restaurants	-0.76	2.09
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	-1.41	0.67
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	-1.62	0.71
Q18	Decorations and maintenance of restaurants	-1.14	1.04
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	-2.07	0.98
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	-1.48	0.71
Q21	Service in restaurants	-1.49	0.77
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	-1.55	0.76
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	-1.98	1.75

Table 6-14 shows that although employees' may have poor empathy levels for some attributes, these do not necessarily correlate with poor service levels. For example employees have displayed particularly poor empathy for the attribute 'decorations and maintenance of lodges', yet this is not an attribute which has caused significant customer dissatisfaction. It is necessary therefore to consider the value of employees' empathy levels in the context of whether particular attributes have or have not caused customer dissatisfaction, and whether changing employees' empathy levels would have any effect on satisfaction levels. Changing employees' understanding of customers' level of satisfaction for lodge decorations and maintenance might be considered an unnecessary exercise since customers are relatively satisfied with this attribute and furthermore employees have little control over the attribute in the first place. However changing employees' understanding of customers' dissatisfaction with service in the restaurants may be more beneficial since there is room for improvement and employees have a degree of control over the attribute.

### 6.5.2. Structural, process and over-arching attributes

A further consideration with the attributes in Table 6-14 is their level of ordinality. The attribute with the highest customer dissatisfaction value is 'suitability of restaurants' at -2.09, yet it is not clear what this attribute subsumes and how it can be improved. For this reason the nineteen attributes that have been analysed in this chapter can be divided according to their characteristics and placed under three broad headings, i.e. 'structural', 'process' and 'over-arching'. The structural attributes are those variables which are primarily static, tangible and are controlled by the organisation; the process attributes are those variables which are primarily active, intangible and are



strongly influenced by the employee; the over-arching attributes are those variables which subsume the structural and process attributes. Table 6-15 displays the attribute groupings under their respective headings and Table 6-16 shows the level of customer dissatisfaction within the three areas.

Table 6-15: Structural, process and over-arching attributes

Structural	Process	Over-arching
Location of lodges and restaurants	Cleanliness of lodges and restaurants	Overall standards in lodges and restaurants
Comfort of lodges and restaurants	Friendliness in lodges and restaurants	Value for money of lodges and restaurants
Decorations and maintenance of lodges and restaurants	Service in lodges and restaurants	Restaurant suitability
Childrens' facilities	Food quality	

Table 6-16: Customer dissatisfaction of attributes

	Lodge	Restaurant	Combined
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
structural	6.34	19.40	25.74
process	4.85	34.05	38.90
over-arching	<u>4.41</u>	<u>30.95</u>	<u>35.36</u>
	15.60	84.40	100.00

Table 6-16 shows the spread of customer dissatisfaction across the lodges and restaurants for the three types of attributes. As shown in Table 6-14 the structural attributes are those which are of a fixed type and possibly cause dissatisfaction through inappropriate design. Action to improve customer satisfaction is likely to be determined and handled by head office or senior management authority. The process attributes are those which are primarily carried out by service employees and dissatisfaction may be caused by inappropriate staff selection or training, or possibly poor physical or systems design. Action to improve customer satisfaction may be more under the control of local management or even the service employees themselves. The over-arching attributes are those which are more abstract and are affected by the performance of the structural and process attributes. These are likely to improve with the improvement of structural and process attributes.

This distinction between these attributes emphasises where the cause of service failure may be

attributed, e.g. with personnel policies, with design, with local management, or with senior/head office management. Although senior management are ultimately responsible for the quality of all services and facilities, the distinctions help indicate which members are best placed to initiate and carry out action to improve customer satisfaction. Table 6-16 shows that 84.4 percent of customer dissatisfaction identified revolves around the restaurant services, primarily with the process attributes and least with the structural attributes. The most problematic area appears to be the process attributes in the restaurants, which also emerged in the employee results in Table 6-9. Improving employee selection and training, and improving the systems to provide services should increase the customers' satisfaction for the process attributes, and improving the design of physical facilities should improve customers' satisfaction for the structural attributes. These should both subsequently have a positive effect on customers' satisfaction levels for the over-arching attributes.

Although the employee results provided different weightings for the individual attributes, interestingly they proposed that 83.9 percent of customer dissatisfaction would occur with the restaurants as opposed to actual customer dissatisfaction at 84.4 percent. This may suggest that although employees do not have an accurate perception of customers' satisfaction levels on individual attributes, they may well have a broad understanding.

#### 6.6. Validity and reliability of the quantitative results

To provide the results in the study with some credibility it is necessary to consider the response rates achieved, and the validity and reliability of the survey instruments [Churchill 1979; Peter 1981]. Table 6-17 summarises the responses from the customer survey in percentage figures.

Table 6-17: Customer response percentages

<u>questionnaires</u>	'A'	'B'
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
missing	56.8	46.1
uncompleted	15.8	12.9
unmatched	13.4	12.9
matched	<u>14.0</u>	<u>28.1</u>
	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>
not counted <sup>9</sup>	n = 400	n = 200

The analyses for the customer survey was carried out with 14.0% of 2,600 'A' questionnaires and 28.1 percent of 1,300 'B' questionnaires. If the survey had been controlled a little more rigorously

by management it might have been possible to have received a larger response rate and a larger number of matching questionnaires. Although all of the lodge managers did not carry out the requested instructions, some of them did return uncompleted questionnaires to the research centre some time after the survey period. In total 410 (15.8%) uncompleted 'A' questionnaires and 167 (12.9%) uncompleted 'B' questionnaires were returned which indicates that some of the units still had questionnaires to be distributed. Due to the erratic return of the uncompleted questionnaires, and the lack of serial numbers on the 'B' questionnaires, it is difficult to identify which units were returning these questionnaires. Although the 28.1 percent response rate achieved for the 'B' questionnaires should provide a reasonable representation of lodge customers' opinions, some caution must be exercised since a large percentage of questionnaires still remain unaccounted for.

Several researchers have discussed the difficulties with low response rates [Kress 1988; Lewis 1984; Weiers 1988], and the characteristics of non-respondents, and although this study was designed to capture some information on non-respondents by ensuring that every guest checking-in to a lodge would complete questionnaire 'A', the lack of control during the survey administration resulted in this objective becoming compromised. It is therefore difficult to assess the differences between respondents and non-respondents, but section 6.3.5 highlighted the differences between those that elected to complete questionnaire 'B' and those that chose not to. It may be possible therefore to hypothesise that those who did not complete either 'A' or 'B' (absolute non-respondents) have similar or more pronounced characteristics to those who simply completed questionnaire 'A' (part-respondents). This therefore would indicate that non-respondents could have the characteristics shown in Appendix C9 which are discussed in section 6.3.5. and have been repeated in Table 6-18.

Table 6-18: Possible profile of respondents and non-respondents

<u>profile of respondents</u>	<u>profile of non-respondents</u>
• > 36 years	• < 35 years
• on business trips	• on pleasure trips
• travelling alone	• travelling with others
• staying more than one night	• staying one night
• visiting local interests	• passing through the area
• are repeat guests	• are first-time users

Although the data is not available to prove that non-respondents display these characteristics, it would appear reasonable to suggest that non-respondents are similar to part-respondents in not having the time or inclination to complete lengthy questionnaires, i.e. those on short overnight

through trips may not have the time; and those on pleasure trips may not have the intention of repeating the same visit in the near future, and therefore are relatively unconcerned about possible changes resulting from the questionnaires. However it is not clear why younger individuals would have less propensity to completing questionnaires.

It is accepted that these assumptions are based upon considerable generalisations and conjecture, but the available data should provide some valuable insight into how regular lodge consumers in general view the existing service package. These responses can be partly validated by the responses from the employees, since by virtue of their high exposure to all guests, they may be able to provide reasonable assessments of the typical lodge users' perceptions. The response rates for the employees have been summarised in Table 6-19.

Table 6-19: Employee response percentage figures

<u>questionnaires</u>	<u>%</u>
missing	16.2
not usable	3.8
usable	<u>80.0</u>
	<u>100.0</u>
not counted <sup>9</sup>	n = 40

As with the customer responses, the employee responses were strongly influenced by the attitudes of the staff and management members involved in the surveys. With a little more organisational and branch support it may have been possible to have achieved a higher response rate. The major differences between the various employees were discussed earlier, i.e. those individuals which had more personal contact with guests, such as lodge staff, have a higher degree of empathy for their customers than other members.

Although there were some considerable differences between customers and employees on some of the attributes, the high correlations between others, such as cleanliness and the provision of childrens' facilities, are considered to be good indicators of the validity of the customer responses. Furthermore these two attributes displayed very similar performances during the initial interviews with overnight guests, which indicates a high degree of construct validity, such as 'convergent' and 'nomological' validity [Peter 1981]. The reliability of the results appear to be high as well. The SERVQUAL instruments were tested earlier using Cronbach coefficient alpha, and these values indicated that the instruments have high internal consistency for both the customer and employee questionnaires. Further tests of validity and reliability will be considered in the next two chapters.

Although several references have been made to the variances between customers from different lodges, and employees from different positions, much of the analyses in this chapter have used the averaged results to generalise the findings. The S.D. values displayed in Appendices 4, 5, 12 and 13 provide a good indication to the variances amongst customers and amongst employees, and therefore should provide some insight to the validity of these generalisations.

Overall amongst the customer and employee results, there appears to be a general tendency for the low-scoring attributes along the expectation and perception dimensions to display the highest S.D. values. This indicates that there is more agreement amongst the respondents with reference to the most important (expectation dimension) and best performing (perception dimension) attributes, and less agreement amongst the low-scoring attributes. Since on many occasions the restaurant attributes have scored less on the perception dimensions, they have automatically attracted the highest variances. The restaurant part of the service package therefore attracts less consistency than the lodge part. However there appears to be little similarity in the variance order of the attributes between the expectation and perception dimensions.

It could be hypothesised that the reason why respondents have shown greater consistency with the high scoring attributes than with the low scoring attributes is that respondents find it easier to provide a value at the extreme end of the scale than with a middle value where an attribute is considered to have partly underperformed. Further research though needs to be carried out before this can be proven.

### **6.7. Limitations of questionnaire design**

Eight of the respondents who returned completed questionnaires commented on the questionnaire design, and these comments have been listed below.

'I am at the Psychology Department at Brunel University, familiar with questionnaires. This is a very bad one.'

'The negatives in these questions make them difficult to think about after a long day on the road.'

'...I do not like the negative type of question...'

'Some of the questions you ask are unnecessary to say the least'

'Some of these questions should be either 'Yes' or 'No'...'

'...dislike the way the questionnaire is worded in a negative way as in Q9 + others. Why not just ask do we have friendly staff. I can see you getting a lot of answers people don't mean because they are reading too quickly as I nearly did.'

'This is without doubt the worst questionnaire I have ever completed.'

'I found the questionnaire very confusing!'

It is acknowledged that the questionnaires were very long, and that the negative questions may have been a little confusing, and these comments are worthy of consideration for future questionnaire designs. It is proposed here though that the questionnaire design had more benefits in eliciting the required information rather than not, since a high number of questionnaires were completed and they have provided fairly consistent and unsurprising responses. However the value of the questionnaire design and its reliability and validity should become more apparent when the quantitative results are compared with the qualitative results in the next chapter.

## **6.8. Conclusion to questionnaire results**

This chapter has provided some evidence to support two of the three propositions of this study, i.e. the delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding customers' separate expectations and their separate perceptions (P2), and can also be improved by understanding employees' perceptions of their customers' experiences (P3), with the use of a dual scale SERVQUAL-type instrument. The data collected by the instrument showed a high degree of internal consistency, considerable consistency with the variables at the top and lower ends of the scale amongst and between customers and employees, and some consistency with the results from the repertory interviews. This suggests that the instrument provide a valid and reliable measure for capturing perceptions.

The results from the data collection indicate that most customer dissatisfaction occurs with the process attributes, in particular those associated with the restaurant facility of the roadside lodge package, which can be significantly influenced by the behaviour of the service employees. These attributes are also likely to be those which management can respond to fairly quickly by altering their human resource policies and operating systems. The results also indicated that the service employees had a greater understanding of their customers' perceptions than they did of customers' expectations. Keeping employees aware of customers' expectations may therefore contribute to the improvement of the process attributes, and tapping the employees' perceptions of customers' perceptions may provide a source of market research for management. Since improving the

structural attributes of the service package may involve considerable financial investment with a considerable time lag, management may benefit from keeping the customer informed of the service package being offered to roadside lodge guests to ensure that their expectations are kept within controllable parameters.

The next chapter discusses the comments which customer-respondents provided at the back of the questionnaires, together with the employee interview comments, which may provide greater depth to the analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaires.

## Footnotes to Chapter VI

1. Most of the analyses in this chapter have been carried out with an SPSSx package.
2. One of the lodges had just lost their manager through a dismissal and the other lodge had a manager who was about to be replaced due to reasons unknown to the researcher.
3. A further 410 'A' questionnaires and 167 'B' questionnaires were returned uncompleted after the survey period. This has been discussed in section 6.7.
4. At the time of designing the survey there was some concern that the receptionists may forget to collate the two questionnaires together, but this was partly dispelled after the considering the reasonable results from the pilot and the subsequent issuing of clear written instructions to the lodges for the main survey. To overcome this potential problem completely it would have been necessary to issue equal numbers of 'A' and 'B' questionnaires with matching codes, but at the time this was considered excessive (and expensive) since it was unlikely that all respondents would complete both questionnaires.
5. The standard error of difference was found by using the formula:

$$z = \frac{x_1 - x_2 - (u_1 - u_2)}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

- Where:  $x_1$  = mean of sample 1  
 $x_2$  = mean of sample 2  
 $u_1 - u_2 = 0$ , i.e., there is no difference in the population means  
 $s_1$  = s.d. of sample 1  
 $s_2$  = s.d. of sample 2  
 $n_1$  = number in sample 1  
 $n_2$  = number in sample 2

If  $z \leq 1.96$  (when d.f. is greater than 120), the result is significant at the 0.05% level.  $H_0$  is accepted and the means are considered to be similar. The results from the comparisons of means were also run through the T-test using the SPSSx package which showed fairly consistent results with the formula results.

6. The returns from the lodges were 716 customer profile questionnaires and 533 service evaluation questionnaires. This suggests that technically speaking 533 of the respondents returned evaluation questionnaires, whilst the remaining 183 did not wish to complete a second questionnaire.



However the profile questionnaires have indicated that 207 respondents did not wish to complete a second questionnaire. This indicates that some questionnaires have gone astray but a comparison can be made between the 207 'No' profiles and the 509 'Yes' profiles. The 'survey record form' (Appendix B4) which was given to the lodge managers for them to record the details of the survey was an attempt to introduce some control into cataloguing the questionnaire distribution. However, the researcher experienced considerable difficulties in obtaining more than four of these forms from the lodges after the survey. This subsequently reduced the ability to control the survey administration.

7. It was arranged beforehand with head office and each site general manager of the survey requirements, but the organisation's internal communication network did not appear to be very effective. This resulted in considerable difficulties with obtaining complete cooperation from the sites.

8. The two sites which did not return questionnaires received repeated requests from the researcher and head office to return completed questionnaires as soon as possible. However because the survey was considered by head office to be an academic study, and not an official company survey, both the employee and customer questionnaire surveys were viewed and treated with some indifference. It is not known however what effect this has had on the survey results.

9. Although these questionnaires were distributed to the lodges, they were not included in the final calculation of response rates. The questionnaires represent separate batches delivered to lodges which, for various reasons such as those in note 7 and 8, did not participate in the survey.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Blueprinting Results & Findings**

## **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the customer comments collected at the back of the structured questionnaires, and the employee flow charts and comments collected using the perceptual blueprinting technique. The customer and employee results will be compared against each other to assess the level of employee empathy for their customers, which will then be compared with the results from Chapter VI to assess how much the quantitative results correspond with the qualitative results. The flow charts, or perceptual blueprints, will be used as a structure to analysing the service delivery system.

## **7.2. Analysis of customer and employee comments**

The data collected for this part of the study has come from two sources:

- (i) Customer comments were obtained from the open-ended questions in the SERVQUAL instrument; and
- (ii) Employee comments and flow charts were obtained from the perceptual blueprinting technique developed in this study.

The design of these data collection stages were discussed in Chapters IV and V, and this chapter will concentrate on the actual data obtained and the analyses. The chapter is divided into four main stages to facilitate the analyses, and these are:

- (a) Customer comments;
- (b) Employee comments;
- (c) Perceptual blueprints; and
- (d) Summary of responses.

## **7.3. Customer comments**

To obtain a thorough understanding of the comments provided by the customer-respondents, it was decided to analyse as many questionnaires as possible. Since the 365 matching questionnaires analysed in Chapter VI could only provide 203 questionnaires with unstructured comments, a further 95 questionnaires from the 168 unmatched 'B' questionnaires were also used in the analysis. This brought the total number of questionnaires to be analysed to 298, or 55.9 percent of the 533 'B' questionnaires returned correctly completed.

The analysis of the customer data followed the content analysis framework presented in Appendix

A4, following the five steps listed below:

(1) The written text in each case is examined within the three subsections labelled 'lodge', 'restaurant', and 'other'. Although some respondents did not adhere strictly to these subsections, the basic divisions facilitated the overall analysis;

(2) Each case was examined for redundant data, i.e. written comments which had little or no practical relevance to the study, or which had been unnecessarily repeated. Typical examples of redundant data are included in this example:

'You must have gathered that my wife and myself like Quickchef lodges very much. The price is right, Quality consistent and this is the draw card as you never really know what you are going to get in this price bracket. Often you get ripped off with higher phone charges etc in other Hotels. You should advertise more in B.T.A. pamphlets.'

Case: 474

This case is a good example of redundancy. The respondent appears pleased with the product, but there is little reference to specific issues. Following the content analysis framework, the first question after looking at the raw data is to ask: 'Is it informative with respect to this study?' It is possible to show the value of the data by extracting relevant comments from the case as displayed in Figure 7-1.

Figure 7-1: Analysis of Case 474

<u>Sub-case</u>	<u>Comment</u>	<u>Case: 474</u>
(i)	'The price is right...'	
(ii)	'Quality consistent...'	
(iii)	'Often you get ripped off with higher phone charges etc. in other Hotels'	

(3) The useful data was divided into sub-cases in which discrete sections of responses could be kept independent. In the example of case 474 three sub-cases have been discerned, but number (iii) appears rather ambiguous since the hotels do not charge for phone calls but provide public pay-phones in the lobbies. This essentially means that sub-case (iii) is redundant in the context of this product;

(4) The sub-cases are then linked up with broad categories. Over time these categories may be modified several times according to their quality, i.e. they must be relevant, not too broad or not too specific. The analysis of case 474 has therefore only been able to extract two useful

sub-cases; and

(5) The sub-cases are then assessed to identify their partiality, i.e. whether they represent complimentary or critical remarks, as illustrated in Figure 7-2.

Figure 7-2: Categorisation of Case 474

<u>Sub-cases</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Partiality</u>
(i) 'The price is right...'	Price/value	complimentary
(ii) 'Quality consistent...'	Quality	complimentary

Case 474 in Figure 7-2 therefore has provided two complimentary comments towards the lodge service package and no critical comments. In most instances the critical comments are obvious, but in other instances the critical comments may not be so obvious. For example a comment in Case 188 was:

'Should have continental quilts on beds'

Case 188

Although the comment is not outwardly critical about the existing service being provided, it is considered in this analysis to be sufficiently critical to be included in this category. The analysis of respondent comments will therefore be categorised according to their complimentary or critical bias.

This example of Case 474 has now been analysed up until the category balloon in the content analysis framework, and the sub-cases have been clearly identified and categorised. Both of these sub-cases are recognised as being super-ordinal (general) responses which may subsume other sub-ordinal (specific) responses, but for the time being they are considered to be mutually exclusive and free-standing. Furthermore the two sub-cases are both recognised as being complimentary as opposed to being critical.

#### **7.4. Employee comments**

The data on employees' comments has been obtained through the perceptual blueprinting technique. Two types of data were elicited using this technique, i.e.:

- (i) employees' perceptions of customer activities; and
- (ii) employees' evaluative perceptions of the SDS.

Employees' perceptions of customer activities were collected to obtain flow charts of the SDS the

typical lodge guest goes through during an overnight stay at a roadside lodge, whilst employees' evaluative perceptions of the SDS were collected to obtain employees' complimentary and critical comments on the ability of the SDS to provide the required service for lodge guests. The flow chart is intended to provide a representation of all the main activities lodge guests participate in during their stay, as well as providing a template for mapping on comments identifying where customers and employees consider the SDS is providing the required service.

#### 7.4.1. Employee participation

The employee data was collected from six roadside sites evenly distributed across the UK where it was arranged that three interviews would be carried out with management members at each site. However due to unexpected logistical difficulties on the part of the individual managers selected, the planned eighteen interviews were not achieved, but nineteen interviews were eventually carried out with a wider range of staff in various grades and departments. The interviews followed the sequence described in Chapter V, but of those nineteen interviews, only fifteen provided acceptable flow charts; the other four were considered as incomplete. These fifteen flow charts represented the separate individuals' perceptions of customer activities, and these separate flow charts were treated as 'raw blueprints'. The respondent-types involved in the interviews and providing individual blueprints have been summarised in Figure 7-3.

Figure 7-3: Employee respondent types

	<u>mgt.</u>	<u>lodge</u>	<u>catering</u>	
general management	2 (1)	-	-	
lodge manager	-	3	-	
lodge supervisor	-	1	-	
receptionist	-	1 (1)	-	
catering manager	-	-	4 (1)	
section leader	-	-	4	
maid	-	(1)	-	
total	<u>2 (3)</u>	<u>5 (7)</u>	<u>8 (9)</u>	15 (19) responses

Key: bracketed numbers = interviewed but did not provided blueprints

#### 7.4.2. Employee perceptions of customer activities

It is possible to analyse the blueprints using a variety of permutations, e.g. comparing blueprints

from catering staff with those from lodge staff; comparing blueprints from management staff with those from non-management staff; comparing blueprints from one site with those from another site, etc. However because each blueprint comprises of only a small number of activities, between 10 and 19, they are not sufficiently comprehensive enough to draw any valid conclusions from these fragmented types of permutations. An example of one of these blueprints has been shown in Appendix D1. The most significant finding that was obtained from comparing the grouped blueprints was that catering staff were more aware of the 'catering' activities than the lodge staff, but both were equally aware of the 'lodge' activities. This may reflect the fact that catering staff are often drafted into to help in the lodge, but the lodge staff are never used for catering operations.

For further analysis the blueprints were then combined together to form a 'master' perceptual blueprint. This has been shown in Appendix D2. The master shows a very comprehensive range of activities that the 'typical' lodge guest might participate in during an overnight stay at a roadside lodge, with a total of 50 employee-generated activities. It is important to establish though how accurate is the master perceptual blueprint in portraying all of the expected activities, and does it capture any unexpected activities?

Since it was necessary to validate the master blueprint as being a true representation of customer activities during a stay at a lodge, without the researcher actually adding to the blueprint himself, the master was sent to the head office of the client-organisation for validation by the senior executive with overall responsibility for the lodge service package. It was implied in an accompanying letter to the executive that the researcher had drawn the flow chart himself and he needed the executive to verify whether the researcher had accurately captured the customer activities. The master was then returned to the research centre with some additions made by the executive. The new chart has been shown in Appendix D3 and D4, with the executive's additions highlighted in different and bold script respectively. Since the blueprint had now been built up from the contributions from fifteen separate employees and had been completed and verified by a senior manager with responsibility for the service delivery system, this final blueprint with 58 separate activities was now considered to be a fairly accurate representation of the typical activities carried out by an overnight customer at a roadside lodge.

#### **7.4.3. Employees' perceptions of the SDS.**

This second phase of this study was designed to collect employees' comments on the SDS following the P.N.I. technique discussed in the Chapter V. These comments have been shown in Appendix D5. Although only fifteen blueprints were collected from the employee interviews, all nineteen employees provided comments on the lodge package. Figure 7-4 shows the breakdown of the data collected.

Figure 7-4: PNI categories collected from nineteen employees

<u>Category</u>	<u>n</u>
positives	87
negatives	107
implementations	<u>15</u>
	<u>209</u>

The employees provided a clear list of positive points they thought the lodge package was offering, and also a clear list of negative points reflecting the weak points of the package. As expected the implementation points were often repeats of either the positives or negatives, and where necessary were eliminated to prevent double recording. An example of this has been shown in Figure 7-5 with one of the employee cases.

Figure 7-5: Breakdown of employee Case 11

<u>Category</u>	<u>Comment</u>
positive	'room is brilliant for price'
negative	'meal voucher system not good'
implementation	'provide bed & breakfast tariff'

After analysing the tape-recordings and studying the notes, it appeared that this particular employee-respondent (case 11) felt that the room tariff was good, the voucher system for breakfast was poor, but the issue could be resolved with an inclusive bed & breakfast tariff. This is an example where the negative and implementation aspects are addressing the same issue, and since it would be incorrect to record them as two separate issues, it is necessary to place the comments into just one of the two categories.

Part of the requirements for this analysis stage is to build up a list of characteristics representing employees' perceptions which can be then used to compare against customers' perceptions. Due to the placing of customer comments into 'complimentary' and 'critical' categories, it was considered necessary to place the employee data in similar categories to allow for more direct comparisons to be made, an approach similar to that used by Nightingale (1983). Figure 7-6 shows the breakdown of the customer and employee data into these two separate categories.



Figure 7-6: Categorisation of customer and employee qualitative data

<u>Category/respondent type</u>	Customer <u>n = 298</u>	Employees <u>n = 19</u>
Complimentary comments	179	87
Critical comments	429	122

Although a comparison between 19 employees may not appear to be a large sample, especially when compared against 298 customers, the difference may not be so great when one considers two points:

(i) The employees' perceptions may be fairly representative of customers' perceptions due to the large number of lodge and restaurant guests they will be exposed to and have direct contact with over a period [Lindqvist 1990]<sup>1</sup>;

(ii) The employees' were encouraged to address specific issues relating to the service package in an active way, whilst the customers' provided comments in a passive way. The employees' were therefore able to provide a greater number of focused comments per individual than were the customers.

## 7.5. Perceptual blueprint analysis

### 7.5.1. Method of analysis

To facilitate the analysis of the master blueprint with the customer and employee responses, it is necessary to place the blueprint's 55 activities into broad groupings. Thirteen separate discernible groups have been identified which represent a general class of actions, and these groups with their relevant headings have been shown in Figure 7-7 and Appendix D6.

Figure 7-7: Blueprint activity areas

<u>Group</u>	<u>Name</u>
1.	Entry
2.	Check-in
3.	In-room
4.	Activities
5.	Restaurant access
6.	Restaurant suitability
7.	Self-service

- 8. Table-service
- 9. Restaurant evaluation
- 10. After-dinner
- 11. Sleep
- 12. Breakfast
- 13. Leave

The customer and employee comments have also been coded to facilitate the analysis. These codes are:

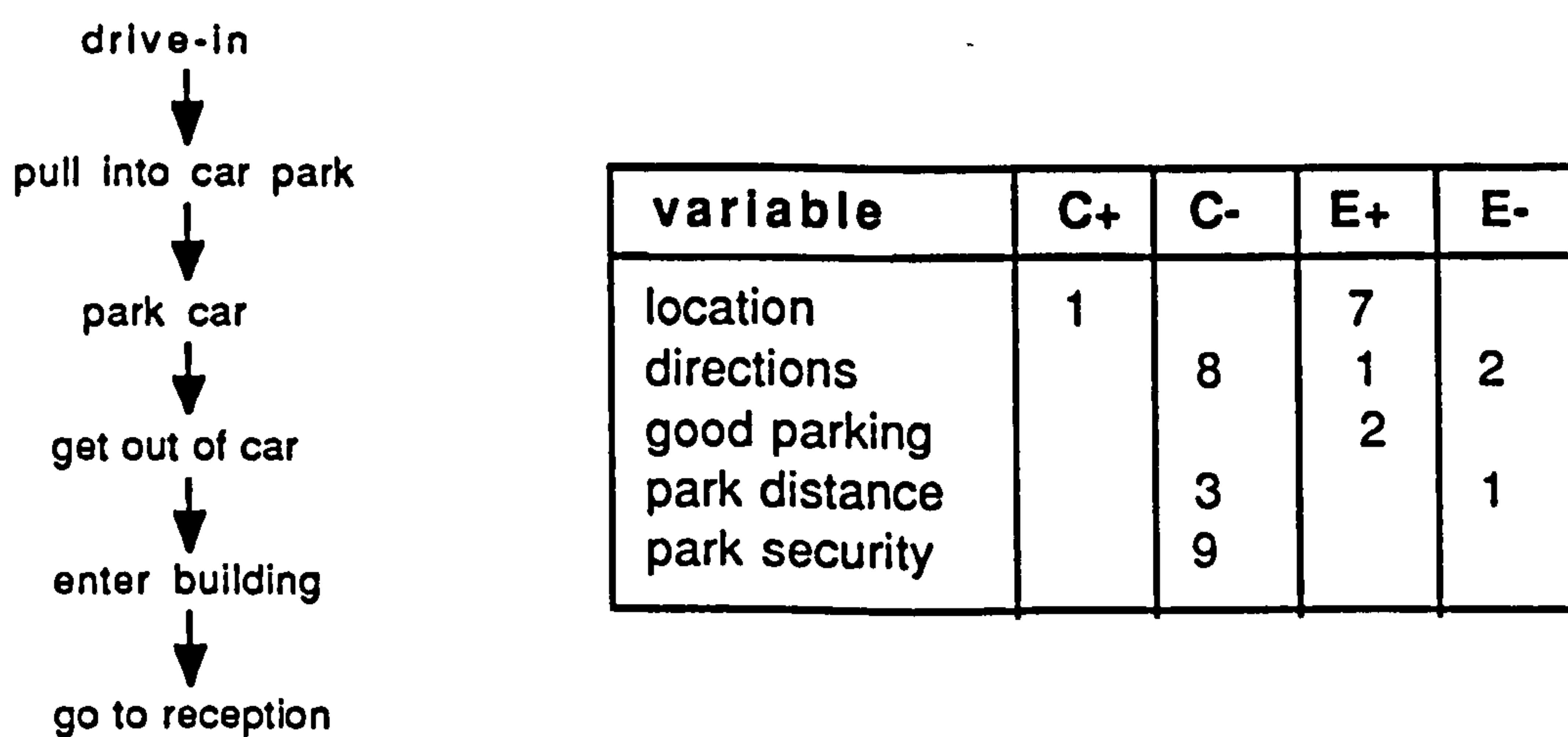
- Customer complimentary comments = C+
- Customer critical comments = C-
- Employee complimentary comments = E+
- Employee critical comments = E-

Each activity area is accompanied with a table of corresponding complimentary and critical comments from customers and employees where they were provided.

### 7.5.2. Activity areas

The first group to be considered is the 'Entry' which encompasses all the issues concerning the potential customers' arrival at a roadside service area and lodge.

Figure 7-8: Group 1 'Entry'

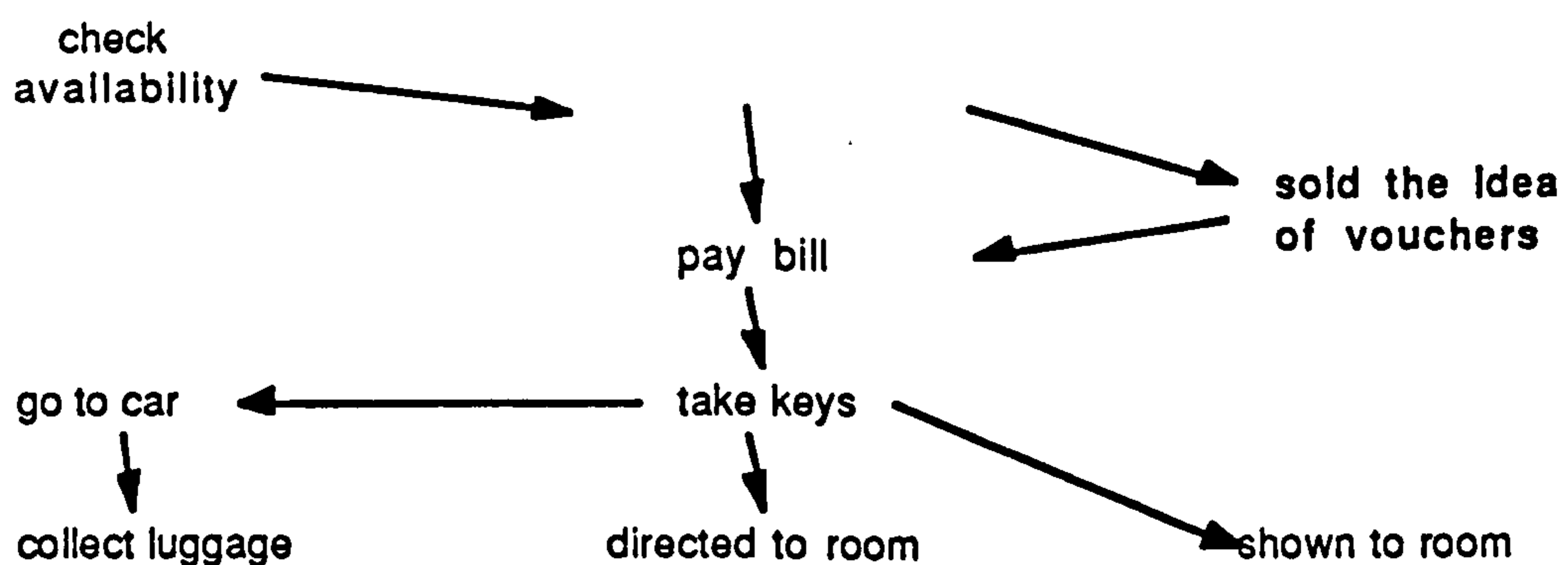


These six activities show the general movements of the potential customer as they drive into the service area and enter the lodge. The location of the lodges received considerable praise from the employees (7 out of 19 respondents) with only one mention by a customer (1 out of 298 responses). Directions to the lodge (at more than one site) caused the customers some difficulties

which was partly acknowledged by the employees. Good parking was a feature mentioned exclusively by the employees. The distance between the lodge and the car park generated some negative remarks from the customers and one employee. The security of the car parks though received strong comments from the customers with most considering that the management should keep lodge parking separate from the main parking area. Generally speaking all of these activities and variables are under the control of head office and are essentially structural attributes.

These attributes were not included in the questionnaire survey since they did not arise as salient constructs in the initial repertory interviews. However the perceptual blueprinting approach has forced more variables to be considered when considering service quality, such as security, which is of some interest when considering the quality of the whole roadside lodge service package.

Figure 7-9: Group 2 'Check-in'



variables	C+	C-	E+	E-
check-in procedure	2		7	
reception staff	10		2	
night receptionist		2		2
card system				1
queues forming				1
prices	2	13	11	
b & b rate				2
vouchers		6	2	2
discounts		1		1
dogs		4		
shown to room			1	

Group 2 relates to the checking-in procedures and the reception by the front office personnel. The fast and simple check-in procedure at a lodge was considered by both parties to be particularly advantageous. The reception staff received high praise by the guests and some recognition from the employees. The lack of a night receptionist was considered undesirable by both parties. A card

system for fast check-in and guest recognition was considered by one employee to be worth introducing. The lack of room in the reception area created queues, in the eyes of one employee. The tariff structure was considered good by several employees and by two customers. However several customers considered that the competitors offered a more favourable tariff structure. The voucher system was considered to be quite good by the employees, but some of the employees and many of the guests considered that the system should be extended to the shopping facilities, and to regulars. One employee thought a discount should be given to regulars whilst one guest considered that OAPs should receive a discount. Four guests were unhappy about the recently adopted rule of banning dogs. One employee thought guests appreciated being shown to their room rather than just being directed.

Figure 7-10: Group 3 'In-room'

go to room  
↓  
freshen up

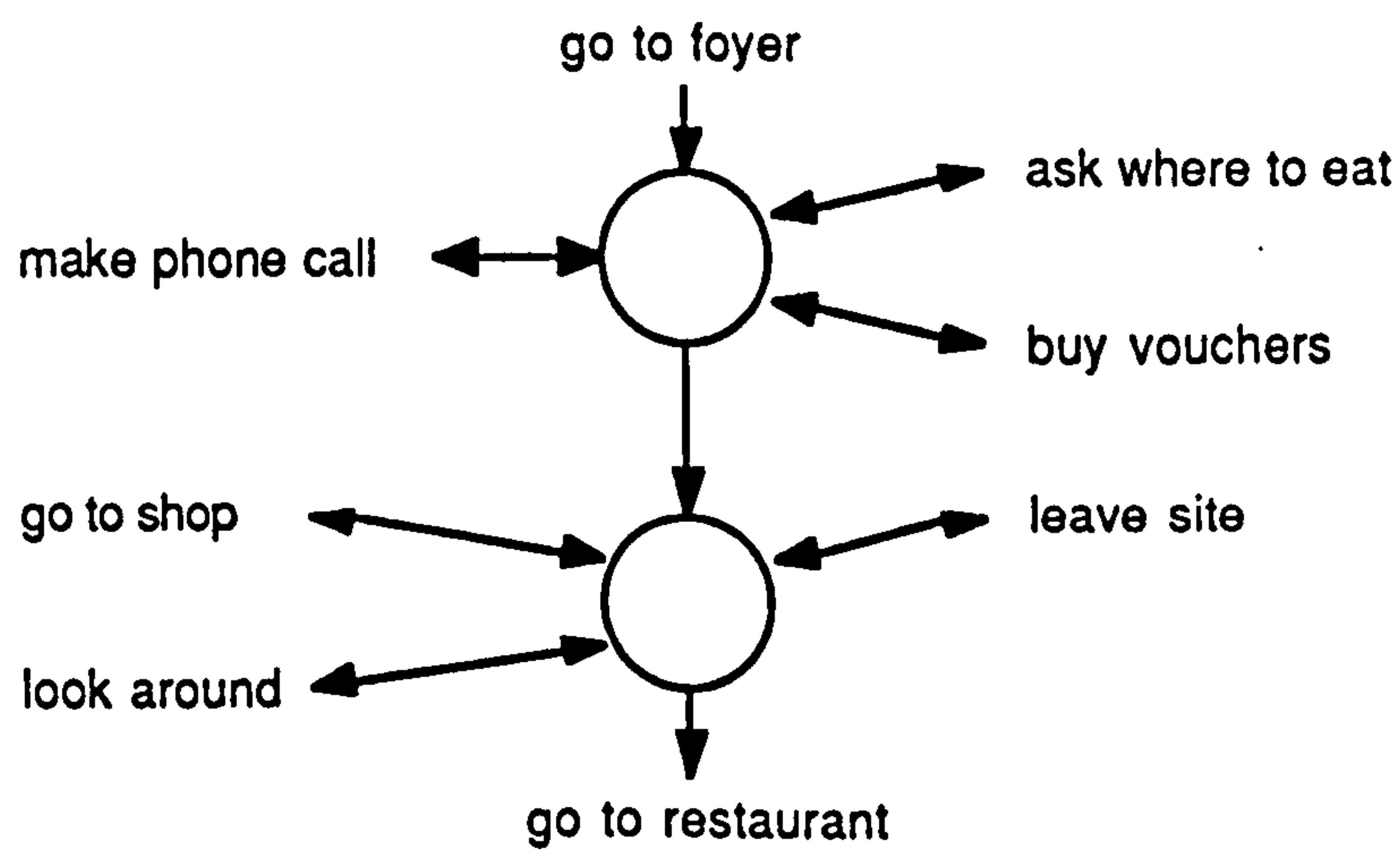
variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
smoke in room		10		
bedroom temperature		3	1	
lodge/bedroom cleanliness	20	5	6	
bathroom cleanliness		4		
room service		2		
drinks and biscuits		8		
telephone		28		10
TV remote control		1		
trouser press		8		
hair dryers		1		
shoe cleaning		1		
furniture	3	9		
quilts	1	8		
towels		3		
toiletries		9		
bedroom fittings		1		
bathroom fittings/design		5	1	
bedroom door		8		
shower control		11		
decorations			1	
lodge/room quality/consistency			7	
lodge/bedroom comfort	7		3	
view			2	

Group 3 includes few activities but a considerable number of categories. The most significant category relates to the absence, and thus subsequent need, of a telephone in the bedroom, with both parties acknowledging its importance. The difficulties in controlling the water temperature in the shower created some dissatisfaction with the guests, followed by rooms being smoky, often after the guest has requested a non-smoking room. Uncomfortable beds and the lack of toiletries in the

bathrooms generated some comments from guests, followed by the poor and inadequate selection of in-room refreshment facilities, the use of blankets instead of quilts on the beds, and the heavy and noisy bedroom doors. The guests further referred to the poorly designed bathrooms, the inadequate number of towels provided, and the room temperatures when they first arrive in the bedrooms. Although the bedrooms were generally considered to be very clean, by both customers and employees, there were some complaints of bedroom and bathroom cleanliness.

The three main attributes which were measured in the questionnaire survey were cleanliness, comfort and decorations. Generally speaking these three show a broad similarity between the questionnaire and PB results: cleanliness and comfort of the lodges are rated fairly high, and decorations were assumed to have more importance by the employees than by the customers.

Figure 7-11: Group 4 'Activities'

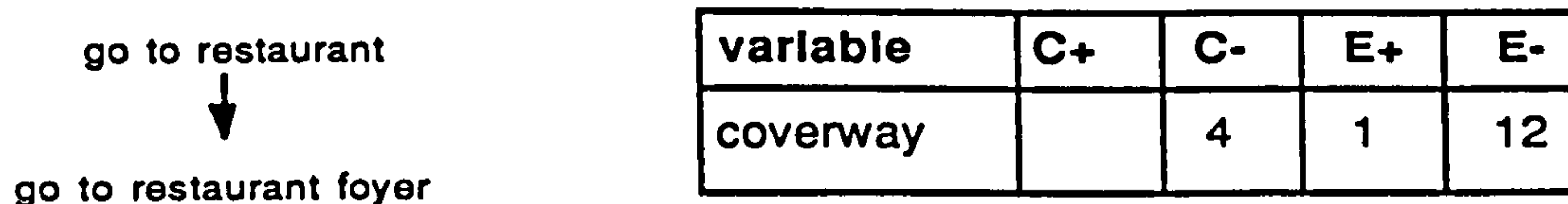


variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
lounge/recreation		5		
bar facility		12		8
interaction				7
play area		3		
phonecard facility		4		
business facilities		3		1
shop	1	6		
comprehensive			9	

Group 4 focuses on the activities available to the overnight customer. Apart from the employees considering that the guest is offered a very comprehensive range of facilities, the employees concurred with the guests by acknowledging the lack of suitable areas for guest-to-guest interaction. The shop hours, the shop staff, and the lack of a telephone for phonecard users created further dissatisfaction with some of the guests. Three guests and one employee considered that

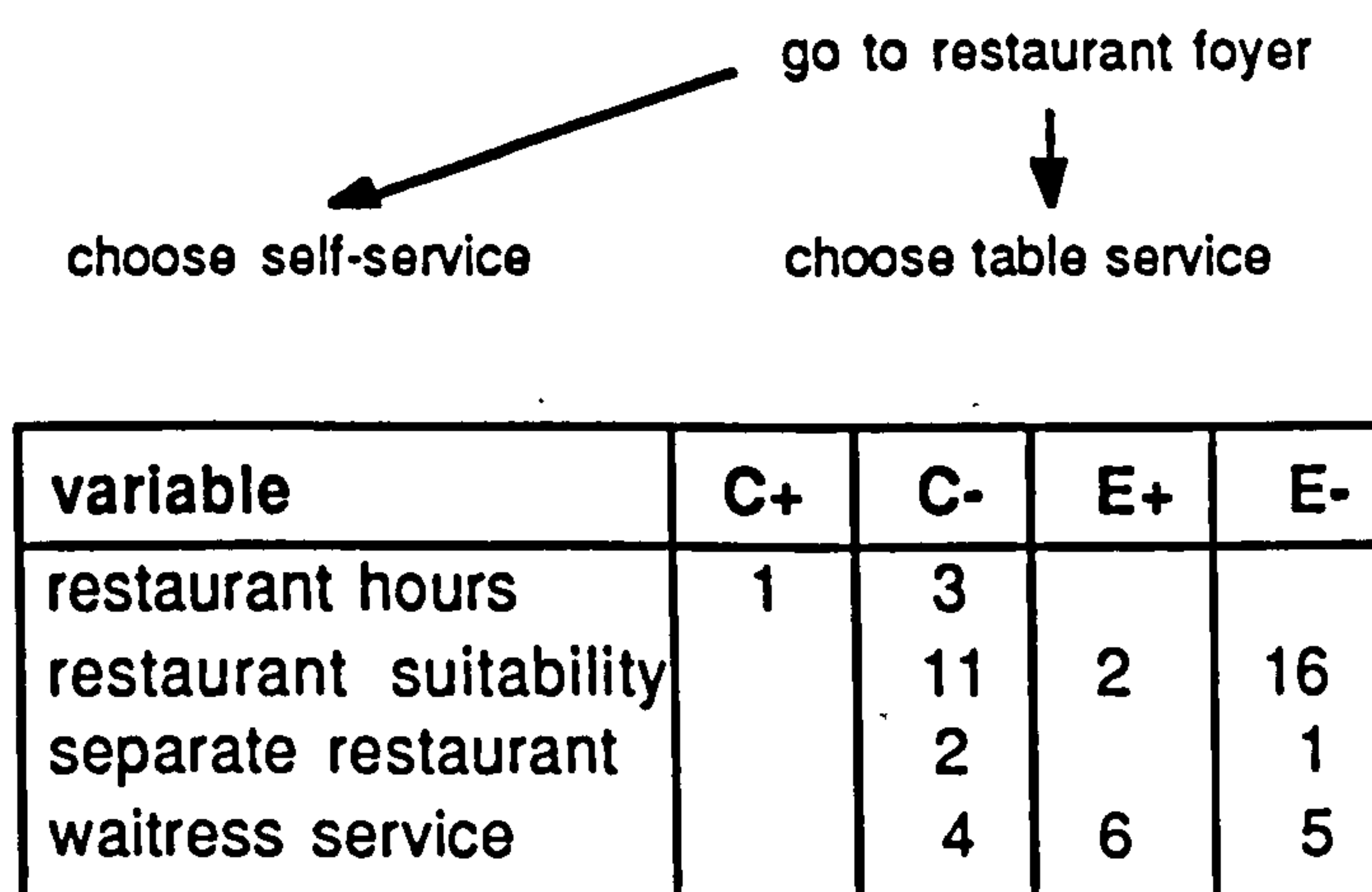
there should be more business facilities available for the guests, with a further three considering the need for a play area for children. Overall the need for providing for children in the roadside lodges appears fairly low when considering the results from both the questionnaire and comment survey.

Figure 7-12: Group 5 'Restaurant access'



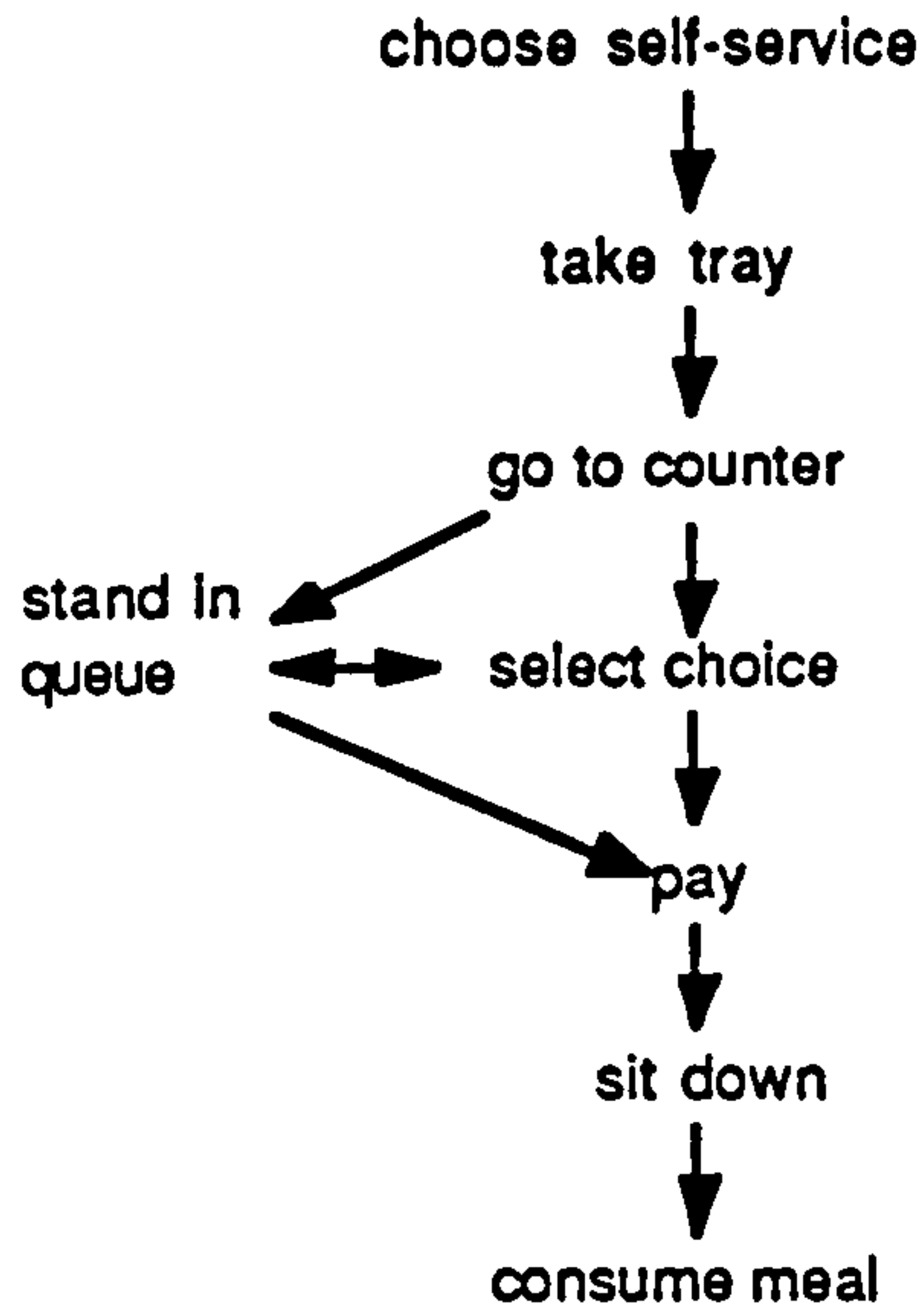
The lack of an internal restaurant, or a restaurant joined by a covered linkway, generated some dissatisfaction by customers and even more by the employees. One employee welcomed the integrated restaurant at their site.

Figure 7-13: Group 6 'Restaurant suitability'



Group 6 shows that there were considerable categories relating to the unsuitability of the restaurants for lodge guests, with three individuals suggesting that the guests could be offered a separate facility from the general motorists. Several employees commented on how successful the table service was, whilst a few guests and a few employees recommended extending the table service system. The questionnaire results from both customer and employees showed a high degree of consistency with these comments in indicating that the restaurants were not suitable for lodge guests.

**Figure 7-14: Group 7 'Self-service'**

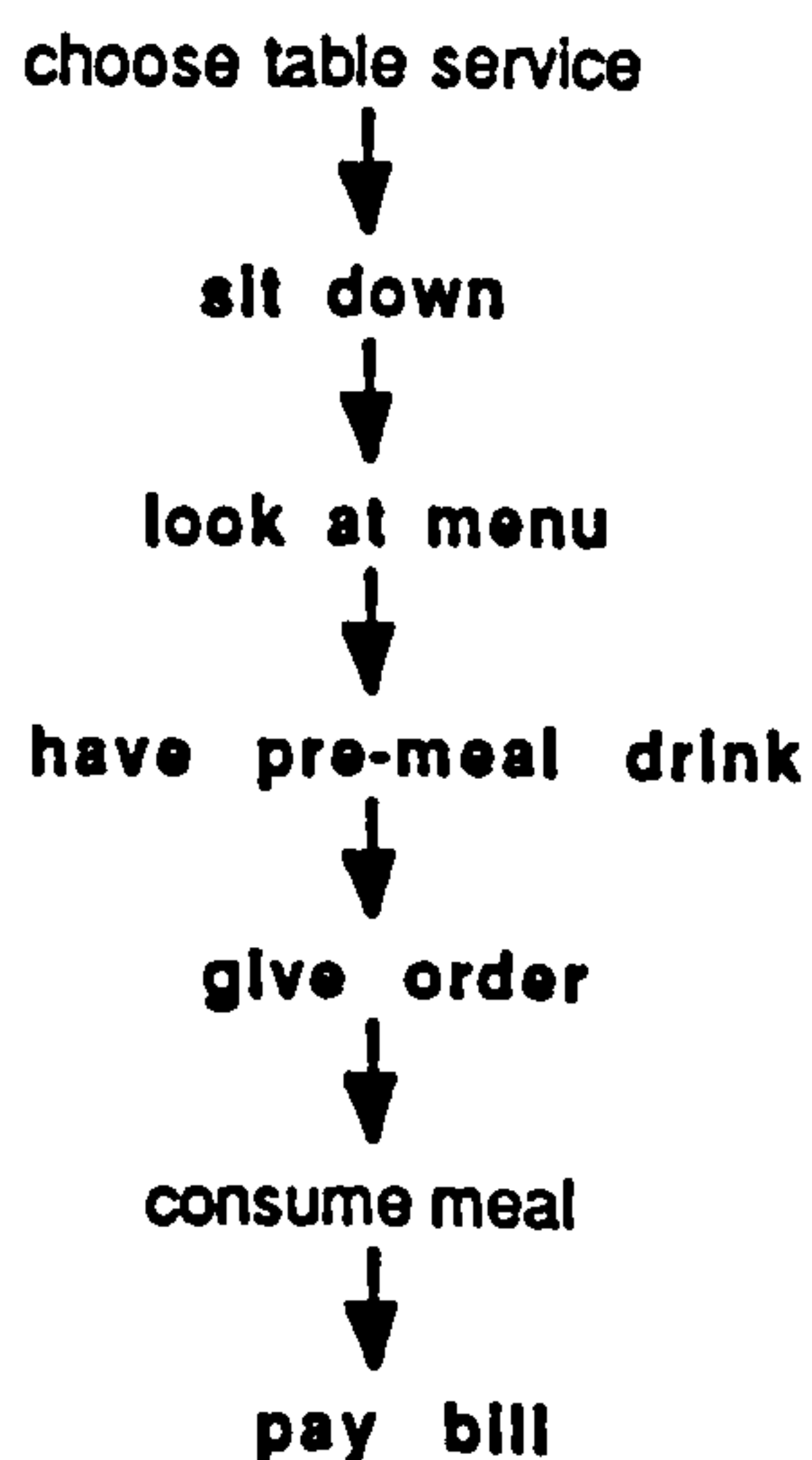


variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
queues		12		
table clearing		2		
cutlery cleanliness		8		
food temperature		19		
food dryness		8		

Group 7 focuses on the self-service stream of the restaurant available for the general motorist which lodge guests are welcome to use. This section attracted no compliments from the guests and no comments at all from the employees. The temperature of the food was frequently linked to the time required to queue whilst waiting to select food choices and to pass through the cash desk. Food dryness was linked to the length of time food sat in the self-service counters. The cutlery available for self-service diners was often found to be dirty and the tables were often found to be left uncleared for extended periods.

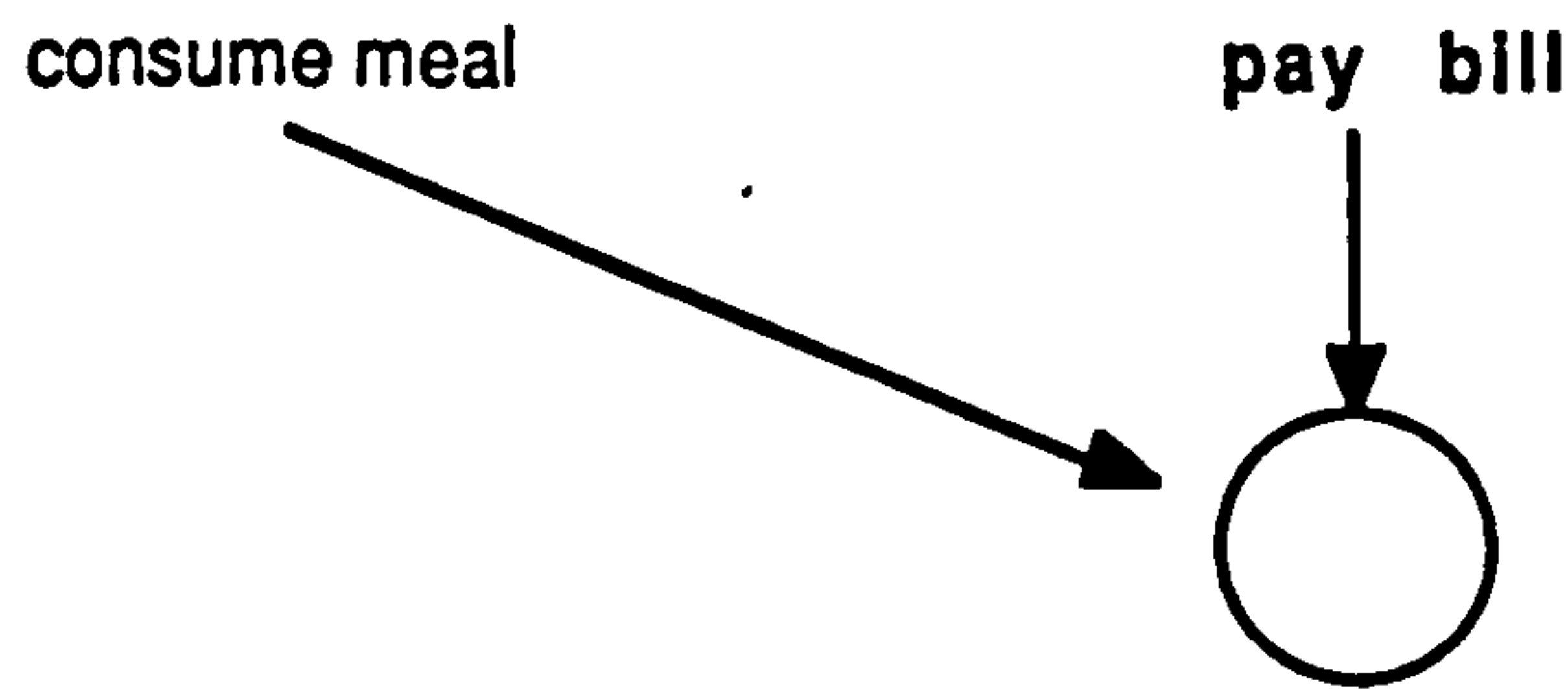
Group 7 relates mainly to process attributes which the employees may have some control over. The quality of the food and the cleanliness of the restaurants were low performing attributes in the questionnaire survey, part of which may be explained by the temperature and dryness of the food, and the poor clearing system in the restaurant commented respectively upon by the customers here.

**Figure 7-15: Group 8 'Table-service'**



This activity is covered by the comments in the previous and next activities

**Figure 7-16: Group 9 'Restaurant evaluation'**



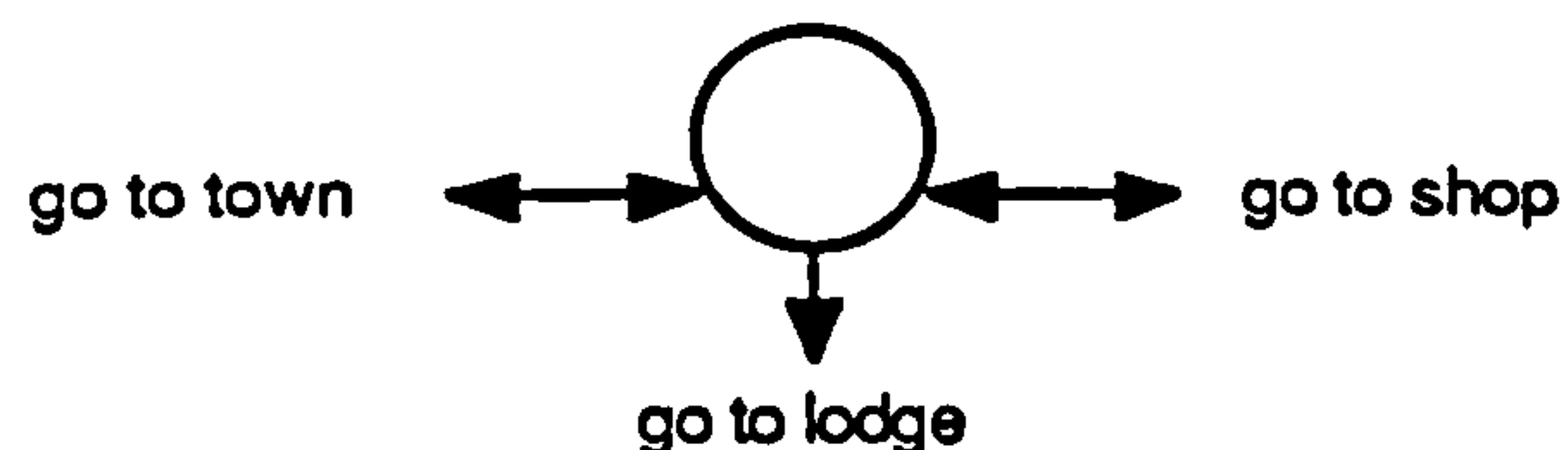
variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
Platters			6	9
food choice	1	44		2
alcohol			2	3
food quality	3	26	1	7
prices	2	10		
value for money		7		2
restaurant comfort		3		
smoking rule		6		
rest. cleanliness	6	9		
restaurant service	2	6	1	3
restaurant staff	11	10		
restaurant manning		1		
volume control				7
guest recognition			1	2
toilet cleanliness		2		

The Platters<sup>2</sup> style was commended by six of the employees whilst a further five recommended that they should operate the same style at all units. The remaining four employees though complained about the difficulties in manning this service and subsequently the difficulties in providing a consistent service. This area provides a little ambiguity since none of the respondents gave details relating to the table service, or the Platters restaurant, during the flowchart exercise. The choice of food available received the most attention with many customers remarking on the lack of 'healthy' choices, and the lack of choice available during the quieter hours. The quality of the food was generally considered to be poor with many commenting on the high prices and poor value for money. Reactions to the staff and their service levels received mixed responses whilst manning and the control of the highly variable and inconsistent demand patterns were acknowledged as being problematic. Control of 'no smoking' rules were not enforced strongly enough, and the general restaurant cleanliness produced mixed reactions. The cleanliness of the toilets though was considered to be a problem by a small number of customers. One employee considered that lodge guests were treated well in the restaurant whilst another two thought they should receive better treatment.



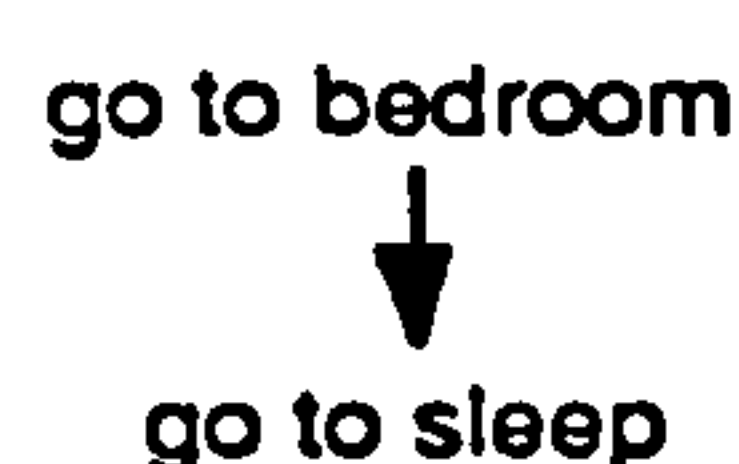
Food quality, restaurant comfort, restaurant cleanliness, restaurant service and restaurant value for money were all attributes which scored both poorly in the questionnaire survey and by customer and employee comments.

Figure 7-17: Group 10 'After dinner'



These activities have been considered in other sections.

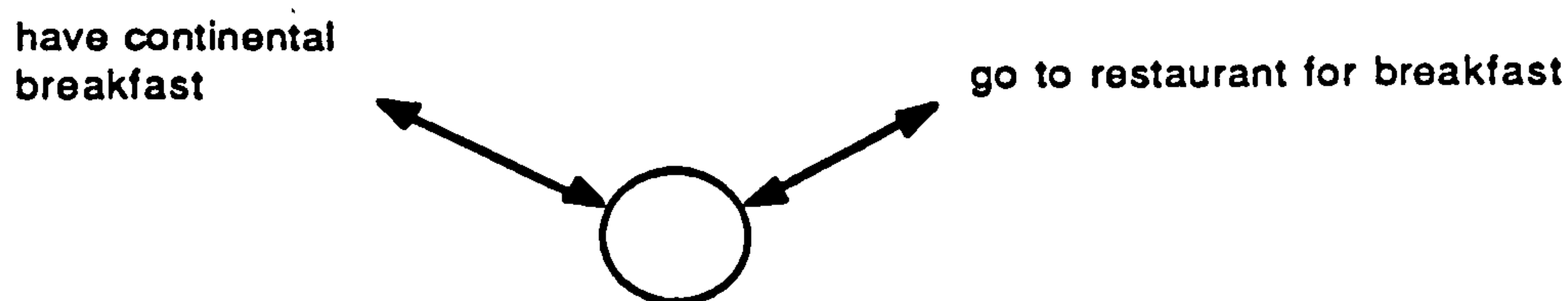
Figure 7-18: Group 11 'Sleep'



variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
lorry noise		7		1
internal noise	4	8		2
lodge security		3		

Apart from sleep, most of the bedroom activities were covered in the 'in-room' group. Noise appeared to create some problems either with the lorry park being too close to the lodge or other guests making a noise when they returned or arrived late at night. Security in the lodge was considered to be a salient issue by only three of the guests, similar to the findings from the repertory interviews.

Figure 7-19: Group 12 'Breakfast'

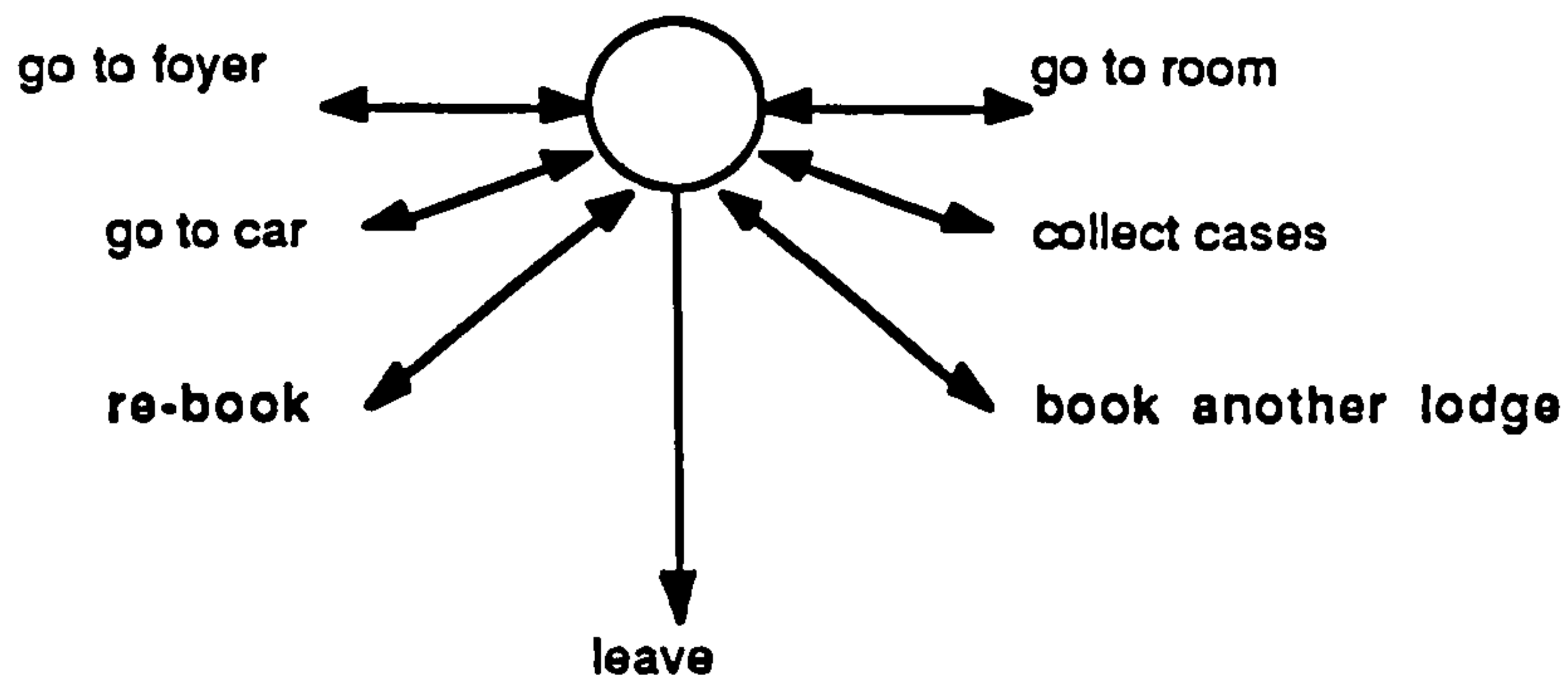


variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
breakfast			2	
continental breakfast		8	2	7
staffing				1
restaurant general	9	11		

The continental breakfast offered to lodge guests was generally considered to be of a poor quality by both customers and employees. The restaurant breakfast received few exclusive comments possibly because most of these were covered in the earlier restaurant groups. The restaurant in

general received mixed feelings from the customers even though specific aspects of the restaurant, such as food quality and suitability, performed fairly low.

Figure 7-20: Group 13 'Leave'



variable	C+	C-	E+	E-
lodge staff	26			
lodge service	9			
lodge general	40			
lodge value for money	18	3		
size of lodges				3
number of lodges		22		1

This last group includes the exit activities of the guest. A large number of customers considered that the lodges were generally a very good product offering value for money, and were operated by good staff with a reasonable service level. The employees considered that the lodges should be larger to accommodate more guests, whilst the guests considered that there should be more lodges. These results concur with those from the questionnaire survey which illustrated that the lodges performed fairly well.

Overall it appears that the customer and employee comments which have been summarised in this chapter concur generally with the results achieved in the customer and employee questionnaire survey. Although the magnitude of agreement is not identical between the two sources, which may be explained by the two different ways the data was collected, the broad directions are similar with very few inconsistencies becoming evident.

## 7.6. Summary of results

### 7.6.1. Customer and employee comments

Although the space at the back of the customer questionnaires was provided for additional comments on issues that were not sufficiently covered in the structured questions, some 55.9

percent (298) of the respondents used the space. However these comments were not as focused as those collected from the employees which has made direct correlations between the two respondent-types difficult to treat as being comparatively equal. The amount and range of qualitative data collected though should provide a basis for understanding customers' perceptions of service quality, and should provide further data on how well the employees understand their customers' perceptions.

The customer and employee comments presented with the activity groups in this chapter indicate in which broad areas the comments can be placed, and summary analyses of the most frequent customer comments and employee comments have been presented in Tables 7-1 and 7-2 respectively.

Table 7-1: Most frequent customer comments with corresponding employee comments

<u>Variable</u>	<u>C+</u>	<u>C-</u>	<u>E+</u>	<u>E-</u>
Food choice	1	44	-	2
Lodge general	40	-	-	-
Food quality	3	26	1	7
Bedroom telephone	-	28	-	10
Lodge staff	26	-	-	-
Lodge/bedroom clean.	20	5	6	-
Number of lodges	-	22	-	1

Key: C+ = customer complimentary comments  
 C- = customer critical comments  
 E+ = employee complimentary comments  
 E- = employee critical comments

In summary the customers have found the lodge concept a welcome addition to the stock of overnight accommodation, and would like to see more of them. They have found the lodges clean and the staff very good, and although not shown in Table 7-1, the customers found the lodges comfortable and good value. The customers though did want to see more in-room and in-lodge facilities and services, more flexible and discount tariff structures, considerably different restaurant services, and improved parking arrangements. Table 7-1 shows that the employees did recognise the importance of the telephone to guests and the poor perception of food quality, possibly through direct feedback from the guests themselves. From the employee point of view, the seven most frequently mentioned variables (excluding telephone in the room) have been shown in Table 7-2.

**Table 7-2: Most frequent employee comments with corresponding customer comments**

<u>Variable</u>	<u>E+</u>	<u>E-</u>	<u>C+</u>	<u>C-</u>
Restaurant suit.	2	16	-	11
Platters	6	9	-	-
Coverway	1	12	-	4
Waitress service	6	5	-	4
Prices	11	-	2	13
Comprehensive	9	-	-	-
Continental breakfast	2	7	-	8

Key: C+ = customer complimentary comments  
 C- = customer critical comments  
 E+ = employee complimentary comments  
 E- = employee critical comments

The Table shows that the employees considered that the restaurants provided for the motorists were not suitable for lodge guests, as perceived by the guests themselves. However they did see that an internally linked Platters style restaurant with waitress service as being advantageous, especially if it could be properly manned. Both the employees and the customers also considered that the continental breakfasts were of poor quality. Although not shown in the Table the employees thought that customers would appreciate a lounge or bar area where they could socially interact. Differences occurred with the employees considering that the lodge prices were good, that the service areas offered a comprehensive range of facilities and services, and that the bedrooms were sufficiently equipped. These views were not equally shared by the customers.

### 7.6.2. Master perceptual blueprint

The employee master blueprint provides data on employees' perception of the service delivery system. The fifteen employees that provided flow-charts to make-up the master blueprint identified 50 activities (Appendix D4), and the company executive added a further 8 bringing the total to 58 activities. Five of the executive additions referred to the activities carried out by guests when they have a table service meal in the restaurant, and one addition referred to the activity of lodge receptionists selling discount vouchers to guests for use in the restaurants. Since these activities are all related and were not included on the flow-charts, it appears that a whole area was sub-consciously left out of the flow-chart exercises. When the executive responsible for the service delivery system was questioned (at a later stage) why this activity area was omitted, he replied to the researcher that providing table service to a few lodge guests in very busy motorists' restaurants

was particularly difficult and it was likely that the employees did not mention the area because they rarely performed it.

Although the employees did not mention these activities during the flow-chart exercise, they did refer to them in the second part of the interview which was used to elicit the PNI points. Table 7-3 summarises the customer and employee comments that referred to the restaurant facility.

Table 7-3: Issues surrounding restaurant facility

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Mentioned by Customers</u>	<u>Mentioned by Employees</u>
Restaurants are not suitable	√	√
Table service difficult to man		√
Volume control is problematic		√
Queues are problem	√	
Poor food choice	√	√
Poor food quality	√	√
Food cold and dry	√	
Poor food value	√	√
Dirty cutlery	√	
Tables not cleared	√	
Restaurant cleanliness	√	
Restaurant uncomfortable	√	
Restaurant staff	√	
Restaurant service	√	√
Provide more table service	√	√
Platters are good		√
Provide Platters restaurants		√
Provide covered linkway	√	√
Provide integrated restaurant	√	√
Provide separate restaurant	√	√

Table 7-3 shows that both customers and employees provided a varied range of comments on the restaurant facilities, with the employees concurring with the customers on many issues. The interpretation of this data has been summarised in the next section.

### 7.6.3. Summary of comments

It is possible to draw some tentative findings from the data, and these have been summarised below:

1. Both customers and employees think the restaurants are unsuitable for lodge guests. The employees find difficulties with manning the restaurants and providing a consistent service due to the large fluctuations in demand. Lodge guests complain about the self-service facility because: there is a poor choice of food; the food goes dry after a period of sitting in the counter; they have to queue with their food which goes cold by the time they reach the table, which means the food is poor value; the cutlery is dirty and the tables are often not cleared; the seating is uncomfortable. The staff and service they provide is often inconsistent and below expectations. Some guests though did find the restaurants generally quite good;
2. Both customers and employees think more table service should be provided for lodge guests. Employees think the Platters concept is good and should be extended to all service areas. Both customers and employees think that there should at least be a coverway between the lodge and restaurant for protection against undesirable weather conditions, but possibly an integrated restaurant with the lodge would be better, especially if it served lodge guests only;
3. The reason the table-service facility did not receive a high profile on the employee blueprints is two-fold: the employees had difficulty in distinguishing between individual lodge guests amongst the large volume of motorists and, the employees had difficulties in providing this facility when the restaurant was busy. These two factors are likely to contribute to employees not being able, or not willing, to promote the table service within the present system, and therefore did not articulate this facility when they were providing blueprints; and
4. If the organisation was able to promote the table service more to lodge guests, perhaps through the lodge receptionists, and provide more staffing to deliver a table service for these guests, several benefits could be automatically realised, e.g. the guests would not have to queue; guests could be directed towards a cleared table with clean cutlery and possibly comfortable chairs; they would be served hot and good quality food; their perception of the staff and service would improve; and overall they would consider that they had received good value for money.

These four points are an attempt to make sense of and summarise a large amount of complex data, and provide a credible summary of the issues surrounding the restaurants provided for lodge guests. Although there were several other aspects of the lodge package that could have been discussed in greater detail, such as the telephone service, overall the restaurant facility attracted the most critical attention. The method of analysis that was used for the restaurant issues should

therefore facilitate the analysis of some of the less complex issues.

Although the lodge customers are relatively pleased with the lodge concept and its tariff structure, it appears that they would still like a wider range of services and facilities, typically those found in full-service hotels. For example, a few respondents desired more in-room facilities, a few desired a separate restaurant for lodge guests, whilst a number would have liked a bar service. However providing these services and facilities is counter-productive to the lodge concept - the lodge concept was designed to be limited in services and facilities to keep the tariffs low, and adding more would simply convert them into the full-range hotels with higher tariffs. Although it may be possible to change the lodge concept to satisfy the specific requirements of these respondents, it may be more appropriate to educate the marketplace through communication media to ensure that potential customers understand the package on offer.

### 7.7. Validity and reliability of the qualitative results

As with the quantitative study discussed in the last chapter, it is necessary to establish the validity and reliability of the qualitative results by assessing the sufficiency of the response rates. However the qualitative data cannot be subjected to the same rigorous tests as the quantitative data, and the assessment of validity and reliability is more dependent upon considering the response rates achieved, assessing the consistency of the data from the various sources, and through logical deduction. The responses rates for the customer comments have been shown in Tables 7-4.

Table 7-4: Customer qualitative responses

<u>questionnaires</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
missing	600	46.2
unused	167	12.8
received blank	235	18.1
comments received	<u>298</u>	<u>22.9</u>
	<u>1,300</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Table 7-4 shows that the analyses has been carried out on 22.9 percent of the questionnaires distributed. This is considered to be an acceptable basis to draw some valid inferences since it comes from a wide range of comments from 298 respondents. Table 7-5 shows the response rates for the employee comments.

Table 7-5: Employee qualitative responses

<u>planned</u>	<u>achieved</u>
18 management/supervisory interviews	19 various employee interviews

Although only nineteen employees were used in the qualitative study, the results from these individuals are considered to be fairly valid since they show high levels of agreement amongst themselves on some issues, such as the poor suitability of the restaurants, and in some cases correlate strongly with the customer comments. Furthermore these nineteen individuals would have been exposed to a large number of customers and customer experiences which would have provided them with some understanding of customer perceptions of quality.

Further evidence of validity can be gained by comparing the qualitative results with the quantitative results which are discussed in the last chapter. The results from both the customer questionnaires and the employee questionnaires show some correlations with the customer comments, e.g. customers perceive that the restaurants provide poor value for money and the motorist-style restaurants are not suitable for lodge guests. Since some of the concurring quantitative and qualitative data have come from maximally different measures, this provides some support for convergent validity [Peter 1981].

## 7.8. Conclusions

The customer findings presented in this chapter came from a content analysis of the unstructured comments provided by overnight lodge guests (additional to the quantitative values discussed in the last chapter), whilst the employee findings came from an analysis of the PNI issues provided by service employees during perceptual blueprinting interviewing. Although the findings from the two sources show considerable overlap, collecting data with two different methods does not lend itself to easy comparative analysis. However since the findings do show some similarities, this may indicate that the sources have generated valid results.

Overall the qualitative data has shown that customers and employees both consider that the restaurant facilities provided for lodge guests are not appropriate, mainly due to the difficulty of catering for the specific requirements of small numbers of overnight guests in a system which has been designed and is operated for large volumes of short-stay motorists. Having sufficient members of staff to provide a table service in high volume restaurants was perceived by the employees to be a difficulty, whilst the customers commented that the food served was of a poor quality due to the type of service being provided. The lodging facilities received fewer negative



comments from both customers and employees, possibly due to these facilities being designed and operated specifically for lodge guests. Although the lodging facilities received a high degree of praise, several customer-respondents indicated that they would like to see more services and facilities provided for overnight guests, yet providing these extras would be contrary to the principles of the lodge concept, i.e. few services and facilities equals low tariff structures.

Not only do the qualitative results from the customers and employees show a fairly high degree of consistency, but they also show a high degree of consistency with the quantitative findings discussed in Chapter VI. With some issues the qualitative data may explain the underlying reasons for some of the quantitative data, such as 'food quality' and 'restaurant cleanliness'. The food quality attribute received a high negative rating in the quantitative results and the qualitative analysis has indicated that this may be due to food drying out whilst displayed in the self-service food counter, and food going cold whilst customers have to queue to pay for their food selection. The high ratings given to cleanliness in the restaurants in the quantitative findings may be a result of the ineffective table clearing system which the restaurants operate as identified by the qualitative analysis.

The freedom provided to both customer and employee respondents in commenting upon the strengths and weaknesses of the lodge service package eliminated the possibility of the researcher biasing the data collected. Since the data collected refers to both tangible and intangible attributes, this provides support for the proposition (P1) that 'service quality represents the customer's assessment of a transactional experience, which may include any permutation of tangible and intangible elements.' The last chapter of this thesis will discuss the evidence for this proposition, and the evidence collected for the other propositions, and consolidate the evidence provided for achieving the aim of this study, i.e. 'to show how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using the perceptions of both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience'.

## **Footnotes to Chapter VII**

1. These contributors were speaking at the QUIS II conference in Norwalk, Connecticut, in July 1990.
2. The 'Platters' name refers to the table-service restaurant style operated by the organisation across some of their units.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **Perceptual Blueprinting**

## **8.1. Introduction**

This research study has been conducted to show that service quality is a customer's subjective assessment of the overall service package, and as such can be understood by adopting a phenomenologically-oriented systems perspective. This perspective can then be used by management to control the delivery of consistently good service quality by identifying and using both the customers' and the service employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of the service delivery system. Perceptual blueprinting was the technique that was developed in this study to achieve this, and much of its concepts are related to the concepts of total quality management. This chapter will discuss the foundation underpinning perceptual blueprinting, discuss some practical examples, discuss the relationship between perceptual blueprinting and total quality management, and finally suggest some further research opportunities.

## **8.2. The systems perspective**

### **8.2.1. Foundation to perceptual blueprinting**

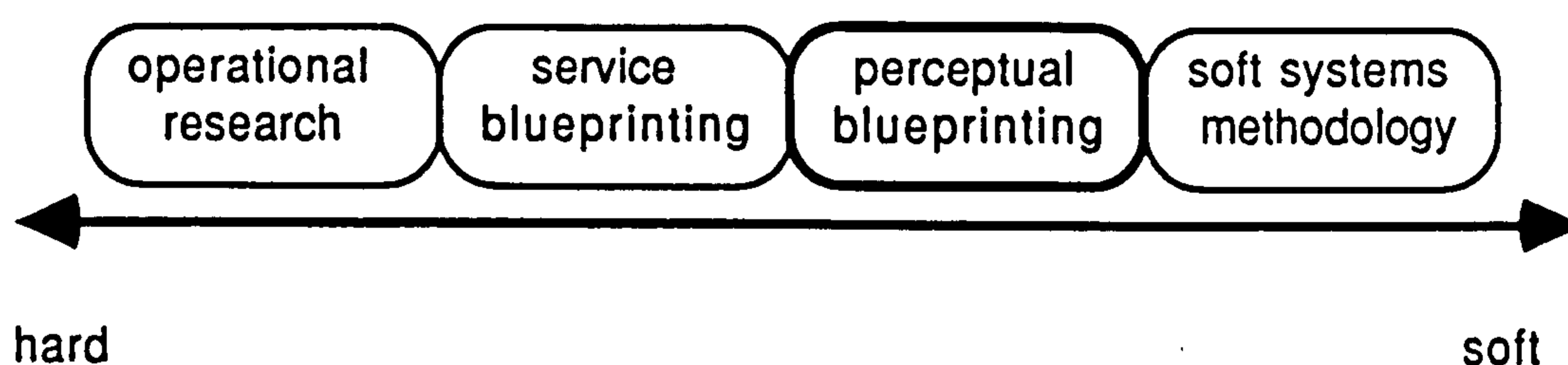
The perceptual blueprinting technique was developed from the concepts of Shostack's 'service blueprinting' (1984), Checkland's 'soft systems methodology' (1981), and 'perceptual gap analysis' discussed by service quality authors, such as Parasuraman et al (1985). Service blueprinting (SB) and soft systems analysis (SSM) are based on principles developed in the systems discipline, a discipline which represents a wide range of techniques and applications. The early systems applications were built on 'hard', objective principles which concentrated on documenting processes in manufacturing industries in order that changes can be made on paper before carrying out physical changes. These typically included techniques developed in operational research (OR). Their limited ability in representing 'soft' situations in the engineering world and the human element in service processes though led to the development of the soft systems methodology and service blueprinting respectively (discussed in Chapter V).

SSM has resulted in being an action research tool which is used to bring about changes in organisations by mapping ideas, issues and concepts on paper, whilst SB has resulted in being an analyst's tool used to make changes to services by mapping the service process on paper. Although both methods were valuable in providing this study with some important concepts, neither technique was suitable for the aim of this study, i.e. to capture perceptions of a service delivery system. The perceptual blueprinting technique was therefore developed to achieve the aim by extracting the more useful concepts from the various systems approaches.

### 8.2.2. Systems and its characteristics

Although all of the systems approaches share common characteristics, such as holism and process-orientation, the essential difference between the approaches is the degree of 'hardness' or 'softness' they exhibit [Ledington 1987]. As with service blueprinting though, perceptual blueprinting (PB) is neither completely hard nor completely soft, but it can be represented on a 'systems continuum' to display how it relates to other systems approaches. Figure 8-1 shows where perceptual blueprinting is positioned on the hard to soft dimension, and furthermore shows that it has not attempted to replace other systems approaches, but has simply joined the systems family.

Figure 8-1: Systems continuum

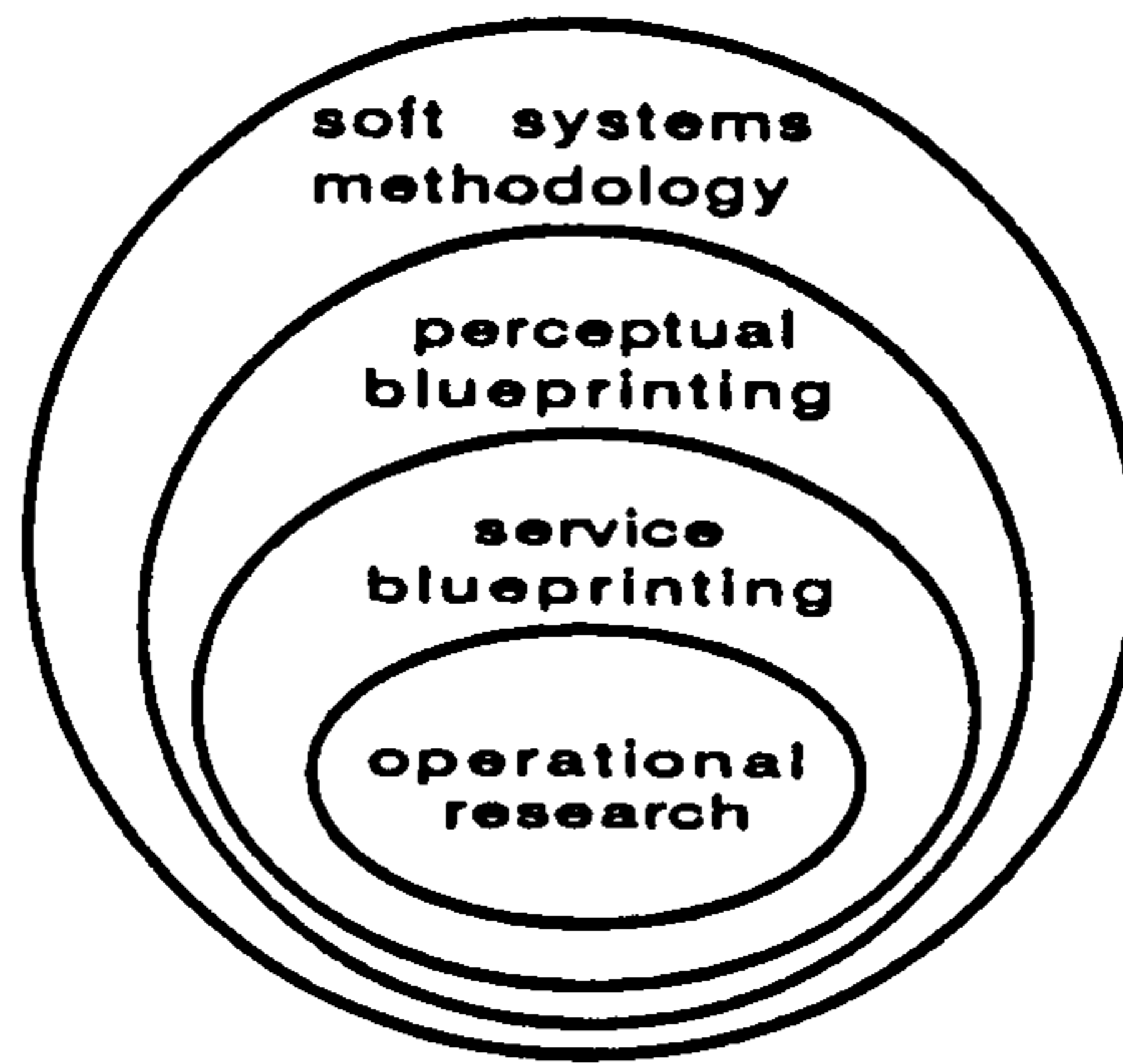


Since the PB technique falls in between SB and SSM on the systems continuum, then its characteristics will tend to be similar to these approaches. PB is more soft than hard, and similarly to SSM it is based on holism rather than on reductionism [McLoughlin 1986]. Compared to SB, PB is more qualitative, open, and phenomenologicistic since it gives greater precedence to the viewpoints of the system users. Compared to SSM though, PB is more concrete and restrictive since it focuses on actual service delivery systems and not on values or strategic issues. Unlike OR or SB it is not concerned with the analyst's viewpoint of technical issues, and unlike SSM it is not concerned with the management's viewpoint of the wider issues, but is concerned primarily with the customers' and service employees' perceptions of how successful the service process functions.

### 8.2.3. Complementary approaches

Isolating the differences between the various systems approaches helps to distinguish their ranges of convenience, but this does not mean that these methods cannot be complementary. Many of these methods can be combined together to provide a comprehensive and powerful approach to problem solving and change in organisations. Figure 8-2 shows how the four systems methods discussed in this chapter can be combined to form such a complementary approach.

Figure 8-2: Systems combination diagram



The systems combination diagram in Figure 8-2 shows the systems techniques in the same order as those displayed in Figure 8-1, but with the addition of ordinality showing how SSM subsumes PB, how PB subsumes SB, and how SB subsumes OR. The value of combining these approaches enables an organisational analysis to start at the holistic, strategic level, dealing with the company and its direction using first the SSM technique. The analysis can then move through to PB where it is able to accommodate people's perceptions of a service process, through to SB to accurately document a service delivery system, and finally to OR to deal with the technical and tactical issues on the service production line. The analysis can then move to and from each level in an iterative way to bring various resolution levels 'dialectically' together.

The advantage of using a combination of different systems techniques together in such a way means that the social and technical issues are examined in a wider context, which often is a necessity if a complete understanding of a situation is to be gained [Jackson 1990; Tait 1988]. Although the technical view is important in dealing with specific issues, the social view promotes a broader picture by involving various individuals which may be affected by proposed changes. This broader perspective contributes to understanding the 'problem situation' rather than just the 'perceived problem' and may identify social and causal factors which impact upon organisational issues which are not evident at the higher and more technical resolution levels [Checkland 1981]. A good systems analysis should therefore start and finish at the holistic and abstract level to ensure that the people issues are considered and the causal links are identified and accommodated before any scientifically correct changes are implemented which are unlikely to succeed if they are socially or culturally unacceptable.

### **8.3. Applications of perceptual blueprinting**

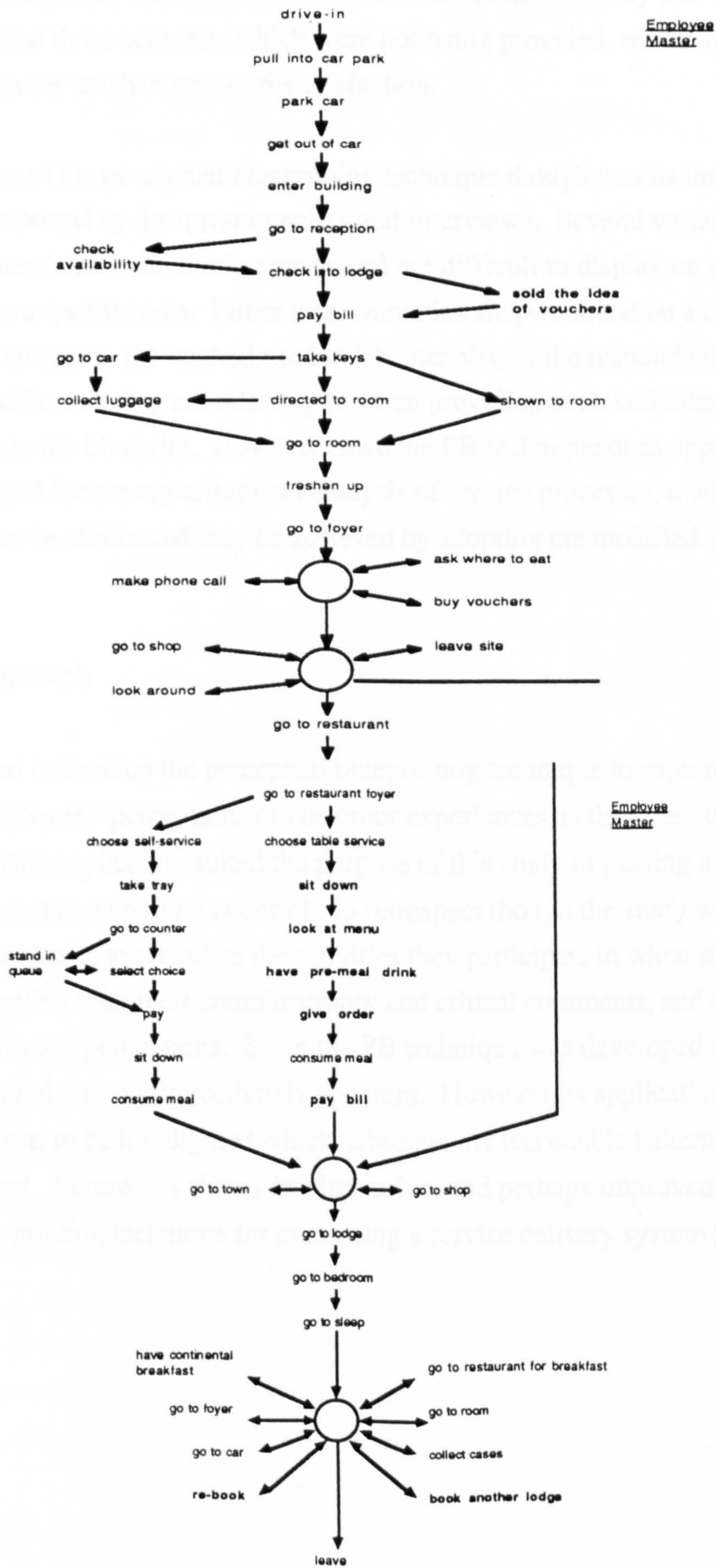
#### **8.3.1. Perceptual blueprinting in this study**

This study collected perceptual blueprints from fifteen individuals, with additions from one executive, to identify and document the perceived service process the customers participate in at a selection of roadside lodges<sup>1</sup>. This has been reproduced in Figure 8-3 from Appendix D4 below. Since the process was identified by a range of employees who are exposed to many customers and service encounters each day, it is assumed that the final blueprint represents a reasonably accurate model of the 'actual' customer activities, excepting the occasional idiosyncratic behaviour. This representation therefore has identified the system boundary of the roadside lodge package by identifying which activities are engaged in by overnight guests. However, if this system boundary differs in any way from the parameters of the service package as perceived by senior management, then the management should question whether they are providing the service expected by their customers. A question that needs to be addressed by the client-organisation in this study therefore is: 'Does the restaurant facility represent part of the lodge service package, and if so, how can it be made compatible with the lodging facility?' Results from this study certainly indicate that the restaurant facility is part of the lodge service package, yet it is not performing to the same expected standard as the lodge facility.

Although the PB approach offered a new way in capturing and documenting the parameters of a service package, some limiting aspects of it have to be recognised. For example, in this study the employee-respondents identified 50 separate activities which they considered were typical of overnight lodge guests. The lodge executive who was asked to inspect the employee blueprint identified a further eight activities<sup>2</sup>, six of which related to the restaurant facility and services and the provision of a table service to lodge guests. Since the previous quantitative stage of this study identified the table service for lodge guests to be particularly problematic, then the omission of this activity in the blueprint questions the ability of this technique in identifying all relevant activities in a service delivery system. This could suggest that the blueprint was incomplete and that nineteen employee-respondents was not a sufficient number to provide a realistic blueprint. However the technique did identify those activities which were salient in these employees' minds.

When questioned why the employees omitted this particular activity, the executive who had overall responsibility for this service delivery system hypothesised that these activities were omitted due to the low take-up of the table service, which in itself was probably due to the difficulty in providing it effectively. This would suggest therefore that providing a [quality] table service for lodge guests is difficult in a roadside restaurant, and because it is difficult the employees do not promote or encourage its take-up. In turn the lodge guests would then tend to use the self-service system

Figure 8-3: Employee Master Blueprint





which serves the passing motorist, the very service which appears to have generated a large amount of customer dissatisfaction. Although one might consider that the perceptual blueprinting technique failed in not identifying all of the most significant activities, one could say that the technique successfully identified those activities which were not being provided, which subsequently explained the reason for much customer dissatisfaction.

A definite limitation of the perceptual blueprinting technique though was its inability to 'map' all of the relevant data collected by the questionnaires and interviews. Several variables, such as 'good service' or 'cleanliness', are over-arching terms and are difficult to display on a process chart unless they are referring to a specific area. Either these variables are positioned on a checklist next to the relevant activities, similar to the method used in Chapter VII, or the respondents are encouraged to identify which specific area they are referring to when providing such variables to enable them to be mapped directly onto the blueprint. However since the PB technique does appear to offer considerable potential for the organisational analysis of service processes, a way in which some of these limitations can be eliminated may be achieved by adopting the modified approach discussed next.

### 8.3.2. Modified approach

This study was used to develop the perceptual blueprinting technique to capture and document customers' and employees' perceptions of customer experiences as they pass through the service delivery system. This application suited the purpose of this study in gaining a better understanding of service quality, and potentially its control. In retrospect though the study would have gained more by getting customers to articulate the activities they participate in when staying overnight at a roadside lodge, together with their complimentary and critical comments, and comparing these directly with employees' perceptions. Since the PB technique was developed experientially in this study, its full potential was not immediately apparent. However its application in this study has enabled its limitations to be highlighted which subsequently has enabled alternative approaches and steps to be proposed. Figure 8-4 shows an alternative, and perhaps improved way of employing the perceptual blueprinting technique for examining a service delivery system [Senior and Randall 1991].

**Figure 8-4: Perceptual blueprinting model**

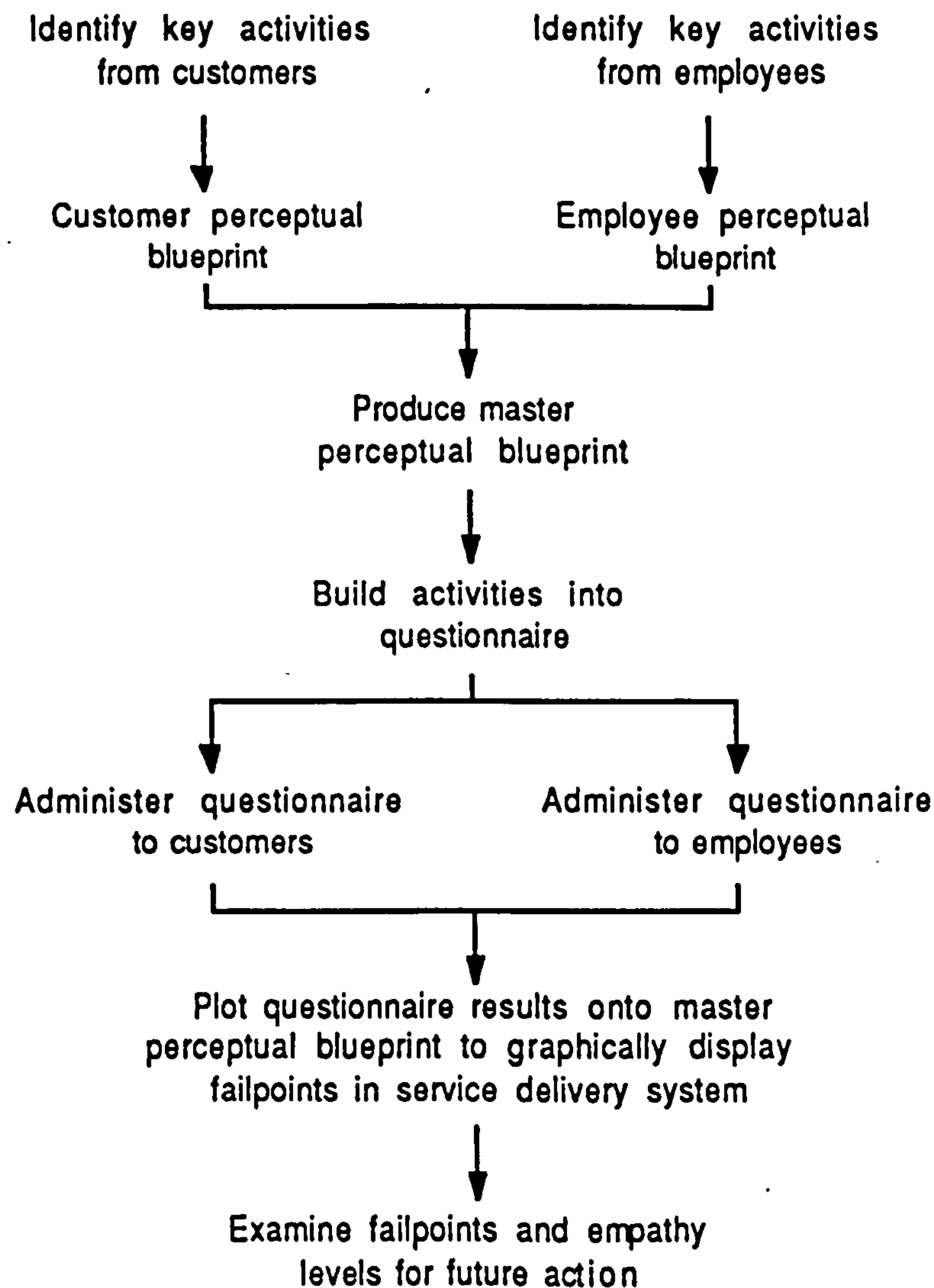


Figure 8-4 shows that customer and employee interviews are carried out first to identify the activities customers typically participate in during their period in a service delivery system. This exercise provides a separate customer perceptual blueprint and a separate employee perceptual blueprint. The activities though are best expressed as verbs to reflect their active nature and subsequently enable respondents to conceptually build a complete picture of the service process. The activities need to be at the same resolution level and mutually exclusive to maintain a consistent linkage between them, and be replicated in the same language used by the respondents to ensure that the final blueprint is still understood by the respondents and is not distorted by the researcher. Furthermore only those activities which are provided by the respondents should be documented since any additions or deletions by the researcher may conceal potential areas of service quality failure, as witnessed by the provision of table service in the roadside lodge study.

The customer and employee blueprints are then combined together to form a master perceptual blueprint which, with sufficient respondents, should provide a fairly accurate representation of most of the customer activities. The activities themselves are then treated as attributes to be built into a

questionnaire, possibly a SERVQUAL-type design, and the questionnaire would then be administered to both customers and employees. Similar to this study the questions would be oriented in the employee questionnaire to ensure that it is employees' perceptions of customers' perceptions that are being assessed and not employees' perceptions of the service delivery system. The questionnaire results can then be directly mapped onto the master perceptual blueprint to identify failpoints between customers' expectations and perceptions, and differences between customers' and employees' evaluations.

This particular model provides several advantages over the approach that was used in this study. First because the data from both customers and employees would be collected in the same way, the customer and employee maps and questionnaire results can be directly compared against each other to identify empathy levels. Secondly since the attributes for the questionnaires would be taken from the master perceptual blueprint before they are administered, the questionnaire results can be mapped directly back onto the master blueprint to illustrate service quality failpoints and empathy levels. If this approach had been adopted in this study, then the SERVQUAL questionnaire attributes would have been selected from the activities identified by the employees, i.e. the questionnaire design could have started with statement-questions on car parking facilities, checking-in procedures, and continuing through to checking-out procedures as shown in Table 8-1.

Table 8-1: Potential list of areas for further roadside lodge surveys

1. Ease of drive-in and sufficiency of signage
2. Location and sufficiency of car parking
3. Ease and efficiency of of check-in procedures
4. Friendliness and professionalism of reception staff
5. Comfort and cleanliness of bedroom
6. Location and quietness of bedroom
7. Adequacy of in-room facilities
8. Sufficiency of lodge area services and facilities
9. Location of restaurant
10. Style of restaurant and service
11. Choice and quality of food
12. Friendliness and professionalism of restaurant staff
13. Quality and speed of service
14. Comfort and cleanliness of restaurant
15. Restaurant value for money
16. Quality of continental breakfast
17. Ease of check-out

## 18. Lodge value for money

The results from the customer and employee questionnaires could then have been graphically mapped onto the blueprint to display the location and concentration of service failpoints and low empathy areas more clearly than the method used in Chapter VII. A further advantage of designing a questionnaire based on the activities elicited from perceptual blueprints is that a logical and comprehensive sequence of activities can be identified without any form of discrimination influencing the choice of attributes.

### 8.3.3. Alternative approaches

The approach used in this study and the modified approach just discussed share the same intention of identifying customers' assessment of the service experience and delivery system, and the identification of employees' perceptions of customers' assessment. Other foci for the perceptual blueprinting approach though are possible, such as:

(a) Employees describing their operational experiences - employees in a particular work setting can be asked to articulate their daily activities to create an aggregate perceptual blueprint of an operational area. An analysis of the map by management or by employees themselves may highlight areas of difficulties or inefficiency (operational failpoints) which can then subsequently become points of discussion and improvement for either an operational research analyst or a quality circle;

(b) Managers describing customer experiences - managers can be asked to describe the activities of customers as they pass through the service delivery system. This may provide a suitable preliminary before asking employees to articulate their perceptions.

(c) Managers describing operational experiences - managers can be asked to describe the activities carried out by their employees within a particular work setting, which again may provide a template for operational research analysis; and

The value of carrying out the perceptual blueprinting technique in various permutations, and bringing them together to form a master blueprint, can result in a map of the front-room activities as perceived by customers, employees and management, together with the back-room activities, as perceived by employees and management. Such an integrated blueprint may show clear perceptual differences between and amongst customers, employees and management, and thereby provide valuable insight into where employees and management have a misunderstanding of customers and each other. Since service offerings should be viewed from the comprehensive and holistic

perspective, this approach may provide greater insight into understanding and controlling service quality by highlighting causal links rather than just adopting a narrow, piecemeal approach. This approach may even be extended to include suppliers to the organisation.

With some of these applications it is also possible to build 'time' into the models. Customers could be asked to identify areas where they felt the service took too long, which can be marked as visible 'service' failpoints on a blueprint, and employees could be asked to identify areas where they (perceived that they) had difficulties in delivering a speedy service, which can also be marked as 'operational failpoints'. The correlation of service and operational failpoints will therefore identify those areas where the service process has to be improved for the benefit of either the customer, and/or the employee. Eliminating the operational failpoints may of course automatically eliminate the service failpoints.

Additionally the technique can also be applied on a longitudinal basis to assess if implemented quality assurance programmes, or improved training programmes, have had a positive effect through the reduction or disappearance of failpoints. A longitudinal study can also monitor customer habits over time to identify trends and patterns in their behaviour, and provide management with clear evidence of popular (heavy usage) and less popular (light usage) activities, and emerging and disappearing activities. By detailing actual customer activities as opposed to planned activities, the technique can illustrate service delivery systems in action. This may actually inform senior management of something previously unknown and alert them to customer activities which they need to be aware of.

There are no doubt several more features that can be built into the perceptual blueprinting technique, with various applications becoming possible, but essentially the perceptual blueprinting technique discussed in this study is best viewed as an educational tool for organisational use. It is more 'an-after-the-fact' research technique rather than a predictive technique, since it focuses on perceptions of an existing situation. It offers numerous advantages in its ability to document varying perceptions in pictorial form for simple communication purposes. This graphical display itself should provide some educational benefits to management, and even to the analyst, and if used for training or re-training purposes, employees may find that their perceptions will become modified, even through the simplest explication. As with the soft systems methodology, the technique helps to provide structure to vague, 'unstructured' situations, and helps individuals to explore the broader aspects of a problem situation rather than just an 'assumed' problem [Checkland 1981].

The previous chapter mentioned that the perceptual blueprints for this study were collected by the researcher during one-to-one interviews with employees, and further mentioned it is possible to

carry out this exercise in groups of employees, similar to a quality circle, whereby several individuals can contribute to the master perceptual blueprint and subsequently help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the package. The group interviews may even be more productive than the individual interviews in some quality assurance programmes since it can generate a certain amount of divergent and creative thinking to problem resolution. Many of these possibilities can be considered under the concept of total quality management.

## **8.4. Total quality management and perceptual blueprinting**

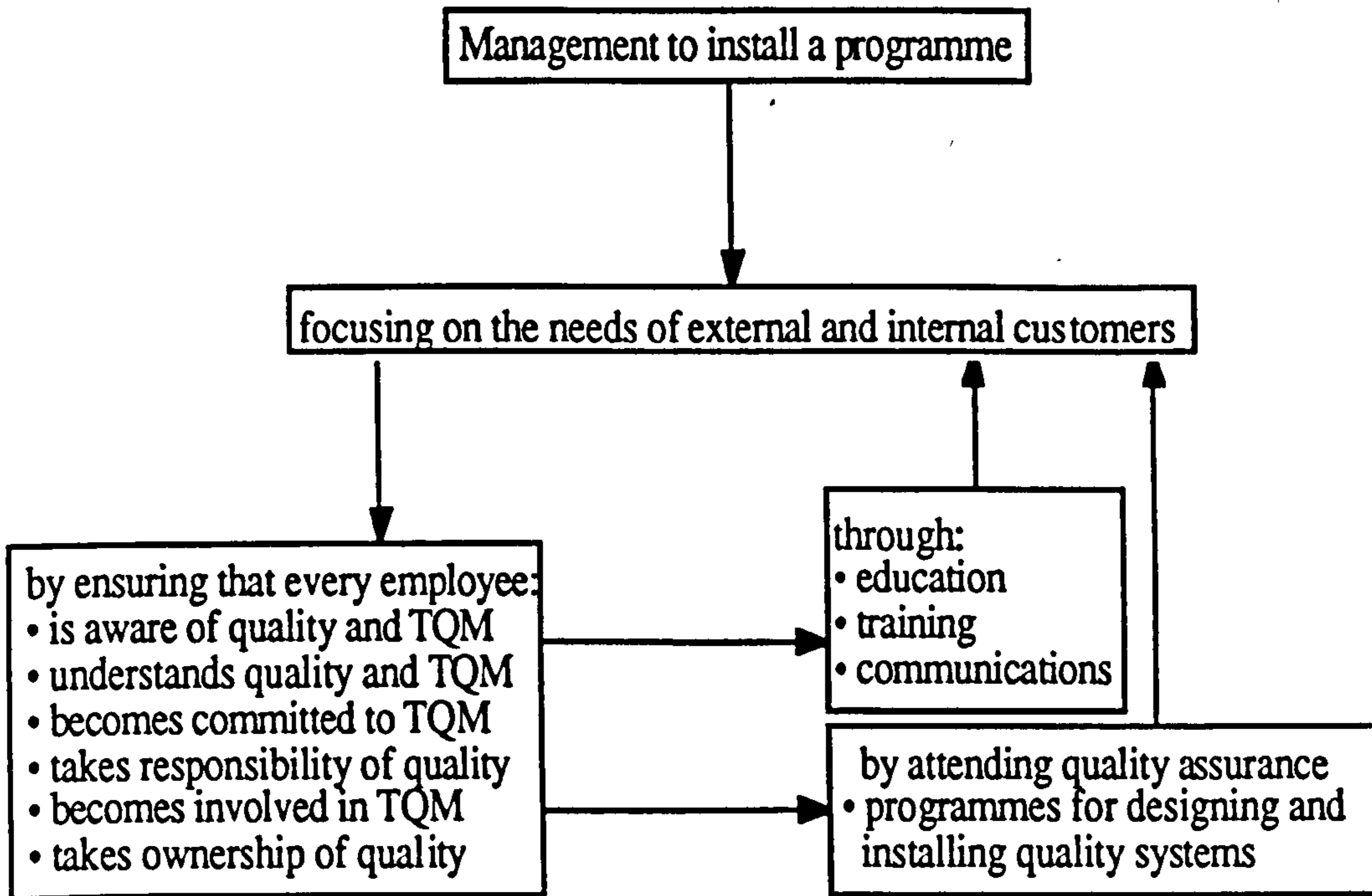
### **8.4.1. Total quality management**

Total quality management (TQM) is an operational philosophy based on the premise that providing customers with good quality products and services on a consistent basis is crucial for the survival and prosperity of organisations. It considers that poor quality is unnecessarily expensive since it leads to correction costs, scrap costs and customer dissatisfaction. TQM is therefore about building quality into products and services and thereby preventing poor quality occurring [Crosby 1979; Deming 1986; Feigenbaum 1983; Ishikawa 1986; Juran 1988; Oakland 1991]. This principle may be even more important for 'pure' services, i.e. those services with largely intangible products, where inspecting service encounters after the event is essentially too late.

TQM recognises that there are several needs to be satisfied. The owners of organisations require a continued return on their investment; customers in the marketplace (external customers) want consistently reliable supplies of quality products and services; and employees in the organisation (internal customers) need consistently reliable supplies of quality raw materials and appropriate systems and tools to produce and deliver quality products and services. TQM is called an 'operational philosophy' since it offers practical tools and principles to help organisations meet these needs. It is 'total' since it affects every individual and activity in an organisation; it is 'quality' since it is about satisfying the wants and needs of an organisation's stakeholders, i.e. owners, customers and employees; and it is 'management' because it requires management to initiate and drive a quality programme.

To ensure that every individual and activity in an organisation works towards providing for the needs of stakeholders, management can introduce a quality improvement programme based on TQM principles. Figure 8-5 illustrates a systematic, structured and coordinated TQM approach leading to quality improvement in an organisation.

**Figure 8-5: Generic TQM Model**



The model in Figure 8-5 illustrates a generic approach to implementing the essential stages of TQM into an organisation. It is 'generic' since the stages have been culled from the writings of the various 'Quality Gurus' [Bendell 1990], such as Crosby (1979), Feigenbaum (1983), Deming (1986), Ishikawa (1986), Juran (1988), and Oakland (1991) [Dotchin and Oakland 1991]. However these principles are not exclusive to these so called gurus since many of them are repetitions and consolidations of the writings of general management authors [Duncan and Van Matre 1990].

TQM starts with management since they are in control of operational activities in an organisation. It requires that management plan and direct all the activities towards the needs of both external and internal customers in a methodical, deliberate and integrated way. Although quality control is the responsibility of every individual in an organisation, Juran (1988) and Crosby (1979) emphasised the need for senior management to take the initiative in quality control and ultimate responsibility for poor quality. Both Deming (1986) and Juran (1988) stressed the need for management to adopt structured, systematic and rigorous approaches to quality control as part of their daily activities rather than as discrete and isolated attempts. The success of some of the fastest growing services, such as fast food chains, has been largely attributed to the adoption of systematic approaches to design [Pickworth 1988] even though they might not outwardly practice TQM principles.

The model in Figure 8-5 shows that the steps to implement TQM in an organisation can be carried out both sequentially and over-lapping. These steps are:

Awareness - This stage requires that every employee becomes aware of the value of quality and

TQM and that a quality climate and culture is developed and fostered in the organisation. The awareness stage is considered to be crucial in 'priming' both management and employees before actually implementing any action. The concept of organisational culture, or social context of the workplace [Albrecht 1990], has also received considerable attention in the literature, and is widely acknowledged in organisations because of its reputed long-term positive effect on organisational performance and profits through improved customer and employee relationships [Baker 1980; Deshpande and Webster 1989; Evardsson and Gustavsson 1988; Glover 1987; Ogbanna and Wilkinson 1988]. Lockwood and Jones (1989) and Smith and Lewis (1989) consider that developing a 'service' culture in an organisation is a prerequisite to ensuring that employees deliver good service quality on a consistent basis;

Understanding - The next crucial stage is ensuring that every employee understands how TQM can be implemented. This usually requires formal and structured education and training programmes on quality control techniques, i.e. which techniques to choose, how to use them, and when best to use them. Since variation is considered to be the cause of most quality problems, many of these techniques focus on statistical processes which are effective in identifying and controlling variation and deviation from accepted norms. Deming (1986), Juran (1988) and Ishikawa (1985) believed that a high level of importance should be given to educating and training both management and employees on a continuous basis, rather than on an ad hoc basis;

Commitment - Ensuring that employees' are aware of the value of quality and understand how TQM operates should develop a sense of commitment within the organisation [Smith 1989]. This commitment is essential since TQM is a user-driven philosophy which cannot be imposed on from the outside but 'must be developed in the minds of everyone in the organisation' [Dotchin and Oakland 1991]. In its minimum form this commitment must extend throughout the organisation with all levels of management continually being committed and being seen to be committed to all quality improvement initiatives;

Responsibility - Although the interface between customer and employee is often considered to be the most difficult area to control [Armistead et al 1986; Chase 1978], each and every employee is a supplier to a customer (external customer) or to another employee (internal customer) [George 1990]. Total quality therefore requires that every member in an organisation is responsible for quality control within their own area to ensure that the end customer receives a quality product [Berry et al 1985; Cornish 1988]. Crosby (1979), Feigenbaum (1983), Ishikawa (1985) and Juran (1988) all stressed the importance of involving employees in quality control throughout the organisation, and treating all employees as internal customers;

Involvement - To reinforce total commitment and responsibility every employee in the organisation



must be allowed to become involved in quality assurance. This may involve attending quality circles or contributing to suggestion boxes. Top management in an organisation though must develop their own quality 'mentality' before involving the whole organisation; and

Ownership - The ultimate aim here is to allow employees to take ownership of changes and quality control in their section through their involvement in quality assurance. Ownership develops and breeds a sense of personal responsibility towards changes and quality work. Albrecht (1990) expands this by emphasising that employees should accept ownership by becoming involved in service planning and take responsibility of the values behind service excellence to ensure a successful delivery.

#### 8.4.2. Quality circles and perceptual blueprinting

As illustrated in Figure 8-5, employees may become more involved in quality by attending quality assurance programmes through such methods as 'quality circles'. Although quality circles originated in the United States in the 1950's, it has continuously received very little support amongst Western firms, management and employees. The concept was taken to Japan where it was pioneered by Ishikawa (1985) during the 1960's and where it is said to have had considerable success in contributing to the post-war success of Japanese industry. Since then it has been re-imported to the West where its success has been very mixed [Bendell 1991]. The problems associated with quality circles being successful in the West are largely attributed to an inadequate understanding of the technique and the lack of a properly developed quality culture before its implementation into an organisation. However Bendell (1990) comments that quality circles have also failed in Japan through lack of interest or excessive intervention by management.

Quality circles are groups of employees who come together on a regular basis to investigate and solve work-related problems, and then submit proposals for change and improvement to management. The circles are usually made up of between four to twelve employees, often as unpaid volunteers, who work in the same area and subsequently are able to provide an informed contribution to problem resolution. Often the groups are led by a trained facilitator who may even be a supervisor within the same work area. Although their use has been limited in the West, their success has been reported in a wide range of businesses, including those in the hotel and catering industry, in banking, and in the construction industry [Bozman and Gibson 1986; Orly 1988; Rosenfeld et al 1991; Smith 1989].

The perceptual blueprinting technique was not designed specifically for quality circles, but it may in fact prove to be a valuable tool for use in such circles. For example, a suggested approach may be to link it up with the steps in Figure 8-4, as shown in Figure 8-6.

**Figure 8-6: Perceptual blueprinting in quality circles**

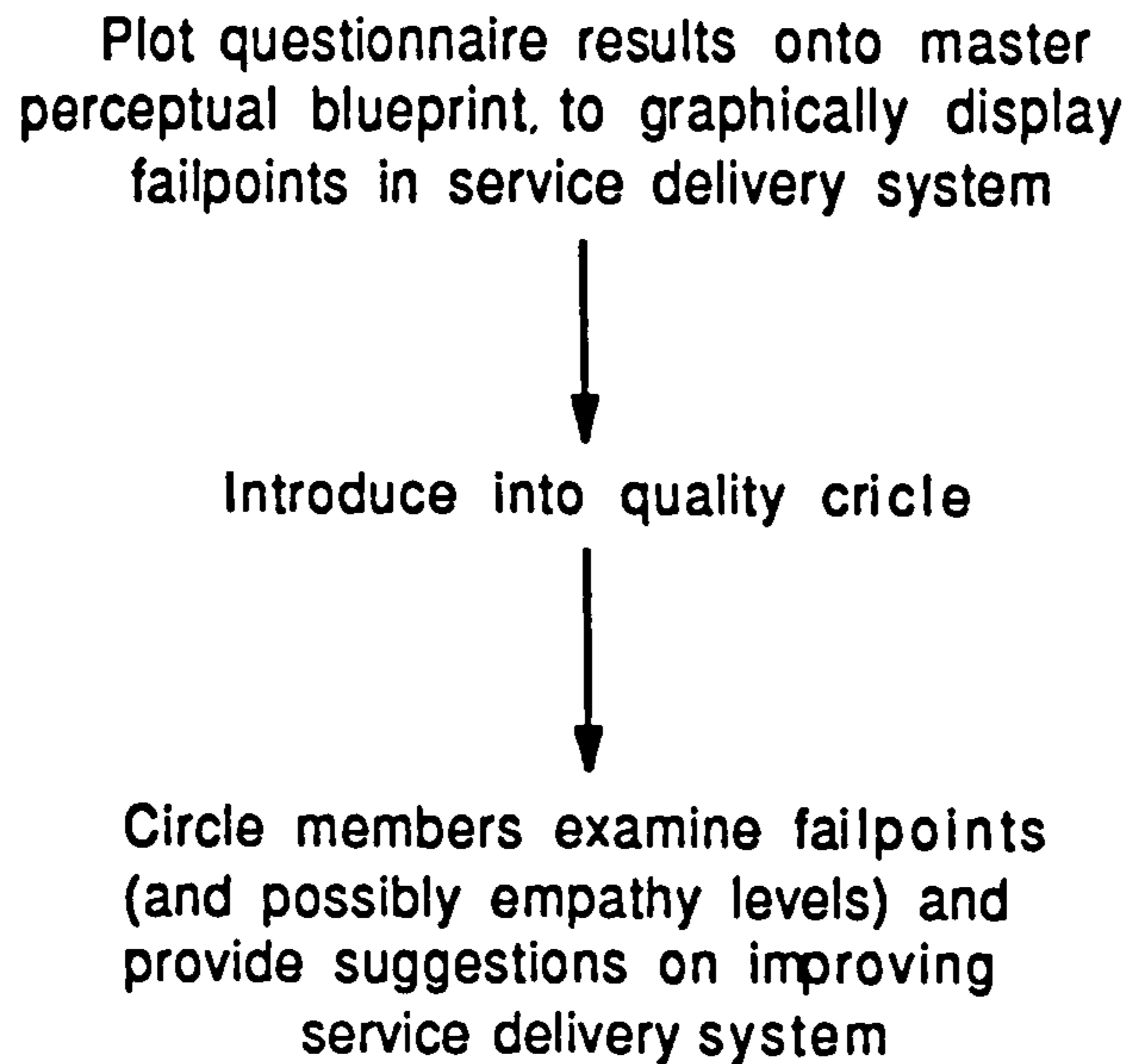


Figure 8-6 shows that once the master perceptual blueprint has been completed with service failpoints displayed, the blueprint can be introduced into a circle. The circle members can then analyse the blueprint, debate its issues, and provide suggestions for suitable courses of action to eliminate the failpoints and subsequently improve the service delivery system. The advantages for using the blueprint in circles are that:

- (a) it provides a structure for analysis by detailing service delivery systems in a logical and sequential approach which all organisational members should be able to relate to [Checkland 1981];
- (b) it provides a graphical illustration of potentially very complex situations for easy communication amongst members;
- (c) for a more detailed analysis, first-level models can be expanded to a higher resolution level;
- (d) it can promote employees' understanding of how their contribution interacts and affects the whole service delivery system which is especially valuable for complex service packages [Dotchin and Oakland 1991];
- (e) it can generate a unity of purpose amongst the members, i.e. by suggesting ways in which the delivery system can be improved for the benefit of the customer it ensures that any analyses or proposed changes focus primarily on service quality issues rather than unrelated operational or personnel issues;
- (f) it may identify the actual boundary of the service delivery system and the activities which may

impinge upon service quality by allowing respondents freedom in articulating their own perceived activities;

(g) it may help to identify and 'flag' operational failpoints which represent operational difficulties;

(h) it can illustrate clearly the location and concentration of existing service and operational failpoints in the system; and

(i) it ensures that proposed changes will be culturally acceptable and technically feasible whilst at the same time remaining customer-oriented by involving affected organisational members in the analysis.

As with conventional quality circles, the perceptual blueprinting technique can be used with members from one department only, or it can be used with members from several departments, or it can be used with members from completely different functional areas. On occasions 'guest experts' may be invited to contribute to issues which require conceptually or technically difficult solutions.

Whichever arrangement is used a cross-departmental or cross-functional approach is useful for studying areas which have ramifications crossing departmental or functional boundaries by ensuring that proposed changes are both feasible and 'culturally' acceptable. As with many problem solving situations there may be concensus in 'what' should be changed, but in politically difficult situations where the need is to reconcile potentially conflicting needs, the 'how' to implement change may have to be selected from a range of alternatives [Checkland 1981]. The multi-perspective approach can be used to force involved individuals out of their biased and protective viewpoints, alter their perceptions, and subsequently look at situations from an objective and multi-perspective viewpoint (an issue which appears to have been successful with the PNI method employed in the roadside lodge study with the employee-respondents). Since changes in organisations are often difficult to implement [Ritchie 1987], the involvement of employees with PB in quality circles may facilitate changes in a controlled way due to the circle members being aware of the history, logistics and outcome of proposed changes. PB therefore is as much as identifying a 'social' process as well as identifying an 'activity-based' process which is characteristic of the hard, objective systems approaches.

As with many TQM approaches, the benefits of PB in quality circles may not be immediately apparent, but a continuous drive to quality by senior management should realise the pay-offs over a cumulative period. Although its prominence may fluctuate throughout the life of its use in organisations, the changing nature of marketplaces and increasing demands of customers may prevent it from becoming completely redundant. Its use may even be further extended by using the

technique to improve service quality for different and emerging market segments [Pickworth 1988].

As shown by the TQM model in Figure 8-4 with the introduction of quality assurance programmes, the PB technique may have to be introduced after an organisation has already moved down the path of TQM to ensure its initial and continued acceptance and success. The technique can certainly aid the TQM approach by increasing employees' 'awareness' and 'understanding' of the service delivery system they operate within, and any changes they propose which are successfully implemented should improve their 'commitment' to quality and promote their sense of 'ownership' of the changes. The use of the PB technique may even serve as a useful preliminary to the implementation of a quality system, such as BS 5750, in an organisation by involving employees and enabling them to articulate their perceptions and concerns of existing procedures and thereby help to prepare an organisation for such a system.

## 8.5. Conclusions

The perceptual blueprint might usefully be described as a conceptual model based on reality as perceived by its users rather than remote academics or analysts. Although the technique has been developed experientially in this study with only a very limited application in collecting and analysing empirical data, it has been theoretically integrated with real management action, such as that through total quality management. A limitation of this technique was its inability to map customer and employee perceptions of the service onto the blueprint, a limitation though which would be eliminated using the modified approach illustrated in Figure 8-4. However the positive features of the way the technique was used in this study was its ability to expose an area of activities which should correlated with the main areas of customer dissatisfaction, i.e. the provision of table service for lodge guests, and by providing a framework for service delivery analysis. Furthermore this chapter illustrated how the technique can be integrated and used as part of a total quality management approach, in particular with quality circles, or it can be integrated within a much more comprehensive organisational analysis, such as that shown in Figure 8-2. It is not known at this stage how many other applications the technique could generate apart from those already discussed in this study, but many of the principles underpinning it may provide a fertile ground for other areas of research outside service delivery system and organisational analysis. It may be particularly useful in educational and training situations where the emphasis is on illustrating that the service delivery system is not a mere random aggregate of components, but is an integral whole with emergent properties and with different services and products impacting upon the perceived quality of the system at various stages.

## Footnotes to Chapter VIII

1. The method for the perceptual blueprinting technique was discussed in Chapter V.

2. The six activities relating to the restaurant facilities and services were:

'sold the idea of vouchers'

'sit down'

'look at menu'

'have pre-meal drink'

'give order'

'pay bill'

The remaining two activities were:

're-book'

'book another lodge'

Capturing discrete activities reflects the possibility that customers rate services as a series of events over time [Oberoi 1989], with prior poor experiences having a 'domino' effect on subsequent activities.

## **Chapter IX**

### **Findings and Conclusions**

## **9.1. Introduction**

This study has been conducted to show how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience'. The study has reviewed the literature on service quality and has collected a large amount of data on customers' perceptions of service quality in the UK roadside lodge sector, and on service employees' perceptions of their customers' perceptions. The data collected has concurred with much of the literature reviewed on many issues, which has provided a greater understanding of the concept of service quality and on how it may be delivered more effectively on a consistent basis. This chapter will discuss both the methodological and managerial findings of the study and propose further research opportunities that have emerged from the study.

## **9.2. Methodological findings**

Three main research techniques were employed in this study to achieve the research aim. Two of these techniques were developed by other researchers whilst the third was developed in the course of this study. These three techniques are:

- Kelly's repertory grid technique;
- SERVQUAL statement-questionnaire technique; and
- Perceptual blueprinting technique.

Although these techniques all differ in their backgrounds and the type of data they are attempting to elicit, this study has found them to be complementary when employed to identify customers' assessment of service quality, and subsequently to identify employees' empathy levels for their customers.

### **9.2.1. Kelly's repertory grid technique**

George Kelly, a psychotherapist, developed the repertory grid technique for use with the personal construct theory. Kelly's (1955, 1963) work was based on helping individual's to psychologically re-construct their lives by first getting to understand their personal construct framework, and second to encourage them to view life in new ways. Kelly believed that understanding an individual's perceptions will help to understand their attitudes and behaviour. He commented that...'man creates his own ways of seeing the world in which he lives...' (Kelly 1963, p.12) and 'A person may misrepresent a real phenomenon...yet his misrepresentation will itself be entirely real' (p.8). This is one of the convictions that this study has based itself upon: whether perceptions are right or wrong, customers' perceptions may have a strong influence on their purchasing behaviour, and

furthermore, employees' perceptions may have a strong influence on the service they provide, even though it may not be possible to understand the connection between perceptions and behaviour due to intervening factors.

The repertory grid technique has been widely applied in other research studies outside psychotherapy, especially in the consumer behaviour field in service industries. Hallsworth (1988) provides a concise summary of the more recent applications in the retail industry and concludes that (p.53)...'The Kelly methodology of repertory grids is proving to be increasingly popular in the analysis of consumer perceptions'...because of its objectivity and ability to generate original and apposite constructs. Although there are disadvantages, such as being time-consuming and being restricted to small sample sizes, it still appears to be a useful technique for the purpose of generating and understanding respondent constructs, or customer service quality attributes.

Kelly though warned about the danger of copying ready-made theories and techniques which were designed for other foci of convenience. He proposed that theories can be transferred from one domain to another, but it is necessary to transfer the abstracted principles behind the theory rather than attempting to transfer and apply the concrete elements. The repertory grid technique has been widely used in different ways, and this study has used it differently again. Whether Kelly would agree with the way the technique has been used in this study is not known, but the principles behind the technique have served this study well in eliciting a range of responses which appeared, and were later substantiated, to be important to the respondents in this study.

The repertory grid technique in this study was adapted for use in the hospitality industry. The method enabled individual face-to-face interviews to be carried out with considerable objectivity and ease, and subsequently provided a comprehensive list of quality criteria relevant to a guest's overnight stay in hotel and lodge accommodation. This application followed some of the work by Nightingale (1983) in his study of consumers in the hotel and catering industry, and by the triad method used by Fountain et al (1987) in their study of consumers of motor cars.

### 9.2.2. SERVQUAL statement-questionnaires

The SERVQUAL technique was developed by Parasuraman et al (1986) in the service quality and marketing area. Many writers in the service quality and marketing literature have advocated that service quality is a perceptual phenomenon, and...'that service quality involves a comparison of expectations with performance' [Parasuraman et al 1985]. Most of the instruments and tools that had previously been developed involved two sets of measurements: one to measure expectations before purchase and one to measure perceptions after purchase. This two-step measurement though is not measuring service quality: it is measuring transaction quality [ibid]. Service quality has to be



measured by comparing expectations and perceptions after the purchase experience, which the SERVQUAL technique has been designed to achieve.

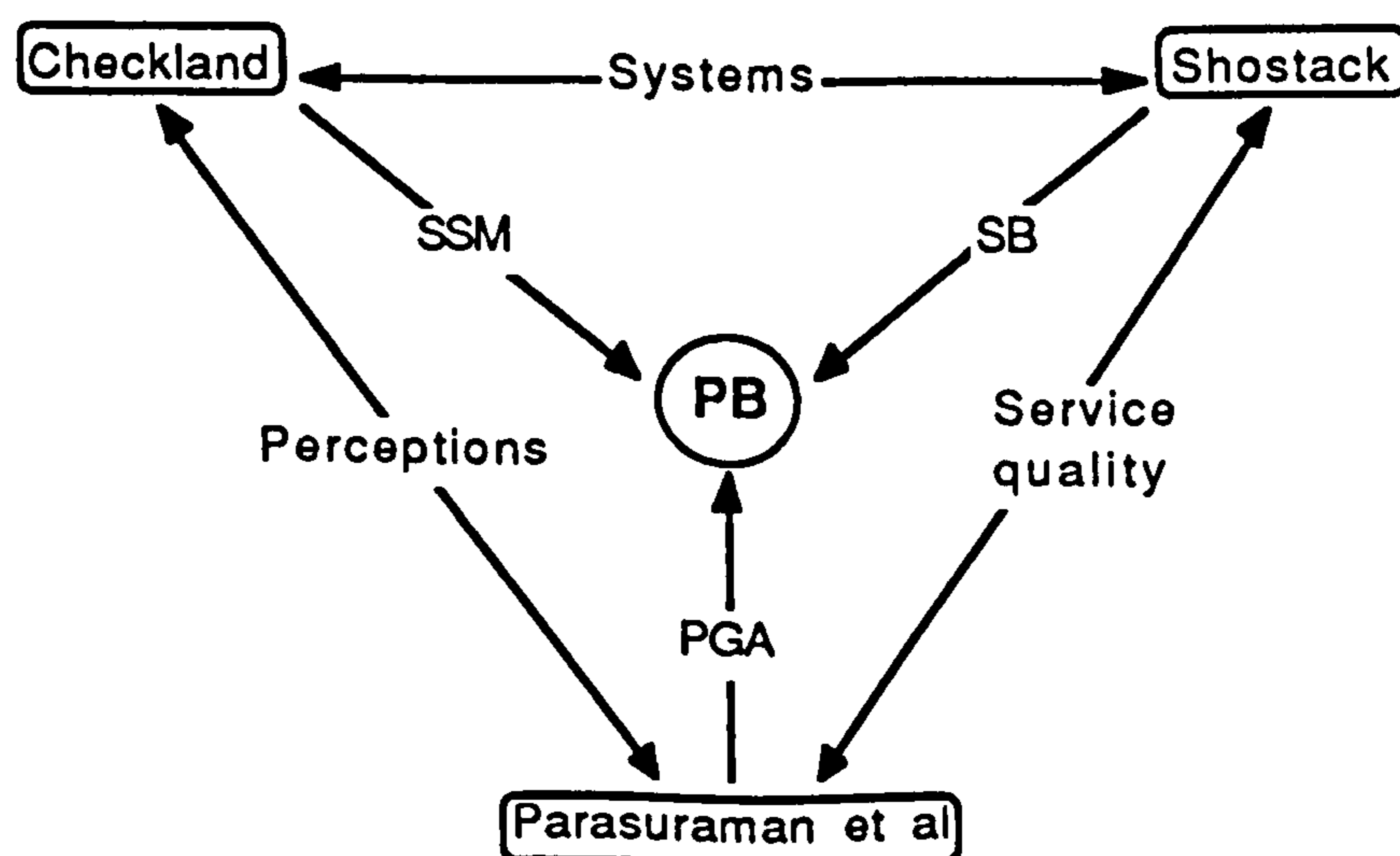
The SERVQUAL design was modified and used in this study to identify customers' assessment of service quality in the UK roadside lodge sector, and to measure employees' perceptions of customers' service quality assessments. The instrument enabled the attributes generated in the repertory interviews to be assessed for expectations and perceptions amongst a large sample of customers, and then amongst a smaller sample of employees. This measuring approach provides an indication of how well each attribute has performed according to customers' expectations, and enables the employees' perceptions of their customers' service quality assessments to be measured in an attempt to identify employees' empathy levels.

Because the SERVQUAL instrument is a highly structured tool which attempts to measure a vague and multi-faceted concept, i.e. service quality, it was considered to be more advantageous to compare the results from the questionnaires with data generated from a qualitative technique. The SERVQUAL instrument provides the opportunity to generate a very large amount of data using large samples of respondents, and can therefore provide results that are reliable. However the qualitative technique, which is more suited to small samples, provides the opportunity to assess the validity of the results generated from the SERVQUAL instrument.

### 9.2.3. Perceptual blueprinting

Perceptual blueprinting (PB) is the technique which was developed during this research study, and although it was used to provide qualitative data to support the quantitative data, the technique offered other benefits for this study. PB was developed using the concepts from three primary literature sources integrated with three primary techniques, as illustrated in Figure 9-1.

Figure 9-1: Sources of Perceptual Blueprinting



The figure shows that the PB technique has its foundations in the systems discipline, the phenomenological movement, and the service quality literature, using concepts mainly from Checkland's (1981) 'soft systems methodology' (SSM), Shostack's (1984) 'service blueprinting' technique (SB), and Parasuraman et al's (1985) 'perceptual gap analysis' (PGA). Although all three literature sources and techniques are very different from each other, they all share overlapping interests and concepts which has promoted the use of them in a complementary way, i.e. through the PB technique.

The systems perspective has always been seen as a valuable way in which problem areas in manufacturing processes can be viewed, but it is now being considered increasingly valuable in viewing other processes, especially those that focus on human situations which are often nebulous and lack clear structure [Checkland 1985]. Although the systems approach provides an opportunity to think about a topic or situation in a completely different way, it is not actually trying to impose systems on our everyday world. Systems thinking is just a human artifact which does not actually exist - it is simply a method of investigation which provides a means of coming to terms with the world we live in [Susman 1979].

The phenomenological movement stimulated the idea that understanding perceptions may help to understand behaviour, and that multiple perceptions are both 'possible' and 'legitimate' [Wilson 1984]. The PB technique in this study was used to elicit and document employees' perceptions of their customers' experiences, and document customers' perceptions of their experiences. First it identified employees' non-evaluative perceptions of customers' typical movements and activities within a service delivery system; then it identified employees' perceptions of the strengths associated with the service delivery system; and finally it identified employees' perceptions of those areas where they thought the service package could be improved - for the benefit of customer experiences. The technique also provided a structure to the analyses stages by illustrating the service delivery system in an orderly way and highlighting areas in the service delivery system where perceptual gaps between employees and customers exist.

The service quality literature, and the growing interest in service quality in general, provided the impetus and main focus for this study. The service quality literature is still in the early stages of developing rigorous methods of study and analyses, and the PB technique has been proposed as a suitable technique for advancing the study and subsequent understanding of service quality control. The PB technique though has based itself on the belief that understanding service quality must anchor itself to the perceptions of customers, and service quality delivery may be controlled through the perceptions of employees.

#### 9.2.4. Perceptions, phenomenology and systems

The three techniques used in this study, i.e. the repertory grid, SERVQUAL, and perceptual blueprinting, all consider that perceptions are real to the perceiving individual, however erroneous or distorted they may be, and that perceptions may have a significant influence on behaviour. This belief is largely shared by the phenomenological movement [Bullock and Stallybrass 1977], and is said to be gaining popularity, albeit at a very slow rate. Vickers, a systems-thinking phenomenologist, commented in 1983 that... 'Positivism has passed its heyday and more modest assumptions have taken its place'. However this assumption may have been somewhat premature. Lutz (1989), as editor of The Journal of Consumer Research, carried out an informal content analysis of unsolicited contributions to his journal, and he concluded that the positivist paradigm still continues to dominate the consumer research field, but the postmodern movement (which includes phenomenological approaches) does represent a small but steady growth. He added that... 'the postmodern paradigm is clearly of heuristic value for the field, offering new methods, new substantive topics, and new criteria for judging research, in short, a whole new world'. However Gummesson (1988), Shrivastava (1987) and Thompson (1989) have all commented that consumer and business research is still dominated by 'logical positivism' and the 'positivistic, natural scientific school', with which the marketing world, consumer research field, and academic community prefer.

The systems discipline has traditionally been dominated by objective and mechanistic methods of analyses, such as operational research (OR), which do not recognise or accommodate the 'human factor'. However some researchers, such as Jackson (1990), are now attempting to make traditional OR approaches more sensitive to the softer issues of organisational analysis and change. Soft systems thinking has added the phenomenological perspective to the systems discipline, by recognising the value of both systems concepts and the phenomenological perspective. Service blueprinting added systems concepts to services, by recognising that services can be effectively viewed from a holistic, process-oriented perspective. Perceptual blueprinting combines these complementary approaches and concepts to form a phenomenological systems tool for investigating service delivery systems from the actors' viewpoint. The combination of these approaches therefore recognises the co-existence of technical and social issues within the service delivery system, and furthermore, recognises that any change to a system must ask not only 'what' should be changed, but also 'how' it should be changed to become 'technically efficient' and 'culturally acceptable' respectively [Huete and Roth 1988; Susman 1979; Wilson 1984]. Perceptual blueprinting therefore is a 'soft' [phenomenological] systems tool which can be applied to 'hard' [actual] system environments where the human element is a major consideration in understanding and implementing change.

### **9.2.5. Perceptions and behaviour**

Although much of the literature and discussion in this thesis has focused on the customers' assessment of service quality and on the employees' perceptions of customers' service expectations and perceptions, the study has not attempted to measure the connection between perceptions and behaviour. Much of the literature used in this study makes an implicit assumption that perceptions influence behaviour, but there has been little attention given to the testing and measurement of this connection. It appears that the service quality literature is still in its infancy in focusing on the definitions of perceptions and has not yet progressed to developing predictive measurements between perceptions and behaviour. The psychology literature though has investigated the connection between attitudes and behaviour, and considerable research evidence has concluded that there is not a direct correlation between the two concepts due to the influence of situational factors that intervene between attitudes and behaviour, as discussed in Chapter I. It is difficult therefore to explicitly state that positive perceptions of service quality lead directly to increased patronage and good word of mouth communications, but this study does take the view that perceptions of good service quality are likely to be more beneficial to a service provider over time than perceptions of poor service quality. Furthermore, it is not possible to state how employees may have developed a good empathy for their customers (apart from employees sharing the same value system as their customers) if customers' behaviour is not a reliable indicator of their attitudes, expectations and perceptions.

### **9.3. Managerial findings**

Although the data presented in this study has been of a 'proprietary' nature, its implications have some relevance to the lodging industry as a whole and to services in general. The study focused on a small but fast expanding sector of the UK hospitality industry where good service quality is considered to be crucial to its continued success, but where the concept of service quality appears to be poorly understood. This study has addressed this problem by reviewing the literature and by providing some empirical data which resolves some of the difficulties associated with the consistent delivery of service quality.

#### **9.3.1. The lodge concept**

The lodge concept has clearly been shown to be a popular and sought-after product, and its future success appears to be assured for some time within the UK marketplace. However the present and predicted growth patterns for this sector suggest that intense competition will occur within some locations, and that competition could easily focus on the concept of service quality [Senior and Akehurst 1988]. Service quality in this context means offering well-coordinated service packages

that comprises of complementary lodging and refreshment services and facilities provided by complementary human resources.

The substantive results for this study have been drawn from four separate sources: (i) structured questionnaires completed by customers; (ii) unstructured comments provided by customers (through the repertory interviews and the unstructured section of the questionnaires); (iii) structured questionnaires completed by employees; and (iv) unstructured comments provided by employees. The use of four separate sources was to ensure that the data is both reliable and valid, and thereby authenticate both the methodological techniques used and the data collected. The results from the study can be considered under two general areas which make up the service delivery system at roadside lodges: (a) the lodging facility, and (b) the refreshment facility.

#### (a) The lodging facility

The findings from the four data sources have indicated that 'cleanliness' is one of the most important elements to a lodging facility, and one of the best performing elements in the lodges investigated. The customer and employee SERVQUAL questionnaires showed consistently high scores and low S.D. values for this attribute, which was supported by the customer and employee comments. This result is consistent with other hotel studies discussed earlier that have indicated that cleanliness is one of the most important elements in assessing hospitality products [Atkinson 1988; Cadotte and Turgeon 1988; Cornwell Self 1988; Institute of Sales and Marketing Management 1988; Knutson 1988; Lewis 1988; Nightingale 1985; Wilensky and Buttle 1988].

The provision of 'childrens' facilities' appears to represent one of the least desired attributes investigated in this study. The repertory grid techniques failed to give it a high rating, but upon the request of the client-organisation this variable was included in the SERVQUAL questionnaires. The questionnaire results subsequently gave this attribute a consistently low value for both the expectation and perception dimensions by both customers and employees. On the surface this would indicate that childrens' facilities are not required by this client-base and that their provision or performance was low. However because the S.D. values for this variable for the expectation dimension were quite wide, this suggests that opinions on the provision of childrens' facilities varied quite considerably, i.e. some respondents considered that they definitely should be provided whilst others considered that they should definitely not be provided.

The provision of an in-room telephone did not emerge as being particularly important in the repertory interviews, but again upon the request of the client-organisation this attribute was included in the SERVQUAL questionnaire. Due the wording of this question in the SERVQUAL instrument though it was not possible to subject this question to the same analytical techniques as the other

questions (see Appendix B2), but the results from this question did indicate that an in-room telephone would be very useful, but guests did not want to pay extra for its provision. The absence of a telephone appeared to be a source of some dissatisfaction when the customer comments were analysed and therefore might suggest that the in-room telephone is either an 'important', 'maintaining' or 'dissatisfying' variable (see Cadotte and Turgeon 1988, Czepiel 1990, and Lewis 1984), i.e. that its provision does not provide satisfaction but its absence causes dissatisfaction.

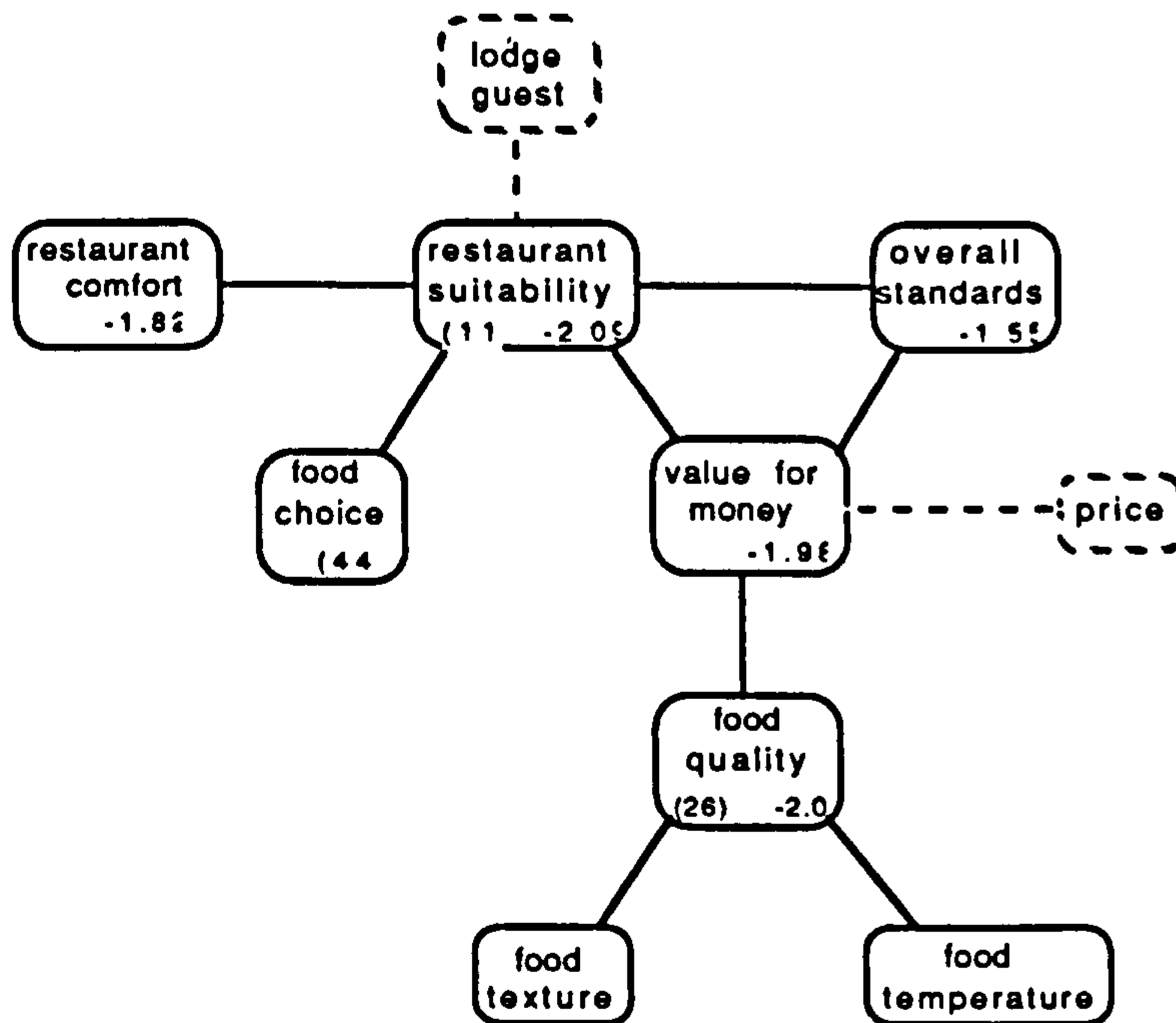
Most of the other variables in the lodging facility appeared to generate less extreme values, and it could be deduced that the lodging facility has been well received. However if competition does become intense in some locations, as predicted by this researcher, then these variables may generate shifting priorities and perceptions.

#### (b) The refreshment facility

It appears that senior management of the Quickchef organisation have not considered refreshment facilities as being a significant part of the lodge concept service package. However several of the data sources indicated that the catering facilities are an important part of the lodge service package as perceived by both the customers and employees. The repertory interviews illustrated that catering facilities may become a determining factor when choosing between two hotels: the structured questionnaires from both customers and employees showed consistently low performance levels for the restaurant attributes; the unstructured comments in the customer questionnaires generated considerable comments relating to the inadequacy of the catering facilities for lodge guests; the perceptual blueprinting technique identified that many lodge guests use the catering facilities; and that the unstructured comments from the employees considered that the service package includes catering facilities which were not performing particularly well. Overall the customer questionnaires indicated that 84.4 percent of their negative perceptions related to the restaurant facility whilst the employee questionnaires indicated that 83.9 percent of customers' negative perceptions related to the restaurant facility.

Figure 9-2 shows the main issues which underpin the negative perceptions of the refreshment facilities which have been extracted from both the quantitative and qualitative studies (taken from Tables 6-5 and 7-1 respectively).

Figure 9-2: Quality failures from both studies as perceived by customers



Key:                    negative values represent SERVQUAL scores  
                           bracketed values represent critical comments

Figure 9-2 illustrates the major quality failures relating to the food and suitability of the restaurants. Customer comments indicated that texture of the food suffered whilst standing in food counters, and that the food went cold after the customer had eventually passed through the self-service system. This led to poor perceptions of food quality which was supported by the questionnaire results. Perceptions of food quality, combined with price, leads to poor perceptions of value for money, which in turn reflects poorly on the overall standards as identified in the questionnaire results. These factors combined with poor food choice, identified from the customer comments and poor comfort levels identified from the questionnaires, results in an overall poor perception of restaurant suitability for lodge guests, as identified by both the customer comments and the questionnaire results.

These results therefore indicate that there is a perceived problem with the restaurant facility associated with the lodge package, and it also indicates that both the quantitative and qualitative studies have partly validated each other by concurring on some of the issues. Table 9-1 briefly lists the main areas that the employees thought were problematic (taken from Tables 6-9 and 7-21).

**Table 9-1: Employees' assessment of quality failures**

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Table 6-9</u>	<u>Table 7-21</u>
Q14 Suitability of restaurants	-1.00	(16)
Q19 Food quality in restaurants	-1.09	
Q23 Value for money in restaurants	-1.25	
Coverway		(12)
Platters		(9)
Waitress service		(6)

**Key:** Table 6-9 provides negative SERVQUAL values

Table 7-21 provides critical comments

Table 9-1 shows that the employee questionnaires and the interviews singled out the restaurant facility as being the most problematic. The questionnaires indicated that the employees thought that the customers did not get value for money, the food quality was poor, and the restaurants were not suitable for lodge guests. The employee interviews indicated that the employees thought the restaurants were not suitable for lodge guests, that there should be a coverway between the lodge and restaurant for guests' comfort, and that the Platters restaurant and waitress service were difficult to operate at a reasonable quality level due to manning and volume control difficulties.

In summary it appears that the respondent-guests in this study are generally displeased with part of the service package, namely the refreshment facilities. One could hypothesise that the client-organisation is offering refreshment facilities which are not appealing to overnight guests (which may perceive themselves as 'hotel guests') since they have been designed for the fast-throughput, high-volume motorist trade. The 'process' attributes in the restaurant generated the most negative values and comments from both customers and employees, and since these attributes are influenced by the actions of the employees, this may indicate that many of the problems can be resolved by understanding and improving the food service system for diners and by improving the technical and social skills of the employees. Unlike the 'structural' attributes, these process attributes can be acted upon at local level to bring fairly rapid results. Changing the structural attributes for lodge guests would involve considerably more time and financial investment, and may not be economical considering the small numbers of guests that would use the service. Since the concept of service quality is still critical though, the service may be partly improved by controlling customers' expectations before they sample the service, an issue which may be addressed through appropriate communication messages to the marketplace.



### **9.3.2. Customers' assessment of service quality**

This study has attempted to understand customers' assessment of service quality in the roadside lodge sector using the repertory interviews and the SERVQUAL questionnaires. The findings, which have been partly covered in the preceding section, have indicated that service quality relates to a multitude of attributes, both tangible and intangible, across a wide area, i.e. within the lodging and refreshment sections of the service package. However the findings from this study have implications beyond the lodge concept and extend into all hospitality products, and all service industries.

This study has supported much of the literature on its definition of service quality by accepting that it is essentially a concept which exists in the mind of each and every customer, and can be measured by comparing customers' separate expectations and separate perceptions. The repertory interviews illustrated how a battery of service-related attributes can be elicited from customers when they are considering a choice between two competing providers. The SERVQUAL questionnaires showed how important these various attributes can be assessed on a relative scale and how well they are performing according to how well they should perform. The unstructured comments in the questionnaires provided further indications to which attributes created satisfaction and dissatisfaction amongst customers.

In summary the key elements of quality identified in this study for lodge guests appear to be broadly related to: good housekeeping (cleanliness), professional service (service, friendliness), value for money (relative prices for standards), and standard of food (food quality). These with other attributes translate into perceptions of overall quality which was also considered to be a key element. As illustrated in the literature review these attributes can be divided into tangibles and intangibles, but in most cases it appears that the critical attributes are often represented by the intangibles.

Providers of services and products in the marketplace therefore have to recognise that assessments of good service quality depend upon (1) what attributes are required for a service package or service experience, (ii) what level should these attributes be performing, and (iii) how well are they performing. The provider can influence assessments of good service quality (a) by promising only those attributes which they can effectively provide on a consistent basis, and (b) by delivering those attributes to the required or promised level.

### **9.3.3. Employees' perceptions**

This section considers the identification in this study of employees' perceptions of customers'

expectations and perceptions of service quality, i.e. employees' empathy levels. The SERVQUAL technique provided measurements of customers' satisfaction levels and employees' empathy levels, whilst the unstructured study, which used both customer and employee unstructured comments, provided evidence of customers' satisfaction levels and employees' empathy levels.

The SERVQUAL technique showed that employees consistently underestimated the importance of the lodge and restaurant attributes, but overestimated the importance of childrens' facilities (Table 6-13). It may be hypothesised that the almost exclusive underestimation is a reflection of the measuring instrument, or whether it has captured true comparisons. The technique further showed that employees' estimation of customers' perceptions received less variability than expectations, with nine attributes being overestimated and ten attributes being underestimated. This might therefore lend support to the fact that the results are valid, and are not an artifact of the instrument. Overall the employees have a much better understanding of customers' post-purchase perceptions than they do of customers' pre-purchase expectations.

Once the results were broken down into employee categories though, this pattern was a little more varied. The perceptual gaps between employees and customers was greatest with the restaurant staff, less with the management staff, and even smaller with the lodge staff. This may suggest that those employees in more contact with lodge guests, i.e. lodge staff, are able to build up a greater understanding of lodge guests' needs, whilst the restaurant staff which have little personal contact with lodge guests, have less opportunity to understand lodge guests' needs. Lodge staff considered that 80.6 percent of the problems associated with the service package were attributable to the restaurant, whilst the restaurant staff considered this to be 69.6 percent, i.e. the restaurant staff attributed less problems to the restaurant, and more to the lodge, than did the lodge staff. The customers attributed 84.7 percent of the problems to the restaurant and the management staff attributed 99.0 percent of the problems to the restaurant, which suggests that lodge staff have a greater understanding of their customers than the management.

The unstructured responses provided less opportunity for direct comparisons since respondents were free to select their own attributes. However some correlations became apparent. The highest correlation between the two parties was the need to provide a waitress service in the restaurants for lodge guests (Table 7-1), followed by the poor quality of continental breakfasts, and by the poor suitability of the motorist-style restaurant for lodge guests. Other high correlations included the need to provide a telephone in the bedrooms, the poor quality of food in the restaurants, and the need for a coverway between the lodge and restaurant. Overall there was a high correlation between the findings from the quantitative and qualitative results, and between the customer and employee responses. The findings from the employee study therefore indicate that employees have a good understanding of their customers in some areas, but less in others.

Recognising that employees have varying degrees of empathy levels indicates that management should treat high empathy levels as a valuable resource which should be capitalized upon, and low empathy levels as a handicap which should be corrected. By correlating customers' satisfaction levels with employees' empathy levels across a range of attributes it is possible to identify appropriate action for management (Tables 6-5 and 6-13). For example, the worst performing attribute was 'suitability of restaurants' at -2.09, but this was also the best empathy score at 0.49 for the employees. This might indicate that the customers' dissatisfaction with the restaurants was well known to (or well guessed by) the employees. Employees may therefore be holders of valuable information which organisations could tap into through quality assurance programmes, such as quality circles. Conversely where employees have scored low on empathy, such as with food quality, employees may benefit from increased awareness of customers' dissatisfaction and from increased training in delivering quality food. It is possible though that the physical facilities in the restaurant or the food production system may also be responsible for poor quality food.

Tables 6-5 and 6-13 show a few other attributes which have scored poorly for customer satisfaction, in particular those which are one point or over. Where these attribute scores may be attributed to poor empathy scores, such as food quality, restaurant service levels, restaurant friendliness and restaurant cleanliness, improvements may be achieved through increased education and training of employees. Where the attributes are related to physical aspects (structural attributes), such as with restaurant suitability, restaurant comfort and restaurant decorations/maintenance, improvements may be achieved through some form of re-designing. Where the attributes are related to systems or processes (process attributes), such as food production and cleaning activities, improvements may be achieved through systems re-design. Furthermore if some of these improvement are carried out then it is likely they would have a positive knock-on effect on some of the other attributes, such as value for money and overall standards in the restaurants (over-arching attributes).

#### **9.3.4. Characteristics of service quality**

This study has discussed the growing importance of service quality in the competitive marketplaces for both commercial and non-commercial organisations, but it has also acknowledged the difficulties organisations have in delivering service quality consistently well. The study has attempted to resolve some of these difficulties by providing an alternative way to looking at services, i.e. by treating all transactions in the marketplace as services, and treating all service transactions as processes. This was achieved by identifying the main characteristics of services discussed by the literature, such as intangibility and inseparability, and building these into process models which resembled the service delivery system concept. Although services have been discussed in process-terms before, with many references to the service delivery system concept,

there appears to be few examples which have combined the service delivery system concept with customers' perceptions - yet it is customers' perceptions of the service or process experience which is used to evaluate the service offering.

The study further identified a battery of attributes which appear to be important to consumers in the hotel sector through the repertory grid interviews, and considered them as service quality control variables in the roadside lodge sector. However it was recognised that some variables were not initially identified through the interviews since they were roadside lodge-specific, but they were subsequently identified through the unstructured comments in the customer questionnaires. Service quality therefore is not only specific to an industry, but is also specific to a sector, and is most certainly specific to an individual.

The service quality concept can be studied and better understood by accepting that (i) there are specific variables which are important to groups of consumers in certain contextual environments, such as in-room telephones for hotel guests, and (ii) that a service (transaction) is a continuous process. Service quality is therefore about the provision and quality of specific variables and about the quality of the process. This process aspect which has been used in this study is valuable in providing a more realistic representation of displaying, and subsequently understanding, service processes. The literature on quality in the manufacturing industry has in recent years emphasised that quality control is process control, and various control techniques emphasise the 'process' and 'systems' approach to quality control. Service industries should not neglect this process/systems perspective for quality control, especially since the customer passing through the service delivery system can be likened to a product passing along a factory production line [Kacker 1988].

### 9.3.5. Managerial implications

The substantive results from the study have widespread managerial implications for all service sectors since the quality of any service will be dependent upon the perceptions of each and every individual involved in the transaction. Management must first recognise that when they enter into a transaction with a customer, the customer will have formed, and will continuously form, expectations of that transaction. The organisation has to initially raise customers' expectations to a level which will attract their custom, but at the same time, keep those expectations within the limits of the organisation's ability to deliver. During delivery of the service, the organisation has to ensure that the customer's perceptions are then kept the same (if not higher) as their changing expectations to ensure the absence of negative perceptual gaps. Once the service transaction has been completed, and the customer has left the service delivery system, with either no perceptual gaps between expectations and perceptions or the formation of positive perceptual gaps, then management will know that they have delivered good service quality. This suggests therefore that

the control of service quality is essentially the control of process quality, which depends upon good systems design and good human resource policies.

The employees who deliver the service, and the employees who support the service providers, have to be aware of the customers' changing expectations and perceptions to ensure that the service they are continuously providing is perceived to be the same as, or higher than, the customers' expectations. Without the knowledge of customers' expectations and perceptions, employees are not sufficiently equipped to deliver service quality on a consistent basis. Employees therefore need to develop high levels of empathy with their customers to ensure that they can deliver the service at the level the customer is expecting. However this study has shown that employees tended to have a greater understanding of customers' post-purchase perceptions than customers' pre-purchase expectations. This might suggest that employees need more information on the level of service that the customer expects to ensure that they do not unwittingly provide the wrong level of service. Although the employees often realised when the customer had not received service quality, they possibly needed more information to help them provide the correct level.

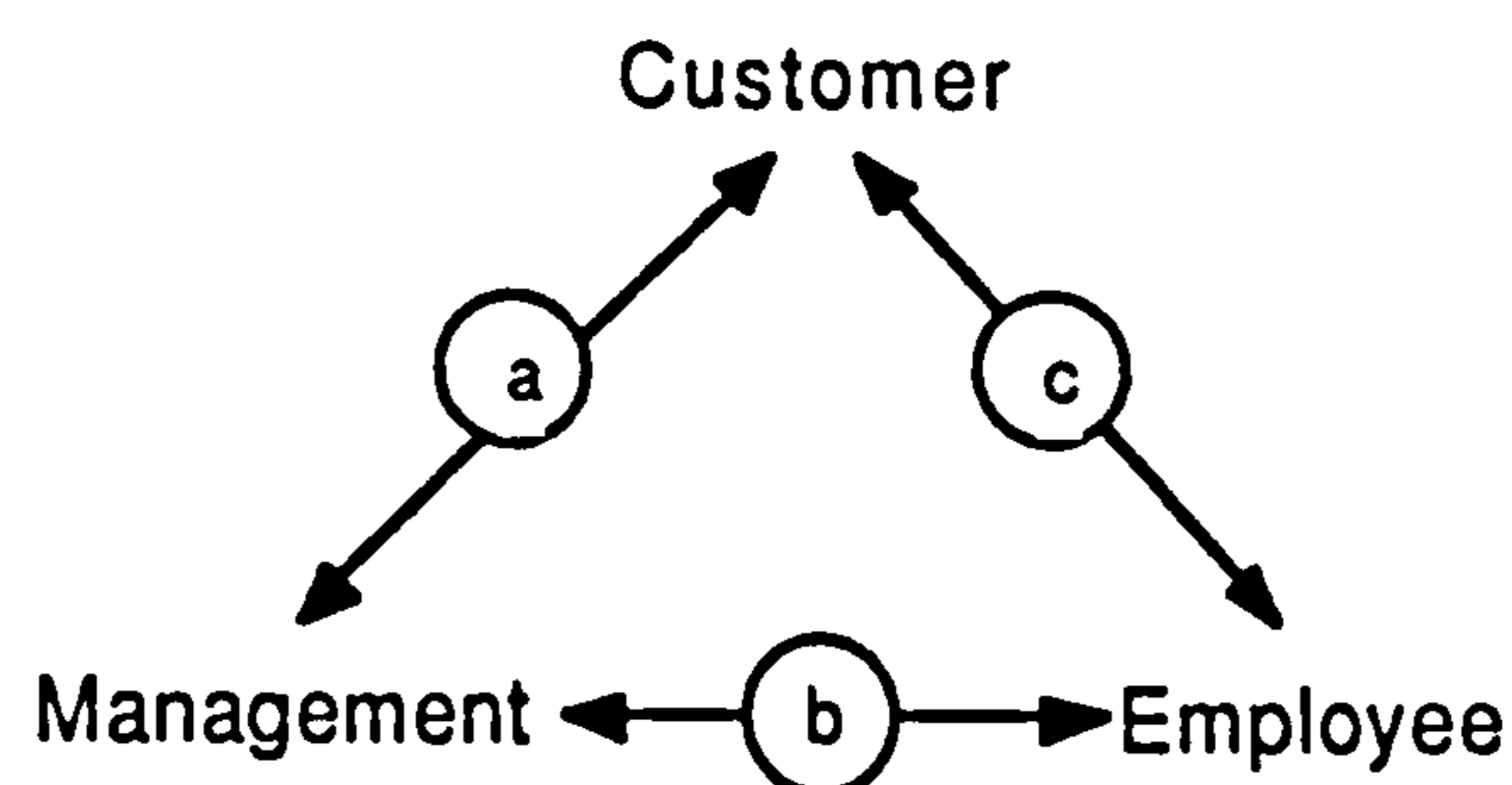
Essentially though for an organisation to ensure the consistent delivery of service quality through their employees, management have to pursue appropriate human resource policies. Recruitment policies must be designed to identify and select those employees that can develop the correct level of technical and social skills. Training programmes must be designed to develop these skills initially, and continually update them according to the changing needs of the marketplace. Finally management need to carry out staff appraisal sessions to ensure that the employees are still able and willing to provide the changing levels of service that the consumer demands.

Although the training of technical skills is crucial to the successful delivery of a technically-correct service, management must recognise the equally crucial aspect of training social skills. Social skills enable the employee to interact with the customer and develop a perceptive awareness of the customer's unspoken and latent needs, which complement the technical skills to provide a professional service. Since each customer's needs are different, and each customer will perceive service quality in their own terms, employees need to develop this sharper sensitivity to provide perceived service quality. Providing every customer with the same consistent service is not providing service quality, but providing customers with the service they expect (within organisational parameters) is providing service quality [Burnstein 1990]. Customers are individuals with their own unique requirements, which have to be met by an almost custom-delivered service. It is therefore management's responsibility to control the customers' expectations through their promises to the marketplace, and for the employee to subsequently deliver service quality to each and every customer's changing and unique needs.

### 9.3.6. Communications

Since the potential for inconsistency or non-conformity of service delivery can be high in an organisation, management can greatly assist their contact employees, and the subsequent delivery of consistently good service, by ensuring that the organisation has an effective communications policy. The key to providing consistently good service is clearly based on consistently good communications to ensure a consistency of perceptions between customers, executives and employees. This relationship is shown in Figure 9-3.

Figure 9-3: The Communication Triangle



Circle (a) shows that the communication link between customers and management is a two-way process. Good market research will guide management in their design of the service offering, and subsequently influence the design of their external communications, such as advertising, so that customers' perceptions can be kept in check. Circle (b) shows the communication link between management and employees is also a two-way process. This represents an opportunity for information to be exchanged, such as through quality assurance programmes. Management receive information through market research and employees receive information at the service encounter. Employees should therefore not only be marketed to, but should become active participants in the service package design and monitoring process. Circle (c) shows the crucial link between customer and employee at the interface which is when the customer will be particularly sensitive to the service offering. This is also a two-way process, especially if employees' are encouraged to be active monitors of customer satisfaction. This encouragement, and the possibility of being involved in quality assurance programmes, should heighten their perceptions to understanding customer requirements and heighten their motivation to deliver to customer requirements.

There is already a considerable body of literature on communications theory which is too large and complex to be discussed here, but in simplistic terms the key to communications effectiveness must be (i) to have communication channels which are short, and link management, employees and customers together, and (ii) to communicate frequently with clear, simple and consistent messages.

### 9.3.7. Quality assurance

It was suggested earlier in the study that the development of good employees' empathy levels can be achieved through quality assurance initiatives, such as quality circles. Such initiatives will promote good communication networks between employees and management and enable those individuals with good empathy levels to interact with those with poor empathy levels. This study has identified a tendency for employees to understand customers' post-purchase perceptions better than customers' pre-purchase expectations, yet it is possible that management will have the opposite understanding through their access to market research information (customers' expectations) and lack of contact with customers at the service boundary (customers' perceptions). Quality assurance programmes between management and employees may therefore contribute significantly to informing management of customers' post-purchase perceptions and informing employees of customers' pre-purchase expectations.

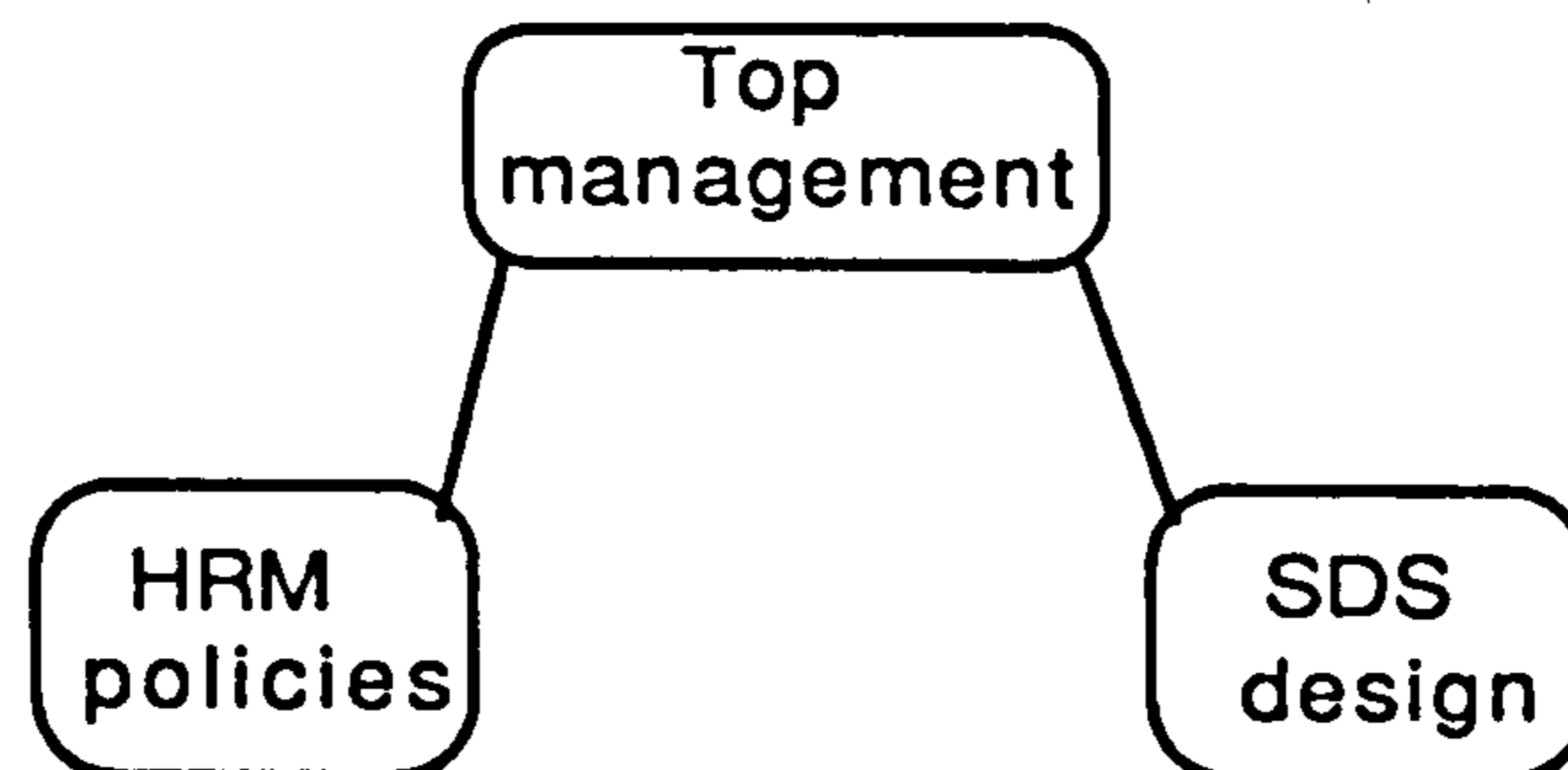
This study also showed that employees that have a regular and personal contact with customers, such as lodge personnel with lodge guests, are likely to develop greater empathy levels than other employees, such as restaurant personnel who have a less frequent and less personal contact with lodge guests. Since the lodge guests perceived that the restaurant facilities were a significantly greater source of service quality failure than the lodging facility, then improved empathy levels amongst the restaurant personnel may contribute to improving the service quality in the restaurants. This suggests that restaurant personnel should be considered 'part-owners' of the lodge guests' service delivery system, and should be actively involved in quality assurance programmes, and possibly mixing of job roles, with lodge personnel to develop a consistency of perceptions.

The involvement of employees in quality assurance programmes will not only facilitate the communication process between and amongst management and employees, but is also likely to develop a sharper perception of personnel to service quality and may provide some form of intrinsic motivation [Orly 1988]. Furthermore, quality assurance programmes can gain from building in techniques such as perceptual blueprinting and service blueprinting whereby several individuals contribute to a master blueprint. Such an approach could identify areas on the map which employees perceive as difficult areas, identify areas from market research where customers perceive service quality failure, and liaise with management to design a more effective system that is sensitive to the needs of both customers and employees, not only to provide good working practices and good service quality, but also to provide employees with the opportunity to continually improve the system [Reichheld and Sasser 1990]. Once a design has been accomplished, employees can then be encouraged to take 'ownership' of particular areas and become active monitors and improvers of service quality in their own area [Kacker 1988], but at the same time, contribute actively to their fellow-employees' service-areas through quality circles.

### 9.3.8. Quality management

This thesis has argued strongly that service quality is dependent upon effective human resource policies and appropriately designed service delivery systems, but ultimately it is the commitment of top management which is responsible for the service package and customer satisfaction, as illustrated in Figure 9-4.

Figure 9-4: Management commitment



Organisational practices are manifestations of top management decisions, and therefore quality service can only come through quality management [Sayle 1986]. If there is insufficient top management support for any changes or improvements to an organisation's operations or policies, then the system cannot be expected to perform effectively. Checkland (1981, p.180) says that...'Changes of three kinds are possible: changes in structure, in procedures, in 'attitudes'.' Ultimately it is the attitudes of top management that is essentially the driving force behind the concept of improving service quality. 'Structures' and 'procedures' simply represent manifestations of management attitudes, and service quality failure is management failure.

### 9.4. Aim and propositions of the study

The aim of this study was:

'To show how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience',

and the propositions which underpinned this aim were:

**P1.** Service quality represents the customer's assessment of a transactional experience, which may include any permutation of tangible and intangible elements;

**P2.** The delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding customers' separate expectations and their separate perceptions; and



**P3. The delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding employees' perceptions of their customers' experiences.**

#### **9.4.1. Proposition 1**

Although much of the marketing and service quality literature have implicitly referred to services as either the encounter between a customer and a provider, or as products of service industries, there are now a few authors who have explicitly stated that a service refers to all transactions in the marketplace, irrespective of their tangible or intangible composition, and irrespective of whether they come from manufacturing or service industries. Since it is the benefits of the transaction which the customer seeks, whatever the composition, it is the quality of those benefits which providers need to consider when attempting to satisfy customers, and since all transactions in the marketplace are essentially representing a 'service' to the customer, whatever their source, it is the quality of that service that providers need to consider when attempting to satisfy customers. Service quality therefore refers to the quality of all services in the marketplace, as perceived by the customer.

This study has shown through the repertory grid interviews and through the unstructured comments provided by the customer questionnaires, that customer satisfaction in the lodging industry is based on a package of attributes displaying both tangibility and intangibility. Since the lodging industry is providing a service to customers by the nature of the tangible and intangible benefits it is offering, then keeping customers satisfied must be related to the quality of the whole service delivery provided by lodging organisations. The proposition that service quality represents the customer's assessment of a transactional experience, which may include any permutation of tangible and intangible elements, appears to be valid from the data collected in this study. However since this study did not actually ask customers what they meant by 'service quality', then this proposition can only be tentatively accepted until further direct evidence is available. Further research is therefore needed to show that customers' own definitions of service quality refer to both the tangible and intangible components of a service transaction.

#### **9.4.2. Proposition 2**

The service quality literature has displayed a general consensus that assessments of service quality are based on customers' desired expectations for a range of attributes and on customers' perceived performance of those attributes. This study used a SERVQUAL-type questionnaire to identify customers' separate expectations and separate perceptions for a range of attributes to identify the existence and size of gaps between desired performance and perceived performance. Since there was a broad correlation between the attributes which performed below expectations in the quantitative data provided by customers with the critical comments from customers in the qualitative

data, then this may suggest that customer dissatisfaction is related to attributes performing below desired expectations as measured by the SERVQUAL instrument. If understanding customers' separate expectations and separate perceptions for a range of attributes is related to their degree of satisfaction, then the proposition that the delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding customers' separate expectations and their separate perceptions appears to be valid if management provide the service customers expect. However since this study did not provide direct statistical correlations between customers' satisfaction levels and the presence and size of gaps within the SERVQUAL data, then this proposition can also only be tentatively accepted until further evidence is available. Further research is therefore needed here to show that the gaps between expectations and perceptions relate directly to customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and that the delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding these expectations and perceptions.

### 9.4.3. Proposition 3

This thesis has discussed studies that have attempted to show the level of understanding employees have for their customers by comparing customers' perceptions of service quality with employees' perceptions of customers' perceptions. It has been considered that if the employee data consistently shows a high correlation with the customer data, then this may indicate that (a) the results have been validated by two separate sources, and (b) employees can then be used to provide management with valuable information on the quality of service the organisation is providing. If the employee results show a low correlation with the customer results, then this may indicate that (i) employees have a poor understanding of their customers, and (ii) the organisation needs to improve their human resource management policies before employees can be used for organisational diagnoses. However it is acknowledged that high correlations may be the result of the wrong constructs being correlated, and low correlations may be due to the techniques and instruments used in the study being valid and/or unreliable.

This study has shown results which have been obtained from a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources from both customers and employees. The results have shown varying degrees of consistency between the various data sources which may indicate that the techniques and instruments used are unreliable. However some of the strongest correlations between the qualitative and quantitative, customer and employee sources, with attributes such as 'cleanliness' and 'food quality', indicate that the techniques and instruments are both valid and reliable. This suggests that the employees do understand their customers on some of the more prominent and salient attributes, such as 'cleanliness' and 'food quality', and possibly do not understand their customers on some of the less prominent and salient attributes, such as 'decorations'. If management can identify the level of understanding their employees have for their customers, then the third proposition that the delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding employees' perceptions of their

customers' experiences appears to be tenable. Further research may be needed though to prove the validity and reliability of the instruments used, and in the constructs measured, to provide greater evidence of the empathy employees have for their customers. Although not an objective of this study, further research may also be necessary to identify how employees have developed their ability to empathise with their customers.

#### **9.4.4. Research aim**

The aim of this research was 'to show how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience', and although the three propositions which underpinned this aim have only been tentatively supported, the research aim has in itself been achieved. This study has provided a working definition of service quality, and has provided some empirical data on customers' and employees' perceptions of service quality with the use of the repertory grid, SERVQUAL and perceptual blueprinting techniques, which in turn provides empirical data to support the research aim. However the modified perceptual blueprinting technique discussed in Chapter VIII and shown in Figures 8-3 and 8-5 provides further theoretical evidence on how this research aim has been achieved, i.e. any future studies which used this approach on its own should be able to generate sufficient empirical data to show how the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using the perceptions of both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience.

### **9.5. Further research**

#### **9.5.1. Kelly's repertory grid technique**

The repertory grid technique has received a considerable amount of attention in the literature and there are several examples of its use and recommendations for future research opportunities. The technique was successfully employed in this study for eliciting a wide range of attributes in the roadside lodge sector, and the same method could be employed in a variety of other consumer research studies. The main advantage of this technique is its ability to identify a range of attributes in an objective way, and in a way which allows the respondents complete freedom in verbalising constructs. The main limiting factor in this study is the availability of time to thoroughly interview respondents. Although this study did identify a battery of relevant attributes, more value may have been gained by interviewing respondents for longer periods.

A further limitation is that the technique may only be useful for eliciting attributes which are highly specific to a subject area. This study asked lodge guests to provide the attributes which were important on their previous 'hotel stays' (which were not necessarily lodges), which were then built

into a questionnaire to measure attributes in the roadside large sector. The variable 'telephone' was not mentioned in the initial repertory interviews, and consequently was not built into the SERVQUAL questionnaire, yet it was identified as a particularly topical issue in the unstructured data due to the respondents' disappointment with its absence in the lodges. Eliciting attributes in one area (e.g. the hotel sector) therefore may not always be directly appropriate for applying directly to another area (e.g. the roadside lodge sector).

The value of the repertory technique though was highlighted by the positioning of several other variables. The five highest construct categories elicited in the repertory interviews correlated with the five highest scoring attributes for the expectation dimension in the customer questionnaires, whilst the construct category 'childrens' facilities' scored low in the repertory interviews and subsequently rated the lowest attribute in the questionnaires. This suggests that the repertory technique was reasonably effective in identifying the positioning of some of the more extreme variables.

#### 9.5.2. SERVQUAL-questionnaire technique

Due to the recent development of the SERVQUAL technique, there is not a wide range of documented applications available in the literature. This study has provided an example of how the instrument can be applied to measure both customers' expectations and perceptions, and employees' assessments of those expectations and perceptions. It has also showed how it can be used to compare customers' assessments from various locations and employees' perceptions in various positions.

Future studies could consider focusing on identifying the varying expectations and perceptions from different customer profiles, and from different employee locations, which this study did not do. Furthermore, the statistical applications used on the data were restricted to identifying measures of centrality, testing the chi-square of relationships, and finding the standard errors of difference. More advanced techniques, such as factor analysis, cluster analysis and discriminant analysis, could be used on the data to identify and correlate variables across respondents, identify and correlate respondents across variables respectively, and illustrate the differences between units or between individuals [Crimp 1985; Lewis 1985]. Although it was not considered necessary to have used these methods in this study since the objectives and aims were achieved through using other methods, data from the SERVQUAL technique lends itself to multivariate analysis.

The use of differently-poled questions in the SERVQUAL questionnaire caused some respondents some difficulties, and although in this study it appears that overall the differences between positive and negative answers were not significant, some differences were observed. The use of

differently-poled questions no doubt forces respondents to consider each question in turn to prevent them adopting a stylised answering technique, but caution must be exercised with the exact wording, since negatively-worded questions may not always be the identical opposite of positively-worded questions. The use of control questions, which have the same polarity in all the questionnaires, provided one method of keeping a check on the influence of question-wording, and is therefore recommended for similar questionnaire designs.

This study did not follow the same question-order arrangement as Parasuraman et al (1986), who presented their questions in a random order, because it was considered that this would make the questionnaire too complex. The questionnaire in this study presented the questions in a logical, sequential order to facilitate questionnaire-completion, but even with this arrangement, some respondents complained of the questionnaire being too long and complex. It is recommended therefore that the design of the SERVQUAL-type questionnaire needs careful consideration if researchers are going to build in many variables, are going to use positively- and negatively-worded statements, and are going to place the questions in random order.

Identifying the differences between expectations and perceptions must be considered with the knowledge that the respondents have provided values to the variables after their experiences. The values for the expectation scores may have therefore been strongly influenced by their immediate preceding experiences, and may not necessarily represent the same value they would have provided before the service experience. High expectation values could therefore be a reflection of a respondent's dissatisfaction with a variable, and not an equitable value when considered in relative terms against the other variables.

The incidence of non-response is a problem which seems to occur with most mail questionnaire surveys, and has been widely discussed by many other researchers [Kress 1988; Lewis 1985; Weiers 1988]. This study also suffered from a high level of non-response, and although the potentiality of bias has been acknowledged and discussed, it still brings the validity of the findings into question. The use of the dual-questionnaire approach, i.e. collecting respondent-profile information from all incoming guests, appeared to offer a satisfactory way in which respondents and non-respondents could be distinguished along certain characteristics. However this technique suffered a little due to the difficulty in encouraging the survey administrators (lodge personnel) to distribute all the questionnaires during the survey period. If all the questionnaires had been distributed to incoming guests, with their designated codes, a higher response rate might have been achieved which would have provided a greater amount of data available to make valid comparisons between respondents and non-respondents.

However the comparisons that were made on the available data in this study did indicate differences

between part-respondents (completing one questionnaire only) and full-respondents (completing both questionnaires), i.e. part-respondents tend to represent short-stay, multiple-individual parties, passing through on non-business trips. It might therefore be hypothesised that complete non-respondents display similar, and possibly more extreme characteristics. If this is the case then future studies need to consider how to encourage these types of respondents to complete hotel questionnaires.

The unstructured section provided at the back of the SERVQUAL questionnaire was completed by a high number of respondents - almost fifty-six percent. Considering that the questionnaires were fairly long and time-consuming to complete, the respondents that did complete the unstructured section must of felt that the structured questions (a) were not sufficiently strong enough to express their true feelings, and (b) did not cover all of the relevant issues to their stay. As in this study the addition of an unstructured section may enrich the data collected through a structured questionnaire, but this may question the validity of the questionnaire design in the first place. Perhaps for this study if the initial attribute-generation stage was applied in the same context as the attribute assessment stage, then the number of unstructured comments may have been less.

### 9.5.3. Perceptual blueprinting technique

The perceptual blueprinting technique has had even less coverage since it was developed in this study and is still very much in an embryonic stage. However this researcher does believe that it has considerable potential. In this study the data for the perceptual blueprints were collected by the researcher during one-to-one interviews with employees. This method was done deliberately to 'prime' employees before attempting to elicit their (potentially sensitive) perceptions about the service delivery system. However it is possible to carry out this exercise in groups of employees, similar to a quality circle, whereby they all contribute to the master perceptual blueprint and subsequently help to identify the strengths and identify the weaknesses of a service package. The group interviews may even be more productive than the individual interviews in some quality assurance programmes since it can generate a certain amount of creative and divergent thinking to problem resolution.

Further research also needs to identify how many respondents are needed to obtain a comprehensive blueprint of a complete service delivery system. In this study only fifteen blueprints were used and it is likely that a greater number would provide a more legitimate representation of a service delivery system. However the actual number required would depend upon the service being investigated. A limited service offering, such as purchasing a newspaper in a shop, may require only between ten and twenty interviews, whereas the purchase of a motor car involving several trips, telephone calls and letters, may require fifty or more interviews. It is not possible to be precise about the number

of respondents required since there are no empirical benchmarks with the approach shown in Figure 8-4, but the number required will become more apparent after more empirical tests. Once the activities have been identified and plotted onto a blueprint, it is then possible to construct a questionnaire as discussed earlier. The number of questionnaires required would again be dependent upon the service and the number of activities/variables being investigated, and again is likely to become more apparent after it has been empirically tested.

The main limitation of the technique, i.e. the inability to map customer and employee perceptions onto the blueprint, arose because the variables generated for the questionnaires came from a different source from the variables generated for the blueprints. This resulted in attempting to plot a list of variables at varying levels of ordinality onto a customer activity map. However further research using the approach in Figure 8-4 would ensure that the variables remain at a consistent level of resolution since they would relate directly to the blueprint activities provided by respondents during interviewing.

Several other variations for using the technique were discussed in the last chapter, such as employing it to capture managers' and employees' perceptions of operational activities. A blueprint displaying operational activities could in fact then be linked up with a blueprint showing customer service activities. Such an integrated approach may prove to be valuable in showing causal links between failures on the operational map which relate directly to failures on the service map. However this approach also needs to be empirically tested before any conclusive findings or recommendations can be made.

Testing the perceptual blueprinting technique in an organisation though may prove to be more problematic than anticipated. The technique requires a sensitive, objective and trained researcher to carry out either one-to-one or group interviews with respondents to elicit the initial activities. These activities need to be then faithfully replicated to produce a perceptual blueprint representing the range of activities articulated by the respondents. Designing and administering the questionnaire, and analysing the data requires an experienced quantitative researcher, whilst interpreting the results requires empathy for both the respondents' viewpoints and those of the client-organisation. If the technique is then introduced into quality circles where groups of employees participate in joint problem resolving, then it is highly likely that the organisation will have to have a well developed quality culture to ensure its acceptance and success, possibly through the belief in and practice of TQM principles.

Unlike the empirical study in this thesis which simply documented and analysed perceptions of an existing service delivery system, the proposed modified approach adopts a two step process: (a) take a broad view of a service process to understand a problem situation, and (b) take a broad view

to propose acceptable changes. Although the modified approach has been recommended for organisational analysis, the method is unlikely to be sufficiently deep for the more academic understandings of individual perceptions and behaviour - it is simply being recommended as a management tool for organisational use in addressing service quality issues. Furthermore it is not a global problem solving technique - it is simply recommended as a small, yet complementary, approach to solving problems in service delivery systems.

## 9.6. Conclusion

This chapter has concluded the thesis by summarising the advantages and disadvantages of the perceptual blueprinting technique which was developed earlier in this study, and by suggesting further opportunities for using the technique in organisational analysis. From a theoretical perspective this study has synthesised a range of concepts to operationalise a soft systems approach into service environments, and from a substantive perspective the study has provided a framework (albeit simplistic) for implementing a quality control and quality assurance technique for service delivery systems. The PB technique is essentially a mechanism for bringing about culturally acceptable changes in an organisation for the benefit of the customer through the employee. Although the technique may be considered a relatively simple tool to use in organisational problem solving, its success is highly dependent upon the presence of experienced researchers and the presence of a quality culture in an organisation. Furthermore since the technique has been developed from little empirical application and much conceptualising, the success of it can only be judged in the light of its validity and utility.

This study though has provided a considerable amount of empirical data to support its propositions and achieve its aim, i.e. service quality does appear to represent the customer's assessment of a transactional experience as they pass through the service delivery system, which may include any permutation of tangible and intangible elements (P1); the delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding customers' separate expectations and their separate perceptions and identifying gaps between them (P2); the delivery of service quality can be improved by understanding employees' perceptions of their customers' experiences through identifying the areas where employees can be used for organisational diagnosis or where they require further education (P3); and the delivery of service quality can be understood more effectively by using both customers' and employees' perceptions of the service experience, in particular with the use of such tools as perceptual blueprinting (aim).

Apart from supporting the propositions and achieving the research aim, this study has also provided both a managerial and methodological contribution. The identification of the factors which constitute service quality in the UK roadside lodge sector has received very little attention in the



literature, which is mainly due to the recent development and commercial sensitivity of the service. This study showed that guests' satisfaction with the roadside lodge package will include any tangible and intangible services and facilities which are required to satisfy their needs during an overnight stay. Expressing service quality as a function of customers' expectations and perceptions as they pass through the service delivery system, and documenting these onto a process chart with employees' perceptions, has not been proposed beforehand. Mapping the perceptions of the users' of the service delivery system, such as the employees and customers, provides more insight into how a service is actually operating rather than how it should operate as viewed by management or a systems analyst. Identifying how a service is operating first though can provide management and systems analysts with valuable information on how a system should subsequently change in its operations to improve the delivery of service quality. More significantly though the development of the perceptual blueprinting technique and its potential applications offers a new way in which service quality delivery can be analysed and improved. The PB technique synthesises the strengths of 'service blueprinting', 'perceptual gap analysis' and 'soft systems methodology' to provide a valuable input towards total quality management. This research study has therefore provided an original contribution through the gradual understanding of service quality in the UK roadside lodge sector, and service quality generally, and the concomitant development of the perceptual blueprinting technique for service quality identification, analysis, and improvement.

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## Appendices

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**Appendix A1**

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Repertory Grid  
 Martin Senior  
 Dorset Institute  
 October 1988

1	✓	✓																		1	SWALLOW
2	✓	✓																		2	DE VERE
3	X	X																		3	BORNI
4	✓																			4	CREST
5	✓																			5	BRAVEL.
6	X																			6	HILTON.
7																				7	CHATRAIT
8																				8	THISTLE
9																				9	HOLIDAY INNS.
10								X	X	X										10	TRAVELEDGES
11								✓	✓	✓										11	POST HOUSE
12								X	X	X										12	EMBURY.
13								✓												13	GRANADA.
14								✓												14	TAF
15								X												15	STAXIS.
16						X														16	hambel.
17						X														17	Novel.
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more food available.  
 quality not  
 quality  
 top of the range = luxury.  
 billing available.  
 reception comfort  
 food comfort  
 little bit you know - don't like.  
 easier to locate further north.  
 leisurely  
 expensive  
 cleanliness comfort  
 prices. value for money.  
 little bit waste

2/2

Repertory Grid  
 Martin Senior  
 Dorset Institute  
 October 1988

1/1

## Appendix A3 - Responses from repertory grid interviews

.....  
**1. Access to and from motorway**

convenient locations - convenient - accessible - situations quite good - conveniently located - more convenient - better location - poor locations

.....  
**2. Access to tourist/beauty spot**

convenient for parks

.....  
**3. Access to town/city centre**

centre of town

.....  
**4. Bar with liquor licence**

would be nice to get a drink

.....  
**5. Bedroom spaciousness**

spacious - room was small

.....  
**6. Character of building and rooms**

lots of character - old substantial building - characterless - like concrete blocks - bland - boring - could be anywhere

.....  
**7. Cleanliness**

clean - spotless - clean enough - rooms clean - dusty - grim - grubby - not clean

.....  
**8. Consistent quality of service**

uneven quality of service - disappointing uneven service

.....  
**9. Consistent standard**

consistent - predictable - fairly consistent - inconsistency

.....  
**10. Facilities for children**

very good for children - excellent hotel for children - good for family and kids

.....  
**11. Geographical/locational availability**

widely available - more of them - geographical coverage not so good

.....  
**12. Hotel staff attitudes and friendliness**

staff are friendly - friendly - helpful - very friendly staff - get to know you - staff fine - good staff - very helpful staff - has customer care policy - staff are excellent - staff are polite - more friendly - very good reception staff - staff polite - very friendly - more approachable - staff very friendly - staff seem friendly - lack of helpfulness - unfriendly - still a stranger - not very friendly - staff are poor - staff old empire - staff aloof

.....  
**13. Inviting/Welcoming Hotel**

has ambience - unfavourable atmosphere - indefinable feeling - uninviting - cold - big and impersonal - felt insignificant - large and impersonal - less personal - impersonal - too business like - not personal - atmosphere is bad

.....  
**14. Leisure facilities**

superb leisure facilities - has more facilities - has swimming pool

.....  
**15. Level of comfort**

unadulterated luxury - comfortable rooms - luxury - more comfortable - quite plush

**16. Hotel Management**

good management - unit management are important - efficient - disorganised - inefficient - disaster - disorganised catering

**17. Name/brand-name of hotel**

lives too much off their name - lives off name - consistently below what one would hope - uses its name - have seen their day - overrated

**18. Overall Standard**

standard quite high - top of the class - no complaints - pleasant - superior - the best - top of the range - top rate hotel - reasonably good impression - favourable - good stay - more upmarket - super - nice - quite good - high standard - very nice - very pleasant - quite nice - high class - very good - very pleased - quality - high quality - good quality - better quality - excellent quality - classy - has finesse - nice hotel - first class - lower quality - poor quality - not quality - lack of quality

**19. Personal touch**

little touches - little comforts - take care of detail - don't do last detail

**20. Quality/standard of food**

food is good - food excellent - good food - better meals - cooked to order - food is better - better food - great food - food very good - food is excellent - meal was adequate - food is a lot worse - food is inedible - poor food - poor catering - disgusting - disgusting quality food - fast food - food is poor - terrible food - terrible breakfast - food was not good

**21. Quick check-in/check-out**

fast and 'hassle-free' check-in

**22. Quietness**

too noisy

**23. Range of bedroom facilities**

video service good - simple on furnishings -basic - very basic - spartan

**24. Range of facilities and services in hotel**

provides everything you want - wide range of services - amenities better - good facilities - everything provided - serves purpose - everything is practical - lots of facilities - better equipped - minimum facilities - limited facilities - lacking facilities - little limited in facilities - good for limited stay

**25. Reception staff**

nice welcome

**26. Restaurant Management**

could be run better

**27. Restaurant staff attitudes and friendliness**

unfriendly and poor attitude

**28. Room Price**

not as expensive - very expensive - tend to be expensive - too expensive - can be expensive - quite expensive - prices too expensive - highly priced - too pricey

**29. Room temperature**

rooms too cold or too hot

**30. Security**

always check for security

**31. Standards of accommodation**

first class accommodation - rooms nice - good rooms - better bedrooms - good quality rooms

**32. Standards of catering**

could be better in restaurant

**33. Standard of service in hotel**

service excellent - service good - good service - service immaculate - can't do enough for you - generally good service - excellent service - extremely impressed with manners of night porter - happier service - service extremely good - good service - quality service - service very good - superior service - service not so good - poor service - mediocre service - disgusting service - poor service - service is terrible

**34. Standard of service in restaurant**

poor table service

**35. Standard of maintenance/decorations**

smarter - better decorations - nice and homely - decor looks good - pleasing appearance - well maintained - cheaper in standard - basically poor standard - half-decorated room - needed renovation - poor decor - rooms were inferior - crummy - tatty

**36. Telephone in bedroom**

would like telephone in room - telephone

**37. Toiletries in bathroom**

why don't they put shampoo in bathroom? - toiletries

**38. Type of catering facilities**

more choice - lot of choice - good menu - good menu choice -- food is cheaper - meals are terrific value for money - excellent value food - poor range

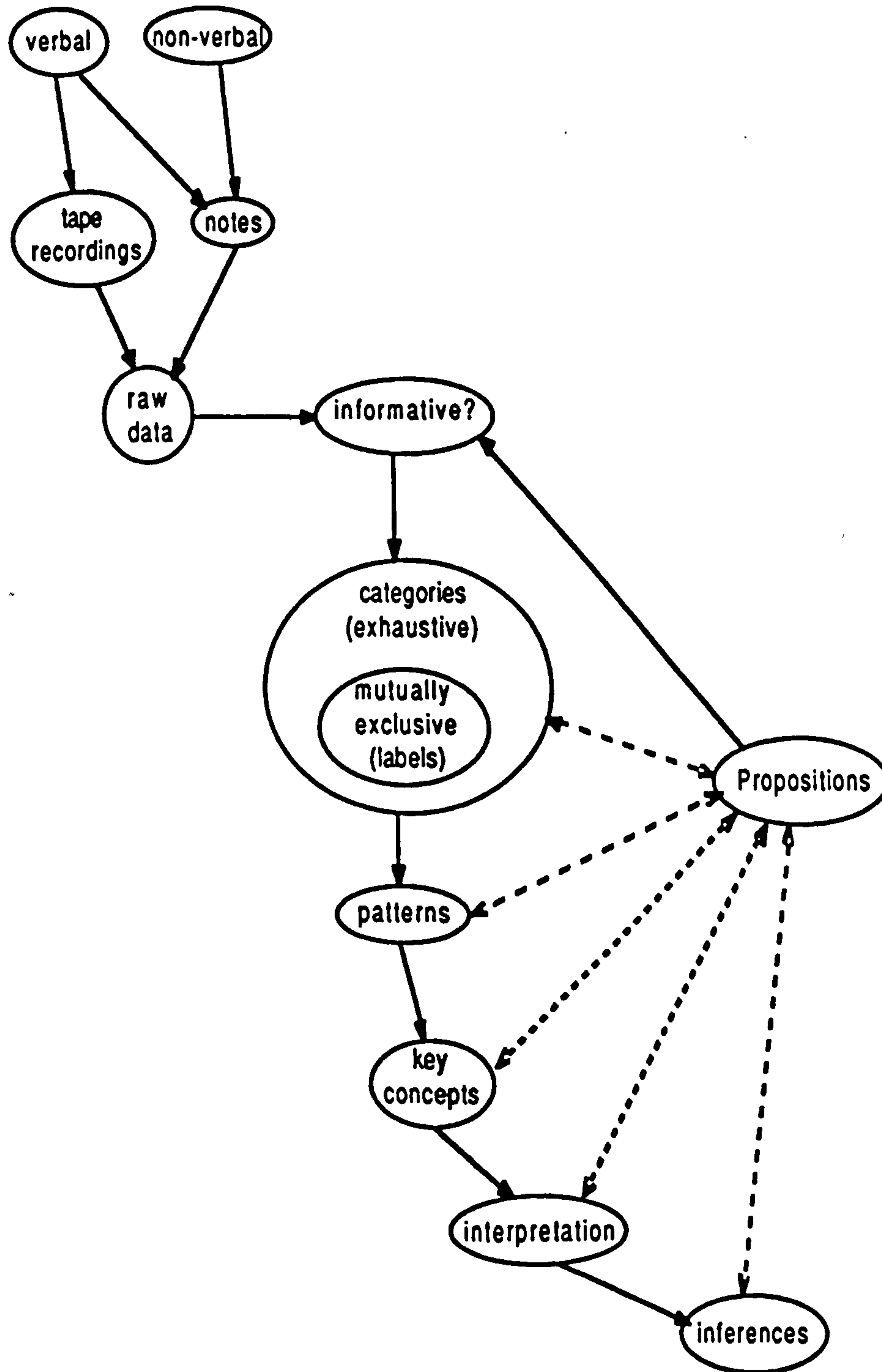
**39. Type of hotel**

more individual - not herded - more traditional - slightly more individualistic - informal - more modern for business - commercial/business - modern - very commercial - straightforward - good concept - well developed hotels - good when in haste - not really like a hotel - more like a mote - go when you like - cheap image - nondescript - nothing fancy - nothing special - much of a muchness - old fashioned - standard not good - slightly downmarket - below standard - middle of the road

**40. Value-for-money**

value for money - value - economic - price is reasonable - good value for money - good value for the price - reasonable price - better value for money - price reasonable - excellent value for money - good value - favourable prices - same as good quality at half the price - good rate - what they offer is very good - cheaper - lot of money for what they are - overpriced - expensive for what you get - not necessarily value - not value for money

# Appendix A4 - Content analysis framework



## Appendix A5 - Table 3-3 attributes compared with attributes by Atkinson

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Atkinson (1988)</u>
value for money	Room is clean
overall standard	Feel safe and secure in hotel
cleanliness	Everything works in the room
friendliness	Beds are comfortable
food quality	Free parking is available
style of hotel	Room is good value for money
service quality	Front-desk staff are courteous and helpful
decorations/maintenance	Towels are plentiful
lodge concept	Employees are friendly
comfort	Hotel's location is convenient
location	Service staff are courteous and helpful
restaurant style	Restaurants are good value for money
leisure facilities	Fast, efficient check-in and check-out
in-room facilities	Employees show they want you back
market level	Room is well lit
telephone	Staff perform consistently well throughout hotel
temperature	Rooms are sufficiently large and comfortable
management	Feel comfortable telling friends etc.
childrens' facilities	Everything in the room is first class
consistency/assurance	
bar	
bathroom	
noise	
social interaction	
security	



## **Appendix B1 - Questionnaire Statements**

### **A. Lodge Hotel Statements**

#### **Style of hotel statements**

- Q1a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are better for travellers than other similarly-priced hotels.  
Q1b Quickchef Lodge Hotels are cheaper than many of the other hotel bedrooms I use when I am travelling.
- Q1a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not better for travellers than other similarly-priced hotels.  
Q1b Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not cheaper than many of the other hotel bedrooms I use when I am travelling.
- 

#### **Location statements**

- Q2a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very well located for the traveller.  
Q2b Service area lodges should be very well located for the traveller.
- Q2a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very well located for the traveller.  
Q2b Service area lodges do not have to be very well located for the traveller.
- 

#### **Cleanliness statements**

- Q3a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very clean.  
Q3b Service area lodges should be very clean.
- Q3a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very clean.  
Q3b Service area lodges do not have to be very clean.
- 

#### **Comfort statements**

- Q4a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very comfortable.  
Q4b Service area lodges should be very comfortable.
- Q4a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very comfortable.  
Q4b Service area lodges do not have to be very comfortable.
- 

#### **Maintenance and decoration statements**

- Q5a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very well decorated and maintained.  
Q5b Service area lodges should be very well decorated and maintained.
- Q5a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very well decorated and maintained.  
Q5b Service area lodges do not have to be well decorated and maintained.
-

### **Telephone statements**

- Q6a Quickchef Lodge Hotels should have telephones in the rooms.  
Q6b I would be prepared to pay more for a telephone in my room.

- Q6a Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not have to have telephones in the rooms.  
Q6b I would not be prepared to pay more for a telephone in my room.
- 

### **Mini-bar statements**

- Q7a Quickchef should provide mini-bars in the lodge bedrooms.  
Q7b I would use a mini-bar in a lodge bedroom if it was provided.

- Q7a Quickchef should not provide mini-bars in the lodge bedrooms.  
Q7b I would not use a mini-bar in a lodge bedroom if it was provided.
- 

### **Childrens' facilities statements**

- Q8a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide enough facilities for children.  
Q8b Service area lodges should provide more facilities for children.

- Q8a Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not provide enough facilities for children.  
Q8b Service area lodges do not have to provide more facilities for children.
- 

### **Friendliness statements**

- Q9a Quickchef Lodge Hotels have very friendly staff.  
Q9b Service area lodges should have very friendly staff.

- Q9a Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not have friendly staff.  
Q9b Service area lodges do not have to have friendly staff.
- 

### **Service statements**

- Q10a Quickchef Lodge Hotel staff provide a very good service.  
Q10b Service area lodge staff should provide a very good service.

- Q10a Quickchef Lodge Hotel staff do not provide a very good service.  
Q10b Service area lodge staff do not have to provide a very good service.
- 

### **Overall standard statements**

- Q11a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide a very good overall standard.  
Q11b Service area lodges should provide a very good overall standard.

- Q11a Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not provide a very good overall standard.  
Q11b Service area lodges do not have to provide a very good overall standard.

## **Value for money statements**

Q12a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide value for money.  
Q12b Service area lodges should provide value for money.

Q12a Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not provide value for money.  
Q12b Service area lodges do not have to provide value for money.

---

## **B. Restaurant Statements**

### **Service area attraction statements - restaurants**

Q13a As a motorist I use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.  
Q13b As a lodge guest I use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.

Q13a As a motorist I do not use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.  
Q13b As a lodge guest I do not use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.

---

### **Restaurant statements**

Q14a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very good for lodge guests.  
Q14b Service area restaurants should be designed for the use of lodge guests.

Q14a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very good for lodge guests.  
Q14b Service area restaurants do not have to be very good for lodge guests.

---

### **Location statements**

Q15a Quickchef Restaurants are very well located for the lodge guest  
Q15b Quickchef Restaurants should be very well located for the lodge guest

Q15a Quickchef Restaurants are not very well located for the lodge guest  
Q15b Quickchef Restaurants do not have to be very well located for the lodge guest

---

### **Cleanliness statements**

Q16a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very clean.  
Q16b Service area restaurants should be very clean.

Q16a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very clean.  
Q16b Service area restaurants do not have to be very clean.

### **Comfort statements**

Q17a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very comfortable.  
Q17b Service area restaurants should be very comfortable.

Q17a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very comfortable.  
Q17b Service area restaurants do not have to be very comfortable.

---

### **Maintenance and decoration statements**

Q18a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very well decorated and maintained.  
Q18b Service area restaurants should be very well decorated and maintained.

Q18a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very well decorated and maintained.  
Q18b Service area restaurants do not have to be very well decorated and maintained.

---

### **Food quality statements**

Q19a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide good quality food.  
Q19b Service area restaurants should provide good quality food.

Q19a Quickchef Service Restaurants do not provide good quality food.  
Q19b Service area restaurants do not have to provide good quality food.

---

### **Friendliness statements**

Q20a Quickchef Service Restaurants have very friendly staff.  
Q20b Service area restaurants should have very friendly staff.

Q20a Quickchef Service Restaurants do not have very friendly staff.  
Q20b Service area restaurants do not have to have very friendly staff.

---

### **Service statements**

Q21a Quickchef Service Restaurant staff provide a very good service.  
Q21b Service area restaurant staff should provide a very good service.

Q21a Quickchef Service Restaurant staff do not provide a very good service.  
Q21b Service restaurant area staff do not have to provide a very good service.

---

### **Overall standard statements**

Q22a Quickchef Service Restaurants offer a very good overall standard.  
Q22b Service area restaurants should offer a very good overall standard.

Q22a Quickchef Service Restaurants do not offer a very good overall standard.  
Q22b Service area restaurants do not have to offer a very good overall standard.

## **Value for money statements**

**Q23a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide value for money.**

**Q23b Service area restaurants should provide value for money.**

**Q23a Quickchef Service Restaurants do not provide value for money.**

**Q23b Service area restaurants do not have to provide value for money.**

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## **C. Miscellaneous Questions**

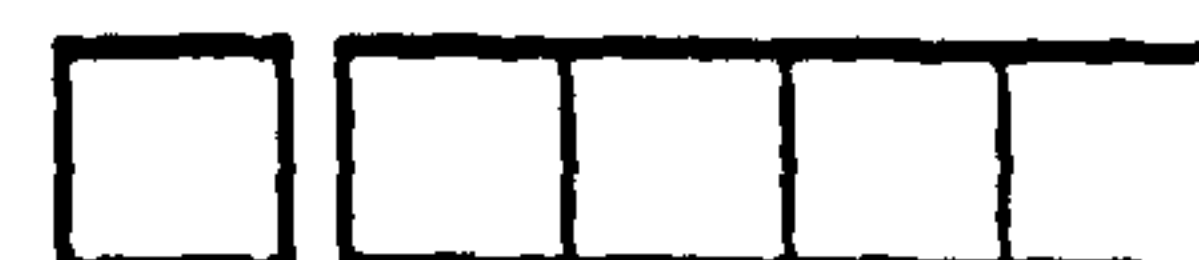
### **Service area attraction statements**

**Q24a As a lodge guest I sometimes use the shopping facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.**

**Q24b As a lodge guest I sometimes use the forecourt facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.**

**Q24a As a lodge guest I do not use the shopping facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.**

**Q24b As a lodge guest I do not use the forecourt facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.**



# QUESTIONNAIRE

## QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

**Directions:** This survey deals with your opinions of Quickchef Lodges and Service Areas. Please show the extent to which you think Quickchef offers the services and facilities described by each statement and the extent to which you think they should be provided. Do this by picking one of the seven numbers next to each statement.

**For example:**

**Q. Quickchef Service Areas offer superb catering facilities**

Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
----------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-------------------

If you strongly **agree** with the statement, circle the number 7.

If you strongly **disagree** with the statement, circle the number 1.

If your feelings are **not strong**, circle one of the numbers in the middle.

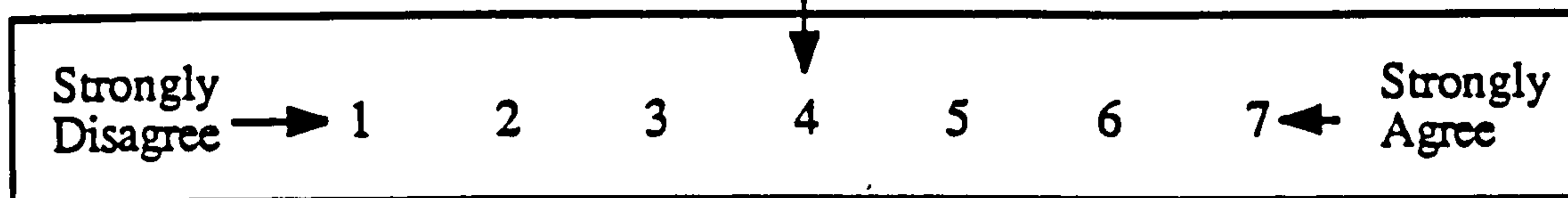
There are no right or wrong answers - all we are interested in is a number that best shows your opinions of Quickchef Service Areas and your expectations about the services and facilities that should be provided.

### Completed Questionnaires:

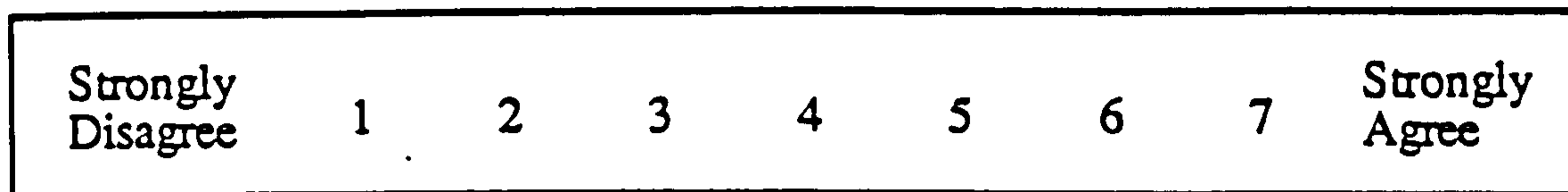
Please leave at reception desk or post in envelope provided (no stamp is required).

**Guide to scoring**

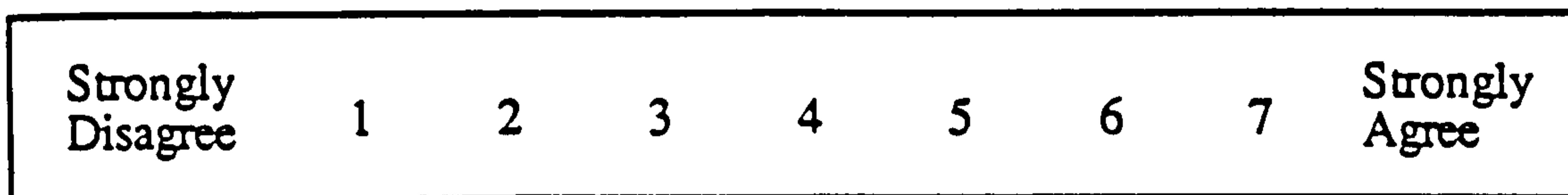
No opinion



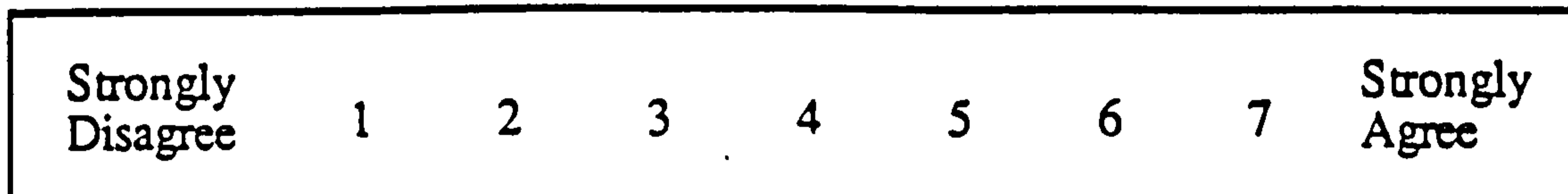
**Q1a** Quickchef Lodge Hotels are better for travellers than other similarly-priced hotels.



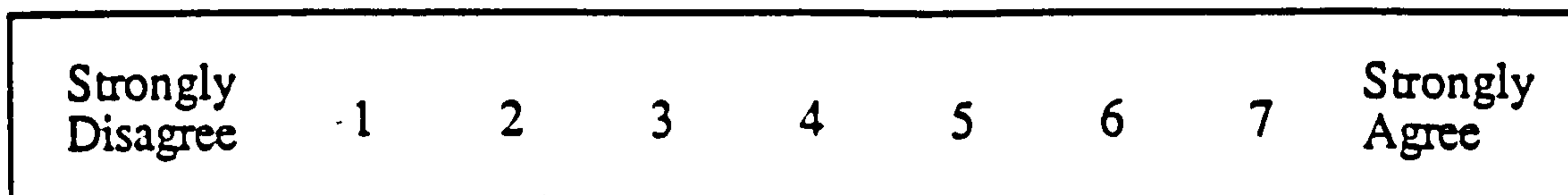
**Q1b** Quickchef Lodge bedrooms are cheaper than many of the other hotel bedrooms I use when I am travelling.



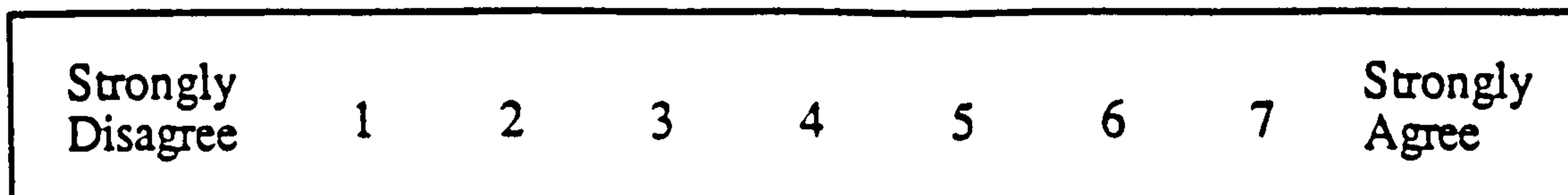
**Q2a** Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very well located for the traveller.



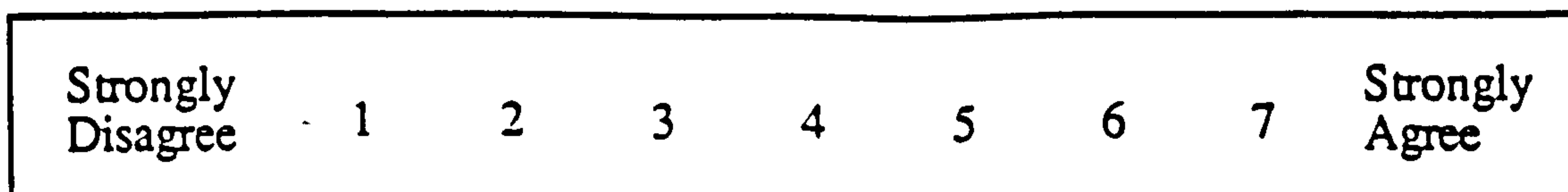
**Q2b** Service area lodges should be very well located for the traveller.



**Q3a** Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very clean.

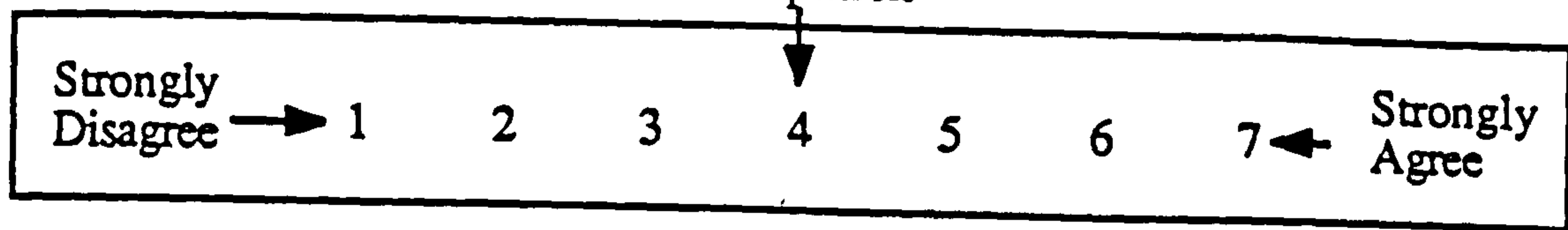


**Q3b** Service area lodges do not have to be very clean.

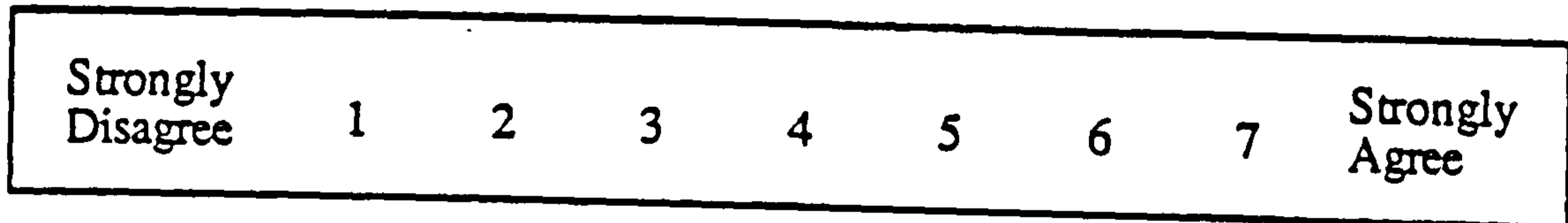




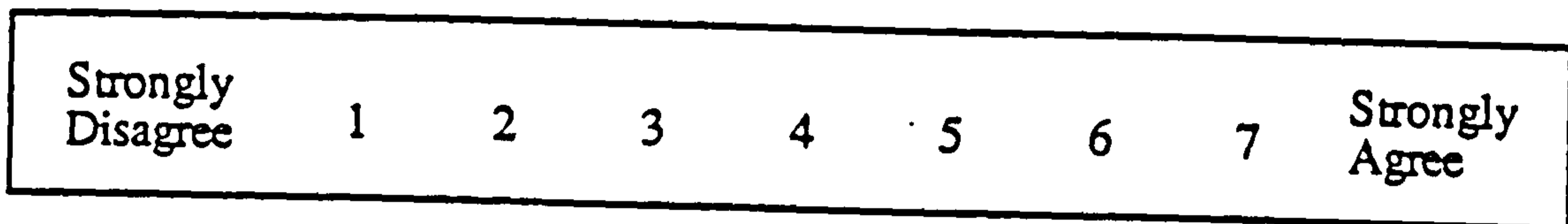
**Guide to scoring**



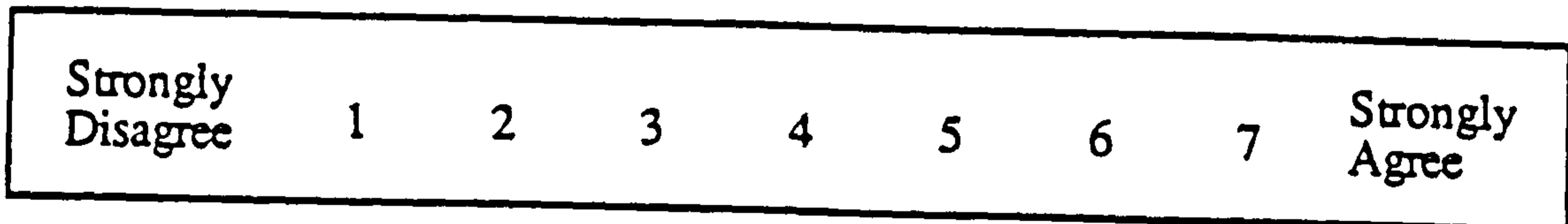
Q4a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very comfortable.



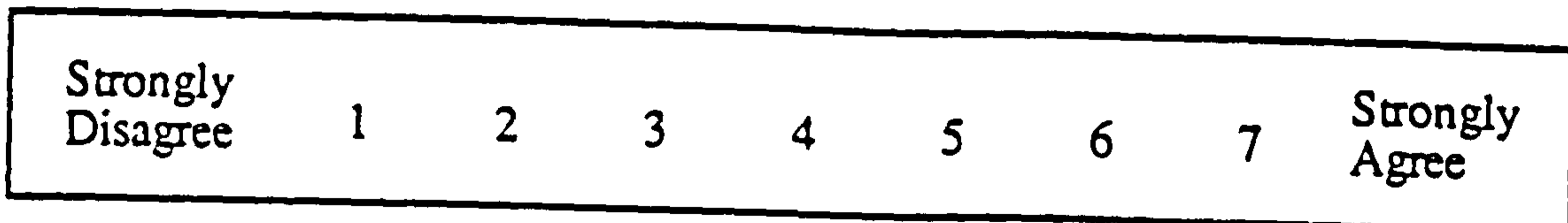
Q4b Service area lodges do not have to be very comfortable.



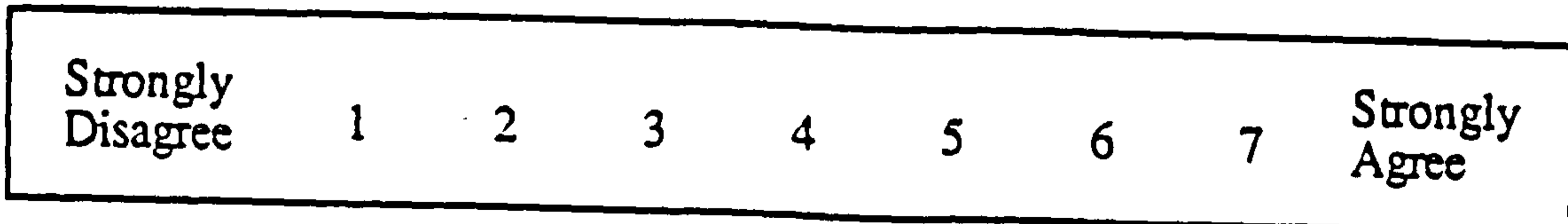
Q5a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are not very well decorated and maintained.



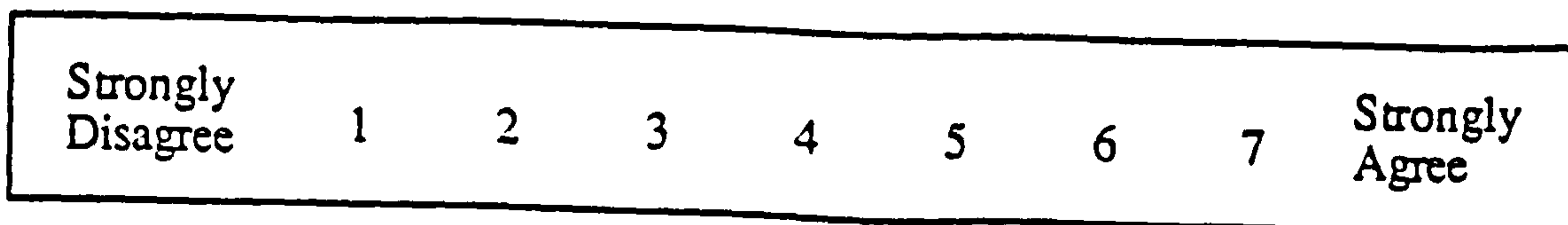
Q5b Service area lodges do not have to be very well decorated and maintained.



Q6a Quickchef Lodge Hotels should have telephones in their bedrooms.

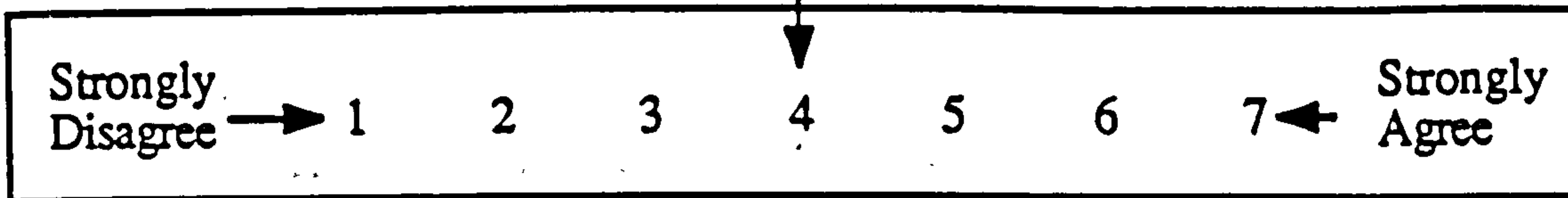


Q6b I would be prepared to pay more for a telephone in my bedroom.

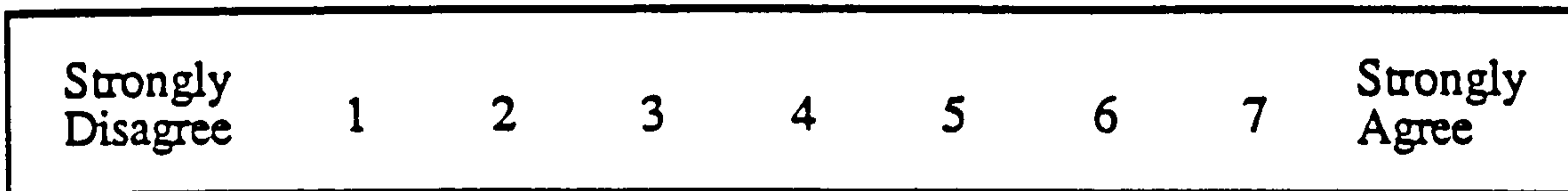


**Guide to scoring**

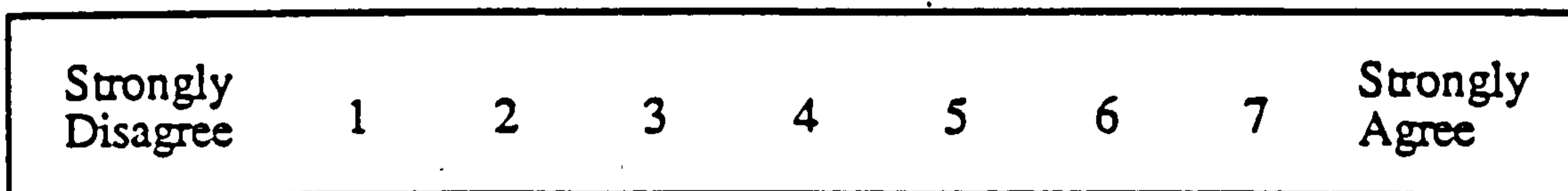
No opinion



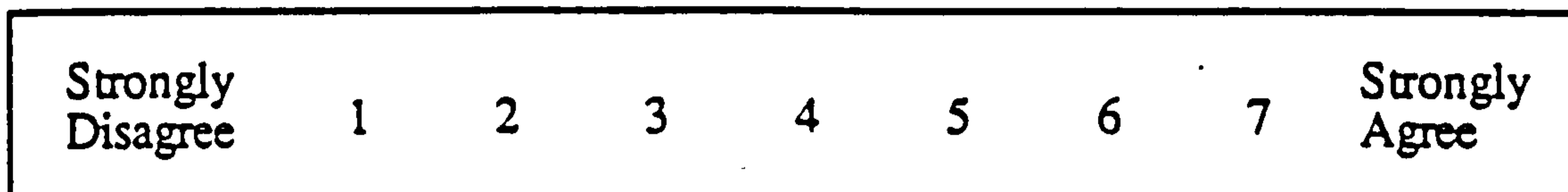
**Q7a** Quickchef Lodge Hotels should not have mini-bars in their bedrooms (non-motorway only).



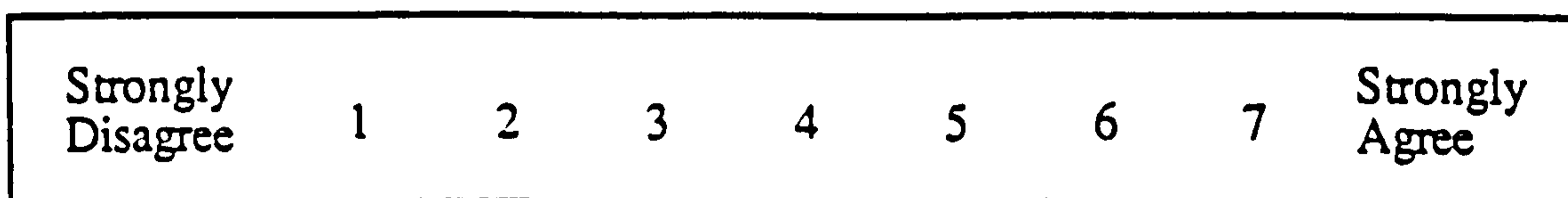
**Q7b** I would not use a mini-bar in my lodge bedroom if it was provided.



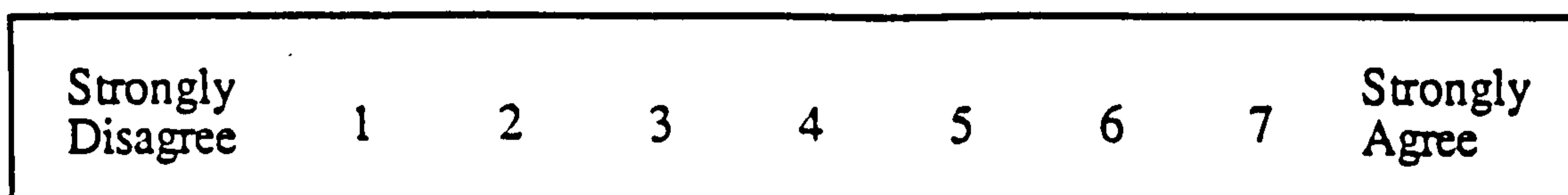
**Q8a** Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not provide enough facilities for children.



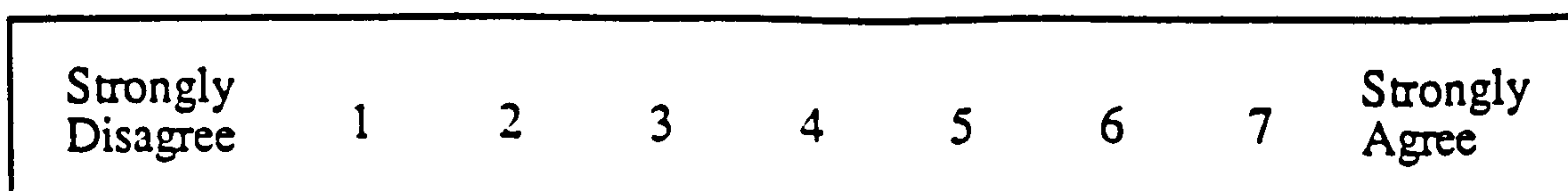
**Q8b** Service area lodges do not have to provide more facilities for children.



**Q9a** Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not have very friendly staff.

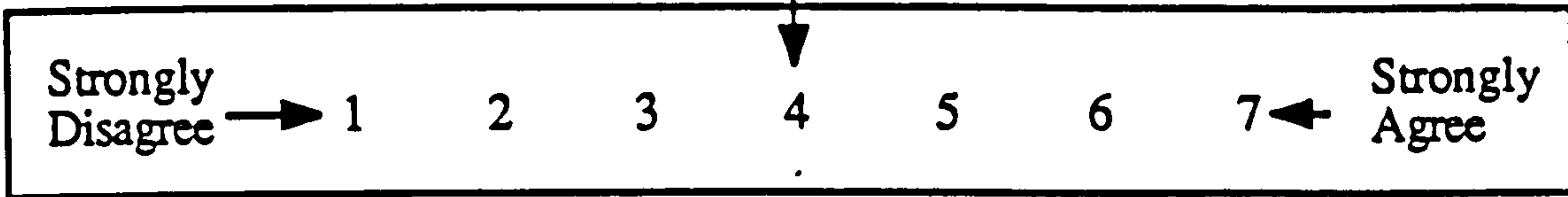


**Q9b** Service area lodges do not have to have very friendly staff.

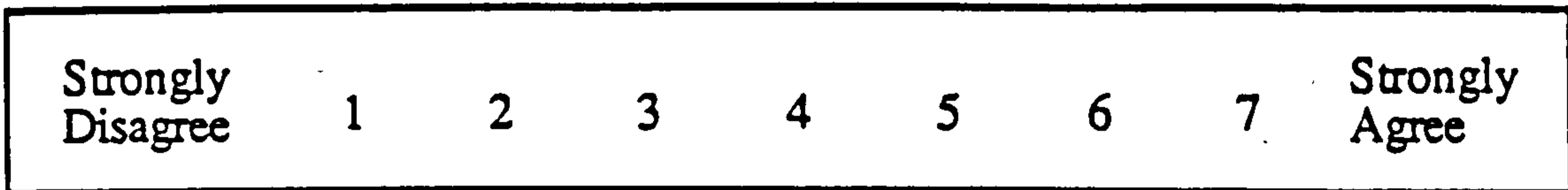


**Guide to scoring**

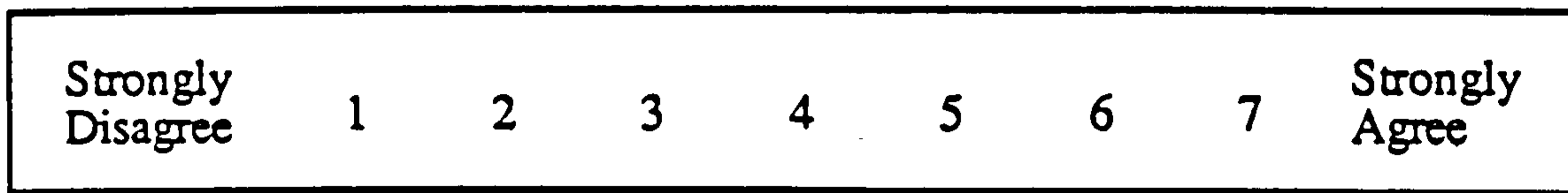
No opinion



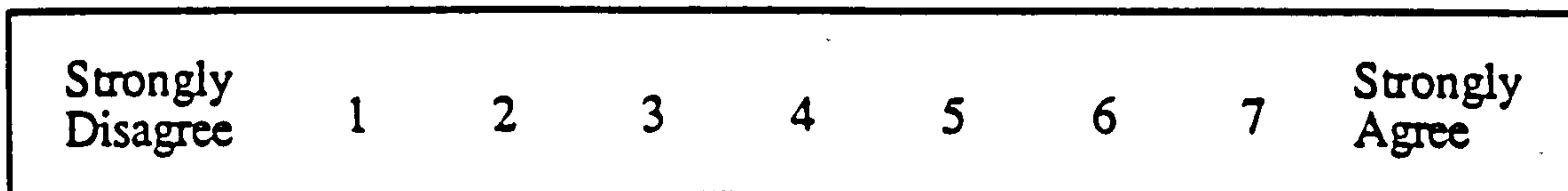
Q10a Quickchef Lodge Hotel staff do not provide a very good service.



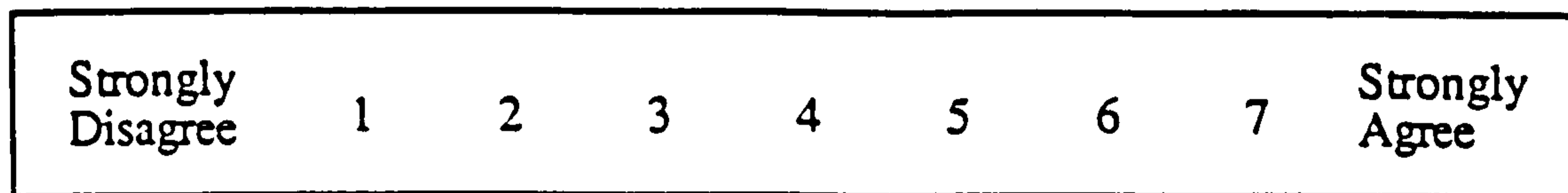
Q10b Service area lodge staff do not have to provide a very good service.



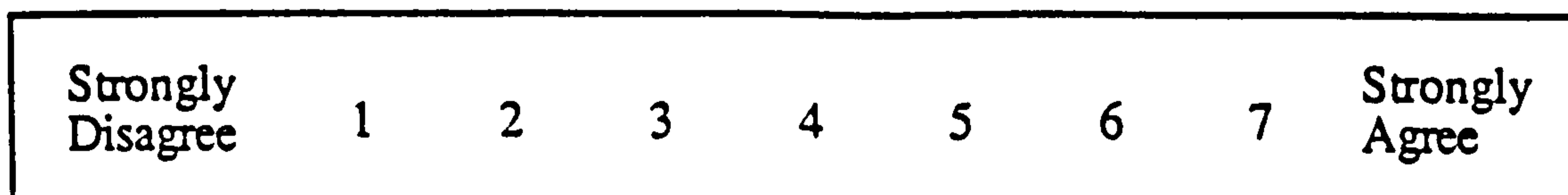
Q11a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide a very good standard overall.



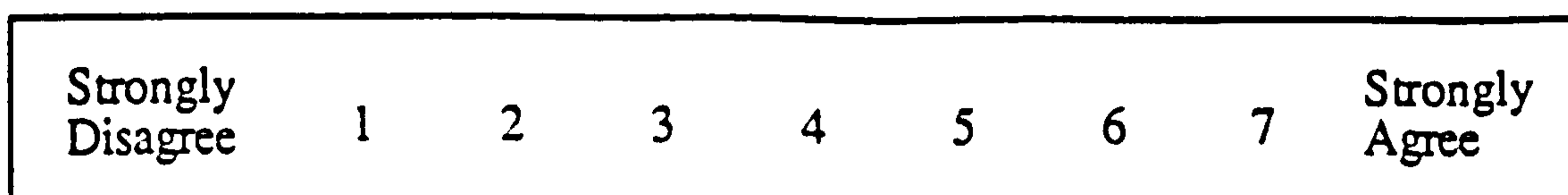
Q11b Service area lodges should provide a very good standard overall.



Q12a Quickchef Lodge Hotels do not provide value for money.

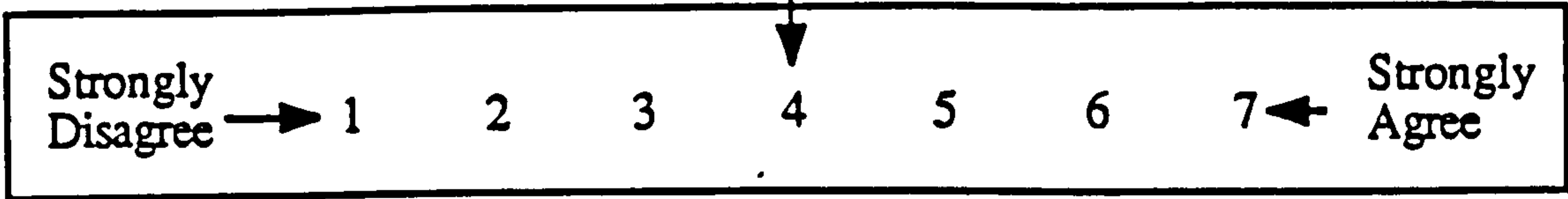


Q12b Service area lodges do not have to provide value for money.



**Guide to scoring**

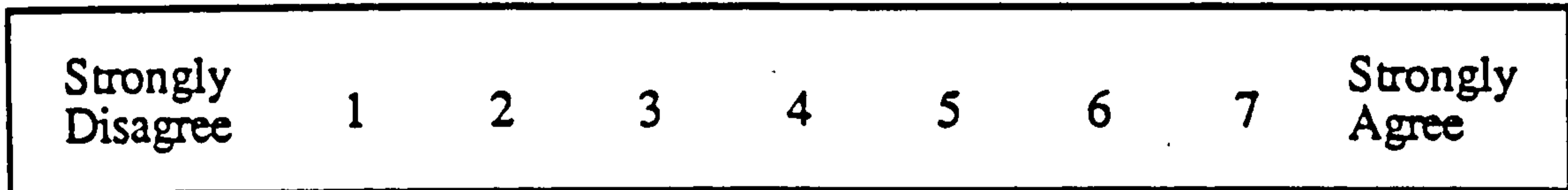
No opinion



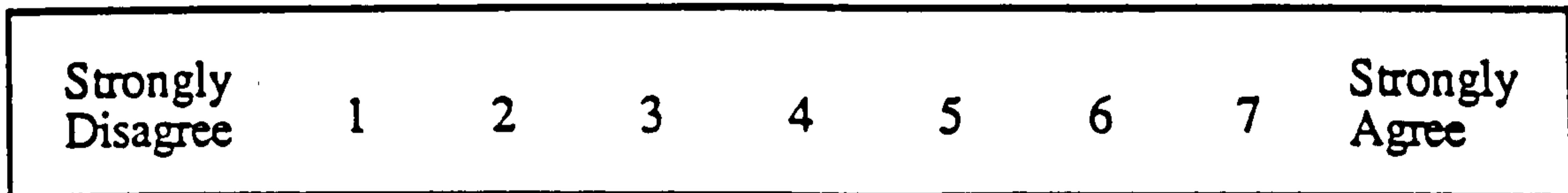
Q13a As a motorist I sometimes use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.



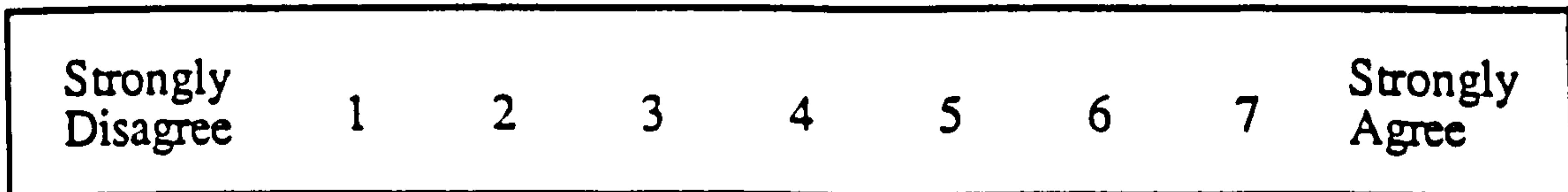
Q13b As a lodge guest I sometimes use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.



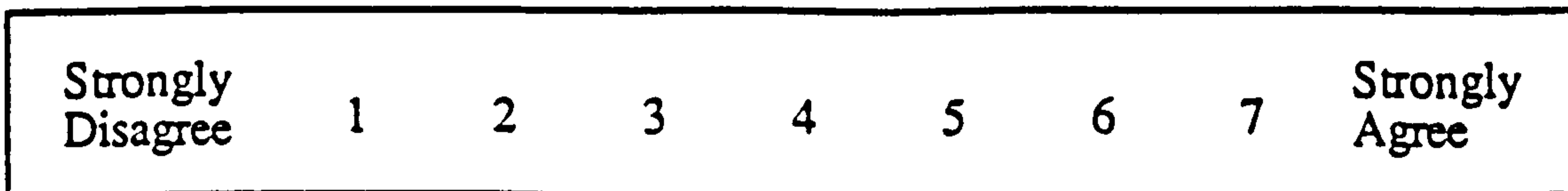
Q14a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very good for lodge guests.



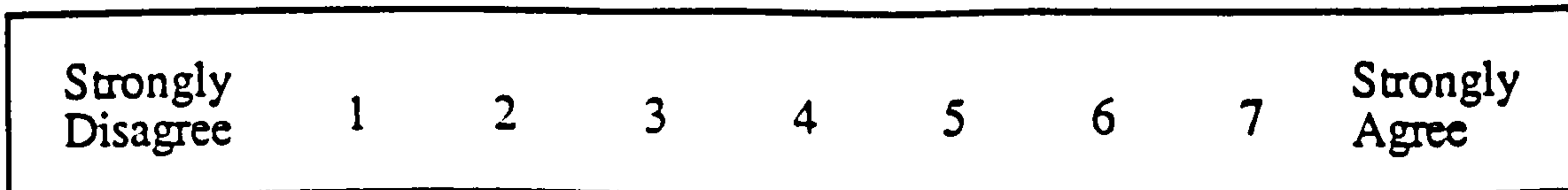
Q14b Service area restaurants do not have to be very good for lodge guests.



Q15a Quickchef Service Restaurants are well located for the lodge guest.

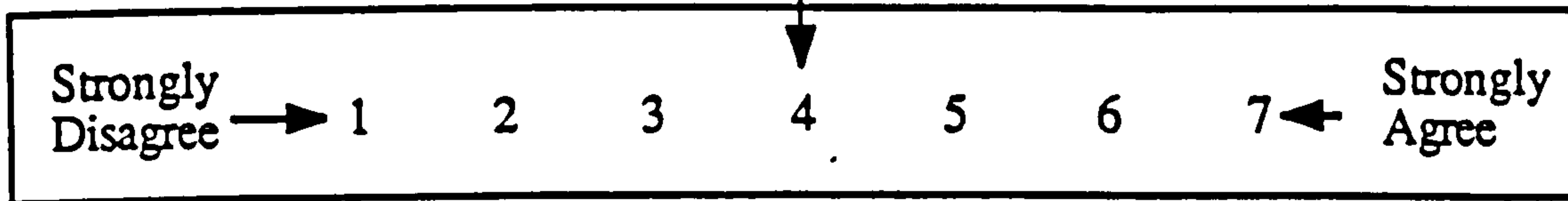


Q15b Service area restaurants should be well located for the lodge guest.

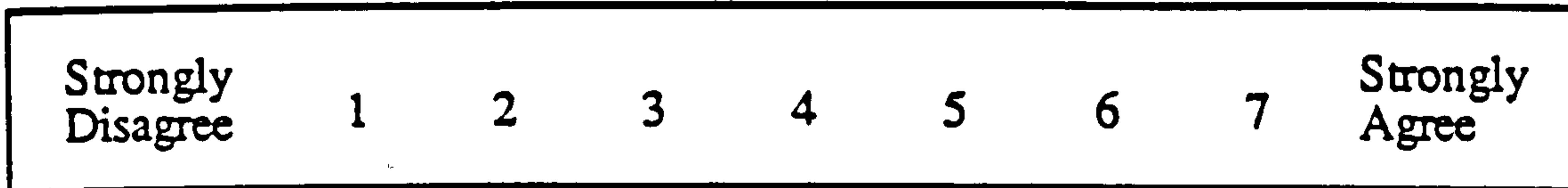


**Guide to scoring**

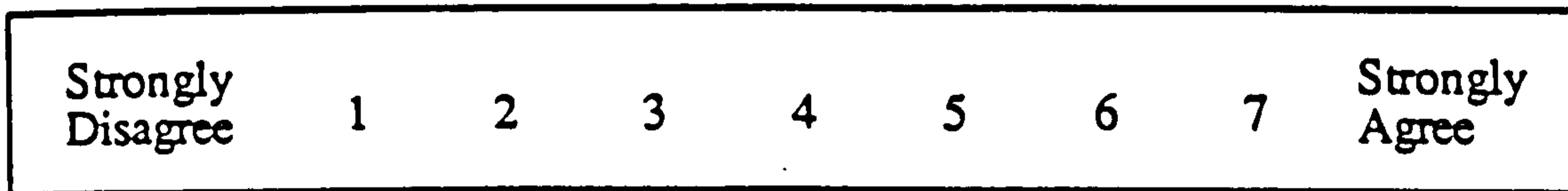
No opinion



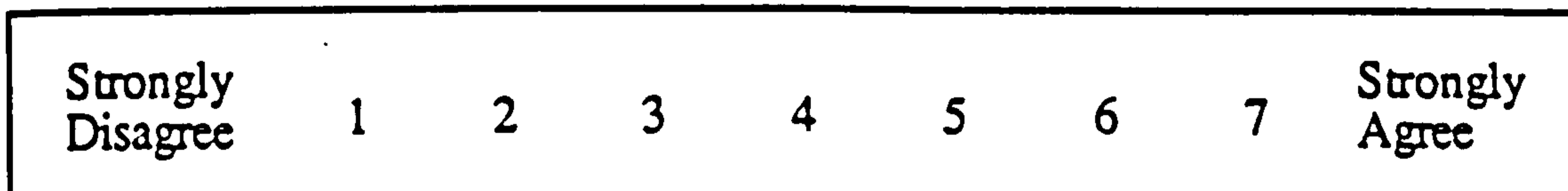
Q16a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very clean.



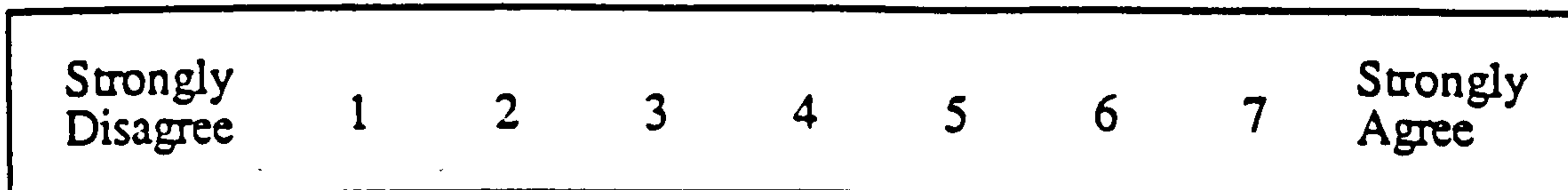
Q16b Service area restaurants do not have to be very clean.



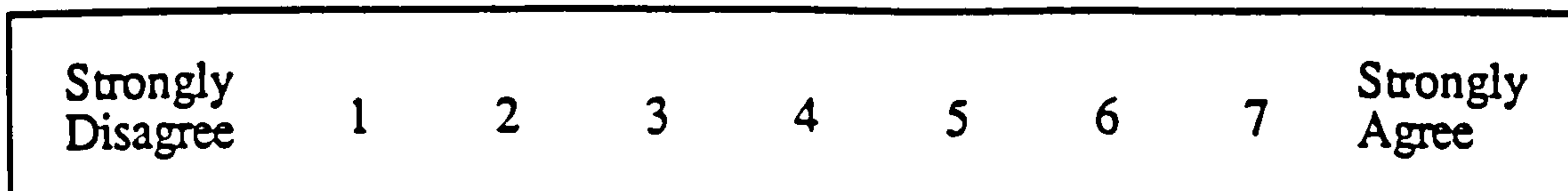
Q17a Quickchef Service Restaurants are not very comfortable.



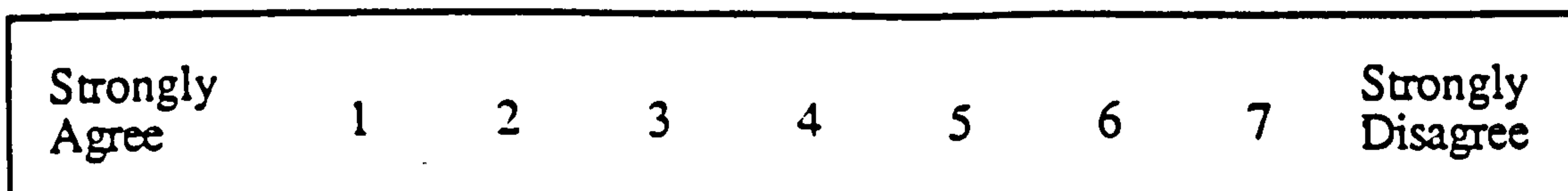
Q17b Service area restaurants do not have to be very comfortable.



Q18a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very well decorated and maintained.

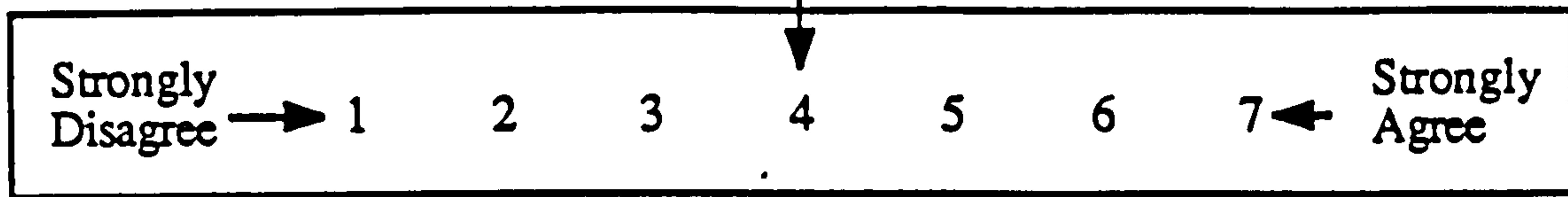


Q18b Service area restaurants should be very well decorated and maintained.

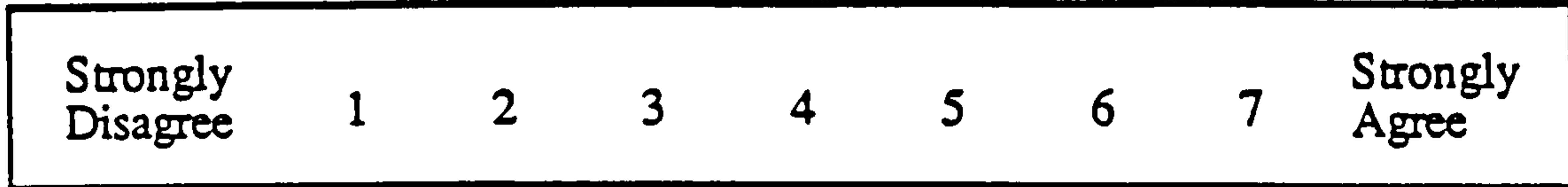


**Guide to scoring**

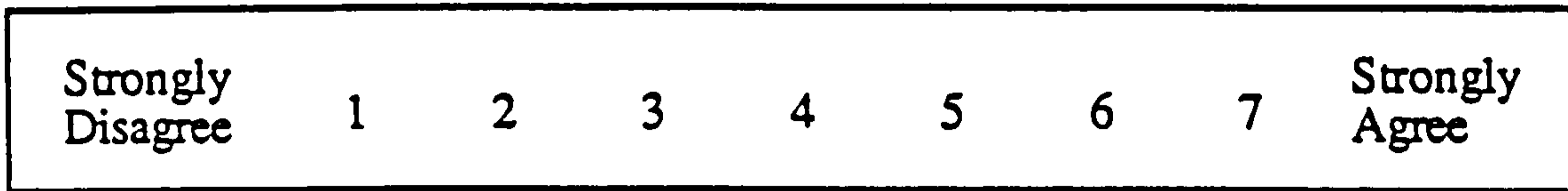
No opinion



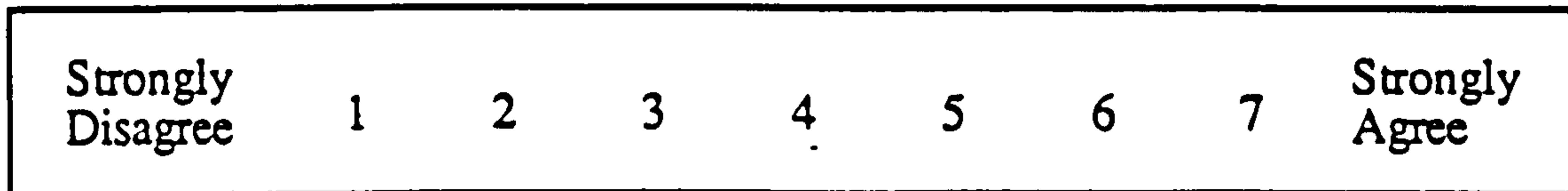
**Q19a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide good quality food.**



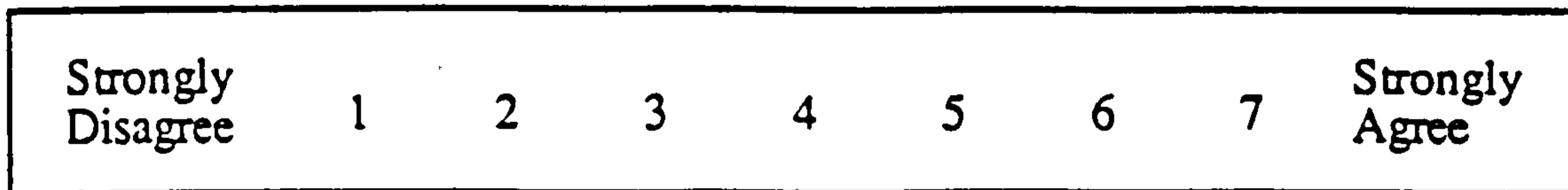
**Q19b Service area restaurants should provide good quality food.**



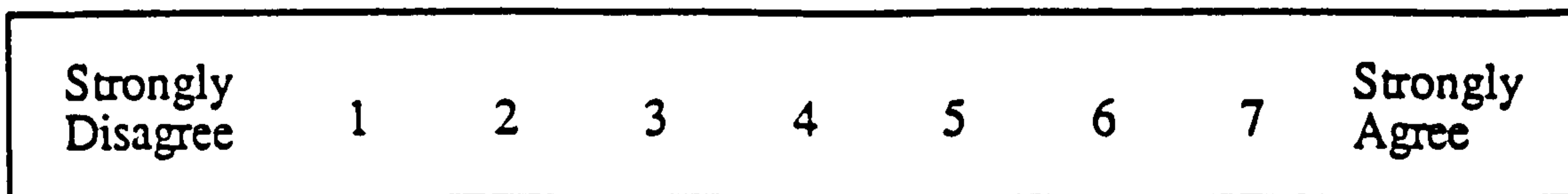
**Q20a Quickchef Service Restaurants have very friendly staff.**



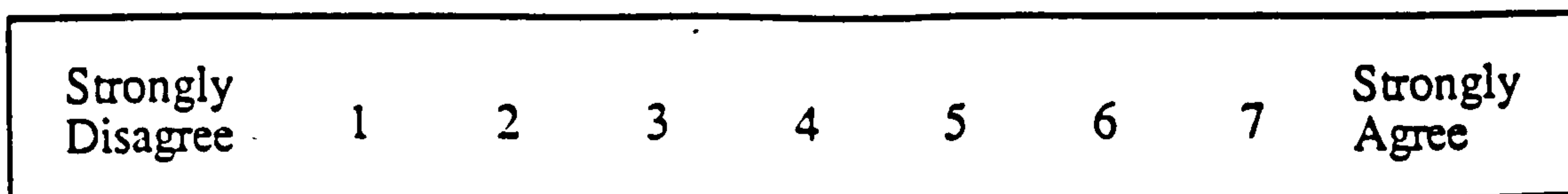
**Q20b Service area restaurants should have very friendly staff.**



**Q21a Quickchef Service Restaurant staff do not provide a very good service.**

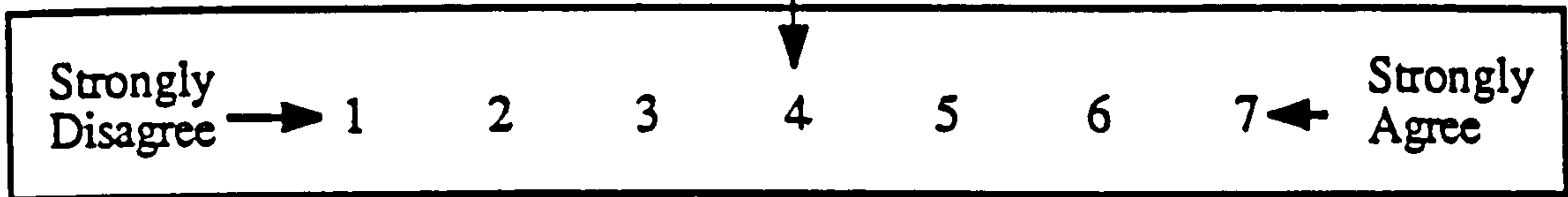


**Q21b Service area restaurant staff do not have to provide a very good service.**

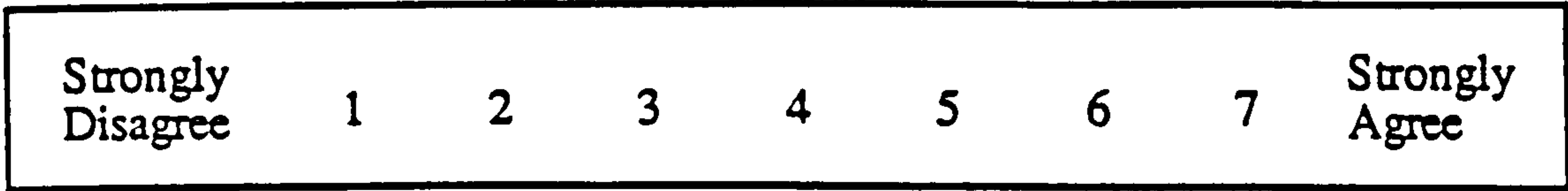


**Guide to scoring**

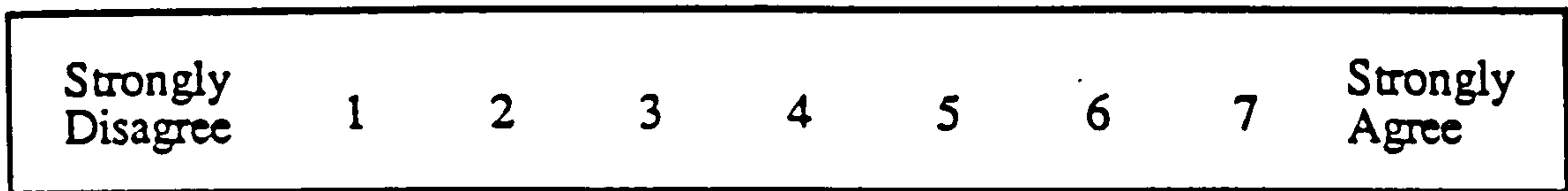
No opinion



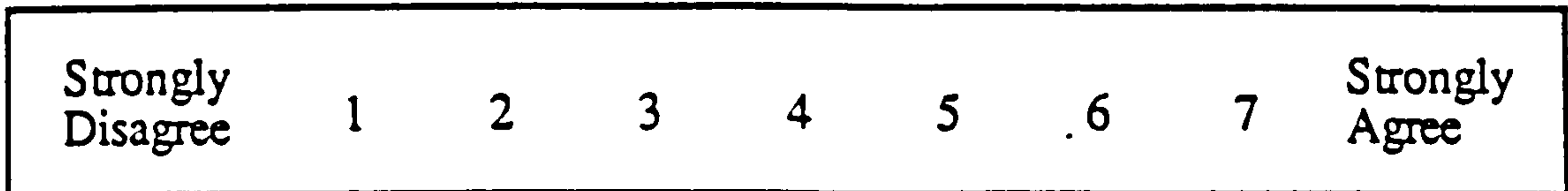
Q22a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide a very good standard overall.



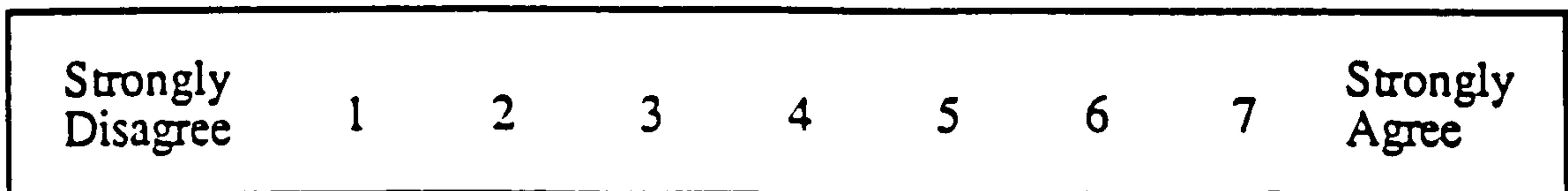
Q22b Service area restaurants should provide a very good standard overall.



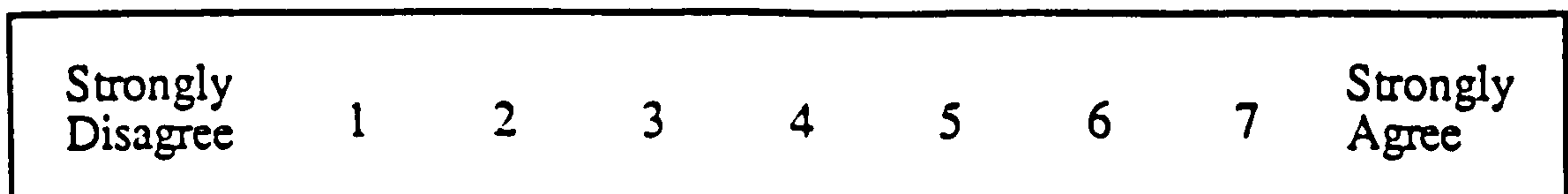
Q23a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide value for money.



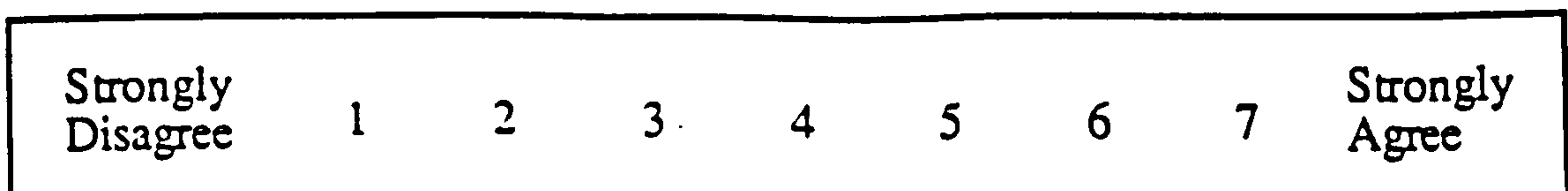
Q23b Service area restaurants should provide value for money.



Q24a As a lodge guest I sometimes use the shopping facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.



Q24b As a lodge guest I sometimes use the forecourt services and facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.



We would like to thank you for participating in this survey. Your opinions will enable us to identify areas you are not pleased with and will enable us to provide a better service in the future. If there is anything that you feel particularly strong about, that you have not been able to express through the previous questions, please indicate in the space provided below:

**Lodge**.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Restaurant**.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Other**.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Address (optional)**  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



Survey carried out by the  
**Dorset Institute**

for

QUICKCHEF  
**Lodge Hotels**

Researcher: Martin Senior

Hospitality Department  
Dorset Institute  
Wallisdown Road  
POOLE  
BH12 5BB

Q7. Employment  Employed (full or part-time)  Self-employed  Not working

Q8. Respondent's main occupational category

<input type="checkbox"/> Management/Professions	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical/Service
<input type="checkbox"/> Sales/Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/> Transport/Delivery
<input type="checkbox"/> Clerical/Secretarial	<input type="checkbox"/> Retired
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Q9. Sex

Male OR  Female

Q10. Respondent's Age

up to 24 years  45 to 54 years

25 to 34 years  55 to 64 years

35 to 44 years  65 years and over

Would you be prepared to complete a second questionnaire (lasting some 5 mins) during your present stay at this lodge?

Please indicate your choice on the back cover of this questionnaire.

Q1. Day of arrival

<input type="checkbox"/> Monday	<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday
<input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Friday
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday

Q2. Length of stay

1 night only  3 nights or more

2 nights

Q3. Purpose of staying overnight

Visiting locally  Stop-over only

Q4. Repeat visit

First time with Quickch**o**ldges  Used Quickch**o**ldges before

Q5. Number in party

One person  Two people or more

Q6. Main purpose of trip

Primarily business  Primarily on holiday

Visiting friends or relatives  Some other purpose

## Appendix B4 - Survey record form

**Date started:** .....

**Day started:** .....

**Date finished:** .....

**Day finished:** .....

**Bedrooms let\*  
during survey:** .....

**Bedspaces let\*  
during survey:** .....

### Guest Profile Questionnaire ('A') details

**Number received at the  
beg. of the survey:** .....

**Number remaining at the  
end of the survey:** .....

### Guest Evaluation Questionnaire ('B') details

**Number received at the  
beg. of the survey:** .....

**Number remaining at the  
end of the survey:** .....

**Lodge Manager/ess:** .....

**\* "let" means actually let to paying guests.**

## Appendix B5 - List of statement-questions used for customer and employee study

- Q1a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are better for travellers than other similarly-priced hotels.  
Q1b Quickchef Lodge Hotels are cheaper than many of the other hotel bedrooms I use when I am travelling.
- Q2a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very well located for the traveller.  
Q2b Service area lodges should be very well located for the traveller.
- Q3a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very clean.  
Q3b Service area lodges should be very clean.
- Q4a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very comfortable.  
Q4b Service area lodges should be very comfortable.
- Q5a Quickchef Lodge Hotels are very well decorated and maintained.  
Q5b Service area lodges should be very well decorated and maintained.
- Q6a Quickchef Lodge Hotels should have telephones in the rooms.  
Q6b I would be prepared to pay more for a telephone in my room.
- Q7a Quickchef should provide mini-bars in the lodge bedrooms.  
Q7b I would use a mini-bar in a lodge bedroom if it was provided.
- Q8a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide enough facilities for children.  
Q8b Service area lodges should provide more facilities for children.
- Q9a Quickchef Lodge Hotels have very friendly staff.  
Q9b Service area lodges should have very friendly staff.
- Q10a Quickchef Lodge Hotel staff provide a very good service.  
Q10b Service area lodge staff should provide a very good service.
- Q11a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide a very good overall standard.  
Q11b Service area lodges should provide a very good overall standard.
- Q12a Quickchef Lodge Hotels provide value for money.  
Q12b Service area lodges should provide value for money.
- Q13a As a motorist I use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.  
Q13b As a lodge guest I use the restaurants at Quickchef Service Areas.
- Q14a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very good for lodge guests.  
Q14b Service area restaurants should be designed for the use of lodge guests.
- Q15a Quickchef Restaurants are very well located for the lodge guest  
Q15b Quickchef Restaurants should be very well located for the lodge guest
- Q16a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very clean.  
Q16b Service area restaurants should be very clean.
- Q17a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very comfortable.  
Q17b Service area restaurants should be very comfortable.
- Q18a Quickchef Service Restaurants are very well decorated and maintained.  
Q18b Service area restaurants should be very well decorated and maintained.
- Q19a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide good quality food.  
Q19b Service area restaurants should provide good quality food.
- Q20a Quickchef Service Restaurants have very friendly staff.  
Q20b Service area restaurants should have very friendly staff.
- Q21a Quickchef Service Restaurant staff provide a very good service.  
Q21b Service area restaurant staff should provide a very good service.
- Q22a Quickchef Service Restaurants offer a very good overall standard.  
Q22b Service area restaurants should offer a very good overall standard.
- Q23a Quickchef Service Restaurants provide value for money.  
Q23b Service area restaurants should provide value for money.
- Q24a As a lodge guest I sometimes use the shopping facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.  
Q24b As a lodge guest I sometimes use the forecourt facilities at Quickchef Service Areas.

**Bold** = used for employee study

## **Appendix B6**

### **Employee Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** Could you read the following two statements and carefully consider whether you agree or disagree with them. Please show your answers by circling one number only against each listed area (shown below each statement).

**Example:**



**Statement 1.** All of the following areas are extremely important to guests staying overnight in a roadside lodge.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	strongly disagree								strongly agree
1.	Location of the lodge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2.	Cleanliness of the lodge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3.	Comfort of the lodge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4.	Decorations in the lodge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5.	Range of childrens' facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6.	Friendliness of the lodge staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7.	Standards of service in the lodge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8.	Standards of lodge - overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
9.	Value for money in the lodge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
10.	Location of the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
11.	Cleanliness of the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
12.	Comfort of the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
13.	Decorations in the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
14.	Friendliness of the restaurant staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
15.	Standards of service in the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
16.	Standards of restaurant - overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
17.	Value for money in the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
18.	Quality of food in the restaurant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
19.	Suitability of restaurant for lodge guests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

**Statement 2. Guests using overnight accommodation would find that all of the following areas are excellent at Quickchef Lodges.**

	strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly agree
1. Location of the lodge		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2. Cleanliness of the lodge		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3. Comfort of the lodge		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4. Decorations in the lodge		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5. Range of childrens' facilities		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6. Friendliness of the lodge staff		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7. Standards of service in the lodge		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8. Standards of lodge - overall		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
9. Value for money in the lodge		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
10. Location of the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
11. Cleanliness of the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
12. Comfort of the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
13. Decorations in the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
14. Friendliness of the restaurant staff		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
15. Standards of service in the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
16. Standards of restaurant - overall		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
17. Value for money in the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
18. Quality of food in the restaurant		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
19. Suitability of restaurant for lodge guests		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

**Please turn-over and complete the back page**

---

**Please note:** This survey is being carried out by an independent researcher working on behalf of Quickchef Motorway Services. The combined answers from the survey will be valuable to Quickchef and future developments. Your contribution to the survey will be very much appreciated and we can guarantee that complete anonymity will be assured to respondents as individual questionnaires will not be released.

---

**Employee position (please indicate)**

- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (a) Room Maid.....          | (d) General Assistant..... |
| (b) Receptionist.....       | (e) Section Leader.....    |
| (c) Supervisor.....         | (f) Shift Manager.....     |
| (g) General Management..... | (h) Other.....             |

**Thank you for your help**



**To all members of staff**

**As part of our continual programme in improving the services at Quickchef Service Areas, we are carrying out an extended survey at selected sites with our customers, and some members of staff. The next part of the programme is particularly interested in your opinions of the services we provide. We recognise that since many of you are in close and constant contact with our customers, your opinions are likely to reflect a true and fair picture of the services we provide.**

**To help us with the study we would like you to complete the 'Employee Survey' which is currently being distributed around your site. The answers you give will only be known by our independent researcher and in no way will affect your position with Quickchef, but your combined answers could significantly contribute to improving the services we provide to our customers.**

**Please follow the instructions carefully in the questionnaire and answer them as truthfully as you can. After putting your employee position (no names needed) on the back page, put each questionnaire in the envelope provided and seal them ready for collection by our researcher.**

**Thank you for your help**

**Signature**

## Appendix C1 - Questionnaire codes

### Questionnaire 'A'

- |     |                              |      |                            |
|-----|------------------------------|------|----------------------------|
| R1. | Day of arrival               | R7.  | Employment                 |
| R2. | Length of stay               | R8.  | Occupational category      |
| R3. | Purpose of staying overnight | R9.  | Sex                        |
| R4. | Repeat visit                 | R10. | Age                        |
| R5. | Number in party              | R11. | Complete questionnaire 'B' |
| R6. | Main purpose of trip         |      |                            |

### Questionnaire 'B'

- Q2a. Lodge well located
- Q2b. Lodge should be well located
- Q3a. Lodge very clean
- Q3b. Lodge should be very clean
- Q4a. Lodge very comfortable
- Q4b. Lodge should be very comfortable
- Q5a. Lodge well decorated
- Q5b. Lodge should be well decorated
- Q8a. Lodge has enough facilities for children
- Q8b. Lodge should have enough facilities for children
- Q9a. Lodge has friendly staff
- Q9b. Lodge should have friendly staff
- Q10a. Lodge provides good service
- Q10b. Lodge should provide good service
- Q11a. Lodge provides good standard overall
- Q11b. Lodge should provide good standard overall
- Q12a. Lodge provides value for money
- Q12b. Lodge should provide value for money
- Q14a. Restaurants good for guests
- Q14b. Restaurants should be good for guests
- Q15a. Restaurants well located
- Q15b. Restaurants should be well located
- Q16a. Restaurants very clean
- Q16b. Restaurants should be very clean
- Q17a. Restaurants very comfortable
- Q17b. Restaurants should be very comfortable
- Q18a. Restaurants very well decorated
- Q18b. Restaurants should be very well decorated
- Q19a. Provide quality food
- Q19b. Should provide quality food
- Q20a. Restaurants have friendly staff
- Q20b. Restaurants should have friendly staff
- Q21a. Restaurants provide good service
- Q21b. Restaurants should provide good service
- Q22a. Restaurants provide good standard overall
- Q22b. Restaurants should provide good standard overall
- Q23a. Restaurants provide value for money
- Q23b. Restaurants should provide value for money

**Appendix C2 - Means and S.D.s between total and matching questionnaires and differences between them.**

<u>Variable code</u>	Unmatched 'B' questionnaires		Matching 'B' questionnaires		<u>Standard error of differences</u>
	<u>mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	
Q2a.	5.68	1.55	5.69	1.56	0.27
Q2b.	6.26	1.35	6.28	1.43	0.87
Q3a.	6.51	1.33	6.50	1.29	0.57
Q3b.	6.84	1.02	6.80	0.90	2.13
Q4a.	6.18	1.24	6.22	1.25	0.98
Q4b.	6.60	1.22	6.57	1.14	0.91
Q5a.	6.40	1.08	6.44	1.13	0.91
Q5b.	6.66	1.10	6.65	1.09	0.36
Q8a.	4.19	1.40	4.24	1.41	1.16
Q8b.	4.29	1.56	4.23	1.61	0.90
Q9a.	6.38	1.02	6.42	1.08	1.10
Q9b.	6.68	0.77	6.74	0.97	1.88
Q10a.	6.32	1.04	6.35	1.03	1.08
Q10b.	6.69	0.81	6.71	0.85	1.09
Q11a.	6.39	1.06	6.43	1.07	1.77
Q11b.	6.73	0.81	6.78	0.88	1.98
Q12a.	6.25	1.34	6.29	1.35	1.01
Q12b.	6.72	0.91	6.74	0.94	0.82
Q14a.	4.51	2.00	4.43	2.01	1.48
Q14b.	6.54	1.04	6.52	1.03	0.84
Q15a.	5.91	1.49	5.84	1.45	1.90
Q15b.	6.62	0.85	6.60	0.84	0.92
Q16a.	5.51	1.60	5.46	1.62	0.76
Q16b.	6.86	0.69	6.87	0.66	0.09
Q17a.	4.96	1.74	4.96	1.73	0.27
Q17b.	6.62	0.85	6.58	0.93	0.54
Q18a.	5.32	1.69	5.25	1.73	1.24
Q18b.	6.47	1.50	6.39	1.36	1.74
Q19a.	4.73	1.91	4.66	1.89	1.19
Q19b.	6.70	0.84	6.73	0.78	0.74
Q20a.	5.18	1.76	5.23	1.75	0.59
Q20b.	6.69	0.87	6.71	0.85	0.73
Q21a.	5.27	1.72	5.28	1.72	0.40
Q21b.	6.75	0.80	6.77	0.82	1.19
Q22a.	5.27	1.74	5.22	1.75	1.06
Q22b.	6.75	0.79	6.77	0.77	0.88
Q23a.	4.66	1.95	4.73	1.95	1.26
Q23b.	6.70	0.87	6.71	0.85	1.13

**Bold = significant differences**

**Appendix C3 - Means and S.D.s between different poled questionnaires and differences between them.**

<u>Variable code</u>	<u>Questionnaire '1'</u>		<u>Questionnaire '2'</u>		<u>Standard error of difference</u>
	<u>mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	
Q2a.	5.98	1.13	5.42	1.82	<b>3.57</b>
Q2b.	6.71	0.59	5.90	1.69	<b>6.21</b>
Q3a.*	6.55	1.28	6.45	1.39	1.61
Q3b.*	6.70	1.25	6.88	0.77	0.71
Q4a.	6.24	1.43	6.19	1.04	0.34
Q4b.	6.53	1.43	6.60	1.01	0.53
Q5a.*	6.45	1.15	6.44	1.03	0.11
Q5b.*	6.61	1.16	6.68	1.05	0.59
Q8a.	4.17	1.48	4.30	1.32	0.91
Q8b.	4.21	1.69	4.26	1.44	0.28
Q9a.	6.50	1.14	6.35	0.91	1.37
Q9b.	6.70	0.95	6.77	0.57	1.04
Q10a.	6.45	1.13	6.27	0.96	1.64
Q10b.	6.69	0.99	6.74	0.60	0.62
Q11a.	6.39	1.12	6.47	1.01	0.75
Q11b.	6.81	0.58	6.74	0.97	0.84
Q12a.*	6.33	1.27	6.27	1.41	0.43
Q12b.*	6.78	0.79	6.71	1.01	0.73
Q14a.	4.31	2.03	4.52	1.97	0.96
Q14b.	6.44	1.26	6.59	0.97	1.36
Q15a.*	5.66	1.66	5.99	1.32	<b>2.11</b>
Q15b.*	6.53	0.99	6.66	0.71	1.44
Q16a.	5.35	1.77	5.55	1.47	1.22
Q16b.	6.87	0.64	6.87	0.53	0.06
Q17a.	4.88	1.90	5.02	1.56	0.75
Q17b.	6.53	0.96	6.62	0.91	0.96
Q18a.	5.29	1.68	5.22	1.77	0.36
Q18b.	6.30	1.64	6.47	1.37	1.05
Q19a.	4.90	1.68	4.45	2.08	<b>2.26</b>
Q19b.	6.75	0.61	6.70	0.90	0.58
Q20a.	5.30	1.62	5.17	1.86	0.72
Q20b.	6.67	0.89	6.74	0.81	0.81
Q21a.*	5.23	1.68	5.33	1.77	0.56
Q21b.*	6.71	1.01	6.83	0.54	1.36
Q22a.	5.32	1.66	5.13	1.84	1.01
Q22b.	6.77	0.73	6.76	0.82	0.11
Q23a.	4.84	1.77	4.62	2.11	1.11
Q23b.	6.76	0.75	6.67	0.94	1.03

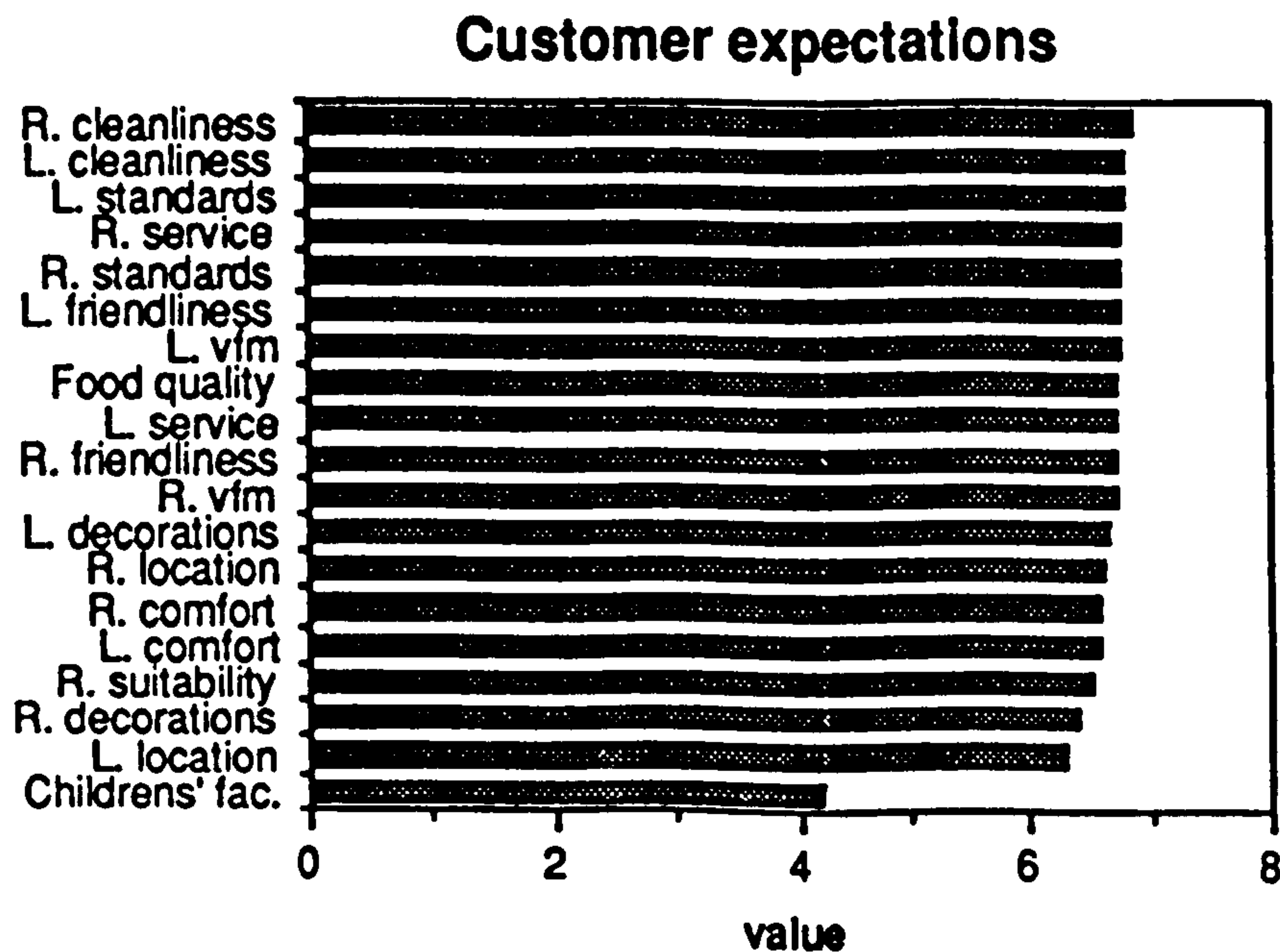
\* = Control questions  
**Bold = significant differences**

## Appendix C4 - Expectation scores

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	6.87	0.69
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	6.80	1.02
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	6.78	0.81
Q21	Service in restaurants	6.77	0.80
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	6.77	0.77
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	6.74	0.77
Q12	Value for money in lodges	6.74	0.91
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	6.73	0.78
Q10	Service in lodges	6.71	0.81
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	6.71	0.85
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	6.71	0.85
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	6.65	1.10
Q15	Location of restaurants	6.60	0.85
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	6.58	0.93
Q4	Comfort of lodges	6.57	1.22
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	6.52	1.04
Q18	Decorations/maintenance of restaurants	6.39	1.50
Q2	Location of lodge	6.28	1.35
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	4.23	1.56

0.98 mean S.D.

E = expectation scores  
S.D. = standard deviations



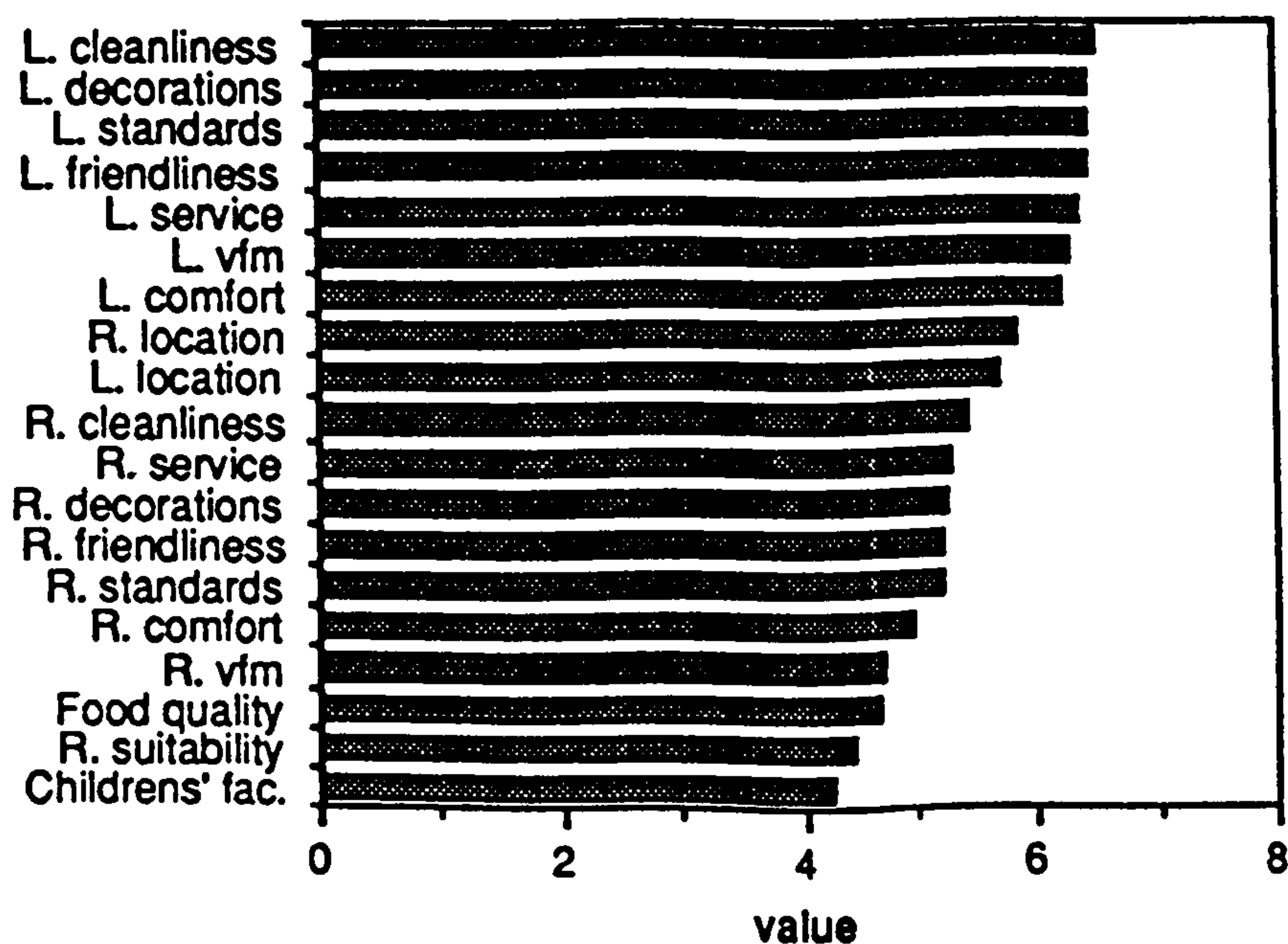
## Appendix C5 - Perception scores

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	6.50	1.34
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	6.44	1.08
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	6.43	1.06
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	6.42	1.02
Q10	Service in lodges	6.35	1.04
Q12	Value for money in lodges	6.29	1.34
Q4	Comfort of lodges	6.22	1.24
Q15	Location of restaurants	5.84	1.49
Q2	Location of lodge	5.69	1.55
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	5.46	1.62
Q21	Service in restaurants	5.28	1.72
Q18	Decorations/maintenance of restaurants	5.25	1.73
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	5.23	1.75
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	5.22	1.75
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	4.96	1.73
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	4.73	1.95
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	4.66	1.91
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	4.43	2.00
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	4.24	1.39

1.51 mean S.D.

P = perception scores  
S.D. = standard deviations

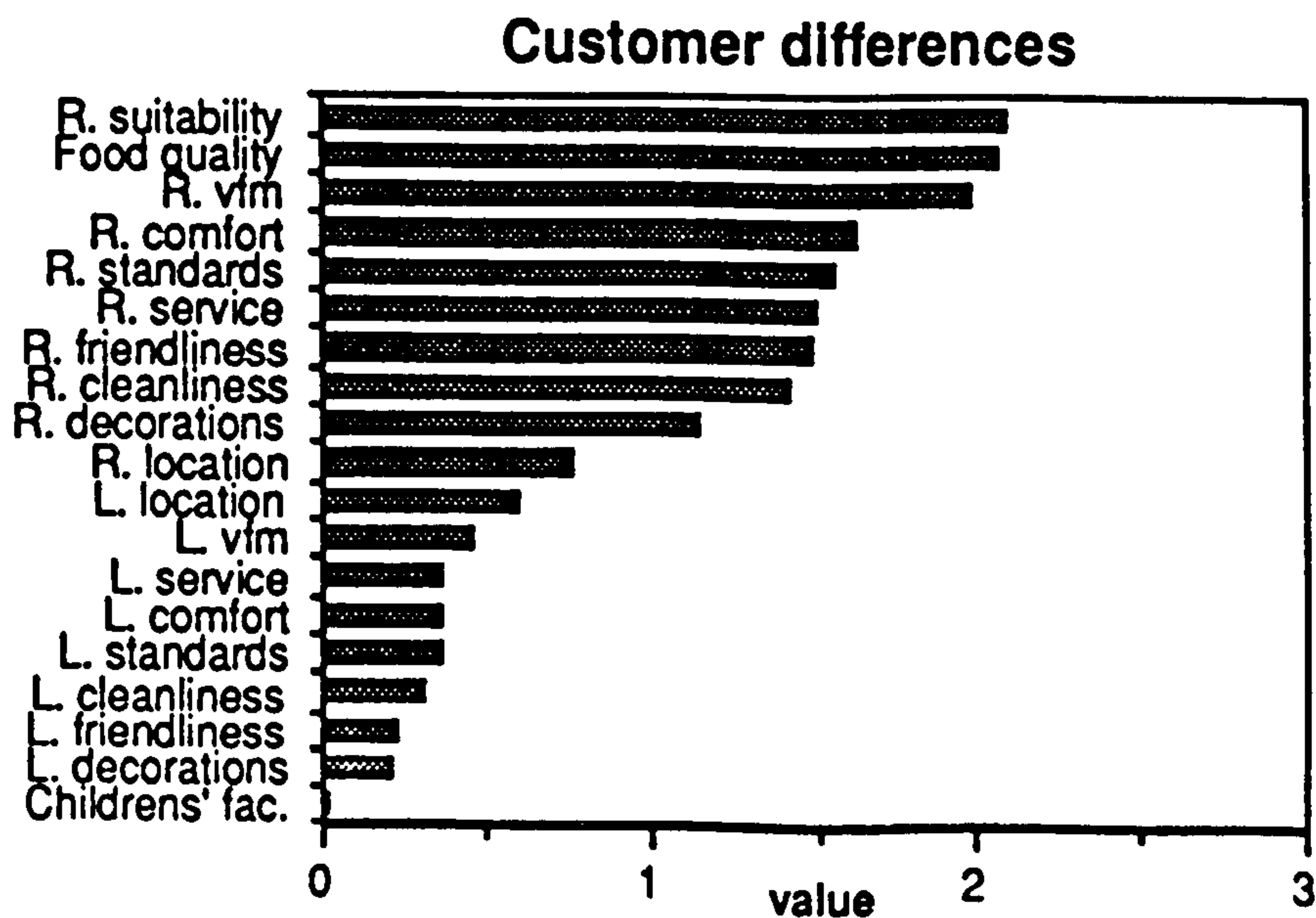
### Customer perceptions



## Appendix C6 - Difference scores

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>D</u>
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	2.09
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	2.07
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	1.98
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	1.62
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	1.55
Q21	Service in restaurants	1.49
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	1.48
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	1.41
Q18	Decorations/maintenance of restaurants	1.14
Q15	Location of restaurants	0.76
Q2	Location of lodge	0.59
Q12	Value for money in lodges	0.45
Q10	Service in lodges	0.36
Q4	Comfort of lodges	0.35
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	0.35
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	0.30
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	0.22
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	0.21
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	+0.01

D = difference scores



## Appendix C8 - Individual and group profiles

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variable</u>				
R1.	<u>Day of arrival</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	monday	12	19	17	63
	tuesday	16	11	12	82
	wednesday	12	8	7	52
	thursday	9	8	14	62
	friday	10	15	18	59
	saturday	10	5	1	25
	sunday	9	6	1	22
R2.	<u>Length of stay</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	1 night only	60	54	68	280
	2 nights	10	13	0	48
	3 nights or more	8	5	2	36
R3.	<u>Purpose of staying</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	visiting locally	32	34	5	149
	stop-over only	46	38	65	215
R4.	<u>Repeat visit</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	1st time with 'X'	32	31	34	139
	used Quickchef before	46	41	36	225
R5.	<u>Number in party</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	one person	34	34	17	169
	two or more	43	38	53	194
R6.	<u>Purpose of trip*</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	primarily business				206
	VFR				31
	on holiday				91
	other purpose				37
R7.	<u>Employment</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	self-employed	14	12	12	60
	employed	55	54	47	272
	not working	8	5	11	30
R8.	<u>Occupational category*</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	management/professions				184
	sales/marketing				83
	clerical/secretary				5
	technical/service				22
	transport/delivery				14
	retired				27
	other				20



R9.	<u>Sex</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	male	69	59	54	310
	female	9	12	16	53
R10.	<u>Age</u>	<u>lodge 'D'</u>	<u>lodge 'H'</u>	<u>lodge 'J'</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	up to 24	3	3	3	21
	25 to 34	10	13	14	62
	35 to 44	22	28	16	109
	45 to 54	19	13	14	83
	55 to 64	12	11	15	59
	65 and over	12	4	8	30

\* missing data not available

## Appendix C9 - Respondent differences

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Yes%</u>	<u>No%</u>
R1.	<u>Day of arrival</u>		
	monday	78.1	21.9
	tuesday	70.1	29.9
	wednesday	71.8	28.2
	thursday	73.2	26.8
	friday	69.6	30.4
	saturday	55.1	44.9
	sunday	74.4	25.6
	$x^2$ 26.28	p = 0.94	
R2.	<u>Length of stay</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	1 night only	68.4	31.6
	2 nights	77.7	22.3
	3 nights or more	84.5	15.5
	$x^2$ 365.65	p = 0.0000	
R3.	<u>Purpose of staying</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	visiting locally	74.3	15.7
	stop-over only	68.6	31.4
	$x^2$ 717.89	p = 0.0000	
R4.	<u>Repeat visit</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	1st time with 'X'	67.2	32.8
	used Quickchefbefore	73.1	26.9
	$x^2$ 717.12	p = 0.0000	
R5.	<u>Number in party</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	one person	77.1	22.9
	two or more	66.0	34.0
	$x^2$ 724.16	p = 0.0000	
R6.	<u>Purpose of trip</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	primarily business	73.6	26.4
	VFR	60.6	39.4
	on holiday	70.1	29.9
	other purpose	67.9	32.1
	$x^2$ 737.67	p = 0.0000	

R7.	<u>Employment</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	self-employed	71.2	28.8
	employed	70.7	29.3
	not working	70.0	30.0

$x^2$  1.27                       $p = 1.0$

R8.	<u>Occupational category</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	management/professions	71.6	28.4
	sales/marketing	68.3	31.7
	clerical/secretary	54.5	45.5
	technical/service	75.9	24.1
	transport/delivery	76.0	24.0
	retired	71.2	28.8
	other	71.1	28.9

$x^2$  727.60                       $p = 0.001$

R9.	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	male	71.5	28.5
	female	68.0	32.0

$x^2$  711.59                       $p = 0.0000$

R10.	<u>Age</u>	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
	up to 24	61.7	38.3
	25 to 34	64.8	35.2
	35 to 44	74.2	26.8
	45 to 54	73.9	26.1
	55 to 64	70.6	29.4
	65 and over	71.7	28.3

$x^2$  25.37                       $p = 0.0452$

## Appendix C10 - Profile permutations

R2.	<u>Length of stay</u>	visiting <u>locally</u> %	stopover <u>only</u> %
	one night only	53.0	93.5
	two nights	26.9	3.7
	three or more	20.1	2.8

$\chi^2$  446.42

$p = 0.0000$

## Appendix C11 - Profile differences between full- and part-respondents

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
R1.	<u>Day of arrival</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
	monday	17.0	17.8
	tuesday	19.1	22.5
	wednesday	27.7	14.2
	thursday	17.0	17.0
	friday	12.8	16.2
	saturday	4.3	6.8
	sunday	2.1	6.0
R2.	<u>Length of stay</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	1 night only	80.1	76.7
	2 nights	12.8	13.4
	3 nights or more	6.4	9.9
R3.	<u>Purpose of staying</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	visiting locally	46.8	40.8
	stop-over only	53.2	59.2
R4.	<u>Repeat visit</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	1st time with Quickchef	42.6	38.1
	used Quickchef before	57.4	61.9
R5.	<u>Number in party</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	one person	59.6	46.3
	two or more	40.4	53.7
R6.	<u>Purpose of trip</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	primarily business	66.0	56.4
	VFR	6.4	8.5
	on holiday	21.2	25.0
	other purpose	6.4	10.1
R7.	<u>Employment</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	self-employed	17.0	16.4
	employed	74.5	74.5
	not working	8.5	9.1

R8.	<u>Occupational category</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	man./professions	55.3	50.4
	sales/marketing	12.8	22.7
	clerical/secretary	4.3	1.4
	technical/service	8.5	6.0
	transport/delivery	8.5	3.8
	retired	6.4	7.4
	other	4.3	5.5

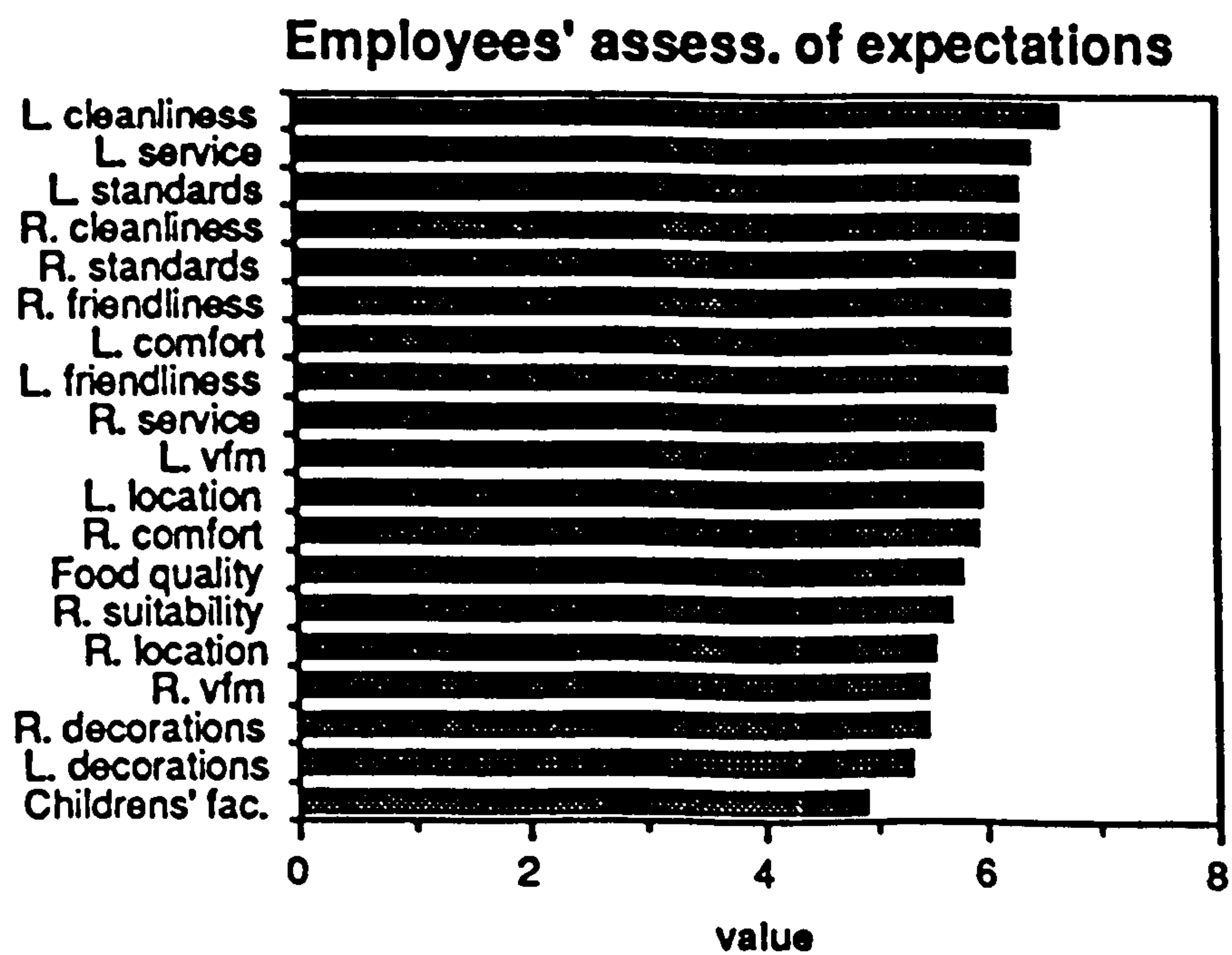
R9.	<u>Sex</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	male	83.0	84.9
	female	17.0	15.1

R10.	<u>Age</u>	<u>47 cases</u>	<u>365 cases</u>
	up to 24	4.3	5.8
	25 to 34	10.6	17.0
	35 to 44	30.0	29.9
	45 to 54	23.4	22.7
	55 to 64	23.4	16.2
	65 and over	8.5	8.2

## Appendix C12 - Employees' assessment of expectations

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	6.64	0.72
Q10	Service in lodges	6.39	1.05
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	6.30	1.09
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	6.30	1.06
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	6.27	1.12
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	6.23	1.26
Q4	Comfort of lodges	6.22	1.02
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	6.19	1.15
Q21	Service in restaurants	6.06	1.40
Q12	Value for money in lodges	5.98	1.41
Q2	Location of lodge	5.95	1.17
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	5.91	1.16
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	5.78	1.39
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	5.66	1.63
Q15	Location of restaurants	5.52	1.37
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	5.47	1.62
Q18	Decorations/maintenance of restaurants	5.44	1.37
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	5.30	1.28
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	4.39	1.93
		5.60	1.27 mean S.D.

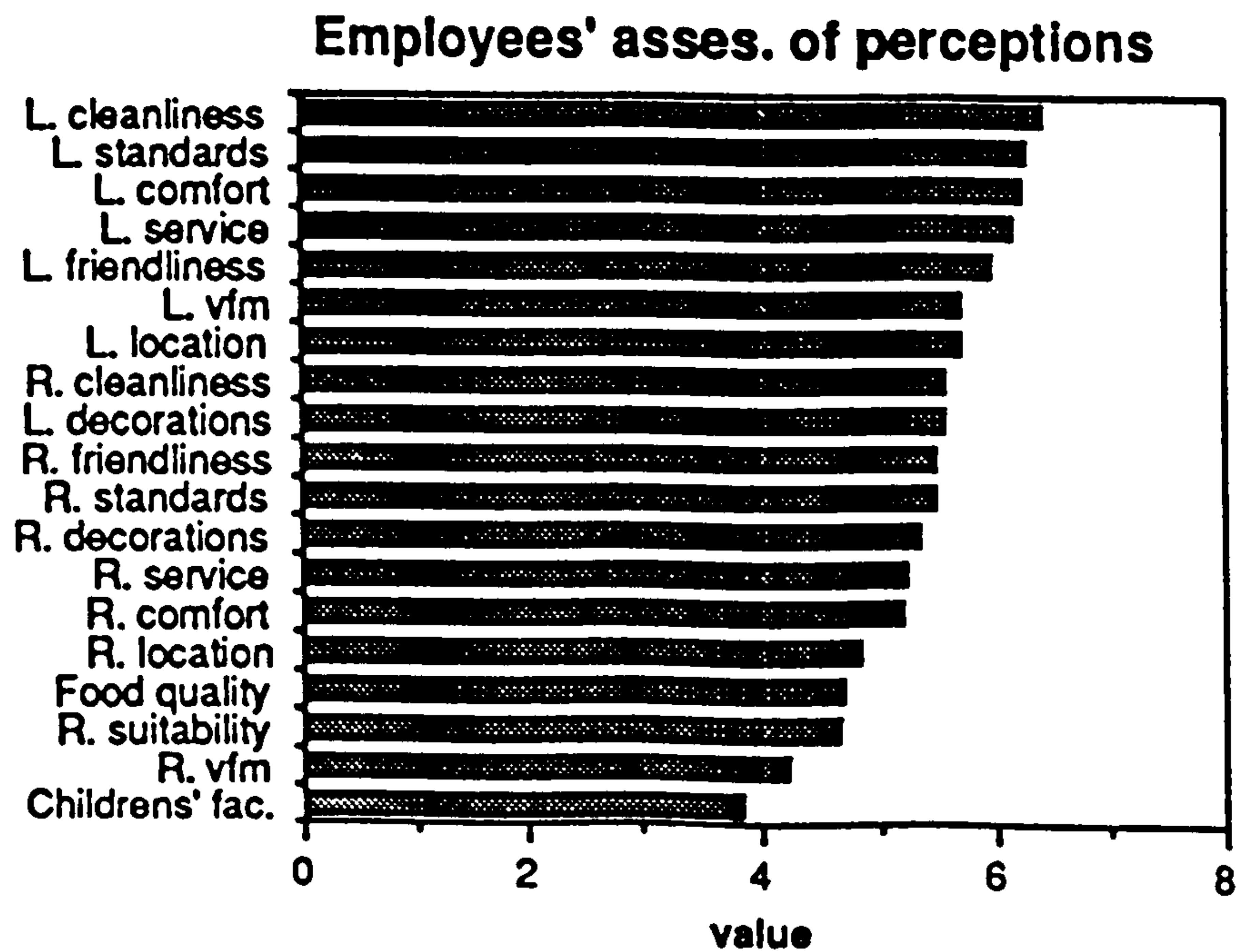
Key: E = expectation score  
 + = perceptions exceed expectations  
 - = expectations exceed perceptions



## Appendix C13 - Employees' assessment of perceptions

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	6.41	1.02
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	6.27	1.09
Q4	Comfort of lodges	6.23	1.23
Q10	Service in lodges	6.16	1.09
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	5.98	1.23
Q12	Value for money in lodges	5.72	1.84
Q2	Location of lodge	5.70	1.50
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	5.58	1.43
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	5.56	1.23
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	5.48	1.55
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	5.48	1.41
Q18	Decorations/maintenance of restaurants	5.34	1.31
Q21	Service in restaurants	5.22	1.59
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	5.20	1.46
Q15	Location of restaurants	4.83	1.75
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	4.69	1.59
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	4.66	1.84
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	4.22	1.86
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	3.81	1.79
		<u>5.40</u>	<u>1.46</u> mean S.D.

Key: P = perception scores  
 + = perceptions exceed expectations  
 - = expectations exceed perceptions



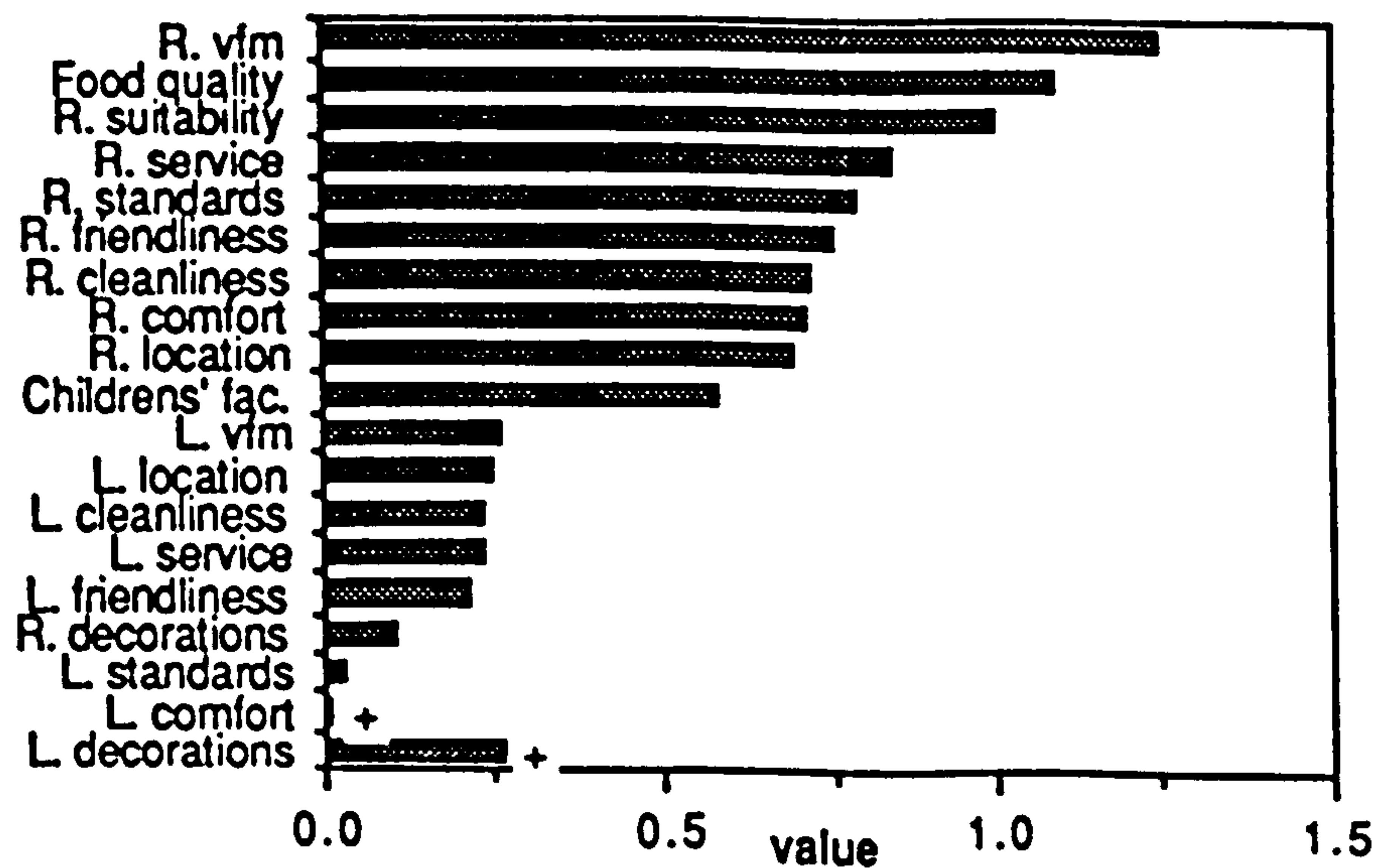


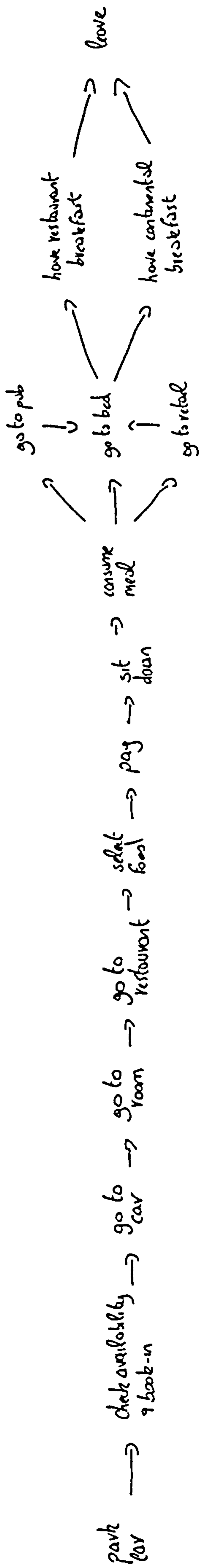
## Appendix C14 - Employees' assessment of service quality gaps

<u>Code</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>D</u>
Q23	Value for money in restaurants	-1.25
Q19	Food quality in restaurants	-1.09
Q14	Suitability of restaurants	-1.00
Q21	Service in restaurants	-0.84
Q22	Overall standard in restaurants	-0.79
Q20	Staff friendliness in restaurants	-0.75
Q16	Cleanliness in restaurants	-0.72
Q17	Comfort of restaurants	-0.71
Q15	Location of restaurants	-0.69
Q8	Childrens' facilities in lodges	-0.58
Q12	Value for money in lodges	-0.26
Q2	Location of lodge	-0.25
Q3	Cleanliness of lodges	-0.23
Q10	Service in lodges	-0.23
Q9	Staff friendliness in lodges	-0.21
Q18	Decorations/maintenance of restaurants	-0.10
Q11	Overall standard in lodges	-0.03
Q4	Comfort of lodges	+0.01
Q5	Decorations and maintenance of lodges	+0.26
		-0.50

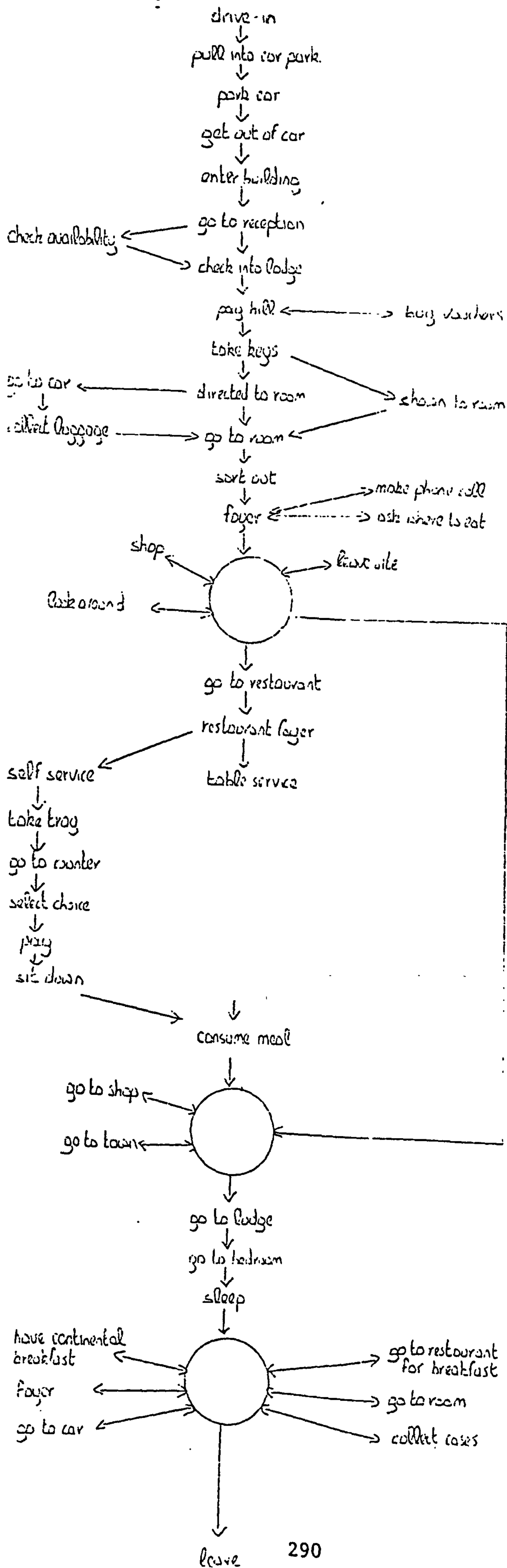
Key: D = difference score  
 + = perceptions exceed expectations  
 - = expectations exceed perceptions

Employees' assess. of differences

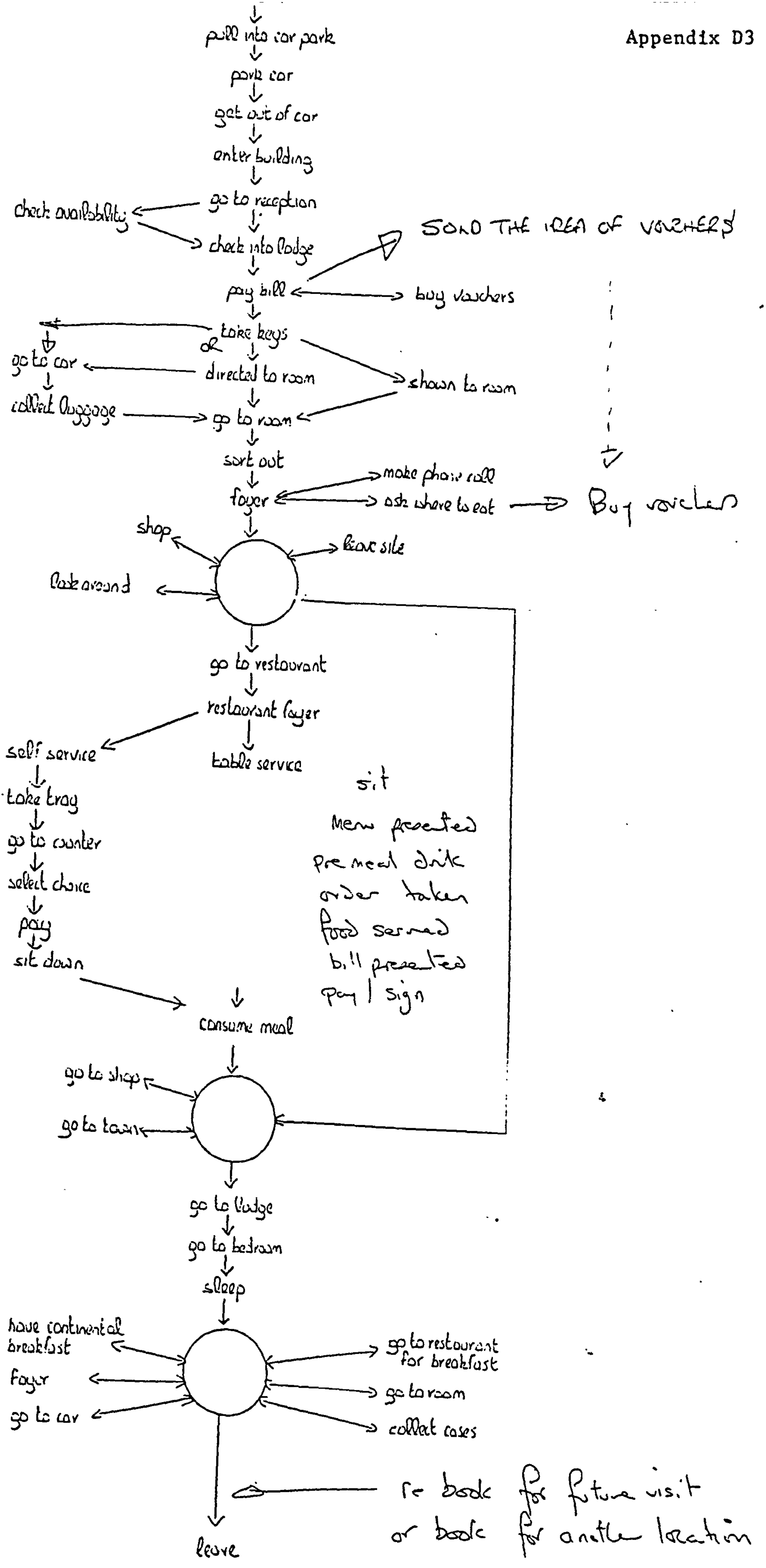




2nd Interview  
 Catering Manager  
 Site 1

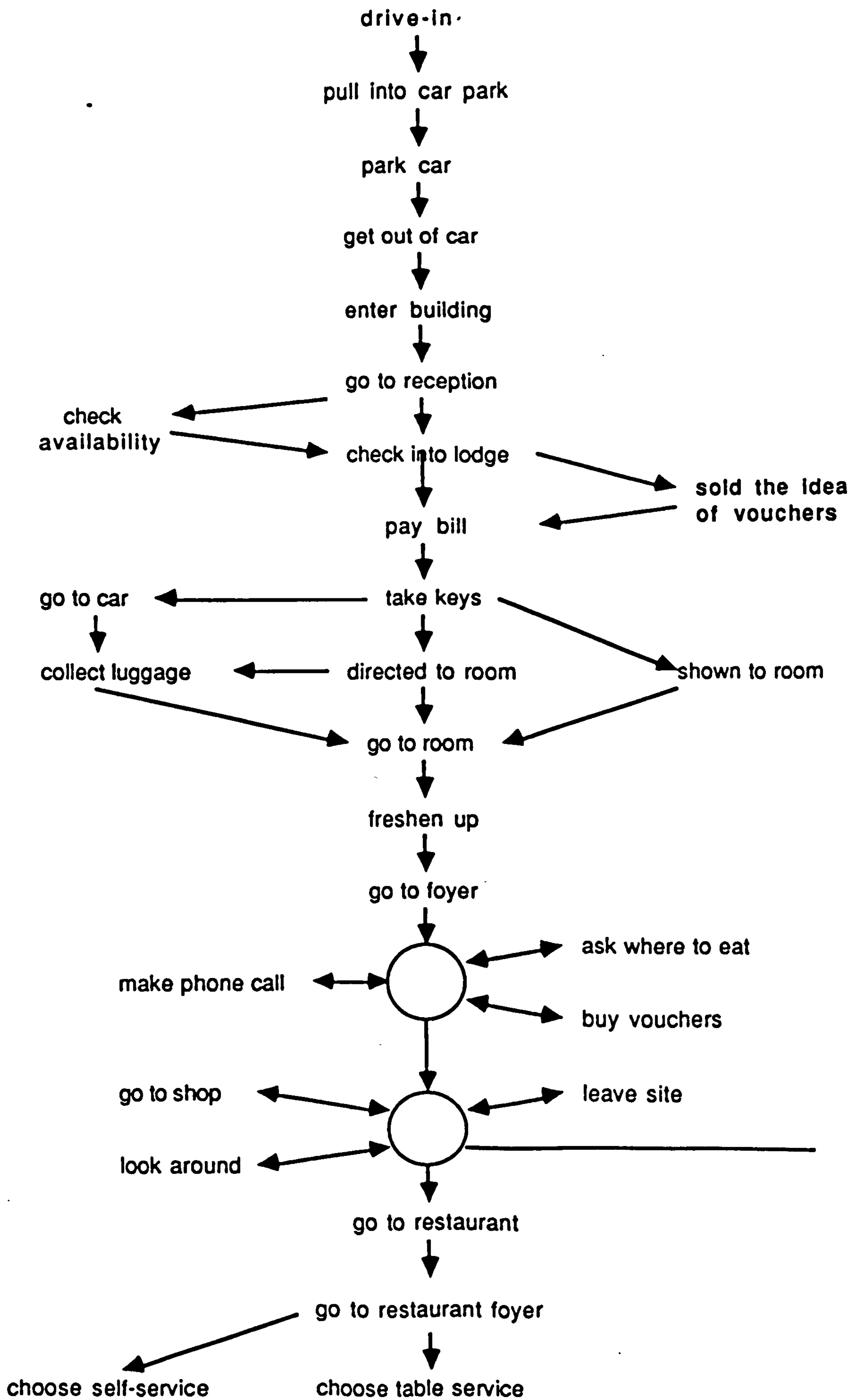


Blue = Combined staff  
 Black = head office addition

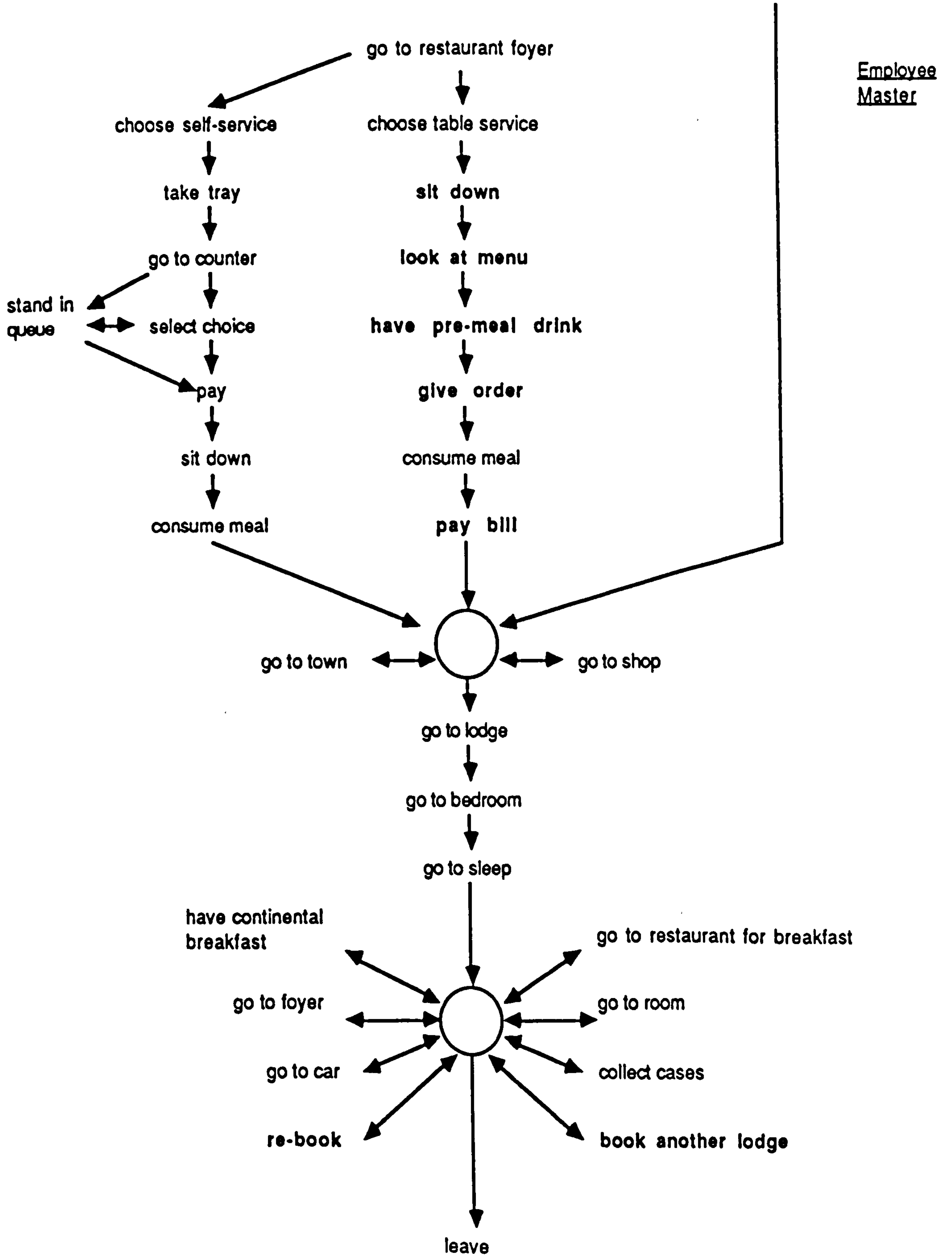


**Appendix D4**

Employee  
Master



Appendix D4



## Appendix D5

### Receptionists' comments

#### Receptionist - positive

'close to motorway, town and airport'  
'all the facilities on site...petrol, post, phones, shop'  
'better since redecorations'  
'budget prices'  
'everything is provided'  
'facilities'  
'view'

'cheap'  
'lodge is lovely'  
'lodges are excellent'  
'rooms are tidy and clean'  
'10% discount off food'  
'drinks machine'

#### Receptionist - negative

'every customer complains of catering'  
'too much food cooked at once...dried up and greasy'  
'no coverway between lodge and restaurant'  
'meal voucher system not good'  
'lorry park is noisy'  
'continental breakfast...plastic tray with in-flight food...not always eaten'

'try to cope for too many'  
'too early...cooking'  
'no phones in rooms'  
'too hot or too cold'  
'no bar'

#### Receptionist - recommendations

'extra staff to cope with individual demands'  
'nothing in lodge without putting prices up...telephones'  
'recommend nicely laid tray for breakfast'  
'telephones in rooms'

'cook more food to order'  
'more rooms'  
'operate on a smaller basis'

### Lodge managers' comments

#### Lodge Manager - positive

'ease of booking'  
'right price'  
'good quality rooms'  
'advance payment...fast exit and simple'  
'clean, comfortable rooms with shower and TV'  
'friendly reception'  
'restaurant waitress service'  
'joined restaurant'

'no time restrictions for restaurants'  
'easy to find'  
'prices'  
'staff'  
'location'  
'rooms clean and comfortable'  
'restaurant meals'

#### Lodge Manager - negative

'restaurant'  
'limited choice late at night'  
'phone situation'  
'noise from other rooms'  
'no lounge facilities'

'queues behind buses'  
'not enough staff for breakfast'  
'families in restaurant'  
'no bar facilities'  
'customer in his own company'

### Lodge Manager - recommendations

'voucher for breakfast...guest recognition'  
'Platters restaurant'  
'different entrance for lodge guests'

'card system'  
'breakfast call system'  
'introduce telephones in room'

### Section leaders' comments

#### Section Leader - positive

'tidiness, cleanliness, hygienic'  
'staff attitudes, friendliness and welcome'  
'Platters area'  
'waitress service'  
'staff members'  
'service'

'good facilities'  
'in-room breakfast for price'  
'meal vouchers'  
'restaurant design'  
'food is getting better'  
'clean lodge'

#### Section Leader - negative

'lack of privacy and segregation'  
'walkway between lodge and restaurant'  
'prices...bad value for money'  
'poor variety'  
'distance from car to restaurant...for disabled or older persons'  
'staffing of Platters is difficult...not fair to offer inconsistent service'  
'night service is poor...nobody to book in customers'

'control of customers in Platters'  
'food complaints'  
'cold food'  
'no interaction or place for activities'

#### Section Leader - recommendations

'waitress service'  
'extend meal vouchers, especially for regulars'  
'put restaurant in lodge'  
'bar for collar and tie'  
'possibly include breakfast in room charge'

'table lay-up could be improved'  
'discount on room price'  
'lounge for sitting and interaction'  
'improve signage in road'  
'close off Platters'

### Catering managers' comments

#### Catering Manager - positive

'standards of lodges'  
'convenience and easy access'  
'economics of package, including restaurant'  
'everything is available for the hotel guest'  
'check in system...simple, quick and no mess'  
'good service in restaurant...not breakfast and weekends'  
'fresh, good quality food cooked to order'  
'Platters operation...excellent...staff get tips...customer spends more'  
'cost of room'  
'facilities, forecourt, shops'  
'area and scenic country'  
'car parking facilities'  
'pleasant, helpful staff'

'prices and value for money'  
'good value'  
'license'  
'ample parking'  
'shown to room'  
'room is brilliant for price'  
'Platters'  
'value for money'  
'treatment of lodge guests'  
'central'  
'very nice restaurants'  
'choice of breakfast'



### Catering Manager - negative

'no alcohol'  
restaurant'  
'seating not adequate'  
'menu style...depending upon customer'  
'lodge and restaurant signage is baffling'  
'part self-service...depends upon expectations'  
'problems in the evening for proper meal'  
'restaurant designed for fast-food throughput'  
'lack of alcohol'  
'staff shortages causes problems in Platters'  
'lack of room in reception...queues form'  
'no bar'

'distance between lodge and  
'arriving coaches'  
'physical walk to restaurant...barrier'  
'continental breakfast'  
'bad weather'  
'bar meals down the road'  
'no area for relaxing'  
'lodge customers expect a hotel'  
'breakfast and weekend food'  
'lack of bar area'  
'lack of telephones in rooms'

### Catering Manager - recommendations

'self-service restaurant with limited menu'  
'walkway between restaurant and lodge'  
'curtains in restaurant to provide visual attraction'  
'go for Platters operation...there is a market for it'  
'small restaurant on site, like Little Chef, more choice'  
'THF Welcome Break...right advertising'  
'promote business facilities...combine administration and reception'

'provide alcohol'  
'more room in reception'  
'improve service through training'  
'licensed or unlicensed lounge'  
'provide restaurant environment'  
'telephones'

### **Lodge supervisors' comments**

#### Lodge Supervisor - positive

'good price'  
'can have continental breakfast whenever'

'within easy location'  
'not tied to departure time'

#### Lodge Supervisor - negative

'restaurant does not look appealing'  
'no telephones in bedrooms'  
'businessmen expect to have breakfast included...one transaction'  
'separate building for restaurant...especially in bad weather'

'no bar'

#### Lodge Supervisor - recommendations

'introduce bar...for company and to unwind'  
'lounge in lodge for relaxing and interaction'

'bed and breakfast tariff'  
'make restaurant more homely'

### **General managers' comments**

#### General Manager - positive

'price'  
'confirmation of room'  
'informative receptionist and treatment'  
'restaurant breakfast...has brand image'  
'standard of room'  
'convenient if on motorway'  
'range of services available'

'standards'  
'network and advance booking'  
'Platters'  
'room availability'  
'consistent room standard'  
'24 hour meal service'  
'reasonably priced lodge package'

General Manager - negative

'place isn't big enough'  
'continental breakfast'  
'continental breakfast'  
'lack of bar'

'noise'  
'Country Kitchen'  
'non-hotel service'

'varying restaurant standards across country'  
'older MSAs are not welcoming'

'lack of telephone in room'  
'customer care is poor'  
'uncovered walkway'

General Manager - recommendations

'airline food'  
'different catering for lodge users...limited use within lodge'  
'something for families...continental style'  
'link lodge to main building'  
'deeper baths, better showers, bath sheets'  
'staff costs and conditions are kept too low...need to improve'  
'dealing with too many markets...segment'

'provide Platters'  
'extend the lodge'  
'more lodges'  
'telephones in bedrooms'  
'could follow Little Chef'

Room maid's comments

Room Maid - positive

'comfortable'  
'friendly'

'very clean'  
'central'

Room Maid - negative

'outside distance between room and restaurant'

'restaurant is dear'

Room Maid - recommendations

'breakfast facilities in hotel with lodge staff'

# Appendix D6 - Blueprint groups

Employee  
Master

