

Service quality management in conference tourism: Expectations versus delivery

W.A McCallaghan
12325074

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Supervisor: Prof E Slabbert
Assistant supervisor: Dr L du Plessis

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DECLARATION

I, Wilhelmina Aletta McCallaghan, hereby declare that "Service quality management in conference tourism: service expectations versus service delivery" is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the references.

I further declare that it has never, on any previous occasion, been presented in part of as a whole to any institution or board for the awarding of any degree.



W.A McCallaghan

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was to determine service expectations of conference delegates in relation to the service delivered at Quest Conference Estate. This objective was achieved by firstly analysing service quality in terms of the expectation of service delivery prior to attending a conference and secondly analysing the actual service received whilst attending the conference and the influence thereof on the intention to return. Secondly, a literature study was conducted to review the role of service quality in the tourism industry, to identify and analyse current models that can be used to measure service quality (the SERVQUAL model was found to be the most applicable in the context of this study), to determine the service expectations and service perceptions of conference delegates at the Quest Conference Estate and to analyse the conference industry and the importance of service quality within. Thirdly the empirical results were discussed. Lastly, conclusions were drawn from the research and recommendations were made for the effective management of service delivery in a conference environment and for Quest Conference Estate, as well as for future research.

From the literature study, research done by Parasuraman *et al.* was used as the theoretical framework for this study and the SERVQUAL model used for the exploratory phase. This model has been proven to be a valid and reliable measuring instrument of service quality and it was critical for the empirical research to be accurate and scientifically founded. The questionnaire was adapted to suit the needs of a conference service setting. The objective of the questionnaire was to measure the service quality of Quest Conference Estate. Questionnaires were given to 397 delegates who attended a conference, meeting or seminar at Quest Conference Estate. These delegates were asked to complete a section before the start of the conference on demographic information and what kind of service they expected to receive from Quest Conference Estate. The same delegates were approached after the conference, to indicate in another section of the questionnaire, their perception on the actual service received. The results were then statistically interpreted to determine the possible gap between expected service and actual service delivered.

From the responses to the questionnaire an analysis on the expectations of visitors to Quest Conference Estate was done, and according to this, it was clear that the two main expectations from respondents were that the food and beverages service will be hygienic, adequate and sufficient and that the conference equipment will work properly. This was closely followed by the expectation that Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests with a safe and secure environment. It was also determined that most delegates attending a conference at Quest Conference Estate felt that they expected much more from the actual service received, but that they will still attend conferences at Quest Conference Estate in the future and will still recommend the facility to others.

These results can be applied to bridge the gap between expected service and perceived service by offering the service that is actually expected from Quest Conference Estate. Most tourism businesses believe that they deliver good service but service delivery should be measured on a regular basis to determine whether it adheres to the needs of the delegates or not. Service delivery should also be offered at a consistent high level as delegates will in future expect the same and higher levels of service delivery as previously experienced.

KEYWORDS: Service quality, perceived service, expected service, business tourism, conferences, meetings, conference tourism and South Africa.

OPSOMMING

Die primêre doel van hierdie studie was om te bepaal wat die konferensie-ganger verwag van die diens wat Quest Conference Estate lewer teenoor dit wat hy/sy ontvang. Hierdie doel is bereik deur eerstens die dienskwaliteit te analiseer, deur te kyk wat mense verwag van diens voor aankoms, teenoor dit wat hulle voel hulle in werklikheid gekry het, asook die invloed hiervan op toekomstige besoeke. Tweedens, is 'n literatuurstudie gedoen om 'n oorsig van die rol van dienskwaliteit in die toerismebedryf te kry, om die huidige modelle wat gebruik word om dienskwaliteit te meet, te identifiseer en te analiseer (daar is gevind dat die SERVQUAL model die toepaslikste is in 'n konferensie omgewing), om die konferensie-ganger by Quest Conference Estate se verwagte diens teenoor die diens wat ontvang is te bepaal en om die konferensiebedryf te analiseer asook die belangrikheid van dienskwaliteit binne in die konferensiebedryf te bepaal. Derdens is die resultate van die empiriese studie bespreek en aanbevelings gemaak oor die effektiewe bestuur van dienslewering in 'n konferensie omgewing en vir Quest Conference Estate. Aanbevelings is ook oor toekomstige navorsing gemaak.

Vanuit die literatuurstudie is navorsing wat deur Parasuraman *et al.* gedoen is gebruik as die teoretiese raamwerk vir die studie en daar is besluit om die SERVQUAL-model te gebruik in die empiriese studie. Daar is gevind dat dit 'n geldige en betroubare meetinstrument is vir dienskwaliteit omdat dit belangrik was dat die empiriese studie akkuraat en wetenskaplik korrek is. Die vraelys is aangepas om die behoeftes van 'n konferensie-studie en omgewing aan te spreek. Die doel van die vraelys was dus om die dienskwaliteit van Quest Conference Estate, te bepaal. Die vraelys is aan 397 besoekers, wat of 'n konferensie, vergadering of seminar by Quest Conference Estate bygewoon het, versprei. Die deelnemers is gevra om 'n gedeelte uit die vraelys te voltooi wat gehandel het oor die demografiese besonderhede en wat hulle verwag van die diens wat hulle gaan ontvang by Quest Conference Estate. Na afhandeling van die konferensie is die afgevaardigdes weer genader, om 'n tweede gedeelte van die vraelys te voltooi, wat gehandel het oor die diens wat hulle voel hulle in werklikheid ontvang het

by Quest Conference Estate. Hierna is die resultate statisties verwerk, om die moontlike gapings tussen die verwagte diens en werklike diens te bepaal.

Vanuit die terugvoering op die vraelys is 'n analise geformuleer op grond van wat die besoekers aan Quest Conference Estate verwag het. Dit was duidelik dat die twee hoof verwagtinge was dat die spysenieringsdienste, higiënies, op standaard en voldoende moet wees en dat die konferensietoerusting in goeie werkende toestand is. Dit was gevolg deur die verwagting dat Quest Conference Estate 'n veilige hawe aan die besoekers sal bied. Daar is ook bevind dat die besoekers aan Quest Conference Estate, heelwat meer verwag het van die diens as wat hulle ontvang het, maar dat hulle tog aangedui het dat hulle in die toekoms weer van Quest Conference Estate gebruik sal maak en dat hulle dit sal aanbeveel aan ander.

Die resultate kan toegepas word, om die gaping tussen die verwagte diens en die werklike diens te verminder deur die diens te lewer wat verwag word. Meeste toerisme produkte lewer goeie diens maar dit moet gereeld gemeet word om te bepaal of dit aan die behoeftes van die besoekers voldoen. Dienslewering moet voortdurende op 'n hoë kwaliteitsvlak aangebied word, omrede afgevaardigdes dieselfde diens wat hulle nou ontvang (en selfs beter), sal verwag in die toekoms.

SLEUTELWOORDE: Dienskwaliteit, verwagte diens, werklike diens, besigheidstoerisme, konferensies, vergaderings, konferensie toerisme en Suid Afrika.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APEX:	Accepted Practices Exchange
CBD:	Convention on Biological Diversity
CIC:	Convention Industry Council
CTICC:	Cape Town International Convention Centre
EXSA:	Exhibitions Association of Southern Africa
GDP:	Gross domestic product
ICCA:	International Congress and Convention Association
ICC:	International conference centre
MICE:	Meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions
NTSS:	National Tourism Sector Strategy
SAACI:	Southern Africa Conference, Exhibition and Incentive Guide
SANCB:	South African National Convention Bureau
SATOUR:	South African Tourism
SCC:	Sandton Convention Centre
SCTH:	Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage
SERVQUAL:	Service Quality model
SPSS:	Statistical Package of Social Science
UK:	United Kingdom
UIA:	International Union of Architects World Congress
USA:	United States of America
WSSD:	World summit on sustainable development
WTO:	World Trade Organisation



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The world has almost reached a position where a scientist could, if so wished, spend almost the whole year going from one conference to another (Oseman, 1989:146). Conferences are much more pleasant than work, it takes place mostly in work time and are usually paid for by one's employer. Conferences provide both perspective and stimulus, and the enjoyable aspects make the impact even greater (Saayman & Slabbert, 2001:6). Therefore it can be said that a conference can play an important role in tourism, for people to travel, to eat, to sleep, spend money and to participate in entertainment, thus contributing to the tourism industry.

Conferences can be very diverse, as revealed by the definitions of the APEX Industry Glossary (CIC, 2005). It can be seen as a participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation. It can also be seen as an event used by any organisation to meet and exchange views, convey a message, open a debate or give publicity to some area of opinion on a specific issue. No tradition, continuity or periodicity is required to convene a conference. Although not generally limited in time, conferences are usually of short duration with specific objectives and usually on a smaller scale than congresses (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris and McDonnel, 2010:25).

According to Ferdinand and Kitchin (2012:271), meetings and conferences are events that are becoming more and more prominent. Even with all the digital advances

enabling instant long distance communication that supports virtual meetings, there is still a need for that personal, face-to-face communication to support the building of successful long-term business relationships between various organisations and businesses. Therefore it may be said that conference tourism entails travel for the purpose of attending or participating in conferences, shows, exhibitions, seminars, meetings and similar events (Saayman & Slabbert, 2001:7).

There can be little doubt that nowadays quality is one of the most critical aspects of the strategic management of conference venues. Excellent service pays off because it creates true delegates – delegates who are glad to have selected a conference venue after the service experience, will use the facility again and tell others about that particular conference venue (Baker & Crompton, 2000:786; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008:590; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990:9). Service quality has been linked to outcomes such as customer satisfaction – the extent to which a product meets or fulfils a customer's wants, which may be true of a high- or low-quality product (Ko & Pastore, 2004:161,163), customer loyalty (Kandampully, 1998:433; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008:588; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990:9), value (Laroche, Ueltschy, Abe, Cleveland & Yannopoulos, 2004:59), and repurchase intention – using the same conference venue again (Baker & Crompton, 2000:790; Fornell, 1992:11; Kozak, 2001:785).

The key success factors in managing a conference venue have been identified by Kruger (2006:170), of which service delivery is one. Due to the competition in the conference sector it is important to deliver a quality product, to ensure long-term relationships with delegates. This research study will attempt to determine the correlation between service expectations and service delivery in achieving service quality in conference tourism. The scope of this research study focuses on measuring service quality in the conference sector, specifically Quest Conference Estate, by analysing service expectations versus service delivery.

In the next section the background of the study will be discussed, followed by the objectives and research methodology. Attention is also given to the definition of concepts and the outline of chapters.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Quality management in conferencing strives towards the improvement of the service to deliver a unique and distinctive service (Williams & Buswell, 2003:22) and maintain a competitive advantage. Conference managers are challenged by a complex service environment that has been characterised as a holistic process, which refers to (a) the total experience a delegate has with one particular organisation's service and the service provided by the interrelationship of various sectors of the tourism industries (Lovelock, 1984:223 and Obenour, Patterson, Pederson & Pearson, 2006:35), (b) the interconnection of tourism organisations (Obenour *et al.*, 2006:35 and Otto & Ritchie, 1996:168), (c) performance, (d) experience, (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:42 and Woods & Deegan, 2003:271), and (e) social encounter. Within this holistic service experience, conference managers aim to deliver a quality service and develop strategies to improve the service performances from the participants' point of view.

Scheuing and Christopher (1993:389), Bigne, Sanchez and Sanchez (2001:608), as well as Wilson *et al.* 2008:79 and cited by Agbor, 2011:1, state that organisations throughout the world are beginning to realise that measuring customer satisfaction is no longer an option but an essential part of the management system. In the early 1990's, Lewis and Mitchell (1990:11) as well as Svensson (2004:278) later on noted that the importance of service quality as an indicator of customer satisfaction and organisational performance is widely acknowledged and has led to a major research thrust which has focused on a number of industries. The importance of this research movement is also evident in the remark by Schofield and Breen (2006:393) that in order to win and retain customers, service quality is now widely regarded as important in achieving customer satisfaction – when the outcomes are matched by the service experience.

Shahin (2006:1) defines the concept customer service as the manner in which managers' deal with customers. There are four major components of customer service: customer relations, delivery, repair services and warranties. Most aspects of customer service can be placed in the last of these categories. Like branding and packaging, customer service is a crucial element of overall product strategy. George (2001:277) contends that service quality is the delivery of excellent or superior service relative to customers' expectations. Perceived quality is best modelled as the gap between customers' expectations concerning the product or service and the perceptions concerning the product or service. When expectations are lower than perceptions, perceived quality is good. When expectations and perceptions match, perceived quality is acceptable. In my opinion, service quality can thus be defined as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (MacKay & Crompton, 1988:46 and Shahin, 2006:2).

Various models have been developed to describe service quality. The perceived service quality model of Grönroos (1983:15) and Williams and Buswell (2003:53) shows that the perception of service quality results from a comparison of what customers expects to get with what actually has been received. The perceived service is determined primarily by the customers' evaluation of the relationship between corporate image, technical quality and functional quality. On the other hand the expectancy-disconfirmation model, as developed by Olivier (1993:419) and Zwick, Pieters and Baumgartner (1995:104) are the most dominant model of customer satisfaction. According to this model, satisfaction outcomes are a function of perceived performance and perceived disconfirmation (Bovaird & Löffler 2001). Perceived disconfirmation depends on perceived performance and standard of comparison. Standards of comparison may include expectations, ideals, competitors, other service categories, marketer promises and industry norms.

SERVQUAL is a service quality measurement instrument that was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988 in the 1980's. Although more than 30 years

old, this model is still regarded as valid today and widely used in practice. The SERVQUAL scale has been used in a variety of studies in different settings to assess customer perceptions of service quality. A few examples are, Ahuja, Mahlawat & Masood (2011), Babakus and Mangold (1992); Brysland and Curry (2001); Donnelly and White (2012); Finn and Lamb (1991); Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005); Ndamnsa (2013); Siadat (2008) and Umath, Marwah & Soni (2013). The underlying service quality dimensions measured by the SERVQUAL model have also been the key to the development of other similar measurement frameworks. The model is based on the idea that service quality is derived from the difference between customers' expectations about performance and the assessment of the actual performance of a specific organisation (Luk & Layton, 2002:109 and Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:16). The SERVQUAL model has proven to be the most popular quality, measuring instrument in all industries. According to research done (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990:23), ten general criteria, or dimensions was identified by customers judging service quality. The 10 dimensions; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication and understanding the customers, is thorough and appropriate for assessing quality. These dimensions were eventually reduced to five because some dimensions were overlapping (three original and two combined dimensions – the last two dimensions – assurance and empathy – contain items representing seven original dimensions (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985:47-48 & 1988:23-24). These five dimensions are applicable to any organisation that delivers a service in its normal way of doing business. These 5 dimensions (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.1: The dimensions of service quality

Dimension	Description
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, for example delivering the service that was advertised – capacity that the venues can take and availability
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. The helpfulness and friendliness of personnel.
Assurance	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and the ability to inspire trust and

Dimension	Description
	confidence. The needs of the clients are met in terms of the venue, rooms and food, parking and safety.
Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel. For example the cleanliness of the venues dining areas, layout of the venue, catering equipment and first impression of the building.
Empathy	Caring, individualised attention that the organisation provides to the customers. To educate the personnel to know and understand the needs of the clients and the distance from accommodation to the conference venue

Source: Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:23) & Zeithaml *et al.* (1990:23)

These dimensions mainly focus on the human aspects of service delivery (responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy) and the tangibles of service. According to a study carried out by Ladhari, (2009), it is recommended that the SERVQUAL model is a good scale to use when measuring service quality in various specific industries but that it is important to choose the most important dimensions of this model that fit to that particular service being measured in order to assure reliable and valid results. In this regard, this model will be used in this study because it takes into account customer's expectations of a service as well as perceptions of the service which is the best way to measure service quality in service sectors (Shahin, 2006:3).

Service quality has been researched in the conference environment and it was found that quality in conference tourism is dependent on four primary dimensions. The major thrust of the model by Shonk and Chelladurai (2008:591) indicated that perceived overall quality of conferencing (Conference Tourism quality) leads to satisfaction with the experience, which in turn leads to the delegate's intentions to return to the city or town of the conference, and the conference venue itself. This is very good for the development of the conference sector as a whole. This is dependent on four primary dimensions, namely: *access quality*, *accommodation quality*, *venue quality* and *personnel quality*. Each one of these four dimensions, which account for the overall quality of conference tourism, is said to be indicated by the respective sub-dimensions (15 dimensions in total). These variables included in the model are explained below.

Personnel quality refers to the arrangements regarding the personnel. Personnel should be briefed beforehand on the venue allocation, what the expected duties entail and the overall aim of the conference. Employees should have computer training, be literate and able to assist the client in every possible way and do this in a friendly manner. *Accommodation quality* refers to the reception area, dining area and rooms, which should be of the highest standard and always spotless. Accommodation facilities should preferably be in the same area as the conference facilities. *Venue quality* refers to the facility where the conference is held. Factors that play a role include cleanliness of the venue and restrooms, comfortable seating, a good sound system, parking facilities, signage and correct layout of the venue according to the needs and size of the group. The number of breakaway rooms and how it will be set up should be considered. Apart from the size of the venue, attention should also be paid to exits and fire escapes. Conference delegates must be comfortably seated and able to see the proceedings. Lastly, *access quality* refers to the ease and speed with which the delegates can reach the desired location. Accessibility may relate to such details as parking areas, airports, freeways and public transportation. Shonk and Chelladurai (2008:592) describe approachability and ease as important elements in marketing a conference, as well as the safety of the delegates for the duration of the conference. This model made provision for various tangible aspects but very few intangible aspects as in the case of the SERVQUAL.

It is therefore important to determine expectations (before delivery) and perceptions (after delivery) as any discrepancy may lead to perceptions of poor service quality. For conference venues such as Quest Conference Estate, it is important to determine expectations and perceptions to adapt service delivery strategies according to the needs of visitors. When delegates have high expectations and the reality fall short, they could be disappointed and will likely rate the experience as less than satisfying. This may affect repurchase decisions and customer loyalty. When a delegate feels that the service was not delivered to what was expected, it could influence the motivation to return and result in bad publicity in the form of negative word-of-mouth messages (Beard, 2013:2). If the expectations of delegates are met from the start, it may give

Quest Conference Estate a competitive advantage in an already over-crowded industry. It may ultimately lead to improvement of performance and the image of the conference venue, which will influence future bookings and therefore revenue.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The number of conference venues in the Vaal Region creates a competitive environment, for example Be My Guest Hotel in Vaalpark, Lord's Signature Hotel in Risiville, "Tranformasie Sentrum" in Three Rivers and Riverside Sun Hotel and Emerald Resort & Casino in Vanderbijlpark as well as the newly established Bon Hotel Riviera on Vaal. Various guesthouses also offer these services and create an even more competitive environment. These venues compete with each other to become/remain the preferred conference venue among guests. In order to become a preferred venue, management of conference venues should deliver the service that delegates expect. However, it is currently unknown what delegates expect and how that relates to the actual service experience and service delivery, as there is not many, if any, studies on this specific topic in the conference sector. The question still remains: what do delegates expect of a conference venue, especially Quest Conference Estate, in terms of service before arrival, and how was the actual service received, perceived? If management of Quest Conference Estate can determine what delegates expect before arrival, and then deliver exactly the type of service (including ancillary services) that was expected, it will give Quest Conference Estate the competitive advantage over the other venues.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were set for the study.

1.4.1 Primary objective

The aim of this study is to determine service expectations of conference delegates in relation to the service delivered at Quest Conference Estate.

1.4.2 Secondary objectives

- To conduct an in-depth literature review on the role of service quality in the tourism industry.
- To identify and analyse current service quality models and dimensions focusing on the relationship between service expectations and service perceptions through an in-depth literature review.
- To analyse the conference sector and the importance of service quality within, by means of a literature review.
- To determine the service expectations and service perceptions of conference delegates to the Quest Conference Estate by means of an empirical survey.
- To draw conclusions on the service levels at Quest Conference Estate and make recommendations regarding the delivery of service quality in conference venues and how the application of these results can improve the competitiveness in the conference sector.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method is twofold namely a literature study and an empirical survey.

1.5.1 Literature Review

A literature review is needed in research to summarise the primary findings and knowledge from previous relevant research (Werkmeister & Klein, 2010:394). According to Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, (2011:41) the researcher should clearly demonstrate in the literature review how previous studies relate to one another and how the proposed research ties in with similar research.

In the case of this study subject and non-subject-related literature was utilised. A computer search was done on various databases, such as Business Source Premier, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, SACat, Sabinet and Ebscohost. Keywords that were used include: customer satisfaction, quality of service, customer behaviour, tourism, tourist, conference, customised service, perceived quality, expected quality, quality service and conference management. The literature study also included journal

articles, theses, dissertations, books and other related literature. An Internet search was conducted through different search engines in order to identify additional, recent and relevant literature on the subject matter.

1.5.2 Empirical Study

The purpose of the empirical study is to clarify the research design, the proposed participants, the measuring instruments and a description of the statistical analysis that were used.

The following section highlights the methods chosen to conduct the empirical analysis.

1.5.2.1 Research design

According to Bono & McNamara (2011:659) the primary principles of a well-structured research design are to match the design to the question, match the construct descriptions with operations, carefully specify the model, use measures with recognised construct validity and select appropriate samples and procedures.

There are three types of research design to be used in empirical studies namely descriptive research, exploratory research and causal research. Descriptive research refers to the type of research question, design and data analysis that will be applied to a given topic. It is a study design to depict the participants in an accurate way, more simply put; descriptive research is all about describing people who take part in a study (Bono & McNamara, 2011:659). Exploratory research is defined as the initial research into a hypothetical or theoretical idea. This is where a researcher has an idea or has observed something and seeks to understand more about it. An exploratory research project is an attempt to lay the groundwork that will lead to future studies, or to determine if what is being observed might be explained by a currently existing theory. Most often, exploratory research lays the initial groundwork for future research. Exploratory research can be divided into two broad categories: either a new topic or a new angle (Bono & McNamara, 2011:659). Causal research is conducted in order to identify the extent and nature of cause-and-effect relationships. Casual research can

be conducted in order to assess impacts of specific changes on existing norms, various processes etc. Experiments are the most popular primary data collection methods in studies with casual research design (Bono & McNamara, 2011:659).

The research was designed in order to gain more information about current practice and is therefore descriptive in nature. This type of research involves the study of preferences and attitudes of a group of people in the case of this study an evaluation of the expectations and perceptions of service quality.

1.5.2.2 Development of the questionnaire

There are various ways to conduct research with the two most prominent methods known as quantitative and qualitative research. According to Matveev (2002:59), quantitative and qualitative observations provide intercultural researchers with different ways of operationalising and measuring theoretical constructs and practical concepts. Quantitative methods can provide a high level of measurement precision and statistical power and qualitative methods can supply a greater depth of information about the nature of communication processes in a particular research setting. Table 1.2 summarises the difference between quantitative and qualitative research (Ben-Eliyahu, 2014 and B2B international, s.a.).

Table 1.2: Difference between quantitative and qualitative research

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
This research is used to examine the motives of visitors for attending the event.	This research is used to determine demographic information such as gender, age, income and related facts about the potential market of an event.
Approach to gathering information, focuses on describing a phenomenon in a deep comprehensive manner.	Approach to gathering information, focuses on describing a phenomenon across a larger number of participants, thereby proving the possibility of summarising characteristics across groups or relationships.
More expensive due to the time that is involved in probing for deeper, more expressive answers than only digits.	Comparatively inexpensive to conduct and easy to tabulate and analyse with a computer.

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Research is done in by means of focus groups, participants/observer research or a case study.	Research is done by means of surveys.
Uses smaller sample groups.	Uses bigger sample groups.
May offer a diagnostic understanding of what is wrong.	Provides hard data across different respondent groups that can lead to specific recommendations with measures that can be used as controls to determine the effectiveness of actions
Serves as a spring board for larger studies and deeper understanding that can inform theory, practice and specific situations.	Compares findings and determine what the influence of these findings will be in a situation.

Source: Ben-Eliyahu, (2014); B2B International (s.a.); Getz (1997:280) and Goldblatt (1995:39-41)

Due to the access to respondents it was decided to perform a quantitative research by means of a questionnaire. It was critical for the empirical research to be accurate and scientifically founded. It was therefore decided to use the SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:48), since this has been proven to be a valid and reliable measuring instrument of service quality. The service quality dimensions included in the survey were tangibles, adequacy, understanding, assurance and convenience. For example:

- Items measured by **tangibles** were questions 8 – 15 (For example, Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate and sufficient – see Appendix A).
- Items measured by **adequacy** were questions 16 – 22 & 25 (For example, Employees will always be willing to serve guests – see Appendix A).
- Items measured by **understanding** were questions 24, 26 – 30 (For example, Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in service according to guest demands – see Appendix A).
- Items measured by **assurance** were questions 31 – 34 (For example, Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure environment – see Appendix A).
- Items measured by **convenience** were questions 23, 35 & 36 (For example, It will be easy to access Quest Conference Estate – see Appendix A).

The questionnaire consists of three sections. Section A measured the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B measured aspects regarding the service expectations and section C measured aspects regarding the actual service delivered. Section D was used to assess the overall service quality of Quest Conference Estate. (See Appendix A for the questionnaire)

1.5.2.3 Selection of the sample frame and distribution of the questionnaire

Sample frame according to Welman *et al.* (2005:57), can be defined as a complete list in which each unit of analysis is mentioned only once. The sample should be representative of the sampling frame, which ideally is the same as the population. There are two categories of sampling namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling can be seen as the probability that any element or member of the population will be included in the sample and in non-probability sampling, this probability cannot be specified (Welman *et al.*, 2005:56). The methods applicable to probability sampling according to Welman *et al.* (2005:56), include:

- Simple random samples
- Stratified random samples
- Systematic samples
- Cluster samples

In the case of non-probability sampling according to Welman *et al.* (2005:56), the methods applicable include:

- Accidental or incidental samples
- Quota samples
- Purposive samples
- Snowball samples
- Self-selection samples
- Convenience samples

For the purpose of this study the sample frame consisted of delegates that attended conferences, meetings, workshops or seminars at Quest Conference Estate during the months June to August 2014. During this time frame there were approximately 500

delegates and due to the captured market attending these conferences, meetings, workshops or seminars it was based on complete sampling where all the respondents were asked to participate in the research and to complete the questionnaire. Thus, probability sampling was chosen since all respondents had an equal chance to form part of the survey. The questionnaire was handed out to all delegates, at Quest Conference Estate before the conference, meeting, workshop or seminar commenced. Delegates were verbally encouraged to participate in the study and this led to a higher response rate.

The delegates were asked to complete a section before the start of the conference, meeting, workshop or seminar on demographic details and what kind of service they would expect to receive from Quest Conference Estate. The delegates were once again approached after the duration of the conference, meeting, workshop or seminar to indicate in another section of the questionnaire their experience of the actual service received. This process resulted in N=397 completed questionnaires that could be used in the analysis of the data. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, but did incorporate some non-identifying personal data that was used to develop a profile of the delegates. Respondents were asked when completing the questionnaire for their opinions concerning service quality related to the conference environment.

1.5.2.4 Data analysis

The data was captured in Microsoft Office Excel and analysed by means of SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences, Version 21). Demographic information was used to determine a general profile of a delegate visiting Quest Conference Estate. This was considered an important part due to the fact that it will provide Quest Conference Estate with the relevant information pertaining to the target market. This data was reported by means of frequency tables and figures.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated in order to determine central tendencies of the scale items tested. The calculation of means and

standard deviations enabled the interpretation of the overall service delivery levels of Quest Conference Estate as well as the individual service aspects.

Confirmatory factor analyses were done to identify the five dimensions of service quality as indicated by Parasuraman (1985 & 1988) for both the expected and delivered service quality. A confirmatory factor analysis can be defined as a number of statistical techniques with the aim to simplify complex sets of data. The confirmatory factor analysis simplifies the field by indicating what the important variables are and can simplify a matrix of correlations. Thus, confirmatory factor analysis is generally defined as a method for simplifying complex sets of data (Kline, 1994:3-12).

Paired *t*-tests were done to determine statistical significant differences between the means of expectations and perceptions. A *t*-test can be seen as multiple administrations of an instrument to the same people to assess the instrument's consistency and reliability – thus, a *t*-test helps to compare whether two groups have different average values, for example, whether men and woman have different average heights (Hendrickson, Massey & Cronin, 1993:227 and Keller, 2014:529). This was followed by the calculation of Cohen's effect sizes to determine the practical significant differences between the means of service expectations and service perceptions as these will influence the practical interpretation of the results. Effect size is a measure of how much the truth differs from chance or from a controlled condition (Heckard & Utts, 2012:526).

Due to the standardised nature of the questionnaire a confirmatory factor analysis was also performed on the 29 service attributes to reduce these to meaningful factors and to determine the reliability of data. The latter was done to determine if the measuring instrument did in fact measure the dimensions it intended to measure. The reliability of the data is measured by interpreting the Cronbach Alpha Value. This value provides a measure of the internal consistency of a test or scale; it is expressed as a number between 0 and 1. The items were measured on a likert scale where 1 was “not at all important” and 5 were “extremely important”. Internal consistency describes the extent to which all the items in a test measure the same concept or construct and hence it is

connected to the inter-relatedness of the items within the test (Tavakol and Dennick, 2001:1). The confirmatory factor analysis also allowed for the application of the derived dimension score in a subsequent multiple regression analysis. A regression analysis was used to investigate the relative importance of the five service factors in predicting overall quality. A regression is a seemingly global statistical tool and a regression analysis is a method of measuring the link between two or more phenomena (Dizikes, 2010:1)

1.6 DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

The following concepts are used in the course of the study and therefore need clarification.

1.6.1 Quest Conference Estate

A one stop, fully equipped conference, training and event facility, conveniently located in the business sector of the Vaal Triangle. Only 45 minutes from Johannesburg, this centre has 2 large auditoriums, 5 banqueting halls, 15 conference rooms and an executive boardroom with adjacent lounge. Quest Conference Estate can address any personal or corporate need and is ideal for conferences up to 800 delegates, training seminars, business meetings, weddings and other functions. Stylish accommodation is also available. Quest Conferences Estate is proud to be affiliated with NWU Vaal Triangle Campus (www.questconference.co.za).

1.6.2 Conference delegate

A delegate is someone who speaks or acts on behalf of an organisation at a meeting or conference between organisations of the same level (Walker & Boyer, 2005). Tassiopoulos (2010:5-6) defines a delegate as someone who travel away from home to attend a conference, and who stays overnight at the conference destination. They may also just be one day conference attendees (they do not stay overnight).

1.6.3 Conference

A conference is an organised event that brings people together to discuss a topic of shared interest. It may be commercial or non-commercial, attended by a few or thousands and it may last from a few hours to a few days (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001:5). Conferences are convened for a number of different purposes, such as for policy-making, for the exchange of information and ideas, for training, or for group bonding and networking (Law, 2002:98 and Rogers 2008:20).

The term conference is synonymous with the terms conventions, congresses and meetings (Law, 2002:98). The terms used to describe a conference may vary, depending on the size of the event and where it is held. A small gathering is called a meeting, while a large meeting is usually called a conference (Fenich, 2008 and Rogers 2008:2).

1.6.4 Service quality

Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:35) and Williams and Buswell (2003:588) state that service quality is the fulfilment of customer expectations. Thus the customer's perception of service quality is the gap between perceived service quality and actual service rendered (Chingang & Lukong, 2010:32). According to Turley (1990:6), service quality is evaluated in thousands of temporary relationships between service providers and customers. Laroche *et al.* (2004:58) and Olsen, Teare and Gummesson (1996:141) defines service quality as translating the needs of customers into measurable characteristics so that products and services can be designed and delivered to give satisfaction or value at a price that the customer will pay.

1.6.5 Customer expectations

The term customer expectations are defined by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:48) as the needs and wishes of customers. Expectations are what customers feel a service provider should offer instead of what it does offer (Douglas & Connor, 2003:167). Blem (1995:24) defines expectations as the demands of customers created or modified by the information obtained from organisations and from feedback from other customers. More

recently Oliver (2000:248) defined customer expectations as the driving force behind a customers' first perception of satisfaction and indicate that customers choose a product or service due to the expectation that it will fulfil a need, ease pain, present pleasure or meet desire.

1.6.6 Service delivery

In the case of products, delivery means that an outcome of a production process, a physical product, is moved from the place of production or storage to the place of use or sale. Services are not delivered in that sense. The term service process is used to denote the process in which the service emerges for, and is perceived by, customers, often in interaction with customers (Grönroos, 2000:14).

1.7 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The study consists of the following five chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

The purpose of the first chapter is to provide an introduction to the context in which the study was performed and also deals with the motivation for the study. It also highlights the problem statement and relevant terminology and literature concerning service quality. The research methods are discussed in chapter one providing the reader with an overall picture of the study.

Chapter 2: Analysing service quality and the influence thereof on the intention to return

The purpose of chapter 2 is to analyse service quality, and to illustrate how excellent service can improve an organisation's customer satisfaction and ensure that the customer returns. This chapter aims to provide theoretical insight to the concepts of service quality. Thus an in-depth literature review is given focussing on service quality, customer satisfaction, models of service quality, elements of service quality and the difference between customer service expectations versus customer service perceptions. This chapter serves as the theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3: Analysing conference tourism and the importance of service quality in this context

Chapter three aims to establish and demonstrate the importance of conferences and meetings to the world. The important contribution of conferences towards the South African tourism industry is illustrated in this chapter. This discussion will evolve around concept classification on international conference venues, tourism and business tourism, conferences and meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions. Emphasis is also put on the status of conference tourism in South Africa, the benefits of attending a conference, the development of conference and exhibition tourism, service quality in conference tourism and key factors for organising a conference and selecting a conference venue.

Chapter 4: Empirical analyses

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the empirical analysis of the data collected in 2014 at Quest Conference Estate. Through the application of the SERVQUAL model the results are discussed to shed light on the service expectations and service delivery attributes in a conference environment namely that of Quest Conference Estate. The SERVQUAL model as discussed in chapter 2 informed the questionnaire and analyses.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Chapter 5 is dedicated to discussions related to the conclusions of the study and to make specific recommendations regarding service expectations and service delivery towards Quest Conference Estate as well as recommendations for future research.

The following chapter will be dedicated in analysing service quality and the influence it has on the intention to return.



CHAPTER 2

AN ANALYSIS OF SERVICE QUALITY AND THE INFLUENCE THEREOF ON INTENTION TO RETURN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Service quality is a concept that has created considerable interest in the research literature because of the difficulties in both defining and measuring it with no overall consensus emerging on either. The need to understand and measure service quality is related to the growing recognition that it is more profitable to retain satisfied customers, than to be continually seeking to recruit new customers to replace lapsed ones (Fornell, 1992:7). Customer satisfaction and service quality are often treated together as functions of customer's perceptions and expectations and research has shown that high levels of service quality contribute significantly to profitability (Ledhari, 2009:172 and Wicks & Roethlein, 2009:83).

Service quality is required to be first measured in order to improve the quality in a service organisation. Practitioners and academics are eager to measure service quality accurately in order to have a better understanding of its consequences and eventually determine methods for improving and measuring service quality in search for a competitive advantage (Siadat, 2008:5).

Service quality is thus a universal concept. By providing good service quality, any business will be able to increase its revenue, improve customer service and customer loyalty (Valarie *et al.*, 1990, as cited by Malla, 2012:4). According to Karl (2009:1), strategies in marketing and sales will greatly help in attracting new customers for the business, but it is amazing customer service that keeps people coming back for more. This encourages each business to offer its customers quality

service and to become known for it. In this way, companies are able to differentiate themselves from the competition. Every business must recognise the reality that customer service is imperative in the success of the business.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse service quality, and how excellent service can improve a company’s customer satisfaction levels and ensure that the customer returns. Figure 2.1 gives an overview of the chapter on service quality and what will be discussed.

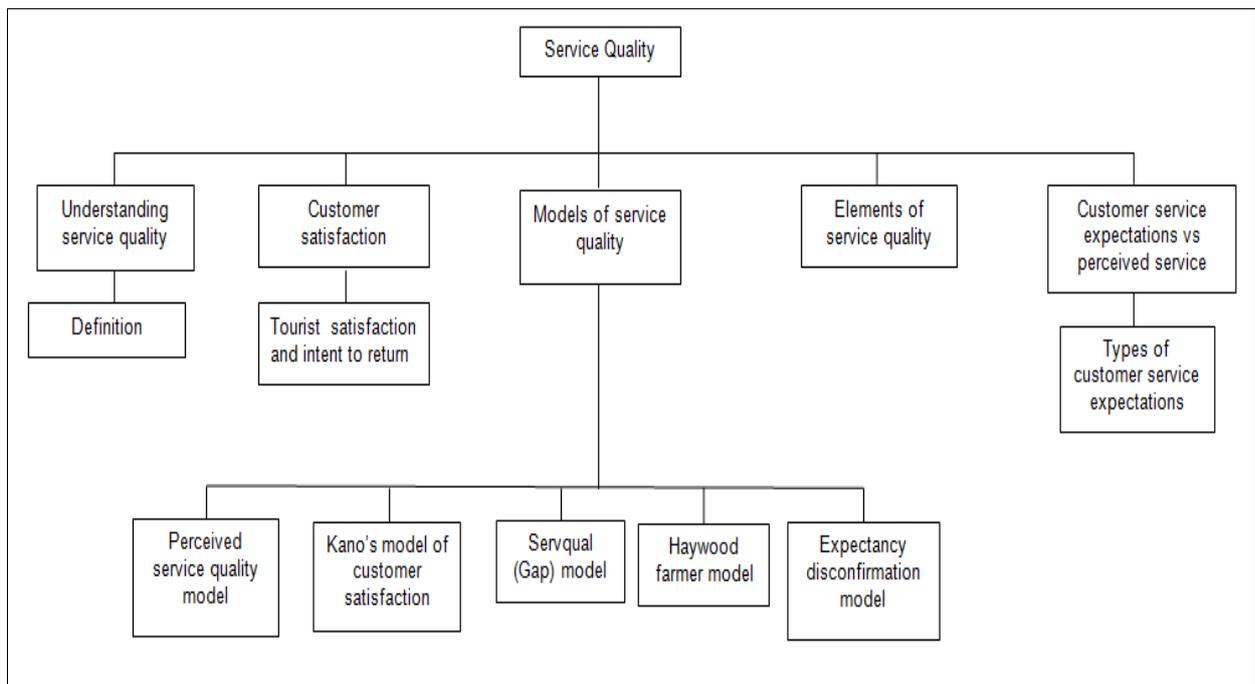


Figure 2.1: Layout of chapter 2

Source: Author’s own compilation

2.2 UNDERSTANDING SERVICE QUALITY

According to Karl (2009:1), a business’ main purpose is to create a customer as it is the customer who essentially determines what a business is and if the business will be a success. Although it is significant to provide time and effort on how one will improve products and services, it is still the customers who establish the future success of a business. Therefore, customer service enhancement is very important if the business wants to prosper. The first part of this chapter focuses on the meaning of service quality.

2.2.1 Defining service quality

Service quality has been defined in many ways and by many different authors. Parasuraman can be considered as one of the fathers of the service quality concept since he did extensive research in the early days on this concept and his research is still used today. In 1985 and 1988 Parasuraman *et al.* (1985:42; 1988:16) defined service quality as the comparison of customers' expectations with actual service performances. Quality evaluations are not made solely on the outcomes of a service; it also involves the evaluation for the process of service quality.

Almost ten years after the definition development of Parasuraman; Asubonteng, McCleary and Swan, (1996:64) defined service quality as "the difference between customers' expectations for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perceptions of the service received". In both these definitions, expectations and perceived delivery were evident. Lewis and Booms (1983) as cited by Malla (2012:21) defined service quality again as a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations. Delivering quality service thus means conforming to customer expectations on a consistent basis.

In a service business, the product is quality. A business's competitors offer the same services, charge the same prices, and have roughly the same costs. If a business wants to distinguish itself, it has to be done through the quality of the service. Service quality means giving the customers exactly what is promised (Mueller & Bedwell, 1993:460) which is easier to deliver if you know what they expect.

According to Penn (2012:1), great customer service is the ability to meet the needs and requirements or the expectations of the customers. It is all about bringing back the same customer again and again. The business can attract the customers by offering exciting prices' and/or promotions but if proper customer service cannot be offered, the customer will not return. Great customer service is about treating the customer with a helpful and friendly attitude and about letting them know that there will be assistance in case of any needs. It is efficient assistance which will distinguish the business from other businesses and which will earn the trust of the

customers, making the customer believe that they came to the right place and made the right choice.

From the above, it is evident that service quality boils down to expectations and perceptions. Thus for the purpose of this study service quality implies that every customer is important and that all expectations should be met or exceeded. It also relates to ensuring that customers get what is expected, which in return leads to customer satisfaction and ultimately increasing the intention to return.

2.3 UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

According to Fecikova (2004:57), most markets are very competitive, and to survive, a business needs to produce products and services of very good quality that yield highly satisfied and loyal customers. Also according to Fecikova (2004:57), establishing and achieving customer satisfaction is a main goal of businesses nowadays, because there is a very clear and strong relationship between the quality of product/service, customer satisfaction and profitability. Satisfaction describes the extent to which a product or service meets or fulfils a customer's wants, which may be true of a high or low quality product. Satisfaction can only be equated with quality if one operates with an entirely subjective concept of "taste" (Oberoi & Hales, 1990:704).

Satisfaction is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to what was expected (Kotler, 2003:261). Based on this review, customer satisfaction is defined as the result of a cognitive and affective evaluation, where some comparative standard is measured to the actual perceived performance. If the perceived performance is less than expected, customers will be dissatisfied. On the other hand, if the perceived performance exceeds expectations, customers will be satisfied. Otherwise, if the perceived expectations are met with performance, customers are in an indifferent or neutral stage (Siadat, 2008:17).

Customer satisfaction can also be defined as a customer's overall evaluation of the performance of an offering to date. This overall satisfaction has a strong positive effect on customer loyalty intentions across a wide range of product and service

categories (Gustafsson, 2005 as cited by Siadat, 2008:18). To attain true customer satisfaction a business needs to achieve quality not only by eliminating the causes for direct complaints but also needs to provide the products/service with excellent, attractive quality and provide delight to the customer (Fecikova, 2004:60).

One of the main ingredients in the market place is thus customer satisfaction. Wirtz (2003:96) listed results and benefits of customer satisfaction as follows: repeat purchase; loyalty; positive word-of-mouth and increased long-term profitability. Therefore, businesses should measure the customer satisfaction to fortify the strengths and improve the business weaknesses. The achievement of true customer satisfaction involves: customer orientated culture and an organisation that focuses on the customer; employee empowerment, process ownership; team building; and partnering with customers and suppliers.

In other words high levels of satisfaction lead to:

- Improvement of a business's reputation and image;
- Reduction of customer turnover; increased attention to customer needs in total quality management planning;
- Reduction of marketing costs, vice versa, lower transactions costs;
- Reduction of costs related to product/service failures;
- And, lastly, increased satisfaction among personnel and greater stability of the workforce (Szymanski & Hise, 2000).

Fecikova (2004:58) illustrates in Figure 2.2 that customer satisfaction leads to profitability and service quality is the corner stone of it.

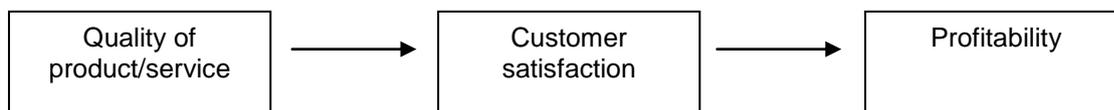


Figure 2.2: Dependence between quality, satisfaction & profitability

Source: Fecikova (2004:58)

The general agreement is then: satisfaction is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or

outcome) in relation to what was expected (Kotler, 2003:261). Satisfied customers are thus more likely to return to those who have helped them and delivered good service with high quality, and dissatisfied customers are more likely to go elsewhere next time. This is the type of situation that products such as conference centres want to avoid.

2.3.1 Tourist satisfaction and intent to return

According to Siadat (2008:6), service quality is about ensuring that customers, both internal and external, get what they want. Customer satisfaction is the feeling or attitude of a customer towards a product or service after it has been used. Satisfaction and service quality are often treated together as functions of customer's perceptions and expectations. Customer satisfaction is determined by defining customer perceptions of quality, expectations and preferences.

Several studies in tourism point to a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and a desire to return (Bigne *et al.*, 2001:607; Kozak, 2001:789 and Yoon & Uysal, 2005:48). Moutinho (1996) as cited by Shonk and Chelladurai (2008:590) suggests that a tourist's initial trail experience is a predecessor to satisfaction and whether the individual becomes a repeat visitor. Kozak (2001:787) claims that increasing satisfaction will result in increased repeat visits in the absence of counter moves by competitors.

It is thus a major challenge to maintain superior service in the tourism products such as conference venues, because the delegates is exposed to a variety of conferences at various facilities on a continuous basis, from the time of departure, until the possible return. In order to ensure the return to a specific conference venue, management must ensure that quality is maintained and satisfaction is upholding (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008:590).

2.4 MODELS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality has been defined differently by different people and there is no consensus on one definition as seen in earlier discussions. For the purpose of this study the definition by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:5) has been adopted, which defines

service quality as the discrepancy between a customers' expectation of a service and the customers' perception of the service offering.

Measuring service quality has been one of the most recurrent topics in management literature (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Grönroos, 1984 and Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). The need to develop valid instruments for the systematic evaluation of an organisation's performance from the customer point of view; and the association between perceived service quality and the other key organisational outcomes (Cronin *et al.*, 2001:93 as cited by Chingang and Lukong, 2010:38) has led to the development of models for measuring service quality.

2.4.1 The perceived service quality model

In 1982, Christian Grönroos, of the Swedish School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland, introduced the perceived service quality model (see Figure 2.3). According to Grönroos (1991:20), service quality studies and subsequent model development has from the beginning been based on what customers perceive as quality. In other words, service quality is an outcome of the marketing concept; focusing on the customer. What is important is what is perceived as quality by the customer and not what designers or operational personnel, employees or managers feel is good or bad quality.

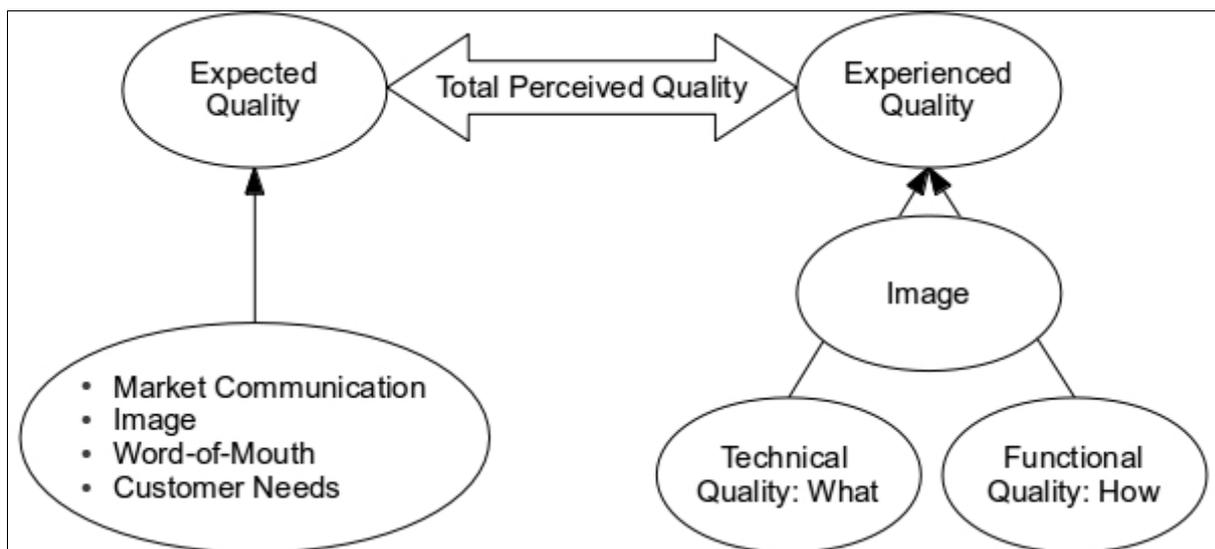


Figure 2.3: Grönroos' model of service quality

Source: Grönroos (1991:20)

According to the perceived service quality model (Figure 2.3), the quality of a service, as perceived by the customer, is the result of a comparison between the expectations of the customer and the real-life experiences. If the “experience quality” exceeds “expected quality,” the “total perceived quality” is positive. If expectations are not met by performance or the actual experience, the perceived quality is low. Final success is dependent on initial expectations compared to actual performance.

This model as depicted in Figure 2.3, demonstrates that the perception of service quality, results from a comparison of what the customer expected to get with what was actually received. Traditional marketing activities, word-of-mouth, traditions and ideologies influence expectations. Organisations should ensure that these expectations can be met before promising these in marketing material. The perceived service is determined primarily by the customers’ evaluation of the relationship between corporate image, technical quality and functional quality (Grönroos, 1984:39).

Grönroos (1988:11) suggests that performance evaluations comprise of two dimensions, namely a technical or outcomes dimension and a functional or process-related dimension. It will not only be the outcome of a service (technical dimension), but also the manner in which a service is performed (functional dimension) that exert an influence on the customers’ perception of a service, although the latter will be based on a rather subjective evaluation. The outcome (technical dimension) of a service can normally, but by no means always, be measured by the customer in an objective manner.

Figure 2.3 also indicate that Grönroos (1984:39) believes that a third dimension, namely a business’s corporate image, exerts an influence on perceived service quality. Several factors can influence this image, like the technical and functional quality, price, external communications, physical location and appearance of the site and the competence and behaviour of service business’ employees (Ghobadian, Speller & Jones, 1994:51). Grönroos (1984:40) also points out that, if a customer has a positive image of a business (because of one or more of the abovementioned reasons for instance) the customer will tend to find excuses for negative technical or

functional quality. If the negative experience with quality however, continues, that customer's image of the business will deteriorate. In the same way, a negative image may easily increase perceived problems with service quality. In the case of service quality perceptions, the business's image can be regarded as a filter (Grönroos, 1984:43; 1988:12).

There are six criteria for good perceived service quality presented by Grönroos (1988:12):

- Professional and skills
- Attitude and behaviour of contact personnel
- Accessibility and flexibility of the business
- Reliability and trustworthiness for the best interest of the customer
- Recovery immediately when something goes wrong
- Reputation and credibility, value for money and good performance.

Grönroos classifies each of these criteria into his three-dimensional service quality model. The first of these criteria, professionalism and skills, is outcomes-related and is therefore a technical quality dimension. The last criterion, reputation and credibility, is image related and will fulfil a filtering function. The other four criteria are all process-related and represent therefore the functional quality dimension (Grönroos, 1988:13).

This model is very relevant to the tourism and conference sector, as many of the services are performed in front of the customer. The image will have assisted the customer to formulate the expectations of the service but the technical and functional qualities will contribute to the customers' perceptions (Williams & Buswell, 2003:50).

2.4.2 Kano's model of customer satisfaction

The second model of customer satisfaction was developed by Kano in 1994. Kano, Seraku, Takahashi and Tsuji (1984:39-18) and Kano (1994), also cited by Sauerwein, Bailom, Matzler & Hinterhuber (1996:1) and Fuchs and Weiermair (2004:217), distinguishes three types of products or service requirements which, when fulfilled, influence tourist satisfaction in different ways.

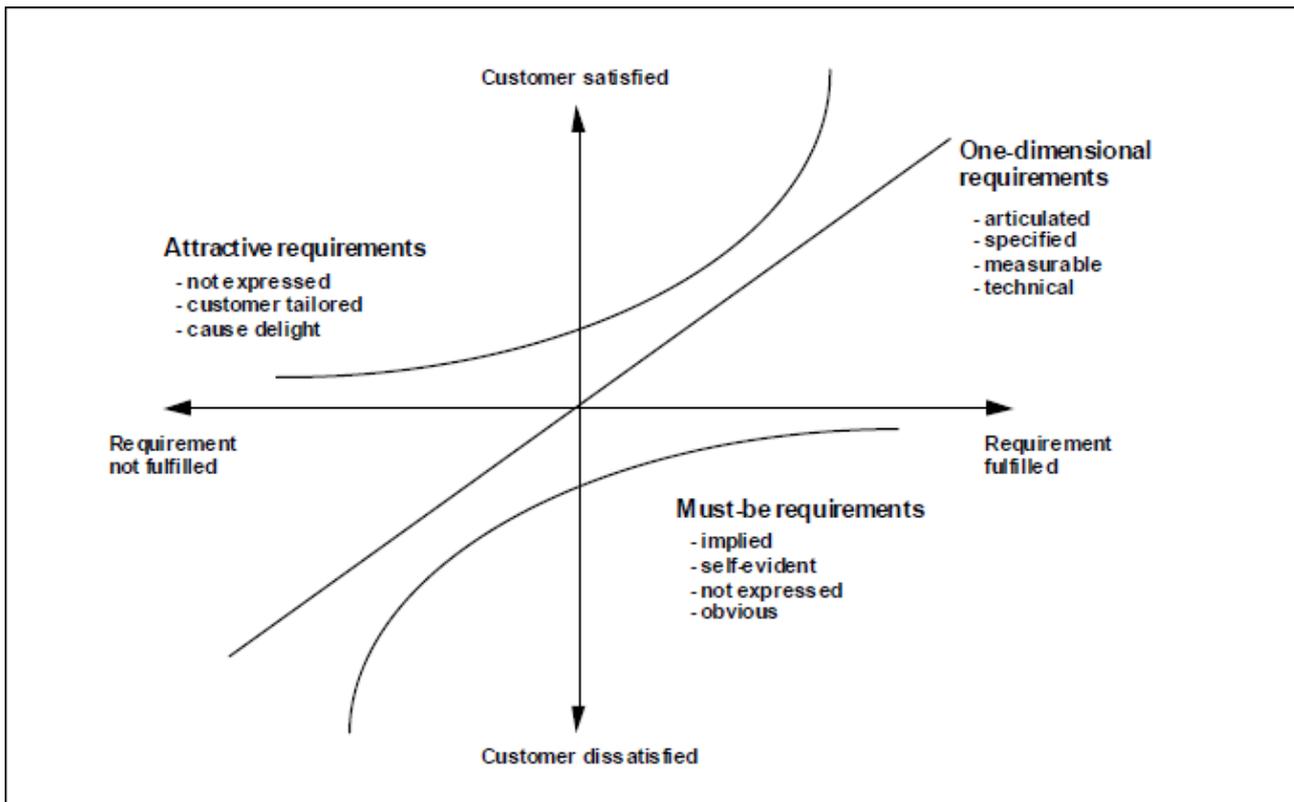


Figure 2.4: Kano's model of customer satisfaction

Sources: Fuchs and Weiermair (2004:217) and Matzler, Pechlaner and Siller (2001:447)

The horizontal axis of the Kano diagram in Figure 2.4, indicates how fully functional some aspects of a product is, and the vertical axis indicates how satisfied the customer is. Traditional ideas about quality have sometimes assumed that customer satisfaction was simply proportional to how functional the product was – the less functional the product, the less satisfied the customer, and the more functional the product, the more satisfied the customer. In Figure 2.4, the line going through the origin at 45 degrees graphs the situation in which customer satisfaction is simply proportional to how fully functional the product is: the situation in which the customer is more satisfied (up) with a more fully functional product (right) and less satisfied (down) with a less functional product (left).

Figure 2.4 also has curves labelled “Must-be” and “Attractive.” The “Must-be” curve indicates aspects where the customer is more dissatisfied when the product is less functional, but where the customer’s satisfaction never rises above neutral no matter how functional the product becomes. Fuchs and Weiermair, (2004:17), supports this by stating that when these requirements are not fulfilled, the tourist will be extremely

dissatisfied. Not supplying the tourist with these qualities may result in the tourist not being interested at all in the service, for example safety or hygiene.

The “Attractive” curve indicates areas in which the customer is more satisfied when the product is more functional but is not dissatisfied when the product is less functional. Fuchs and Weiermair (2004:17) also explain this by saying that on this curve tourist satisfaction is proportional to the level of fulfilment. In the case of services this could be the spaciousness and luxury of a room or variety of tourism attractions and leisure activities.

A customer may also be indifferent to a quality element. Indifference would be plotted on Figure 2.4 roughly along the horizontal axis – that is, the customer is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied whether the product is dysfunctional or fully functional (Berger, Blauth, Boger, Bolster, Burchill, DuMouchel, Pouliot, Richter, Rubinhoff, Shen, Timko and Walden, 1993:4-5)

2.4.3 The SERVQUAL (Gap) model

SERVQUAL is a service quality measurement instrument that was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in the 80’s. Although more than 30 years old, the model is still regarded as valid today and widely used in practice (Cited by Donnelly & White (2012:15) and Prabakaran, Arulraj & Rajagopal (2008:143). A few examples include that of Babakus and Mangold (1992); Brysland and Curry (2001); Donnelly and White (2012); Finn and Lamb (1991); Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005) as well as Siadat (2008). The underlying service quality dimensions measured by the SERVQUAL model have also been the key to the development of other similar measurement frameworks. Buttle (1996:8) mentions several researchers that have used the SERVQUAL model in various industries (retailing, restaurants, banking, telecommunication industry, airline catering, local government, hotels, hospitals, and education). This model has proved to be the most popular quality measuring instrument in several industries (Asubonteng *et al.*, 1996:62; Coulthard, 2004:18 and Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005:102).

According to Woods and Deegan (2003:274) the SERVQUAL model underlines the importance of drawing up standards that reflect the expectations of customers and

then ensuring that service delivery quality matches those standards. The standard should let suppliers know what to supply and allow customers to know what to expect.

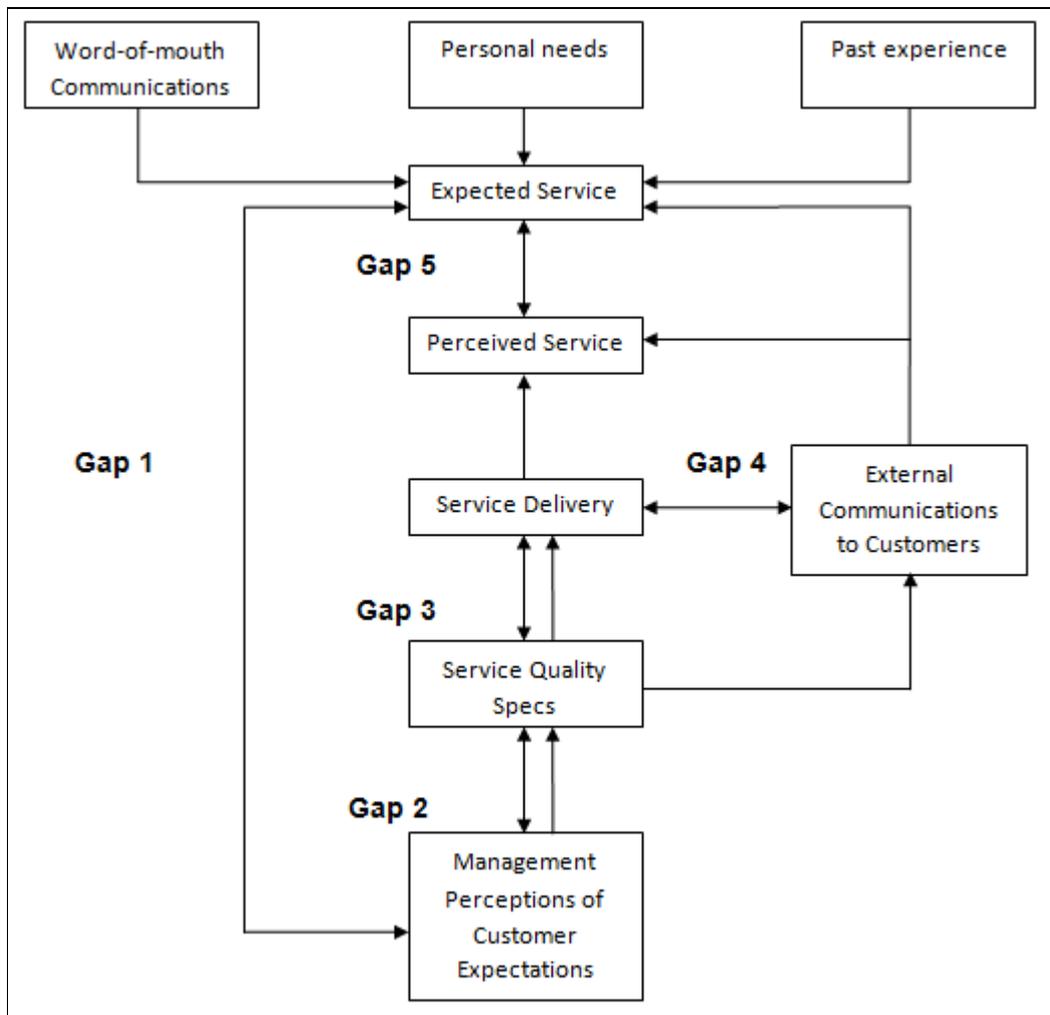


Figure 2.5: The SERVQUAL (Gap) model of service quality

Source: Parasuraman *et al.* (1985:44), Luk and Layton (2002:113) and Curry (1999:182)

According to this model, quality management is largely about meeting or exceeding customer' expectations by setting the right standards, meeting them and communicating them effectively, and identifies a series of (5) gaps in the process. The sum of five gaps represents the difference between the customer's expectations and perceptions of service quality experienced (Woods & Deegan, 2003:272 and Kumar, Kee and Manshor, 2009:214). The "gaps" model developed by Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985:41-50) may be summarised as follows: "Service quality as perceived by a customer depends on the size and direction of the gap between

expected service and perceived service, which in turn, depends on design, marketing and delivery of service”.

Below is a brief look at the meaning of the different gaps, to determine what it stands for (Saayman, 2002:82; Woods & Deegan, 2003:272):

- *Gap 1 (The knowledge gap)*

This gap illustrates the difference between customer expectations and management perceptions of customer expectations (when the business does not know what the tourist expects). The initial step is thus to determine what tourists would like to have. Market research must be done in order to avoid the first gap. Various organisations do not consider this as important and thus the service delivery process can go wrong very early in the transaction process.

- *Gap 2 (The standards gap)*

Gap 2 illustrates the difference between what management perceives the customer to expect and the quality specifications set for service delivery (when wrong standards are set). The main reason for this gap is a lack of management agreement to quality service, lack of knowledge on what to set, too much emphasis on short-term objectives, and neglecting to determine the customer’s view of the facility or attraction.

- *Gap 3 (The delivery gap)*

The difference between the quality standards set for service delivery and the actual quality of service delivery. In other words, the business does not meet its standards, and the latter must thus be identified and corrected. This problem is the easiest to intercept but if the organisation is not committed to correcting the poor service levels this gap will continue to exist and customers will support a different product or service.

- *Gap 4 (The communication gap)*

The difference between the actual quality of service delivery and the service as it is communicated to customers (empty promises). A specific message is communicated, which creates an expectation which is not met. In such a case effective communication plays an important role. This is a problem that regularly occurs in tourism when brochures, social media and other communication mediums create a wrong perception. The challenge with the tourism industry is that the service is in most cases already paid for on arrival at the destination or conference centre.

- *Gap 5 (The sum of the four gaps)*

This gap represents the difference between the customer's expectations and their perceptions of the delivered service. Customers expect certain kinds of services from the business. Customer's expectations are influenced by personal needs, word-of-mouth recommendations and experience of past services (Shahin, 2006:2).

It is clear that the model identify possible gaps for managers to assess the variation between customers' expectations and experience which could be negative or positive if the expectation is higher than experience or expectation is less than or equal to experience respectively.

2.4.4 The Haywood-Farmer model

Haywood-Farmer (1988:21) developed a service quality model based on three important points that could influence the companies' performance in terms of providing expected quality to customers. The Haywood-Farmer model (Figure 2.6), suggests that an enterprise provides high quality when it satisfies on time the preferences and expectations of customers, and for this reason enterprises need to discover what customers expect for service (Siameti & Kakouris, 2009:407).

Haywood-Farmer (1988:21) suggests that services have three basic attributes, the so-called three P's of service quality. These three P's represent:

- Physical facilities, processes and procedure
- People's behaviour elements; and
- Professional judgment

According to Siameti and Kakouris (2009:407) the first group (*physical facilities, processes and procedures*), includes characteristics that have to do with natural installations whilst the second (people's behaviour elements), includes characteristics such as oral or non-oral communication, politeness and friendliness.

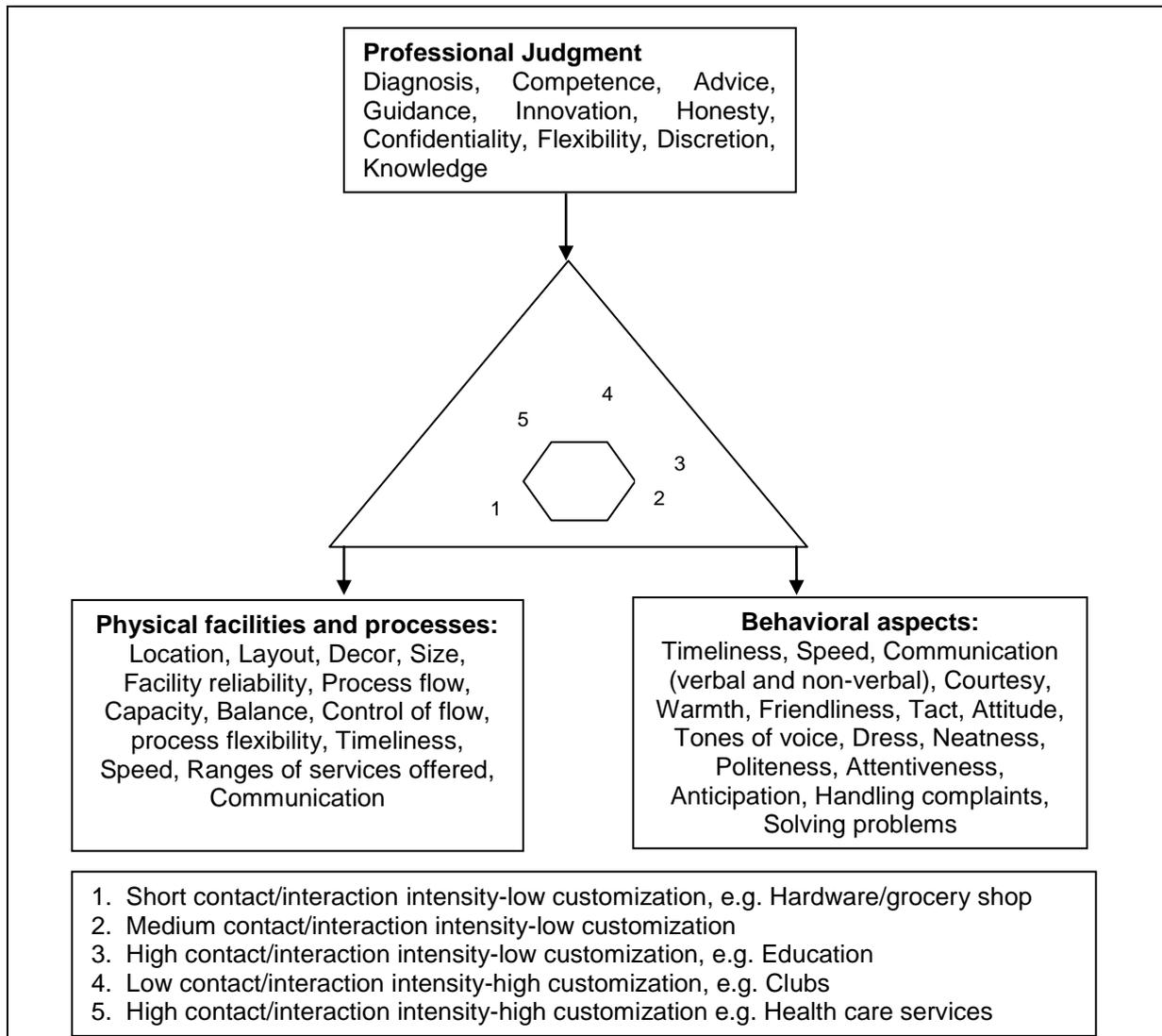


Figure 2.6: Haywood-Farmer's model of service quality

Source: Haywood-Farmer (1988) as adapted by Seth, Deshmukh & Vrat (2005:919)

Finally, professional judgment is related to competitiveness, guidance, innovation, flexibility, knowledge, discretion and to all those elements that confer professionalism of the enterprise. The selection of elements from each group constitutes an important strategic decision on behalf of the enterprise in order to achieve the appropriate balance.

As thoroughly explained by Seth *et al.* (2005:919), Haywood-Farmer (Figure 2.6), try to map different types of service settings as per degree of contact and interaction, degree of labour intensity and degree of service customisation. That means for example that organisations that have high contact/interaction intensity but low customisation, are closer to behavioural aspects in the model. Therefore attention has to be placed on timeliness of service, communication, courtesy, friendliness, attentiveness, complaints handling and problem solving (Mwatsika & Khomba, 2013:4411).

2.4.5 The expectancy-disconfirmation model

Oliver (1993:419) developed the expectancy-disconfirmation model which is the most dominant theory of customer satisfaction (Figure 2.7). Oliver also considered the study already done by Parasuraman, as the approach of the expectancy-disconfirmation model is also associated with the identification of customer expectation versus what they actually experienced. It also focuses on the comparison of the service performance with the customer's expectations. The customer's expectations are also assessed after the service encounter by asking to recall it (Gilbert, Veloutsou, Goode & Moutinho, 2004:372-373).

The expectancy-disconfirmation model can measure satisfaction from perceived quality of products or services in order to measure the customer's satisfaction. This model has two variables: expectation or desire and experience or perceived performance. These variables are defined in two distinct time periods.

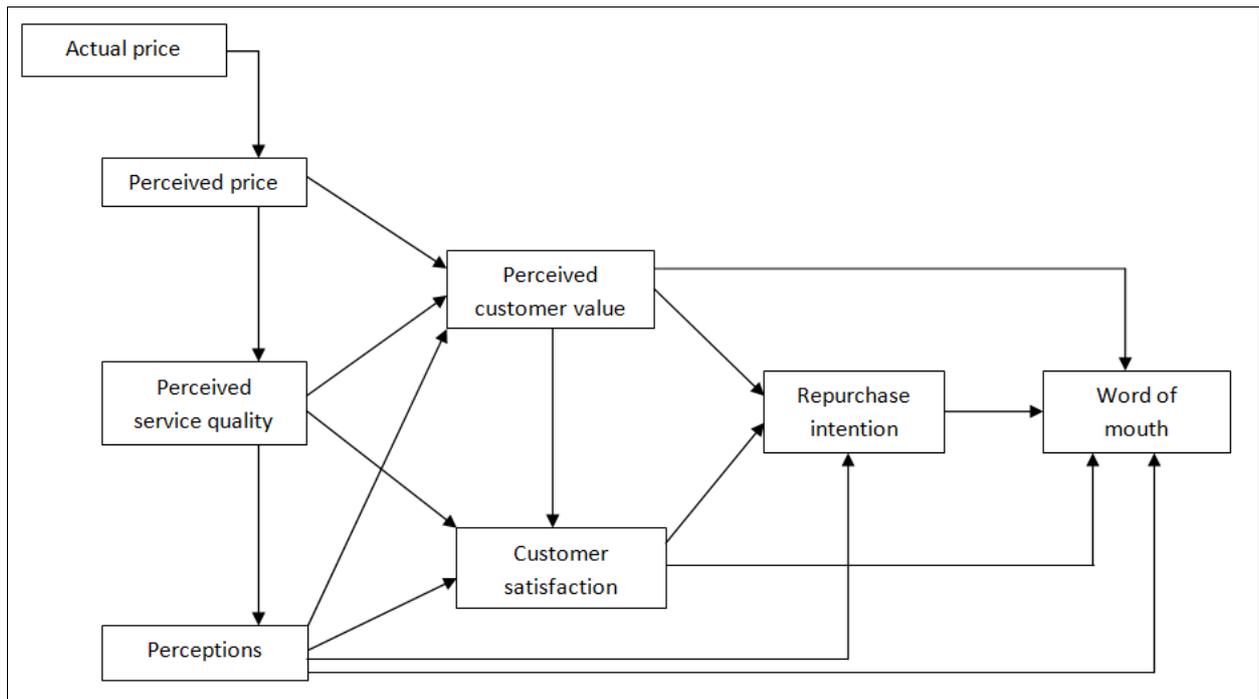


Figure 2.7: The expectancy-disconfirmation model (EDT)

Source: Adapted from Oh (1999:72)

Expectations or desire is related to the pre-purchase time period when a customer has initial expectations or desires about a specific performance, such as quality of products or services. Experience or perceived performance is related to the after-purchase time period when the customer gets the experience after perceiving a real performance such as quality of a specific product or service. The difference between initial expectation or desire and perceived experience or performance is known as disconfirmation of expectation or desire. It means that disconfirmation of expectation or desire can be positive or negative.

When customer's perceived performance over the quality of a specific product or service is higher than the customer's expectation or desire, the positive disconfirmation will occur. In the same way, when customer's perceived performance is worse than what they expected or desired about the quality of a specific product or service, a negative disconfirmation will follow. According to Bovaird & Löffler, (2001:107); Elkhani & Bakri (2012:95); Robledo (2001:23) and Yi (1990), positive disconfirmation leads to the customer's satisfaction and negative disconfirmation means perceived performance of products or services could not exceed or meet the customer satisfaction. Quality is therefore defined as the gap

between customers' expectations and perceptions ($C=P-E$), and a customer will perceive quality positively only when the service provider meets or exceeds his expectations (Robledo, 2001:23).

All these models have one embedded goal: namely to determine if a service delivered satisfied the customer. Lovelock (2001:223) noted that satisfaction is inextricably linked to customer loyalty and relationship commitment. Highly satisfied customers also spread positive word-of-mouth messages and in effect become walking and talking advertisements for an organisation whose services and products have pleased them.

2.5 ELEMENTS OF SERVICE QUALITY

George (2001:277) contends that service quality is the delivery of excellent or superior service to customer's expectations. Perceived quality is best modelled as the gap between customers' expectations concerning the product or service and their perceptions, concerning the product or service. When expectations are lower than perceptions, perceived quality is good. When expectations and perceptions match, perceived quality is acceptable.

As mentioned earlier in the study; according to research done by Zeithaml *et al.* (1990:20-23), ten general criteria or dimensions were identified by customers judging service quality. They are confident that the set of 10 general dimensions of service quality is thorough and appropriate for assessing quality in a broad variety of services (See Figure 2.8).

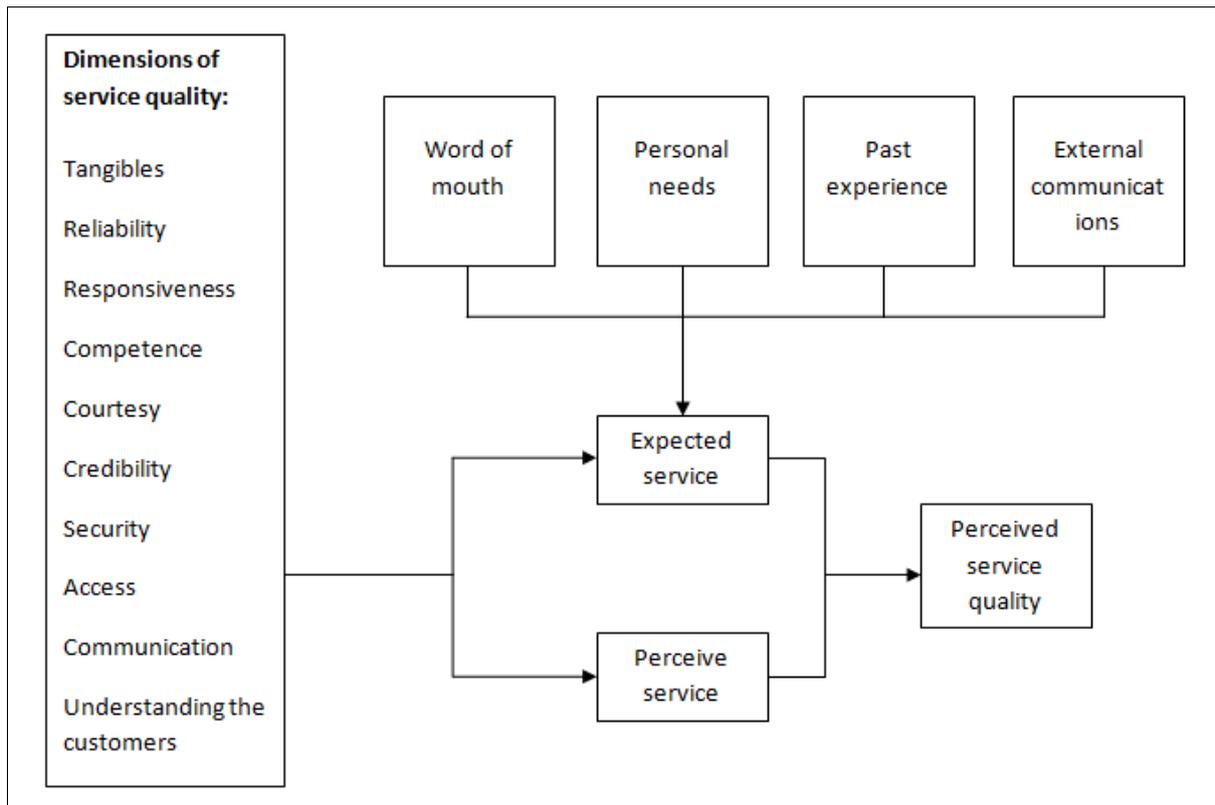


Figure 2.8: Customer assessment of service quality

Source: Zeithaml et al. (1990:23)

These dimensions were eventually reduced to five dimensions that are applicable to various organisations that deliver a service in its normal way of doing business. Various authors have identified different service elements to be discussed below per study:

Table 2.1: The elements of service quality

Element	Description	Source
Reliability	➤ Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.	Hutt and Speh (2001:338) and Robledo (2001:24), Zeithalm <i>et al.</i> (1990)
Responsiveness	➤ Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.	
Assurance	➤ Inspiring trust and confidence by providing a courteous and secure service.	
Tangibles	➤ Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.	
Empathy	➤ The approachability, ease of access and effort taken to understand customers' needs.	
Designing the	➤ Customer needs are clearly identified.	Tripathy (2009:1)

Element	Description	Source
service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reasonable expectations are set. ➤ Services are easy to access, responsive, timely and reliable. ➤ Where possible, some choice is provided to customers. ➤ Those delivering the service have appropriate skills. 	
Implementing the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Service delivery is consistent regardless of where or by whom it is delivered. ➤ Services are simple to understand and receive. ➤ Services are cost effective. 	
Assessing achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Quality of service is regularly reviewed. ➤ Customers have easy right of address for poor quality service. ➤ There is a program of continuous improvement. 	
Speed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Allows one to differentiate between the market place and in customers' eyes. 	
Employee empowerments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The employees have to do whatever has to be done, on the spot, to provide an outstanding customer experience. The most important person in every single company is the front line employee 	Tschohl (2012:1)
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Essential, in whatever service or product being sold. 	
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Its meaning will differ with every customer, as such front line employees need to sense and ask what's important to the customer. Use the customer's name and make them feel special. 	
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This is the first key to superior customer service. Great customer service needs to go beyond receiving the incoming call for a booking. Keep customers up to date with price changes and changes that may occur. 	
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The last thing a customer wants to hear is excuses. In any business things will go wrong. Keep the customer at ease and explain what will be done to correct the mistake. 	Mosqueda (2009:3-6)
Take action	Communication is crucial, but saying the right words	

Element	Description	Source
	<p>means nothing if not backing them up with action. Know what actions are going to be taken to meet the service obligations. The solution needs to consist of a few points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify the problem. ➤ Create an action plan. ➤ Implement the action plan. ➤ Resolve the problem. ➤ Explain what are going to be done to ensure it does not happen again. 	
Follow up	This point leads back to communication and ensuring that the previous steps were accomplished. Following up ensures that one care about the customer's business and are attempting to give the best service possible.	
Support	This involves contacting the departments within the organisation that impact the accounts. This shows the customer a united front of support.	
Great customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The regard and value of the agency extends to customers. ➤ The loyalty and fidelity held by service providers to those served. ➤ The degree of understanding presented by those served. ➤ The extent to which customers are understood in terms of the needs. ➤ The extent to which the agency individualises service. ➤ The level of customer participation and guidance in regards to what is happening with and for them. ➤ The relevance of service practices to people's needs and preferences. ➤ The extent to which the customer is assisted in maintaining or strengthens the person's autonomy and self-determination. ➤ The extent to which the customer is supported in having and managing personal relationships. ➤ The provision to customer of just the right amount and intensity of support. ➤ The extent to which the agency preserves and 	Kendrick (1994)

Element	Description	Source
	<p>nurtures the customer's natural and informal supports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respect for the rights of the customer and support for the customer to exercise these rights. ➤ The extent to which the service and agency processes are understood and meaningful to the customer. ➤ The service should be affordable. ➤ The service should adapt as customer needs change. ➤ The customer is not stigmatized through association with the service. ➤ The service should be coordinated with other aspects of the customer's life. ➤ The level of appropriate acknowledgment and support for the existential, emotional and spiritual struggles of the customer served. ➤ Adequate level of structure, consistency and dependability of service. ➤ When supervision is needed, it should be properly targeted, enhancing, and empowering for the customer. ➤ The extent to which customers' lives are encouraged to be as normal as possible. ➤ That the interest and needs of the customer served are not supplanted by the interest of the caregiver or the agency. ➤ Customers should not be subjected to involuntary interruptions and competent advocacy, allies and legal advice. ➤ The extent to which the agency provides compensating support to help customer offset practical disadvantages they may face in community living. ➤ The service should be conveniently located and accessible. ➤ The service should have integrity, honesty, and authenticity. 	

Source: Author's own compilation

Table 2.1 gives a summary of the different elements of service quality. The main elements (in summary), according to the above authors are as follow:

- Communication is crucial and it is important to always keep the customer informed and to be honest.
- Always be willing to assist the customer and stay professional at all times.
- Keep service as cost effective as possible.
- Employees should do whatever it takes to provide outstanding service.

It is clear from the literature review that different authors have different views on the elements that contribute to service quality, but it is evident that researchers agree that good quality service leads to satisfied customers that will return and contribute to a profitable business which will be able to differentiate itself from its competitors.

2.6 CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPECTATIONS VS. PERCEIVED SERVICE EXPERIENCE

It is already evident that customer service is a key factor in achieving business success. It can either make or break a business. Essentially, being in business is to generate revenue through selling the products to customers who are in need of these services. Good customer service, above all else, is the primary factor in a business' ability to sustain growth and increase profitability over the long-term. Consistently addressing the needs of the customer through attention to detail, prompt and courteous assistance, and the provision of knowledgeable employees is the first objective in providing a memorable experience (Bullard, 2013:1).

To be able to gain income for the business, it follows that one must carefully design and satisfy the needs of the customers. This is the foundation of an emerging and profitable business. Every decision being made must take into consideration how it affects the customers. The importance of service circumstances affecting the customers must always be given. Every business owner must recognize the reality that customer service is imperative in the success of the business. This will ensure customer's loyalty and commitment to the business. The ability to focus on a customer's needs and providing service to the best of one's ability will ensure that the business will be far more cost-effective than ever imagined (Karl, 2009:1).

Customers form service expectations from past experiences, word-of-mouth messages and advertisements. In general, customers compare perceived service with expected service in which, if the former falls short of the latter, the customers are disappointed. Malla (2012:30) came to the conclusion that “It is not enough anymore to merely satisfy the customer; customers must be “delighted: - surprised by having their needs not just met, but exceeded.”

Gap 5 of the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman, demonstrates the difference between the customers' expectations and the perceptions of the delivered service. Customers expect certain kinds of services from certain businesses. Customers' expectations are influenced by personal needs, word-of-mouth recommendations and experiences of past services. This gap in a business can bring either a negative or positive influence on the image of the business, thus resulting in either good or bad customer satisfaction. If the service expected was better than services rendered = negative influence on image of the business. If the service expected was poorer than services rendered = positive influence on image of the business.

According to Recklies (2006:3), the service experience is closely linked to the perception of the total company and its offering – be it products or service. It is not always necessary to deliver the absolutely perfect customer experience. Instead it is important to solve the customers need or problem in a matter that is perceived appropriate. For many service situations, customers will – depending on the actual nature of the service – not expect an immediate service delivery. There will however be a time frame of expected delivery that is either according to market standard or meets the service promise of the actual service provider. As long as the company keeps this promise, the customers will perceive this as satisfying. It has to be explained to the customer how this particular product on offer, can deliver more value than that offered by competitors. This approach means to widen the customers' perception and to extend their awareness and appreciation to more features or aspects of the offering.

The more realistic customer expectations are, the higher the possibility that it will be met in reality, and good customer – perceived service quality is more likely (Ojasalo,

2001:203). Simply stated, perceived service quality reflects how well the service delivered matches or exceeds a customer's expectations (Laroche *et al.*, 2004:60). According to Zeithaml *et al.* (1993) as cited by Palmer and O'Neil (2003:256) as customers evaluate the levels of performance of a service, the specific performance is typically compared to what was initially expected. Expectations provide a baseline for the assessment of a customer's level of satisfaction. The disconfirmation model contends that service quality can be conceptualised as the difference between what a customer expects to receive and their perceptions of actual delivery. According to Olivier (1997) as cited by Palmer and O'Neil (2003:256), Wilkie (1990) and Wells & Prensky (1996) a product and service performance exceeding some standard based on expectations leads to satisfaction, while performance falling below this standard result in dissatisfaction.

It is the customer who establishes the future success of a business. Therefore, customer service enhancement is very important for the business to prosper (Karl, 2009:1). Many organisations today talk about exceeding customer expectations – delighting and surprising them by giving more than what is expected. This philosophy raised the question, should an organisation simply try to meet customer expectations or try to exceed it? Businesses are supposed to be accurate and dependable and provide the service that was promised (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremier, 2008:71). As the examples of basic expectations of customers in Table 2.2, are examined, the question should be asked, whether an organisation doing any of these things, would be delightful? The conclusion that should be reached is that it is very difficult to surprise or delight customers consistently by delivering reliable service.

Table 2.2: Types of customer service expectations

Expectation	Description
Explicit expectation	Mental targets for product performance, such as well-identified performance standards
Implicit expectation	Reflects established norms of performance. These are established by businesses in general and might include wording such as "compared with other companies..."
Static performance expectation	Address how performance and quality are defined for a specific application. Performance measures related to quality of outcome may include the evaluation of accessibility, customisation, dependability, timeliness,

Expectation	Description
	accuracy, and user friendly interfaces. These are the visible performances.
Dynamic performance expectations	How the product or service is expected to evolve over time. These may be about the changes in support, product or service needed to meet future business or use environments.
Technological expectations	Focus on the evolving state of the product category. Technology is continually evolving, leading to higher expectations of new features.
Interpersonal expectation	These reflect the relationship between the customer and the product or service provider. Person to person relationships are increasingly important, especially here products require support for proper use and functioning.
Situational expectations	In building a customer satisfaction survey, it is also helpful to evaluate why pre-purchase expectations of post-purchase satisfaction may or may not be fulfilled or even measurable.

Source: Smith (2012:1-2)

In conclusion, service expectations vs. perceived service leads to customer satisfaction. According to Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser and Schlesinger, (1994) as cited in Malla (2012:30), customer satisfaction is related to customer loyalty, which in turn is related to profitability. It is also the feeling or attitude of a customer towards a product or service after it has been used. To understand the importance of customer satisfaction, the following facts are highlighted: customers with problems usually do not react and only 4% complain; normally a customer with a problem tells 9 other people about it; while satisfied customers tell 5 other people about the good experience; keeping a current customer costs about 1/7 of the cost of acquiring a new customer, retaining a current employee costs one tenth of hiring and training a new one (Siadat, 2008:7).

2.7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse service quality and the influence thereof on the intention to return to the organisation or use the service again. It was clear that good service quality ensures that customer's receive the service that was expected (Chingang & Lukong (2010:32), which in return leads to loyalty and customers returning. With that in mind service quality can be defined as the difference between customers' expectations and perceptions. This experience is influenced by factors such as word-of-mouth communications, personal needs, past experience and external communications. Several dimensions and criteria exist to

assess the elements of service quality but Parasuraman's model remained well thought through and utilised in various industries. The importance of service quality should not be underestimated.

Customers will remain loyal to a business if the value of the service offered, exceeds the value offered by competitors. While service quality has proved to be an essential ingredient to convince customers to choose one business over another, many businesses have realised that maintaining excellent service on a consistent basis is very important if they are to gain the loyalty of the customer.

Good quality service is one of the most important parts of any business. Keeping the quality service as the forefront of operations makes the business better and provides customers with the quality service expected. It is also more profitable to retain satisfied customers, than to be continually seeking to recruit new customer to replace lapsed ones.

The following chapter – chapter 3 – will be dedicated to analysing the conference sector and to look at the importance of this sector and service quality within the tourism industry.



CHAPTER 3

ANALYSING CONFERENCE TOURISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE QUALITY IN THIS CONTEXT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

According to the National Department of Tourism (2012), South Africa has earmarked tourism as a key sector with excellent potential for growth: the government aims to increase tourism's contribution, both direct and indirectly, to the economy from the 2009 baseline of R189, 4-billion (7.9% of GDP) to R499-billion by 2020. Tourism supports one in every 12 jobs in South Africa. The National Tourism Sector Strategy, launched in 2011, aims to ensure the sector realises its full potential in terms of job creation, social inclusion, services exports and foreign exchange earnings, fostering a better understanding between people and cultures, and green transformation.

According to Dieke (1998:39), one of the most important aspects of travel in Africa is related to "business purposes." Business tourism has been divided into at least fifteen different categories of travel, including individual general business trips, training courses, product launches, corporate hospitality and incentive travel, just to name a few (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001:30). The most important elements of business tourism are the hosting of meetings, conferences or exhibitions (Law, 1978:85). Often these are combined with incentive travel into discussions of the category of MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) tourism.

Africa's share of the global market for international meetings has hovered around 5 per cent for some years, with Kenya that showed strong growth in 2005, and occupied third place behind Egypt and Morocco in fourth position. South Africa,

however, continues to be the most popular African country for conferences/meetings, and Cape Town the leading city. It is thus evident that the competition levels are increasing (Rogers, 2008: 9 & 14).

It has been seen that, in comparison to many other industries, the conference sector is still a very young sector, barely 50 years of age in Europe and North America and even younger in most of the rest of the world (Rogers, 2003:25). Conference and business tourism caters for the high quality, high cost and, therefore, high yield end of the market. According to Astroff and Abey, 2002 (as cited by Tassiopoulos, (2010:503) the average meeting/conference delegate spends approximately \$250 per day, generating nearly over \$122 billion annually according to the Convention Industry Council (CIC). In 2005 conference delegates to the UK spent an average of £164 per day. The greater spending power of business tourists means increased economic benefits for the host destination and a greater return on its investment in infrastructure and marketing. The fact that conference and business tourism takes place throughout the year helps to contribute to the above (Rogers, 2008:27). According to the South African Yearbook, 2012/13:583-584, South Africa remains the top 15 long-haul business events destinations in the world and is the premier business events destination in Africa. The business events industry was identified as an important component in helping to reach the NTSS's target of 15 million international arrivals by 2020.

Government recognises business events tourism as an area with significant growth potential and has therefore established the first SANCB to further promote growth in the conferencing sector (South African Yearbook, 2012/13:584).

For the next five years, South Africa has already secured over 200 international conferences that are established to attract 300 000 delegates and an additional R1.6 billion to the economy. In 2011, South Africa has 392 000 business travellers, of which 140 000 attended conferences and meetings. Foreign tourists spent a total of R76.4 billion in South Africa in 2012, up 7.6% on the total foreign direct spend in the country in 2011 (South African Yearbook, 2012/13:575 & 584).

Conference tourism is thus a very important sector of the tourism industry, an industry which, in all its guises, is claimed to be the world's largest (Rogers, 2008:9). In order to grow this sector effectively and ensure that conference and meeting delegates return to South Africa it is important to ensure service quality at all times.

It is thus the purpose of this chapter to analyse conference tourism and the importance of service quality in this context. Firstly, the important concepts utilised in this chapter will be discussed.

Keeping this in mind and the fact that conference tourism is just a small part within business tourism; a few concepts will need clarification.

3.2 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

The following terms are used in the chapter and therefore need clarification.

3.2.1 International conference centre

Shone (1998:35) describes an international conference centre (ICC) as a large, modern, high-profile venue, constructed by a municipality or dedicated company with a view to profit by or contribute to the economy, usually purpose-built.

Thus, an ICC can be described as a purpose-built facility for the hosting of international conferences, attracting large numbers of people and complying with very high and specific standards regarding the layout and management of the centre.

3.2.2 Tourism and business tourism

According to South Africa.info (2012), tourism is regarded as a modern-day engine of growth as evidenced by the examples of international investments. In 2012, G20 heads of state recognised tourism as a driver of growth and development, as well as a sector that has the potential to spur global economic recovery.

Tourism involves an interaction between different role players such as tourists, job providers, government systems and communities. These role players aim to attract, accommodate, entertain and transport the tourists. It is thus clear that the primary

aspects of tourism consist of transport, accommodation and catering, entertainment and attractions (Saayman & Slabbert, 2001:6).

Business tourism on the other hand includes trips and visits made by employees and others in the course of their work, including attending meetings, conferences and exhibitions (Medlik, 2003:29). It encompasses all aspects of the experience of the business tourist and traveller (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001:3).

3.2.3 MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions)

Business events comprise meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions represented by the acronym MICE, which includes business events and activities. (Lau, 2009:3). These terms are explained below.

According to Rogers (2003:18 & 2008:21) the term meeting, refers to an event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in discussions, socialise, or attend other organised events. Saayman and Slabbert (2001:4) define incentive travel/meetings as meetings where companies motivate personnel by giving them a bonus trip to a specific destination. The company is responsible for all expenses and gives employees a bonus in terms of spending money and recognise the employees for increased levels of performance. It can also be defined as an event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in discussions, socialise, or attend other organised events. There is a secondary exhibit (exhibition) component (Rogers, 2008:21 & 2003:17).

According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2001:5), an exhibition is “an organised event which brings people together to view a topic of shared interest on display. It may be commercial or non-commercial and may be attended by a few or a thousand. It may last from a few hours to a week”. An exhibition is a large-scale public showing of products, an act of showing or displaying of items (Answers.com, 2006).

Thus it is clear that the conference sector today is complex and challenging. Conferences and meetings have become big business and thus represent major economic gain for the host community and facilities where it is being staged.

Conferences and meetings have become a medium for communication. As cited by Tassiopoulos, “on any given day there are more adult learners sitting in hotel meeting rooms than in all the universities in the nation” (Tassiopoulos, 2010:502).

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS TOURISM AND CONFERENCES

Since the 1960’s there has been a steadily increasing investment in the whole infrastructure that supports conferences, meetings and related events, an investment which accelerated into a rapid growth during the 1990’s. The 1990’s were almost certainly the decade which recorded the highest sustained investment to date in global conference sector (Rogers, 2008:5).

According to Spiller (2002) the global conference sector has become one of the most successfully developed sectors in recent decades. From 1999 to 2008, there has been substantial growth in the number of large international association conferences held annually around the world (Davidson & Rogers, 2006). The quantity; size and frequency of conferences have grown dramatically with some cities and countries considering them as an important sector, such as Hong Kong (Qu, Li & Chu, 2000) and Singapore (MacLaurin & Leong, 2000). According to the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) statistics (2009a), the number of meetings per year has grown with more than 3,000 events over the past 10 years (Table 3.1). The ICCA (2014), (as depicted in Table 3.2), has 900 member companies and organisations in 85 countries (ICCA, 2009b).

Table 3.1: The number of meetings from 1999 to 2008

Year	Number of Events
1999	4.425
2000	5.101
2001	5.069
2002	5,898
2003	5,978
2004	7.147
2005	7.232
2006	7.648
2007	7.578
2008	7.475

Source: ICCA (2009a:14)

The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), (2009a:14), conducted a study on the number of rotating international association meetings hosted by countries and cities. This is visible in Table 3.3, with Paris retaining the top rank, Vienna swapping places with Madrid and moving up from number three to number two, and Berlin and Barcelona swapping places at number four and five respectively. With regular jockeying for position between rival destinations, numerous short-term reasons why space is not always available for association meetings and with more meetings still to be discovered by ICCA and its members, these do not represent any dramatic changes.

Table 3.2: Top ranking countries for 2014

Rank	Country	#Meetings
1	U.S.A	831
2	Germany	659
3	Spain	578
4	United Kingdom	543 ↑ *
5	France	533 ↓
6	Italy	452
7	Japan	337
8	China- P.R.	332
9	Netherlands	307 ↑
10	Brazil	291 ↓
11	Austria	287 ↑
12	Canada	265 ↓
13	Australia	260 ↑
14	Sweden	238 ↑
15	Portugal	229 ↓
16	Switzerland	226 ↑
17	Republic of Korea	222 ↓
18	Argentina	191 ↓
19	Turkey	190 ↓
20	Belgium	187 ↓

* indicates the rise or drop in the 2014 ranking compared to 2013

Source: ICCA (2014:1)

Table 3.3: Top ranking cities for 2014

Rank	City	#Meetings
1	Paris	214
2	Vienna	202 ↑ *
3	Madrid	200 ↓
4	Berlin	193 ↑
5	Barcelona	182 ↓
6	London	166 ↑
7	Singapore	142 ↓
8	Amsterdam	133 ↑
9	Istanbul	130 ↓
10	Prague	118 ↑
11	Brussels	112
12	Lisbon	109 ↓
13	Copenhagen	105 ↑
14	Beijing	104 ↑
15	Seoul	99 ↓
16	Hong Kong	98 ↑
17	Budapest	97
	Rome	97 ↑
19	Stockholm	95 ↑
20	Taipei	92 ↑

* indicates the rise or drop in the 2014 ranking compared to 2013

Source: ICCA (2014:1)

According to the 1998 data from the British Tourist Authority and National Tourist Boards, business tourism accounted for about 14% of all trips to or within UK, and 15% of the tourist market within UK (Lennon, 2003:107). An estimate done in 2005, suggested that those numbers for UK may be closer to 30% (Robinson, Heitmann & Dieke, 2011:132). Sharma (2004:253) cited the WTO, which estimated that business tourism accounts for 30% of international tourism, though its importance varies significantly between different countries.

Looking at the above growth of international conference tourism, one should keep in mind that conference tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon in South Africa. Traditionally, South Africa's large city hotels – such as the Carlton in Johannesburg or Elangeni in Durban – represented the major suppliers of conference facilities. In addition to hotels, there were many civic halls, theatres and other multi-purposes buildings that also served the local conference market (Rogerson, 2005:182). According to Rogerson (1990:346), the most important of these hotel-casino developments that incorporated a large multi-purpose facility used for conferences

was at Sun City. During the late 1980's and early 1990's several important developments began to re-shape the country's conference and exhibition tourism economy, which led to the appearance of a number of specialised conference venues, like the Indaba Hotel and Conference Centre in Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2005:183).

Finally, in 1991, a major purpose-built convention centre was opened at Mmabatho. This convention centre with a seating capacity for 3000 in the main auditorium was a major purpose facility, which was managed by the Sun International hotel and casino group. The Mmabatho Convention Centre was to be the forerunner of later developments in South Africa's major cities and represented "the first major purpose-designed public-funded conference centre to be built in South Africa (Grant Thornton Kessel Feinstein, 1991 as cited by Rogerson, 2005:183).

Towards the close of the apartheid area, in 1991, SAACI yearbook recorded a total of 137 venues that offered conference facilities with a capacity of 200 or more seats (SAACI, 1991). As South Africa's major centre for business and location of headquarter offices, the Johannesburg-Pretoria area represented the prime spatial focus. Domestic conference tourism remained at the heart of the growing South African MICE economy.

Since 1994 the most important developments have surrounded the growth of conference tourism, driven by the rise of international MICE tourism, the establishment of international convention centres offering world-class facilities for conferences, and increased levels of competition amongst South Africa's major cities to attract the conference market (Rogerson, 2005:184). This rapid growth of conference tourism, is evidenced by the fact that nationally the MICE sector was estimated to be worth approximately R2.6 billion in 1995 and R17.4 billion in 2004 (South African Tourism, 2005). The growth of the MICE sector was boosted by the rise of international conference tourism. In 1993, the numbers of international visitors to South Africa was estimated at only 14 000 per annum (City of Johannesburg, 2003:4), while in 2004 it was estimated that at least 110 000 international MICE participants visited South Africa, which ranked the country as 22nd in a global listing

of world conference destinations. However, in 2006, South Africa ranked the 18th most popular meeting country in the world (Costa, 2006:60).

Important changes have been evident in the supply of conference venues since 1994. According to the listings provided in the SAACI yearbooks for 1996 and 2004 considerable growth has taken place during the post-apartheid period in the number of conference and exhibitions venues. Between 1996 and 2004 there is recorded a doubling in the numbers of conference and exhibition venues in South Africa (Gelling, 2004 as cited by Rogerson, 2005:185). Although hotels remain numerically the most dominant type of venue, it is shown that there has been a marked expansion in multi-purpose and specialised conference and exhibition venues. Another observed trend is for the growth in country hotels and eco-tourism related venues as newer offerings of conference venues. (Gelling, 2004 as cited by Rogerson, 2005:185).

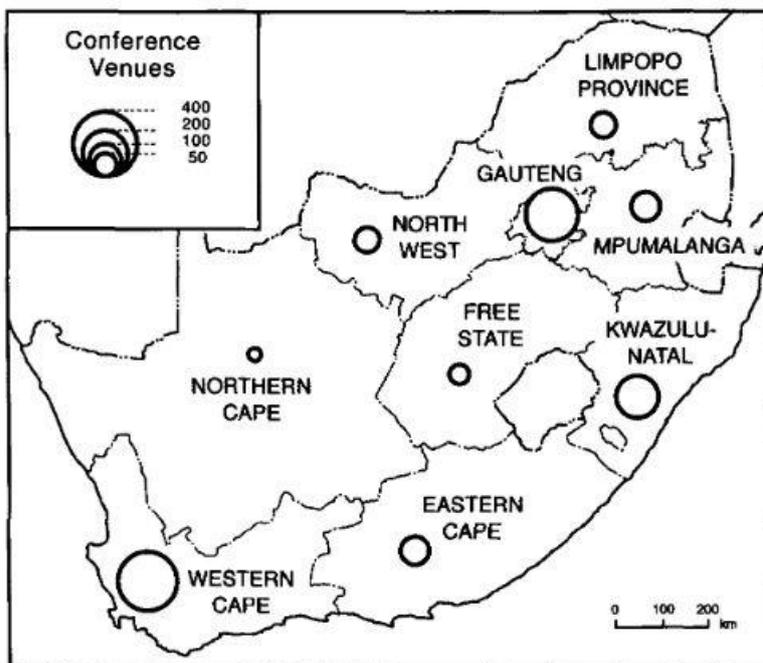


Figure 3.1: Location of conference venues and maximum delegate capacity for 1996

Source: SAACI, (1996)

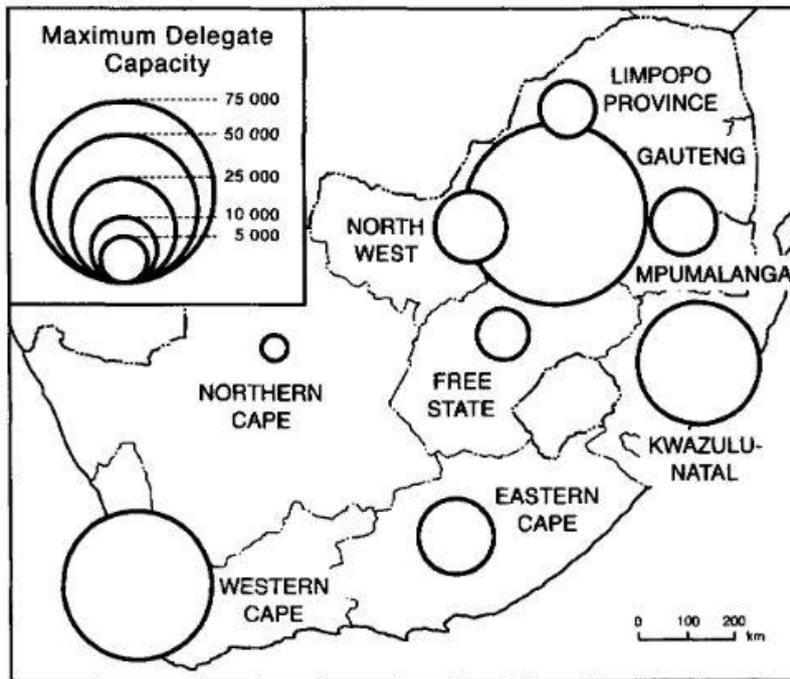


Figure 3.2: Location of conference venues and maximum delegate capacity for 2004

Source: SAACI, (2004)

As shown in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2, the greatest capacity for conferences, in terms of maximum delegate capacity, exists in Gauteng. In Johannesburg, the major centre of Gauteng, several large conference venues have been initiated since the early 1990's (Davie, 2004). Amongst the most important is Gallagher Estate, which in 1994 served as the nerve centre of South Africa's first democratic elections and in 1995 as the venue for a banquet in honour of Queen Elizabeth II (Rogerson, 2002 and City of Johannesburg, 2003). During 2004 Gallagher Estate was selected also as the venue for the inaugural meeting of the Pan-African Parliament, a decision that is seen as enhancing Johannesburg's position in terms of business tourism in Africa (Johannesburg Tourism Company, 2004).

In Durban, the decision was finalised in 1991 to build an International Convention Centre (ICC) with funding of R280 million drawn from the local metropolitan council. Lootvoet and Freund (2004:17) aver that the planned ICC development was one of the flagship projects that brought about the 25th International Union of Architects World Congress (UIA) that was held from 3 – 7 August 2014, and brought more than 5000 delegates to Durban from all spheres of the architectural world. This was the first time that the "World Cup of Architects" was held in sub-Saharan Africa and

constituted the largest gathering of architectural, design and built-environment professionals ever held in the region (UIA, 2014:1).

In Johannesburg, the competing R400 million Sandton Convention Centre (SCC) was constructed as part of the bid commitment for the lucrative Monte Casino hotel and gaming project, opening during the year 2000 (Keyser, 2002). Custom-built to accommodate the largest and most technologically driven event, the SCC was designed to compete with the finest convention facilities in the world and was the focal point for the activities of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the largest international conference ever held in South Africa. The summit attracted over 80 000 delegates of whom over 31 000 were foreigners from around the world. In total eighty countries were represented at the summit and 105 heads of state attended. A large number of businesses were established and much needed jobs were created with an estimated R8 billion flowing into the South African economy as a direct result of the WSSD. The summit also stimulated the upgrade of the city's infrastructure in that R65 million was spent on upgrading roads and R25 million on the rehabilitation of the Moroka dam and the re-establishment of Thokoza Park around the dam. Adding to the upgrading, preference was given to infrastructure in terms of power networks in Alexandra, Hyde Park and Rosebank and various maintenance projects (Fihla, 2003:53).

The most recent addition to the list of international standard conference venues in South Africa is the R320 million mega-projects for the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC). This multi-purpose convention and exhibition centre is situated on the Foreshore area of Cape Town's CBD (Haase, 2002). With the coming on stream in mid-2003 of the CTICC, South Africa now has three cities competing for the MICE market with international standard facilities (Dlamini, 2004). The list of South African cities that are seeking to attract conferences and exhibitions is not confined merely to Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Other cities that have established conference venues and seek to compete for the conference tourism market include Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria.

The International Trade Forum Magazine (2001), again states that business tourists are less cost-sensitive than leisure tourists, spending on average twice as much per

day. Their purchase decisions are influenced primarily by their ability to use time efficiently within business travel schedules. As two-thirds of business travellers extend their business trips for pleasure when they can, there is enormous potential in this market. Business tourism is expected to be one of the most important growth markets for travel industry providers in the years ahead.

In the conclusion, the market for conference tourism has grown substantially and seems destined to continue at a rate of growth above that recorded even for most European national economics (Bradley *et al.*, 2002 as cited by Rogerson, 2005:177). At national level, the importance of this segment of business tourism is underscored by the fact that certain countries have prepared national policies or strategies that are designed to ensure long-term growth and to maximise the local economic and social impact of conference and exhibition tourism.

It is clear when looking at the growth of this sector that tourism destinations, conference managers and governments realised the opportunity of conference tourism. To make sure that a venue stays on top of the market and rises above its competitors, conference managers should make sure that the quality of service rendered is of utmost standard, so that delegates will prefer the venue above others and keep on returning. One aspect that could provide this advantage is quality service and should be the focus of role-players in the conference tourism sector (Leiper, 2004:170; Mason 2008:104 and Poon, 1993:254).

3.4 STATUS OF CONFERENCE TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Within the existing inventory of academic research on tourism in South Africa, very few detailed studies are available on the theme of conference tourism. The only relevant research material is contained as part of broader investigations of local economic development planning in which reference is made to the development and potential local impacts of new convention centres (Maharaj & Ramballi, 1998; Nel & Rogerson, 2005 and Rogerson, 2004). At present, most South African writing on conference tourism is special reports prepared by tourism consultants evaluating the potential of a series of proposed new conference venues. One of the most common issues raised is that “little research has been conducted on the South African MICE

industry” in general and on the segment of conference tourism in particular (Grant Thornton Kessel Feinstein, 1999:12)

The following (Table 3.4) is some research that has, been completed on conferencing/conference tourism in a global market:

Table 3.4: Some research that has been done on conferencing / conference tourism

Author	Title of research/books	Year
C.M Law	Conference & Exhibition tourism	1978
B. Cox, T. Pottinger, M. Garsia and G. Grayforton	How to set up and run conferences and meetings	1986
R. Oseman	Conferences and their literature: a question of value	1989
U. Oberoi and C. Hales	Assessing the quality of the conference hotel service product: towards an empirically based model	1990
K. Ott	How to choose conference sites	1998
A. Shone	The business of conferences: a hospitality overview for the UK and Ireland	1998
H. Qu, L.Li and G.K.T. Chu	The comparative analysis of Hong Kong as an international conference destination in Southeast Asia	2000
R.E. Craven and L.J. Golabowski	The complete idiots guide to meeting and event planning	2001
M. Saayman and E. Slabbert	An introduction to conference tourism	2001
A. Bradley, T. Hall and M. Harrison	Promoting new images for meeting tourism	2002
T. Rogers	Conferences and conventions: a global industry	2003
C.M. Rogerson	Conference and exhibition tourism in the developing world: The South African experience	2005
S.E. Kruger	Key Success factors in managing a conference centre in South Africa	2006
R. Davidson and T. Rogers	Marketing destinations and venues for conferences, conventions and business events	2006
T. Rogers	Conferences and conventions: A global industry	2008
M. Donnelly and E.P White	Assessing the quality of a local authority conference and hospitality venue using the Servqual model	2012
H. Kauppinen	Developing domestic conference tourism at Pyhäätunturi Leisure Tourism Centre	2012
L.M. Ranacher	Green meeting – Eco labelling of sustainable events	2013

Author	Title of research/books	Year
	in conference and business tourism	
J.M. Mongwe	Exploring barriers to effective youth curriculum implementation in the Trans Oranje conference of the Seventh Day Adventists Church	2014

Source: Author's own compilation

Although Rogers (2008:104) states that conference tourism is still very much in its infancy in South Africa, statistics shows that tourism as a whole generated 9.5% of South Africa's gross domestic product in 2013 and accounts for more than 1.4 million direct and indirect jobs in the country (SATOUR, 2014:1). The sector, including domestic and inbound business, is worth around R21 billion according to Rick Taylor, one of the country's leading business tourism consultants. International conferences alone contribute R951 million to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product, while creating 12 000 jobs. The ICCA data also shows South Africa hosting some 44 per cent of Africa's total international meetings and conventions in 2005.

Research shows that of the 1900 exhibitions held in South Africa each year, 51 per cent are held in the Johannesburg area, with Cape Town taking 15 per cent of exhibitions, and Durban coming in at 11 per cent. This is the case since cities host the biggest conference venues, is accessible to delegates and focus on the development of business tourism. In 2003, a strategic alliance was formed between the Johannesburg Tourism Company and the Exhibition Association of Southern Africa (EXSA), with the aim of promoting Johannesburg as a prime destination for national and international exhibitions, conventions and special events (Official website of the City of Johannesburg, 2014).

Destination authorities realise the potential of the economic impacts of capturing the market of business tourism and the importance of developing this segment within the tourism industry. Figure 3.1 shows the economic impacts of business tourism on localities. It discloses that while there are both potentially positive and negative impacts, "it is generally accepted that the economic benefits of business tourism are positive in most places" (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001:77).

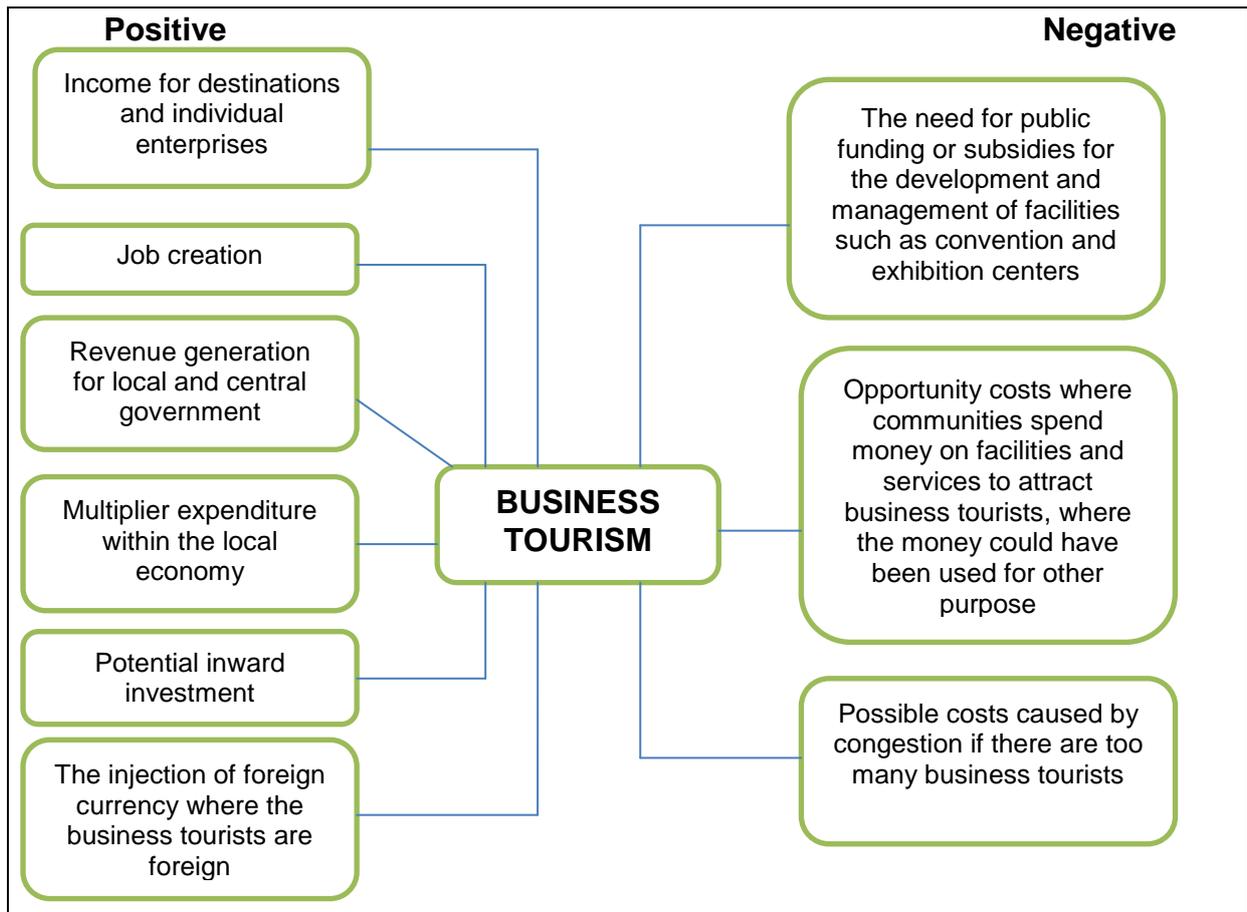


Figure 3.3: The economic impacts of business tourism at local level

Source: Adapted from Swarbrooke & Horner, (2001:76)

According to SCTH, (2015) there is a strong and correlative relation between the national economy of a country and business tourism. Business tourism is able to gain many economic fruits for the interest of the national economy. It is considered a key driver for temporary and permanent jobs. Many governments in the world list business tourism outputs within gross domestic products as well as analysing the cost output of public investment in the sector. The sector generates a large number of permanent and temporary jobs in the field of events' supply chain, organisation and management in addition to accompanied services. Many countries rely on business tourism for the provision of employments to their citizens. In the USA, the hosting of conferences and meetings is viewed as highly beneficial in that they can complement the seasonal fluctuations experienced in leisure tourism activities. The population of Melbourne in Australia, is around 4 million people and over 22 000 of them are employed in the business sector (SCTH, 2015 and Braun & Rungeling, 1992).

Success in business tourism has been shown to being also an array of non-financial rewards to localities, the most significant associated with image and profile enhancement, the physical upgrading and regeneration of decaying areas, and the generation of civic pride among residence (Bradley *et al.*, 2002). Taken together, given the several potential economic and non-economic impacts of business tourism, it is not surprising that many different kinds of localities have been encouraged to seek a slice of this lucrative market by attracting conferences and exhibitions.

Hence it is clear that the impact of business tourism and the conference sector within, in terms of social and economic benefits, is significant to a country or region.

3.5 THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A CONFERENCE

The International Trade Forum magazine (2001), states that conference tourism is a lucrative, fast growing segment of the world's largest industry sector and accounts for approximately 9% of all international travel.

This said, Alpha Kappa Psi (2013:1) and Bodack (2012:1), explains that conferences are more than people just presenting information, data and statistics. Conferences offer delegates an opportunity to learn from those who have more experience in a specific area. People from the same background, attending a conference, have the opportunity to network in gaining information on a specific topic or building relationships globally. Although conferences are not meant to be a vacation, it is often held in popular destinations, which creates the opportunity to do some exploring in and around the city where the conference is held.

It is clear that conferences offer various benefits to attendees and Leigh (2014:1) and Bodack (2012:1-2) list the following benefits:

- Learn new information from the speaker/presenter.
- The chance of networking with new people within the same field.
- The ability to share ideas and get immediate feedback from credible individuals.
- Enabling an attendee to evaluate the latest technologies that can potentially help grow their business.
- Building relationships with other businesses.

- Generates the opportunity to buy new products or services that are usually at marked-down prices, specifically for the event.
- Getting answers for the questions and challenges that arise, from credible individuals.
- Collecting of presentation materials to take home for later reference and study.
- Learning of free resources.
- Learning about facts and statistics that can help to better understand the market and industry.
- Marketing the business on different levels.
- Meeting people in similar business situations.
- Allows an increase in one's email list and lead generation by receiving other people's business cards.
- Allowing the build of traffic to websites by passing out business cards or brochures.

It is clear that when conferences are employed as part of management strategies, advantages could be reaped as part of a competitive advantage. Conferences can generate income and create jobs, but can also increase the image of a facility. Image again has an effect on the process moving from expected quality to perceived quality, to excellent service quality. Service quality overall plays an important role in conference tourism as it can make or break a conference venue.

3.6 SERVICE QUALITY IN CONFERENCE TOURISM

According to Prabakaran, Arulraj and Rajagopal (2008:143), there have been numerous studies relevant to service quality, focused on service quality measurement and instrument development but a few studies on service quality on tourism, more so conference tourism. Marketing researchers have made attempts to measure service quality since the 1988's. Further, these qualities influenced the image the customers had and this image had an effect on the process from expected quality to perceived quality.

Despite many efforts and debates, there has been no consensus on the measure of service quality across industries which could be illustrated in the table below. Table

3.5 indicates a few examples of research that has been done on the topic of service quality within tourism.

Table 3.5: Examples of research in service quality tourism

Author	Year	Topic of research
Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, Patton & Yokoyama	1990	LODGSERV is a 26 item index designed to measure customers' expectations for service quality in the hotel experience. This study confirmed the five generic dimensions of service quality hypothesized by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1986): tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.
Mackay and Crompton	1990	Using the SERVQUAL model as a basis, they developed the REQUAL model. This model is used to evaluate the quality of recreational services.
Cronin & Taylor	1994	Developed the SERVPERF model, and argued that only the performance part of the SERVQUAL should be included as the last mentioned model did not include an outcome dimension and did not emphasise the attention to what customers achieved after receiving a service.
Backman and Veldkamp	1995	They reviewed some previous studies and concluded that the REQUAL model can serve as a template for other researchers to use in their investigation of recreational service quality. The present study reveals the service quality dimension of tourism in Kerala.
Stevens, Knutson & Patton	1995	DINESERV is proposed as a reliable, relatively simple tool for determining how customers view a restaurant's quality. By administering the DINESERV questionnaire to guests, a restaurant operator can get a reading on how customers view the restaurant's quality, identify where problems are, and get an inkling of how to resolve them. DINESERV also provides restaurateurs with a quantified measure of what customers expect in a restaurant.
Dabholkar, Thorpe & Rentz	1996	He presented the hierarchical model of service quality consisting of three levels. 1. Customers' overall perception of service quality 2. This level included five dimensions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Physical aspects</i> • <i>Reliability</i> • <i>Personal interaction</i> • <i>Problem solving</i> • <i>Policy</i>

Author	Year	Topic of research
		3. Sub-dimension of the second dimension
Brady & Cronin	2001	Proposed a new hierarchical model by developing previous models. They adopted the idea of Dabholkar <i>et al.</i> , that service quality perception is multilevel and multidimensional. They also adopted two other dimensions from Grönroos' (1984) model - interaction quality between customers and employees and outcomes. The third dimension - adopted from Rust & Oliver (1994) was service environment. This new model of theirs (Hierarchical model), developed a new way of measuring service quality by having strong literature support and combining several models. This new model is generic and applicable for a variety of service industries and it has the ability and flexibility to have different factors depending on diverse business. By using different stages (multilevel) and multi dimensions in this model, it will enable managers to recognise problems in the primary stage of service provided find customers' needs and identify weaknesses of the service to enhance customer's perceptions of service quality via offering high quality of service. To date this model is the most suitable and applicable model for service quality management.
Tsaur, Chang and Yen	2002	They evaluated a specific model for the airline industry based on SERVQUAL with several attributes based on airline services by using a fuzzy set theory.
Cunningham, Young & Moonkyu	2002	They suggested a new model based on previous studies on airline specific model of service quality for measuring service quality in airline businesses. They suggested baggage handling, bumping procedures, operations and safety, in-flight comfort and connections as the dimensions of this model scaling by several items for each dimension. In addition they used SERVPERF for service quality. They found strong reliability and validity for both models.
Akama & Kieti	2003	They too used the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL service quality attributes were used to measure the quality of service and the overall visitor satisfaction with tourist product and services of the park.
Bigne, Martinez, Miquel and Andreu	2003	Also used the SERVQUAL model to test the quality of service received from travel agencies. They found that it is still a valid and reliable model with which to evaluate the service quality provided by travel agencies.

Author	Year	Topic of research
Palmer & O'Neil	2003	They did a study of visitors to an adventure theme park. A longitudinal study employing a modified SERVQUAL scale observed that perceptions of service quality declined with the passage of time. The 22 SERVQUAL items were adapted to the context of an adventure park. Adaption was carried out on the basis of a literature review on theme parks, and focus groups discussions with previous visitors to theme parks to identify the salient features of service quality.
Kouthouris & Alexandris	2005	They investigated the applicability of the SERVQUAL model in predicting customer satisfaction and customer behavioural intentions in one of the segments of the sport tourism industry, named outdoors. Service quality was measured by the SERVQUAL scale, satisfaction was measured by Oliver (1980) scale, and behavioural intentions were measured by Ajzen & Fishbein (1977) scale.
Shonk & Chelladurai	2008	They proposed a conceptual model of quality in event sport tourism wherein perceived quality of sport tourism is said to influence tourist satisfaction which, in turn, influences the tourist's intentions to return.
Donnelly & White	2012	They applied the SERVQUAL model to a conference and hospitality venue operated by a Scottish local authority.
Wong and Fong	2012	They conceptualised casino service quality as a second-order, four-dimensional construct which assesses casino patrons' perceptions of service delivery, service environment, food service and service product. Based upon a rigorous psychometric process of scale development and validation through three studies in the casino setting, the authors proposed the CASERV scale as a comprehensive instrument for measuring casino services that is reliable, valid and distant from other service quality measures.

Source: Author's own compilation

All of the above researchers have found service quality to play an important role in the tourism industry. The higher or better the service quality, the more likely it will be that tourists/delegates will return to a specific place and a profit will be generated. It is also clear from the above, that very few studies have been conducted on the conference sector.

According to Bullard (2013:1) the perception of having received quality in customer service is important in the decision making process. Delegates want to have a memorable experience and the most important aspect of a delegate's decision on where to attend or book a conference is going to be whether the perception concerning the quality of customer services received, is congruent with the level of respect and courtesy required to earn and retain loyalty as a contentious delegate. A delegate will attend a conference at the venues where he feels comfortable and where the service provided is of the highest quality (Bullard, 2013:1).

Bullard (2013:1) also concluded that good customer service, above all else, is the primary factor in an organisation's ability to sustain growth and increases profitability over the long term. Consistently addressing the needs of the customer through attention to detail, prompt and courteous assistance, and knowledgeable employees, is the first objective in providing a memorable experience. Effective customer service policies focus on providing the customer with customer service that is always consistent and focus on the customer. When an organisation creates a customer-centric and high quality customer service policy, the organisation will continue to create lasting value for the customer.

According to Crosby (1993:389), it makes good managerial sense to have an organisational focus on customer satisfaction for the following three reasons:

- Satisfied customers, which is the cheapest and most effective form of promotion.
- Satisfied customers are loyal customers. It is estimated to be five to seven times more expensive to attract a new customer than to keep an old one.
- Satisfied customers are better customers. They buy more, more often and are willing to pay higher prices.

Quality service also stem from employee participation. To encourage this, employees should be treated the same way as customers are treated – with care and respect. The task of management is to make sure the frontline employees are trained and motivated to deal with customers in a professional, efficient manner that will enhance pride and give the customers what is expected. It makes sense to give the employees the best training, efficient facilities, and logical procedures that will

enable job performance and not get in the way. The reward of this investment is satisfied, loyal customers (Mueller & Bedwell, 1993:461).

Thus if customers are satisfied with the quality of service received, there is a high possibility of return to the venue. Guidelines for providing great customer service to clients to ensure intent to return (Caixeta, 2011:1):

- Respond to clients as soon as possible.
- Keep clients updated.
- Go the extra mile.
- Fix the mistakes and apologies.
- Listen to the client.
- Keep the promise that was made.
- Do not confuse clients with jargon – try to explain whatever the problem is as best as possible without making the clients feel stupid. When proposing a solution, make sure to state it in terms they understand.
- Be patient.
- Know everything needed to know – be the paid expert.

3.7 KEY FACTORS WHEN ORGANISING A CONFERENCE AND SELECTING A CONFERENCE VENUE

Since factors contributing to organising a conference and selecting a conference venue can contribute to people choosing one venue over another, it is important to have an overview of these factors.

In recent years, the conference sector in South Africa has gained momentum. With its favourable exchange rate, accommodation and world-class conference sector, the country is becoming an increasingly popular choice for business and conference travel (Costa, 2005:8).

Organising a conference is a process which is integrated and complex. There are many aspects to consider and to remember. These aspects need to be organised in such a manner that it creates quality experiences for the conference delegates. According to Rogers (2008:172) and Cox *et al.* (1986:42), clear objectives should be set from the beginning, a budget has to be established, a venue must be sourced

and delegates' accommodation and travel arrangements must be made, as well as preparing a programme, so that the conference can be managed for its duration.

Firstly, the general procedures for organising a conference will be discussed.

3.7.1 Pre-conference planning and research

This is to lay the foundation for the conference (Rogers, 2003:143). It is important to decide what type of delegate will be addressed and the number of delegates that will be invited. At this stage one should consider how many speakers should be included as well as whom these speakers will be according considering the type and purpose of the conference.

Also decide whether delegates should organise accommodation for themselves or whether it will be included. This can be followed by the purpose of the conference, the time and date of the conference and what the financial aspects are going to be. Lastly, the location and venue should also be chosen – the location/venue has to fulfil a number of requirements in terms of capacity, accessibility, and type and design (to be discussed later in more detail) (Goldblatt, 2005:48; Rogers, 2003:143-148; Roodt, 2015:20; Salzgeber, 2006:35; Van der Wagen, 2005:21-23 and Wolf & Wolf, 2005:1-6).

3.7.2 Budgeting and financial management

The main financial framework of a conference is the budget (Bennet, 2000:290 and Swarbrooke, 2002:269). Budgets are of crucial importance and staying within the budget is very important to the planning of any conference, despite the size (Yeoman, Robertson, Ali-Knight, Drummond and Mcmanon-Beattie, 2004:273).

Expenditure projections must be set and these have to cover a whole lot of items Bowdin *et al.* (2010:300). The main ones according to Key (2004); Manktelow, Eyare, Parvey, Jackson, Cook, Jones, Edwards & Ward (2012) and Rogers (2008:187) are usually:

- Venue hire
- Catering cost
- Accommodation cost

- Speaker expenses – travel cost and possible presentation material
- Delegates material
- Conference production costs – equipment and technical personnel
- Promotional costs - leaflets and publicity materials, possible advertising and the programme.

Taking the above in consideration, decide then whether all the costs will be covered by the organising company or whether money will be generated through delegate fees (Salzgeber, 2006:36).

3.7.3 Programme planning

The programme should be compatible to the purpose and objectives of the conference. Interactive agendas, involving the delegates with panel discussions, extend the delegates' attention span. The programme also needs to cover issues taking into consideration the delegates' different cultures and different levels of knowledge and proficiency. A good programme is, to a large extent, responsible for increased delegate numbers (Rogers, 2003:162-163).

3.7.4 Marketing and sales

Marketing is the two-way process in which the organisation and its customers both exchange something of value (Bowdin *et al.* 2010:366 and Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong, 2008:7). Thus, this exchange involves people paying registration fees in exchange for attendance at a programme they perceive will be valuable to them (Simerly, 1990:4-5 and Swarbrooke, 2002:198). An effective marketing strategy is vital for the success of a conference, as it is a way to arouse people's interest and to inform and convince potential delegates, to attend the conference. It is therefore responsible for the final number of delegates. Marketing the conference, provide the potential delegate with important details about the event, such as the date, topic and possible programme. Secure websites, displaying information about the conference and providing online registration and payment facilities are used on a common basis (Rogers, 2003:164-165 and Tassiopoulos, 2010:332).

3.7.5 Evaluation and after care

Eventually, on completion of the conference, evaluation and follow up procedures with delegates deliver important pieces of information and clues for future events (Bowdin *et al.* 2010:632). The delegates complete speaker assessments or overall evaluations as soon as possible once the conference is over (Rogers, 2003:167-169). Swarbrooke & Horner (2001:186) suggests that “thank you” letters should be sent to all delegates after the conference.

Julie-May Ellingson from the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) recommends finding a venue that is client-centred, result-driven, and conscious about social and environmental preservation (Roodt, 2015:19). The general consensus is that conference organisers should take certain factors into account when selecting a conference venue (Bradley *et al.* 2002:64 and Shone & Parry, 2004:121), for example:

- The quality of the venue
- Accessibility
- Catering
- Technical facilities
- The image
- Design aspects
- Safety and security
- Availability of accommodation

(Bradley *et al.* 2002:69; Kruger, 2006:107-113 and Saayman & Slabbert, 2001:26).

These factors will now be discussed in detail.

3.7.5.1 The quality of the venue

This refers to the facility where the conference is scheduled to take place and the first and most important factor to take in mind (Bradley *et al.* 2002:69). According to Edwards (2005:1); Ott (1998:24) and Rogers (2008:189), once the venue has been selected, the next step would be to inspect the venue by conducting a site visit. According to Ott (1998:24) and Roodt (2015:20) a site visit allows one to verify that a facility’s physical set up and services will suit the needs of the presenter and delegates. When undertaking the site visit, the following should be considered:

- Are the rooms available for plenary sessions?
- Are there enough toilet facilities?
- Is there good access for disabled delegates?
- What style of seating will be needed?
- Does the venue have natural light?
- How noisy is the heating and air conditioning systems?
- If the conference extends over a few days, is there accommodation available and how many delegates can it accommodate?
- Does the venue have a dedicated conference co-ordinator who can assist with the detailed planning and arrangements?
- Are there in-house technical personnel to operate the audio-visual equipment?
- What audio-visual equipment is needed during the conference?
- Are there emergency evacuation plans in place?
- Can the venue offer any transport assistance for delegates travelling by public transport?
- Is the parking space sufficient?

3.7.5.2 Accessibility

This is the ease and speed with which the delegates can reach the desired location/venue. According to Bobowska (2012) and Shonk & Chelladurai (2008:592) accessibility may relate to such details as parking areas, airports, freeways and public transportation. Access to the facility refers to the ease with which the delegate can reach the venue where the conference will be hosted. It must also be noted that access to the venue also includes the ease of exit from the venue after the conference (Roodt, 2015:19). Schütter (2010:42) states that delegates most often find it important that the international airport is not further away than 30-40 minutes and that the airport should connect to public transportation.

3.7.5.3 Catering

According to Saayman & Slabbert (2001:60) it doesn't matter how simple the conference is, catering will still have to be planned. The catering will depend on the conference, programme, duration and number of delegates.

Shone (1998:80) explains that there are two main methods of provision in terms of catering services: in-house and contracted or out-sourced. The organiser should thus find out if the selected venue offers catering or whether an outside caterer should be made use of. Shone (1998:89) also states that the provision of thoughtful and well-planned catering services is essential. For most delegates the food should be palatable or have appetite appeal (Tassiopoulos, 2000:292).

The main issue regarding catering is menu composition. Food is an integral part of any conference. The range of services available is usually built around five main refreshment opportunities, namely: breakfast, morning coffee, lunch (standardised menu or an a la carte menu), afternoon coffee and dinner (Craven & Golabowski, 2001:189 and Shone, 1998:78). Decisions such as this need careful planning and should be determined by considering the needs of the delegates (Van der Wagen, 2005:313).

3.7.5.4 Technical facilities

New style conference presentations relies very heavily on technology (Oseman, 1989:19) and because technology is ever-changing, communication with conference delegates should also keep up with the times (Craven & Golabowski, 2001:199 and Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2003:160).

According to Crouch & Louviere (2004:128) the availability of on-site audio-visual equipment is of great importance. The basic equipment that should be available in the conference room includes the following (Craven & Golabowski, 2001:199 and Tassiopoulos, 2010:523):

- Personal announcement system
- Microphones
- Projector screen
- Overhead projector
- Projector
- Flip chart
- DVD player

It is also very important to have an on-site technician than can assist delegates with the equipment.

3.7.5.5 The image

The first impressions – what the delegates will think of the facilities upon arrival. According to Rogers (2008:206), venues often find themselves facing strong competition in times of economic downturn. In these situations it is those facilities that “put themselves in the shoes of their clients” to determine what should be offered. Clients want, more than anything, to see the suppliers delivering services to the promised standards. Many facilities invest in the physical “product” – bedrooms, meeting rooms, technology, dining areas, etc. – to give a competitive edge and to underline the customer orientation. According to Schütter (2010:43), facilities should market themselves by offering something spectacular; a certain attractiveness that creates a “wow” reaction.

3.7.5.6 Design aspects

Certain design aspects such as layout, ambience, lighting, air-conditioning and noise, could contribute to the success of the venue (Shone, 1998:69) and should be considered when choosing a venue (Tassiopoulos, 2010:515). Therefore, these above mentioned aspects need careful consideration (Craven & Golabowski, 2001:147 and Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001:62).

➤ Layout

The layout should facilitate networking (Shone, 1998:69) and can vary considerably according to circumstances (Saayman & Slabbert, 2001:52). Craven & Golabowski (2001:148), Rogers (2003:157) and Tassiopoulos (2010:516 – 518) lists a range of room layouts – but in my opinion, taking the requests at Quest Conference Estate in mind, the following are the most popular:

- Classroom
- Cinema
- U-shape and
- Banquet

The size and purpose of a conference will determine the layout to be used (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001:194 and Tassiopoulos, 2010:516).

➤ **Ambience**

Conference organisers are usually in favour of a pleasant location, free from distractions. This might lead to the fact that organisers will opt for relatively plain interior (Shone, 1998:70). The following are some of the most important aspects to consider (Shone, 1998:70 and Wolf & Wolf, 2005:80-92):

- Interior decor
- Colour
- Lighting
- Warmth
- Choice of furniture
- Fixtures and fittings

➤ **Lighting & Air conditioning**

Lighting should be sufficiently flexible for a range of conference tasks (Wolf & Wolf, 2005:89). Tassiopoulos (2010:304) states that organisers should make sure that the important signs such as fire exits are illuminated correctly and that there is a backup or auxiliary power supply, should the main supply be interrupted. Air conditioning should be functioning correctly in order for temperature to be regulated (Shone, 1998:70).

➤ **Noise**

Care should be taken not to equip conference rooms with a noisy heating or air conditioning system (Rogers, 2003:158).

3.7.5.7 Safety and security

It is important that delegates are at ease in conference venues. Therefore, security is required for premises, equipment, cash and other valuables (Tassiopoulos, 2010:524 and Van der Wagen, 2005:267). The venue also needs to be able to provide safe and sufficient parking for delegates (Roodt, 2015:20).

3.7.5.8 Accommodation

A conference venue is significantly more attractive when delegates are able to stay at on-site accommodation facilities (Crouch & Louviere, 2004:127). The location of

the accommodation facilities also plays a major role. The delegates may also evaluate the ease and access from the rooms to the conference venue. If the accommodation facilities are not within walking distance, shuttle services should be made available (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008:592).

According to Saayman & Slabbert (2001:88) accommodation is extremely important, as there is no use in providing luxurious conference rooms, but the standard of the rooms is poor. Swarbrooke & Horner (2001:169) lists the following important issues regarding accommodation:

- Grade and classification of accommodation
- Standard price of rooms; and
- Number of rooms available.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse conference tourism and the importance of service quality in the conference sector. It was evident that the conference sector is still a very young and diverse sector. Young in terms of recognition as a professional sector that requires serious considerations and management. During the last ten years, a major development has taken place in this sector. Many new destinations realised the economic benefit of this sector and have invested heavily to improve their cities to meet the conference sector's needs.

The conference sector is by definition, about people. The word "confer" implies a discussion or meeting, involving two or more people (South African pocket Oxford Dictionary, 2002:180). It follows, therefore, that those wishing to make a career in the sector need to be "people" people. Good interpersonal skills and enjoy mixing with a wide variety of people, is a must have.

Conference tourism is a service sector, which is influenced by the quality of services provided. Several studies in tourism point to a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and the intent to return. Increasing satisfaction will result in increased repeat visits.

It was also evident from this study that there are quite a few benefits for attending a conference as it offers delegates the opportunity to learn from those who have more experience in a specific area. Conferences can also generate income and create jobs and can also increase the image of a venue.

Before hosting a conference, there are a few things an organiser has to take into consideration regarding the planning that needs to be done before hand and also the key success factors to consider when choosing the appropriate venue. From this study the following key success factors to consider, was established:

- Quality of the venue
- Accessibility
- Catering and banqueting
- Technical facilities
- The image
- Design aspects
- Safety and security
- Availability of accommodation



CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this study was to determine the service expectations of conference delegates in relation to the service delivered at Quest Conference Estate in Vanderbijlpark. This can assist Quest Conference Estate in gaining a competitive advantage over similar products in meeting and exceeding expectations of customers. This is especially needed in the conference sector where ever growing number of establishments in one city or town demands high levels of service quality.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss the data gathered by means of the survey. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire whilst attending a conference at Quest Conference Estate in Vanderbijlpark. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed of which 397 completed questionnaires were captured and analysed. The first part of this chapter focuses on the descriptive results of the study and the second part on the exploratory results.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The descriptive results of this study are divided in five sections. Firstly, the socio-demographic information of the respondents is discussed, followed by respondents' expectations of the services to be delivered. In the third section, attention is given to the actual experience of the services delivered as perceived by the respondents. The fourth section gives an overall assessment of the service quality of Quest Conference Estate and in the fifth section the similarities and differences between the expectations and perceptions are discussed.

4.2.1 Socio-demographic information

The socio-demographic information (as captured in section A of the questionnaire) provides an overview of the type of respondent that participated in the survey. This also provides an indication of the characteristics of delegates to Quest Conference Estate.

4.2.1.1 Gender

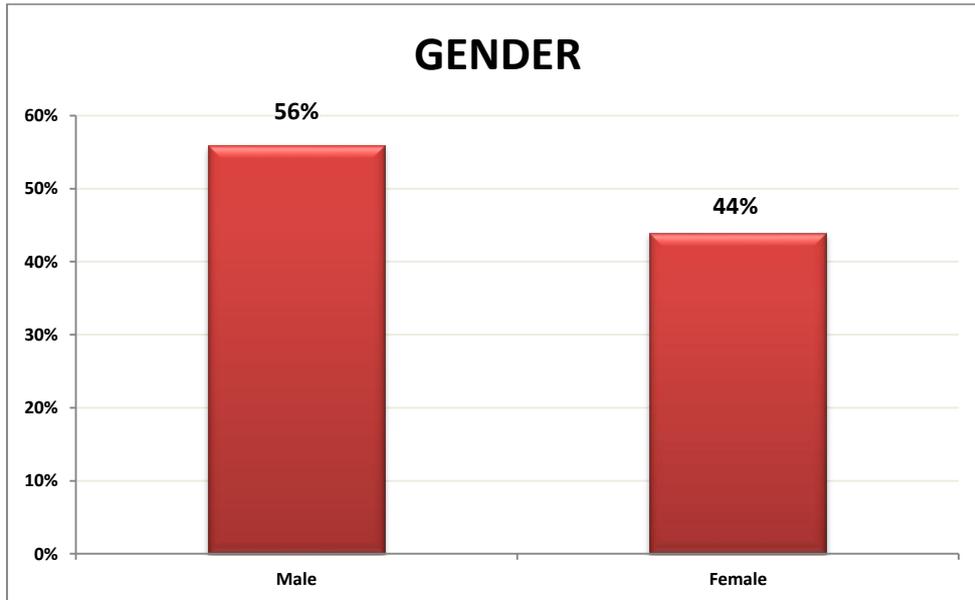


Figure 4.1: Gender

According to Figure 4.1, 56% of the respondents were male and 44% female. This is in line with the general clientele of Quest Conference Estate as there are normally more male conference delegates than females. Most of the presenters are also male.

Rogers (2008:39), also did a survey on behalf of the "UK Conference Market Survey 2006" and also found that 64% of corporate delegates are male.

4.2.1.2 Age

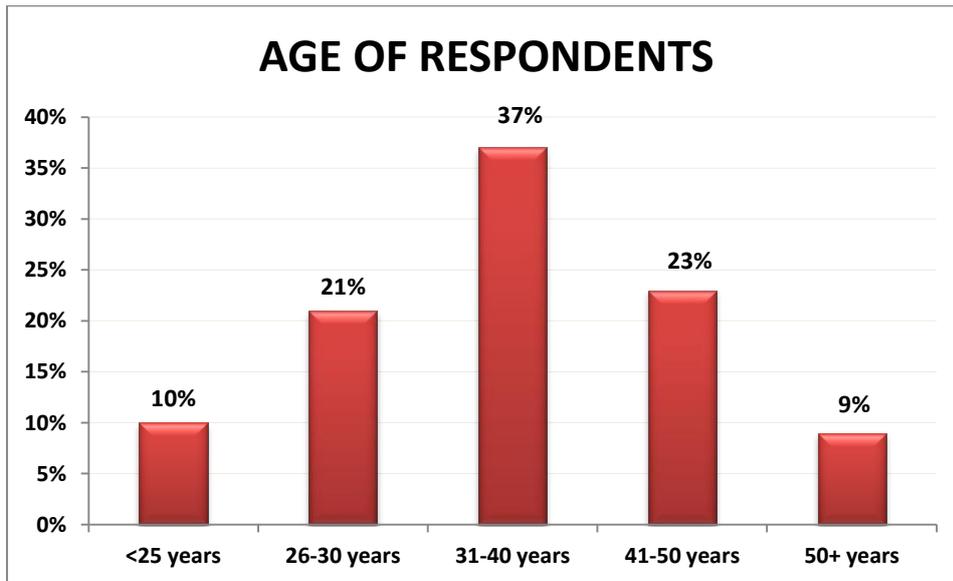


Figure 4.2: Age

According to Figure 4.2, 37% of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years. Twenty three percent (23%) were between ages 41 and 50 years, 21% were between 26 and 30 years of age, 10% were 25 years and younger and the lowest was 9% consisting of respondents 50 years and older. Respondents were on average 41 years old.

4.2.1.3 Marital status

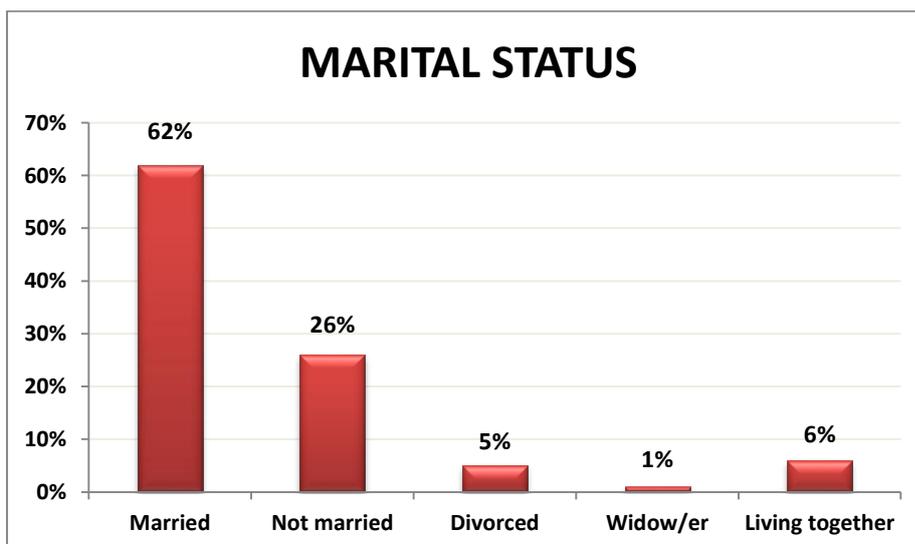


Figure 4.3: Marital status

According to Figure 4.3, 62% of respondents were married, while 26% were not. Six percent (6%) of the respondents were living together, 5% were divorced and the lowest was 1%, who was either a widow or widower.

4.2.1.4 Province of residence

In Table 4.1 the province of residence of the respondents are displayed.

Table 4.1: Province of residence

Province	Percentage
Gauteng	65%
KwaZulu-Natal	1%
Eastern Cape	1%
Western Cape	0%
Northern Cape	1%
Limpopo	1%
Mpumalanga	3%
Free State	14%
North West	13%
International visitors	3%

Table 4.1 indicates that most of the South African respondents came from the Gauteng province, which is 65%, whilst 14% came from the Free State and 13% from the North West province – which is in line with current advertising on OFM, as Quest Conference Estate advertises in the Vaal area, some parts of North West and the Free State. 3% of the respondents came from Mpumalanga, 1% from KwaZulu-Natal and 1% came from the Eastern Cape and Limpopo province respectively. The lowest number of respondents came from the Northern Cape.

None of the respondents indicated the Western Cape as their province of residence, as the Western Cape is home of the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Three percent (3%) of the respondents were international visitors, with most of them from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe (1%). Zero point three percent (0.3%) came from Lesotho, Namibia, Nigeria, Swaziland and the UK.

4.2.1.5 Levels of education

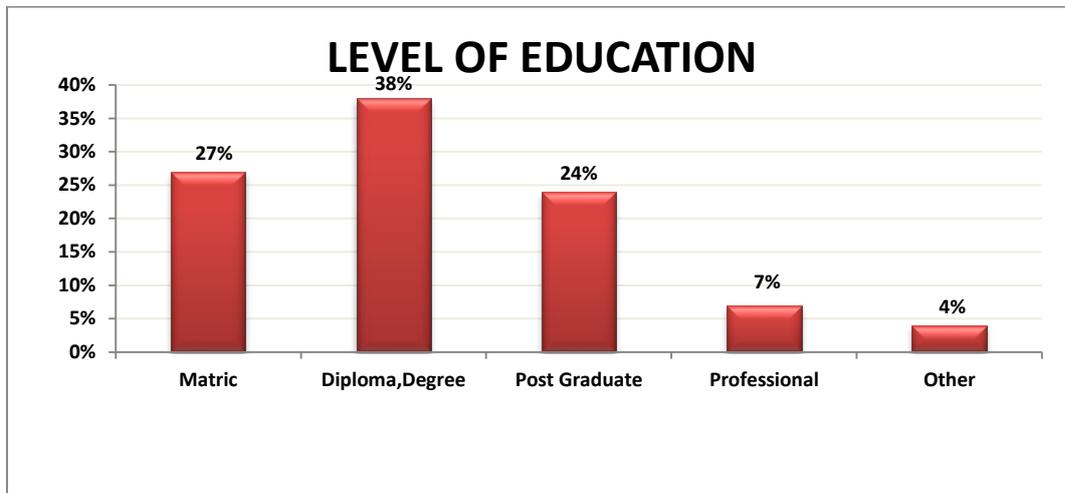


Figure 4.4: Level of education

According to the Figure 4.4, 38% of the respondents had either a diploma or degree and 27% of the respondents indicated they have a matric qualification. 24% of the respondents had a post graduate qualification, whilst 7% indicated they have a professional qualification. The remaining 4% indicated that they are still studying, whilst four delegates did not have any sort of qualification (not even matric).

4.2.1.6 Frequency of visits

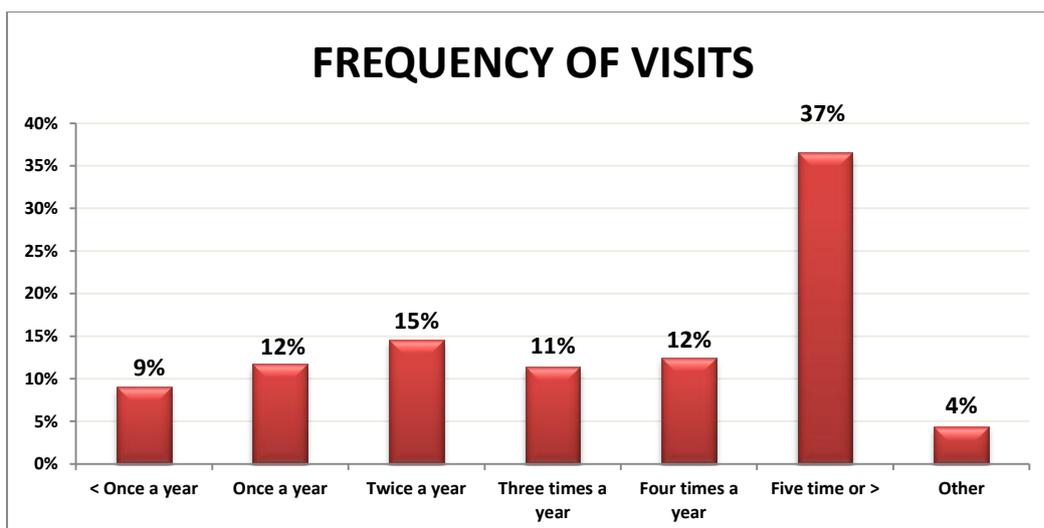


Figure 4.5: Frequency of visits

Figure 4.5 indicates that 37% of the respondents attend a conference five times or more in a year and 15% attend twice a year. Twelve per cent (12%) of the respondents attend four times a year, while 12% attend once a year and 11% attend three times a year. 9% of the respondents attend a conference only once a year and the lowest of 4% indicated that they attend only when necessary. From the statistics it is clear that the majority of the respondents attend conferences more than five times a year. This shows the potential for conference tourism and emphasise the importance of delivering quality service.

4.2.2 Expectations of service quality at Quest Conference Estate

The delegates were asked to complete section B of the questionnaire to indicate what they expected (in terms of service) of Quest Conference Estate before arrival. Based on the information provided in Table 4.2 (next page) the following service **expectations** were rated by the respondents as very to extremely important:

- Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate and sufficient: **83.9%**
- The equipment of Quest Conference Estate will work properly without causing breakdowns: **82.8%**
- Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure environment: **82.5%**
- Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised: **82%**
- Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner: **81.7%**
- Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate for the inconvenience: **81.1%**

The highest mean were obtained for:

- Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate and sufficient: **4.27**
- Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure environment: **4.26**
- Employees will treat guests in a friendly manner: **4.24**
- Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised: **4.24**

Table 4.2: Expectations of service quality

EXPECTATIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE							
EXPECTATIONS BEFORE ARRIVAL	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean	Standard deviation
Quest Conference Estate will have visually appealing buildings and facilities	0.8%	3.8%	38%	39.3%	18.1%	3.70	±.833
The service units of Quest Conference Estate will have adequate capacity (dining rooms, venues, etc.)	8%	1.0%	25.6%	47.7%	24.9%	3.95	±.783
Quest Conference Estate will have modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, communication devices, furniture, etc.)	0.5%	1.8%	24.4%	46.1%	27.2%	3.98	±.797
The atmosphere and equipment will be comfortable and appropriate for purpose of stay (comfortable, clean, and tranquil).	0.5%	0.5%	19.2%	45.3%	34.4%	4.13	±.767
The equipment of Quest Conference Estate will work properly without causing breakdowns	0.5%	1.5%	15.8%	39.3%	42.9%	4.22	±.803
Materials associated with the service will be adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.)	0.8%	2.1%	24.0%	41.1%	32.0%	4.02	±.846
Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	1.0%	0.3%	14.8%	38.7%	45.2%	4.27	±.796
Employees and waiters of Quest Conference Estate will appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	0.8%	1.8%	21.4%	39.8%	36.2%	4.09	±.843
Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised	0.5%	0.5%	17.0%	38.3%	43.7%	4.24	±.785
Quest Conference Estate will perform services right the first	0.5%	1.5%	17.7%	39.7%	40.5%	4.18	±.811

EXPECTATIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE							
EXPECTATIONS BEFORE ARRIVAL	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean	Standard deviation
time							
Employees will provide prompt service	0.5%	0.5%	18.3%	41.9%	38.8%	4.18	±.781
Quest Conference Estate will provide services at the time it promises to do so	0.8%	0.8%	18.8%	38.2%	41.5%	4.19	±.818
Employees will always be willing to serve guests	0.5%	1.0%	18.4%	37.8%	42.3%	4.20	±.809
Employees will always be available when needed	0.8%	1.0%	17.9%	41.1%	39.3%	4.17	±.808
Quest Conference Estate will keep accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	0.5%	2.3%	20.8%	36.5%	40.0%	4.13	±.854
Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate for the inconvenience	1.0%	1.3%	16.7%	40.8%	40.3%	4.18	±.825
Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in services according to guest demands	0.8%	1.0%	23.9%	42.2%	32.1%	4.04	±.819
Quest Conference Estate will provide consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	0.5%	0.5%	24.7%	39.3%	35.0%	4.08	±.811
Employees will have knowledge to provide information and assistance they would require	0.5%	0.5%	22.0%	39.6%	37.3%	4.13	±.803
Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner	0.8%	0.5%	17.0%	37.8%	43.9%	4.24	±.802
Employees of Quest Conference Estate will understand the specific needs of guests	0.8%	0.8%	21.2%	37.5%	39.8%	4.15	±.829
Quest Conference Estate will also be convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the	1.5%	3.8%	21.7%	35.4%	37.6%	4.04	±.939

EXPECTATIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE							
EXPECTATIONS BEFORE ARRIVAL	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean	Standard deviation
disabled)							
Employees will give guests individualised attention that makes them feel special	0.8%	8.3%	26.8%	36.1%	28.0%	3.82	±.960
Quest Conference Estate and its facilities will have operating hours convenient to all their guests	0.5%	1.5%	27.3%	39.1%	31.3%	4.07	±1.68
Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure environment	0.5%	2.3%	14.7%	36.2%	46.3%	4.26	±.827
Guests will have confidence in employees	0.5%	1.8%	24.7%	39.7%	33.3%	4.04	±.835
Employees will have in-depth occupational knowledge (communication skills, professional skills, etc.)	0.5%	1.0%	24.5%	41.2%	32.8%	4.05	±.812
It will be easy to access Quest Conference Estate	0.8%	1.5%	19.4%	40.1%	38.3%	4.14	±.830
Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate will be easy (reaching information via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.)	0.3%	0.5%	21.2%	40.3%	37.8%	4.15	±.782

From the information above, it is evident that guests at Quest Conference Estate have fairly high expectations of factors that require direct personnel and client interaction. Dining areas are expected to be clean and the areas where food is served must also be spotless. The food served should look presentable and be tasty and there should be enough for everyone.

The expectation that the conference will be presented without any breakdowns because of old or faulty equipment, are very high and the venues should have all the necessary equipment needed and technical assistance in case of problems.

Availability of on-site audio-visual equipment is of high and great importance for conference venues, seeking to compare for a share of the convention market (Crouch & Louviere, 2004:128).

According to Craven and Golabowski (2001:199), Shone (1998:94) and Tassiopoulos (2000:382), the basic equipment that should be available and in working condition in the conference venue should include the following:

- PA system
- Microphones
- Projector screen and projector
- DVD player
- Flip chart or white board with markers

The expectations of guests were also high regarding a safe and secure environment. The feeling of being safe, whilst attending a conference, is very important and highly prioritised as well as the fact that all personal belongings will be secure in the venue if left unattended. The assurance that cars will be secured, during the duration of the conference, is also highly prioritised. The findings in this study are supported by Shone (1998:69) and Wolf and Wolf (2005:53), who stated that a conference venue should be easily accessible and the parking area should be adequate, clean and safe. Proper safety and security will put delegates at ease. Security is required for premises, equipment, cash and other valuables (Van der Wagen, 2005:267).

Well planned provision for catering services at a conference facility is essential for the high standard of the delegate's experience (Shone, 1998:89). For most people, the food must be palatable and appealing (Tassiopoulos, 2000:292). Also, delegates should always be welcomed in a friendly manner and the reception area should always be ready and inviting (Shone, 1998:107, Shone & Parry, 2004:186 and Tassiopoulos, 2000:283).

It is clear that expectations were high but not unrealistic.

4.2.3 Perceptions of service quality of Quest Conference Estate

The delegates were asked to complete section C of the questionnaire to indicate how they perceived the actual service rendered by Quest Conference Estate.

Table 4.3: Perceptions of service quality in Quest Conference Estate

PERCEPTIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE							
PERCEPTIONS OF THE SERVICE EXPERIENCE	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Extremely good	Mean	Standard deviation
Quest Conference Estate has visually appealing buildings and facilities	0.3%	1.5%	42.3%	35.9%	20.0%	3.74	±.800
The service units of Quest Conference Estate have adequate capacity (dining rooms, venues, etc.)	0.3%	1.8%	35.8%	39.9%	22.2%	3.82	±.803
Quest Conference Estate has modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, communication devices, furniture, etc.)	0.3%	2.8%	35.5%	38.5%	22.9%	3.81	±.827
The atmosphere and equipment was comfortable and appropriate for purpose of stay (comfortable, clean, and tranquil).	0.5%	2.5%	32.6%	41.9%	22.5%	3.83	±.819
The equipment of Quest Conference Estate worked properly without causing breakdowns	1.0%	4.1%	29.9%	38.1%	26.9%	3.86	±.897
Materials associated with the service was adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.)	0.5%	4.8%	32.6%	37.1%	25.0%	3.81	±.883
Food and beverages served was hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	0.5%	1.5%	27.7%	41.7%	28.5%	3.96	±.818
Employees and waiters of Quest Conference Estate	0.5%	1.8%	28.8%	40.9%	28.0%	3.94	±.826

PERCEPTIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE							
PERCEPTIONS OF THE SERVICE EXPERIENCE	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Extremely good	Mean	Standard deviation
appeared neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)							
Quest Conference Estate did provide the services as promised	0.3%	1.5%	28.2%	43.6%	26.4%	3.95	±.793
Quest Conference Estate performed services right the first time	0.3%	1.8%	31.4%	39.0%	27.6%	3.92	±.824
Employees did provide prompt service		1.5%	30.3%	42.4%	25.8%	3.92	±.786
Quest Conference Estate did provide services at the time it promises to do so		1.3%	31.1%	39.0%	28.6%	3.95	±.805
Employees was always willing to serve guests	0.3%	1.8%	28.5%	41.7%	27.8%	3.95	±.810
Employees was always available when needed	0.3%	1.0%	29.7%	41.3%	27.7%	3.95	±.798
Quest Conference Estate kept accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	0.5%	4.7%	37.2%	37.0%	20.7%	3.73	±.859
Quest Conference Estate resolved guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensated for the inconvenience	0.5%	2.8%	31.1%	44.1%	21.4%	3.83	±.811
Quest Conference Estate provided flexibility in services according to guest demands	0.5%	3.1%	32.6%	42.7%	21.1%	3.81	±.819
Quest Conference Estate provided consistent service (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	0.5%	3.1%	30.3%	43.8%	22.4%	3.85	±.820
Employees did have knowledge to provide information and	0.3%	3.0%	32.0%	39.3%	25.4%	3.87	±.838

PERCEPTIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE							
PERCEPTIONS OF THE SERVICE EXPERIENCE	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Extremely good	Mean	Standard deviation
assistance that was required							
Employees always treated guests in a friendly manner	0.5%	2.5%	24.0%	42.2%	30.8%	4.00	±.834
Employees of Quest Conference Estate understood the specific needs of guests	0.5%	2.8%	32.0%	39.9%	24.7%	3.86	±.841
Quest Conference Estate was also convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled)	0.8%	3.6%	32.0%	35.9%	27.6%	3.86	±.891
Employees gave guests individualised attention that made them feel special	1.0%	4.6%	32.4%	37.7%	24.3%	3.80	±.895
Quest Conference Estate and its facilities had operating hours convenient to all their quests		1.3%	29.2%	45.1%	24.4%	3.93	±.764
Quest Conference Estate provided its quests a safe and secured environment		1.0%	26.4%	43.6%	29.0%	4.01	±.772
Guests had confidence in employees	0.3%	3.1%	31.2%	40.7%	24.7%	3.87	±.831
Employees had in-depth occupational knowledge (communication skills, professional skills, etc.)	0.8%	3.0%	32.6%	39.6%	24.0%	3.83	±.853
It will be easy to access Quest Conference Estate	0.5%	2.5%	24.8%	44.1%	28.1%	3.97	±.853
Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate was easy (reaching information via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.)	0.3%	4.0%	27.3%	41.7%	26.8%	3.91	±.847

Based on the information provided in Table 3.4 the following perceptions were rated by the respondents as very to extremely important:

- Employees always treated guests in a friendly manner: **73%**
- Quest Conference Estate provided its guests a safe and secured environment: **72.6%**
- Food and beverages were hygienic, adequate and sufficient: **70.2%**
- Quest Conference Estate provided the services as promised: **70%**
- Employees were always willing to serve guests: **69.5%**
- Quest Conference Estate and its facilities had operating hours that was convenient to all their guests: **69.5%**
- Employees were always available when needed: **69%**
- It was easy to access Quest Conference Estate: **72.2%**

The highest mean was obtained for:

- Quest Conference Estate provided its guests a safe and secured environment: **4.01**
- Employees always treated guests in a friendly manner: **4.00**
- It was easy to access Quest Conference Estate: **3.97**
- Food and beverages served were hygienic, adequate, and sufficient: **3.96**

According to Kruger (2006:134), providing catering services (98%) and sufficient technical equipment (96%) is very important to clients. The main reasons being that most conferences take place the whole day and some extend over a couple of days, and this means conference delegates will have to consume food and drinks during breaks. Catering is an important part of a conference and will play a role in the decision of which conference venue to choose. The respondents are aware of the fact that sufficient technology that will not cause breakdowns is an important part of all conferences. The use of technology contributes to the success of the conference. The use of technology captures the attention of the delegates and makes the information given during the conference more memorable. Providing a safe and secure environment (77%) and treating guest in a friendly manner (95%), creates a certain image within in the minds of the delegates. It creates a good impression and the delegates will perceive the venue and personnel as well organised and prepared. All these factors above will inspire delegates to visit the conference venue again (Kruger, 2006:136).

In comparison to the expectations it was clear that the average means values for perceptions were lower than those obtained for expectations which will be analysed in-depth in the following sections.

4.2.4 Overall service quality of Quest Conference Estate

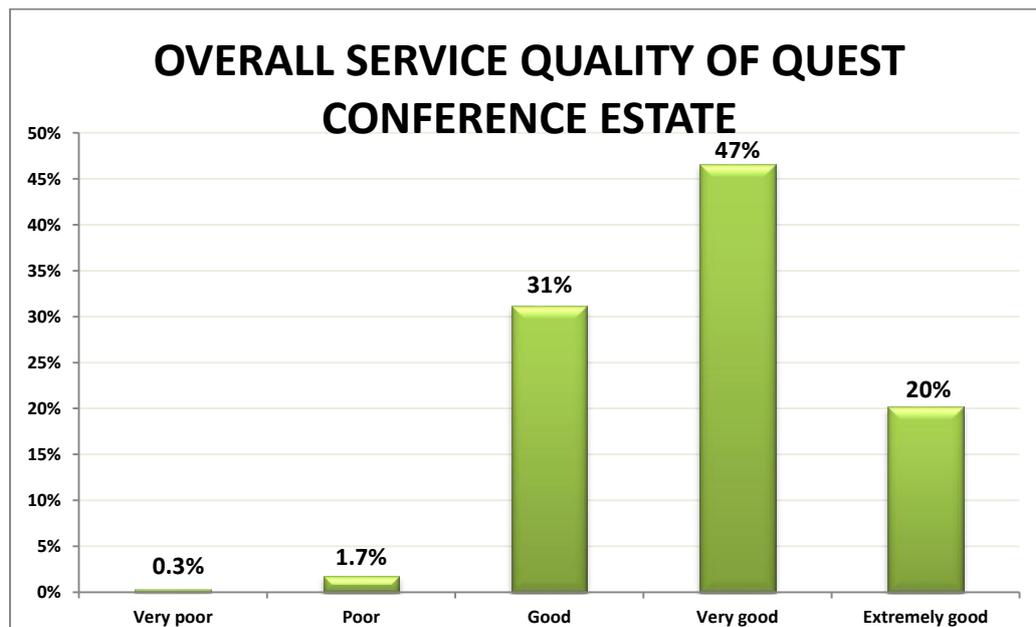


Figure 4.6: Overall service quality of Quest Conference Estate

Figure 4.6 indicates that the service quality standard of Quest Conference Estate is very good (47%) followed by good (31%) and extremely good (20%). Very few respondents (1.9%) rated the overall service quality as very poor to poor. However there seems to be room for improvement when considering that only 20% rated the overall service quality as extremely good.

4.2.4.1 Recommendation of Quest Conference Estate to others

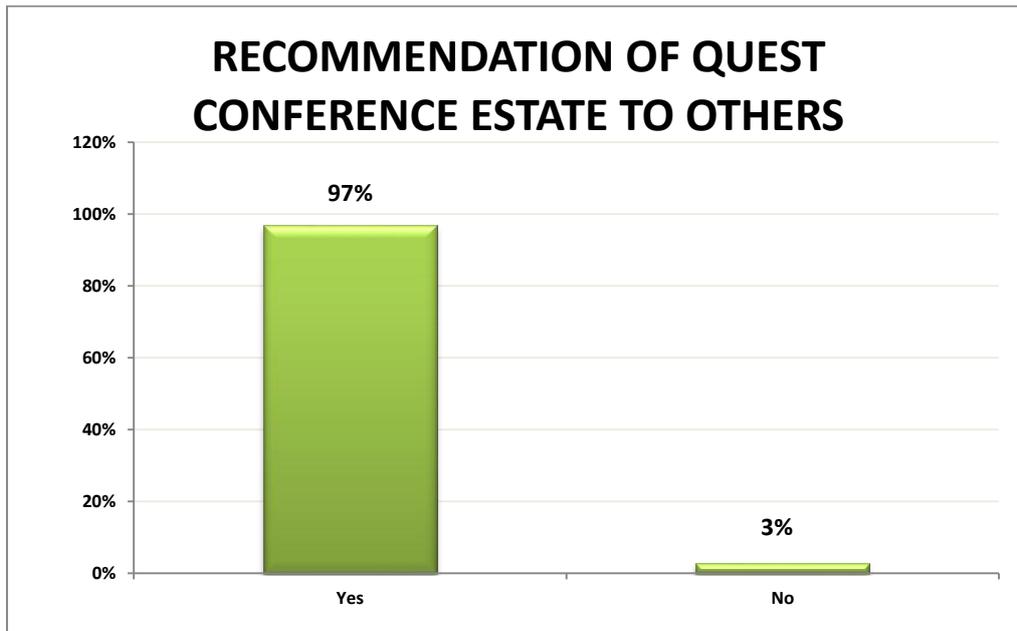


Figure 4.7: Recommendation of Quest Conference Estate to others

According to Figure 4.7, 97% of the respondents said that they would recommend Quest Conference Estate to others, while only 3% said that they would not. This is a very good indication of the type of service that Quest Conference Estate delivers.

4.3 EXPLORATORY RESULTS

The purpose of this section is to further explore guests' expectations and perceptions regarding service quality as emphasised in the literature.

4.3.1 Guests' expectations and perceptions

Table 4.4 indicates the means, standard deviations and the difference (Perceptions – expectation) score calculated for each attribute, *P*-value and Cohen D effect sizes. Ellis and Steyn (2003:2) state that a natural way to comment on practical significance is by using the absolute difference between the groups (for example

age: (1) 87 – 67; (2) 66 – 57; (3) 56 – 47) divided by square root of the mean square error. This measure is called an effect size, which not only makes the difference independent of units and sample size, but relates it also to the spread of the data (Steyn, 1999 & Steyn, 2000, as quoted by Ellis and Steyn (2003:3)).

Cohen (as quoted by Ellis and Steyn, 2003:3) gives the following guidelines for interpreting the effect size in the current study:

- Small effect: $d=0.2$
- Medium effect: $d=0.5$ and
- Large effect: $d=0.8$.

The gap scores are thus determined by subtracting the expectations from the perceptions. Positive scores indicate better than expected service while negative scores indicate poorer quality than expected. A zero or near zero indicates that the quality of the service has met the expectations. The significant difference between the means of expectations and the perceptions were tested by means of Paired t tests.

It is evident from Table 4.4 (next page) that there were mostly small and in four cases no significant differences between the service expectations and the service perceptions, although the respondents felt that they did not actually receive the service they expected (as indicated in the difference between perceptions and expectations). This will give Quest Conference Estate an indication of where they can improve their level of service. Delegates were mostly disappointed in the quality and functioning of the equipment. Although the food was acceptable to their level of expectations, they did expect more homely dining areas.

The most significant differences ($p<0.05$) between expectations and perceptions were found for accurate record keeping by Quest Conference Centre ($d=0.466$; $E=4.13$; $P=3.73$); handling of guest complaints ($d=0.424$; $E=4.18$; $P=3.83$) and the effective working of equipment ($d=0.401$; $E=4.22$; $P=3.86$). It is evident that respondents had higher expectations of these two aspects than what they experienced. It might be that they experience problems in terms of a booking, that

their complaint/s were not well handled and that some equipment created challenges and breakdowns.

Table 4.4: Gap scores between expectations and perceptions (n=397)

	Expectations Means (SD)	Perceptions Means (SD)	Difference (PM-EM)	t-value	P-value	Cohen D	Effect size interpretation
Quest Conference Estate will have visually appealing buildings and facilities	3.70 (0.833)	3.74 (0.800)	0.040	-0.786	0.432	0.048	None
The service units of Quest Conference Estate will have adequate capacity (dining rooms, venues, etc.)	3.95 (0.783)	3.82 (0.803)	-0.130	3.259	0.001	0.162	None
Quest Conference Estate will have modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, communication devices, furniture, etc.)	3.98 (0.797)	3.81 (0.827)	-0.170	3.796	0.000	0.206	Small
The atmosphere and equipment will be comfortable and appropriate for purpose of stay (comfortable, clean, and tranquil).	4.13 (0.767)	3.83 (0.819)	-0.300	6.351	0.000	0.366	Small
The equipment of Quest Conference Estate will work properly without causing breakdowns	4.22 (0.803)	3.86 (0.897)	-0.360	6.982	0.000	0.401	Small
Materials associated with the service will be adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.)	4.02 (0.846)	3.81 (0.883)	-0.210	4.169	0.000	0.248	Small
Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	4.27 (0.796)	3.96 (0.818)	-0.310	6.130	0.000	0.397	Small
Employees and waiters of Quest Conference Estate will appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	4.09 (0.843)	3.94 (0.826)	-0.150	2.994	0.003	0.178	Small
Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised	4.24 (0.785)	3.95 (0.793)	-0.290	6.651	0.000	0.366	Small
Quest Conference Estate will perform services right the first time	4.18 (0.812)	3.92 (0.824)	-0.260	5.928	0.000	0.316	Small
Employees will provide prompt service	4.18 (0.780)	3.92 (0.786)	-0.260	5.590	0.000	0.331	Small
Quest Conference Estate will provide services at the time it promises to do so	4.19 (0.818)	3.95 (0.805)	-0.240	5.623	0.000	0.293	Small

	Expectations Means (SD)	Perceptions Means (SD)	Difference (PM-EM)	t-value	P-value	Cohen D	Effect size interpretation
Employees will always be willing to serve guests	4.20 (0.809)	3.95 (0.810)	-0.250	5.511	0.000	0.309	Small
Employees will always be available when needed	4.17 (0.808)	3.95 (0.798)	-0.220	4.897	0.000	0.272	Small
Quest Conference Estate will keep accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	4.13 (0.854)	3.73 (0.859)	-0.400	8.761	0.000	0.466	Small
Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate for the inconvenience	4.18 (0.825)	3.83 (0.811)	-0.350	7.995	0.000	0.424	Small
Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in services according to guest demands	4.04 (0.819)	3.81 (0.819)	-0.230	5.023	0.000	0.281	Small
Quest Conference Estate will provide consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	4.09 (0.812)	3.85 (0.820)	-0.240	5.129	0.000	0.293	Small
Employees will have knowledge to provide information and assistance they would require	4.13 (0.803)	3.87 (0.838)	-0.260	6.182	0.000	0.311	Small
Employees will always treat quests in a friendly manner	4.24 (0.802)	4.00 (0.834)	-0.240	5.354	0.000	0.288	Small
Employees of Quest Conference Estate will understand the specific needs of guests	4.15 (0.829)	3.86 (0.841)	-0.290	6.559	0.000	0.345	Small
Quest Conference Estate will also be convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled)	4.04 (0.939)	3.86 (0.891)	-0.180	3.332	0.001	0.192	Small
Employees will give guests individualised attention that makes them feel special	3.82 (0.960)	3.80 (0.895)	-0.020	0.481	0.631	0.021	None
Quest Conference Estate and its facilities will have operating hours convenient to all their quests	4.07 (1.679)	3.93 (0.764)	-0.140	1.677	0.094	0.083	None
Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure	4.26 (0.827)	4.01 (0.772)	-0.250	6.005	0.000	0.302	Small

	Expectations Means (SD)	Perceptions Means (SD)	Difference (PM-EM)	t-value	P-value	Cohen D	Effect size interpretation
environment							
Guests will have confidence in employees	4.04 (0.835)	3.87 (0.831)	-0.170	3.742	0.000	0.204	Small
Employees will have in-depth occupational knowledge (communication skills, professional skills, etc.)	4.05 (0.812)	3.83 (0.853)	-0.220	5.052	0.000	0.258	Small
It will be easy to access Quest Conference Estate	4.14 (0.830)	3.97 (0.823)	-0.170	3.803	0.000	0.205	Small
Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate will be easy (reaching information via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.)	4.15 (0.872)	3.91 (0.847)	-0.240	5.442	0.000	0.275	Small

No significant differences were found for visually appealing buildings and facilities ($d=0.048$; $E=3.70$; $P=3.74$), individualised attention given to guests that makes them feel special ($d=0.021$; $E=3.82$; $P=3.80$), the capacity of the venue ($d=0.162$; $E=3.95$; $P=3.82$) and the operating hours of the centre ($d=0.083$; $E=4.07$; $P=3.93$).

4.3.2 Confirmatory factor analysis for Expectations and Perceptions

Due to the use of a standardised questionnaire confirmatory factor analyses were performed on the 29 service attributes to reduce to a meaningful, interpretable and manageable set of factors with regard to expectations and perceptions. These attributes were thus factor analysed to determine the gaps between the dimensions. In both cases a principal component analysis and varimax rotation methods were used to summarise the information. This also allowed for the application of the derived dimension score in the subsequent multiple regression analysis. According to Field (2009:632) it is important to only retain factors with large eigen values and therefore only factors with eigen values equal to or greater than one were considered significant.

The results of the factor analyses revealed the five factors as dimensions of service quality for expectations and perceptions. These five dimensions with 29 attributes explained 66% in the case of expectations and 74% in the case of perceptions of the total variance. These were named: tangibles, adequacy, understanding, assurance and convenience based on the work of Parasuraman but applied to the conference setting.

Table 4.5: Factor analysis for Expectations and Perceptions (n=397)

FACTOR LABEL	Factor 1: Tangibles		Factor 2: Adequacy		Factor 3: Understanding		Factor 4: Assurance		Factor 5: Convenience	
	E	P	E	P	E	P	E	P	E	P
Quest Conference Estate will have visually appealing buildings and facilities	0.50	0.71								
The service units of Quest Conference Estate will have adequate capacity (dining rooms, venues, etc.)	0.63	0.71								
Quest Conference Estate will have modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, communication devices, furniture, etc.)	0.69	0.77								
The atmosphere and equipment will be comfortable and appropriate for purpose of stay (comfortable, clean, and tranquil).	0.74	0.78								
The equipment of Quest Conference Estate will work properly without causing breakdowns	0.67	0.69								
Materials associated with the service will be adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.)	0.59	0.66								
Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	0.62	0.67								
Employees and waiters of Quest Conference Estate will appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	0.61	0.67								
Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised			0.73	0.81						
Quest Conference Estate will perform services right the first time			0.74	0.82						
Employees will provide prompt service			0.81	0.85						
Quest Conference Estate will provide services at the time it			0.83	0.86						

FACTOR LABEL	Factor 1: Tangibles		Factor 2: Adequacy		Factor 3: Understanding		Factor 4: Assurance		Factor 5: Convenience	
	E	P	E	P	E	P	E	P	E	P
promises to do so										
Employees will always be willing to serve guests			0.78	0.82						
Employees will always be available when needed			0.76	0.81						
Quest Conference Estate will keep accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)			0.63	0.64						
Quest Conference Estate will provide consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)			0.69	0.62						
Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in services according to guest demands					0.73	0.77				
Employees will have knowledge to provide information and assistance they would require					0.75	0.80				
Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner					0.76	0.76				
Employees of Quest Conference Estate will understand the specific needs of guests					0.80	0.86				
Quest Conference Estate will also be convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled)					0.56	0.69				
Employees will give guests individualised attention that makes them feel special					0.62	0.83				
Quest Conference Estate and its facilities will have operating hours convenient to all their guests							0.22	0.79		
Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure							0.72	0.81		

FACTOR LABEL	Factor 1: Tangibles		Factor 2: Adequacy		Factor 3: Understanding		Factor 4: Assurance		Factor 5: Convenience	
	E	P	E	P	E	P	E	P	E	P
environment										
Guests will have confidence in employees							0.78	0.81		
Employees will have in-depth occupational knowledge (communication skills, professional skills, etc.)							0.78	0.80		
Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate for the inconvenience									0.73	0.75
It will be easy to access Quest Conference Estate									0.79	0.80
Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate will be easy (reaching information via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.)									0.82	0.82
Cronbach Alpha	0.92	0.94	0.95	0.96	0.91	0.94	0.67	0.92	0.86	0.87

Table 4.6 Factor analysis summary

	Cronbach Alpha	Loading range	Expectations		Perceptions		Difference	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Tangibles	0.92 (E) 0.94 (P)	0.50 - 0.96 0.66 - 0.78	4.04	0.63	3.84	0.70	-0.20	0.13
Adequacy	0.95 (E) 0.96 (P)	0.63 - 0.83 0.62 - 0.86	4.17	0.70	3.90	0.71	-0.27	0.06
Understanding	0.91 (E) 0.94 (P)	0.56 - 0.80 0.69 - 0.86	4.07	0.71	3.86	0.75	-0.21	0.10
Assurance	0.67 (E) 0.92 (P)	0.22 - 0.78 0.78 - 0.81	4.10	0.79	3.90	0.72	-0.20	0.05
Convenience	0.86 (E) 0.87 (P)	0.73 - 0.82 0.75 - 0.82	4.16	0.72	3.90	0.74	-0.26	0.09

Table 4.6 shows the range of within-scale loading. It is clear from this table that the service perceptions are lower than the service expectations. For the purpose of this study, a Cronbach alpha was deemed acceptable at $\alpha > 0.60$. Kline (1999) and supported by Field (2013:709), notes that although the generally accepted value of 0.80 is appropriate for cognitive tests as intelligence tests, for ability tests a cut-off point of 0.70 is more suitable. He goes on to say that when dealing with psychological constructs, values below even 0.70, can, realistically, be expected because of the diversity of the constructs being measured. Some even suggest that in the early stages of research, values as low as 0.50 will suffice (Nunnally, 1978). This is important because reliability is concerned with how credible the research findings are (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2011:145). According to Streiner (2003:103),

reliability is the degree to which measurements of individuals on different occasions or by different observers, or by similar parallel tests, produces the same similar results.

Tangibles, as factor 1, revealed a Cronbach alpha of 0.915 for expectations and 0.940 for perceptions, as depicted in Table 4.6. These results indicate that in respect of tangibles the results are reliable. Table 4.6 also shows that tangibles revealed a mean score of 4.04 for the expectations and a mean score of 3.84 for the perceptions. Therefore the difference in means between the expected value and actual perceived value for tangible is -0.20, which in real terms mean the clients of Quest Conference Estate expected more with regards to the tangibles as what they experienced in reality.

For example, in Table 4.4, clients were asked to indicate what their expectation and perceptions was in regards to the equipment of Quest Conference Estate and if it will work properly without causing breakdowns. The respondents indicated an expectations score of 4.22 and perceived score of 3.86 with regards to equipment. The difference was therefore -0.360, which in real terms indicate that the clients of Quest Conference Estate expected more in regards to the efficiency of equipment than what was experienced in reality. The total perceived score for tangibles is still within the “good” region and also within one standard deviation, which indicate the respondents did not differ a lot in their opinion regarding the tangible factor.

As indicated in Table 4.6, Understanding revealed a Cronbach Alpha of 0.911 for expectations and 0.944 for perceptions. Thus the data is reliable and the items forming Understanding fit together. Respondents also expected more in terms of Understanding than what was experienced. Understanding revealed a mean score of 4.07 for the expectations and a mean score of 3.86 for the perceptions, as shown in Table 4.6. Although the difference is not significant it can be seen that respondents expected more in terms of Understanding than what they experienced. Therefore the mean difference in the expected value and actual perceived value for understanding is -0.21. For example in Table 4.4, clients were asked to indicate their opinion regarding the record keeping of Quest Conference Estate. The respondents indicated an expectations score of 4.13 and perceived score of 3.73 with regards to

keeping accurate records. The difference was therefore -0.400. Thus more was expected from Quest Conference Estate in terms of record keeping. The total perceived score for adequacy is still within the “good” region and also within one standard deviation, which indicate the respondents did not differ a lot in their opinion regarding the understanding.

Adequacy, in Table 4.6, revealed a Cronbach alpha of 0.951 for expectations and 0.958 for perceptions. These results indicate that in respect of adequacy the results are reliable. Adequacy revealed a mean score of 4.17 for the expectations and a mean score of 3.90 for the perceptions. Therefore the mean difference in the expected value and actual perceived value for adequacy is -0.27. Clients of Quest Conference Estate expected more with regards to adequacy as what they experienced in reality. For example clients were asked whether the personnel understand the specific needs of the guests, as shown in Table 4.4. The respondents indicated an expectations score of 4.15 and perceived score of 3.86 with regards to understanding the specific needs of the guests. The difference was therefore -0.290. The total perceived score for understanding is still within the “good” region and also within one standard deviation, which indicate the respondents did not differ a lot in their opinion regarding adequacy.

Assurance revealed a reliability score of 0.672 for expectations and 0.917 for perceptions in Table 4.6. These results indicate that in respect of the assurance factor the results are reliable. The assurance factor also revealed a mean score of 4.10 for the expectations and a mean score of 3.90 for the perceptions. Therefore the mean difference in the expected value and actual perceived value for assurance is -0.20. Clients of Quest Conference Estate expected more with regards to the assurance than what they experienced in reality. For example clients were asked in Table 4.4, whether Quest Conference Estate will provide guests a safe and secure environment. The respondents indicated an expectations score of 4.26 and perceived score of 4.01 with regards to providing the guests a safe en secure environment. The difference was therefore -0.250, which in real terms indicate that the clients of Quest Conference Estate expected more in regards to providing them a safe and secure environment. The total perceived score for understanding is still

within the “good” region and also within one standard deviation, which indicate the respondents did not differ a lot in their opinion regarding assurance.

Convenience measured a Cronbach alpha of 0.859 for expectations and 0.868 for perceptions in Table 4.6, and thus the results are reliable. Convenience also revealed a mean score of 4.16 for the expectations and a mean score of 3.90 for the perceptions. Therefore the mean difference in the expected value and actual perceived value for convenience is -0.26. Again the clients of Quest Conference Estate expected more with regards to convenience than they experienced in reality. For example clients were asked whether the personnel of Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate them for the inconvenience as showed in Table 4.4. The respondents indicated an expectations score of 4.18 and perceived score of 3.83 with regards to resolving the complaints. The difference in mean values was therefore -0.350. The total perceived score for convenience is still within the “good” region and also within one standard deviation, which indicate the respondents did not differ a lot in their opinion regarding convenience.

4.3.3 Regression analyses

A regression analysis was used to investigate the relative importance of the five service factors in predicting overall quality. Thus the five service quality factors were used as independent variables and the overall service quality measure as dependent variable.

Table 4.7: Regression analysis, overall service quality against the expectations of the five service quality factors

Independent variables	Standardised Coefficients	t-values	Significance
	Beta		
(Constant)		8.592	0.000
Factor 1: Tangibles	0.047	0.516	0.606
Factor 2: Adequacy	0.044	0.394	0.694
Factor 3: Understanding	0.313	2.692	0.007
Factor 4: Assurance	0.048	0.645	0.519
Factor 5: Convenience	-0.040	-0.377	0.707

$R^2 = 0.155$ $F = 14.389$ Significance of F: $p = 0.000$

Dependent Variable: Overall service quality

Independent Variable = Service Quality Expectation factors

It is evident from Table 4.7 that Understanding in terms of expectations makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the overall service quality (31%). These expectations were namely:

- Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in services according to guest demands.
- Employees will have knowledge to provide information and assistance guests would require.
- Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner.
- Employees of Quest Conference Estate will understand the specific need of guests.
- Quest Conference Estate will also be convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled).
- Employees will give guests individualised attention that make them feel special.

It was also found that none of the other variables makes a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the overall service quality. How personnel therefore

interact with respondents is extremely important in the overall service quality experience.

Table 4.8: Regression analysis, overall service quality against the perceptions of the five service quality factors

Independent variables	Standardised Coefficients	t-values	Significance
	Beta		
(Constant)		5.957	0.000
Factor 1: Tangibles	0.170	1.923	0.055
Factor 2: Adequacy	0.128	1.205	0.229
Factor 3: Understanding	0.315	3.351	0.001
Factor 4: Assurance	-0.058	-0.610	0.542
Factor 5: Convenience	0.142	1.696	0.091

$R^2 = 0.431$

$F = 59.267$

Significance of F: $p = 0.000$

Dependent Variable: Overall service quality

Independent Variable = Service Quality Perceptions factors

It is evident from Table 4.8 that Understanding in terms of perceptions makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the overall quality (32%). These perceptions were namely:

- Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in services according to guest demands.
- Employees will have knowledge to provide information and assistance they would require.
- Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner.
- Employees of Quest Conference Estate will understand the specific need of guests.
- Quest Conference Estate will also be convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled).
- Employees will give guests individualised attention that make them feel special.

It was also found that Tangibles and Convenience made a significantly unique contribution to the prediction of the overall service quality made.

The following factors were considered as tangibles:

- Quest Conference Estate has visually appealing buildings and facilities. This was the only factor where respondents indicated that they actually received what they expected to.
- The service units of the guesthouse have adequate capacity (dining rooms, venues, etc.).
- Quest Conference Estate has modern-looking equipment (air-conditioner, furniture, communication devices, etc.)
- The atmosphere and equipment are comfortable and appropriate for purpose of the visit (comfortable, clean and tranquil).
- The equipment of Quest Conference Estate works properly without any breakdowns.
- Materials associated with the services are adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.).
- Food and beverages served are hygienic, adequate and sufficient.
- Employees of Quest Conference Estate appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming).

The following factors were considered as convenience:

- Quest Conference Estate resolved guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensated for the inconvenience.
- It is easy to access Quest Conference Estate (transportation, car parking area etc.).
- Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate is easy (reaching via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.).

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse and discuss the data gathered by means of the survey. Firstly, with regard to the socio-demographic results it was found that respondents were mostly male, married, between the ages of 31 and 40 years and residing primarily in Gauteng. These respondents have a diploma or degree qualification. Most of these respondents attend a conference five times or more a year.

Secondly, from the analysis on the expectations of visitors to Quest Conference Estate, it was clear that the two main expectations from respondents included that the food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate and sufficient and that the equipment will work properly. This was closely followed by the expectation that Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests with a safe and secure environment. Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate and sufficient yielded a mean value of 4.27. Thirdly, the analyses on the perceptions of visitors to Quest Conference Estate yielded lower values than the expectations. The three main perceptions of visitors, included: employees always treat guests in a friendly manner, Quest Conference Estate provides its guests a safe and secure environment and it is easy to access Quest Conference Estate. The perception that yielded the highest mean value was: Quest provides its guests a safe and secure environment ($M=4.01$). The latter was also one of their expectations and it is therefore a pity that this specific expectation was not adequately met.

Fourthly, the visitors rated the overall service quality of Quest Conference Estate as very good, but only 20.2% rated it as extremely good. Fifthly, it was found that very small or no differences exist between the expectations and perceptions, although it was clear that respondents expected slightly more from Quest Conference Estate than what was received.

Sixthly, the factor analysis on expectations and perceptions yielded five reliable factors for both analyses labelled: Tangibles, Adequacy, Understanding, Assurance and Convenience with high Cronbach Alpha (CA) values in all factors. The multiple regressions indicated that Understanding made the strongest contribution to overall service quality in the expectation phase. This was also the case for perceptions but

the analyses show that Tangibles and Convenience can also contribute to the predictions of overall service quality.

The last chapter will be dedicated in laying down conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations will be made to Quest Conference Estate.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the empirical results were presented and discussed. The fifth and last chapter will lay down the conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations will be made for Quest Conference Estate, literature and for possible future research.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the primary objective of this was to determine service expectations of conference delegates in relation to the service delivery at Quest Conference Estate. In order to achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were identified, namely to:

- Conduct an in-depth literature review on the role of service quality in the tourism industry.
- Identify and analyse current service quality models and dimensions focusing on the relationship between service expectations and service perceptions through an in-depth literature review.
- Analyse the conference industry and the importance of service quality within by means of a literature review.
- Determine the service expectations and service perceptions of conference delegates to the Quest Conference Estate by means of an empirical survey.
- To draw conclusions on the service levels at Quest Conference Estate and make recommendations regarding the delivery of service quality in conference centres and how the application of these results can improve the competitiveness in the conference industry.

The objectives were accomplished as follows:

In Chapter 2 a literature review was done in order to determine the role of service quality in the tourism industry. Theory from the literature in Chapter 2 revealed that it is important for any business to completely understand what service quality entails. It is also important that careful attention should be given to customer satisfaction because there is a very clear and strong relationship between the quality of product/service, customer satisfaction and profitability. Literature also confirmed that there is a strong relationship between customer/tourist satisfaction and the intent to return.

In Chapter 2 several models were analysed and the relationship between service expectations and service perceptions were investigated. These models included the Perceived service quality model, Expectancy disconfirmation model, Haywood farmer model, Kano's model of customer satisfaction and Servqual (Gap) model.

In Chapter 3 an analysis of the development and importance of conference tourism was investigated and discussed. It was also found that conferences is rapidly developing and makes a significant contribution to business tourism. Conference tourism is big business, and one of the most successful growth industries of our age. All over the world more conferences are being held today than was ever thought possible.

In Chapter 4 the expected service and perceived service levels were empirically tested at Quest Conference Estate. The general observation from the empirical results revealed that conference users at Quest Conference Estate expected better service than actually experienced.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to draw conclusions and make recommendations regarding the delivery of service quality in conference centres.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

For this section, conclusions are presented regarding the literature review and the survey data that was analysed (Chapters 1 – 4).

5.2.1 Conclusions with regard to the role of service quality in the tourism industry

- Service quality is considered an important tool in a company's struggle to differentiate itself from its competitors (cf. 1.2).
- The need to understand and measure service quality is related to the growing recognition that it is more profitable to retain satisfied customers, than to be continually seeking to recruit new customers to replace lapsed ones. Quality is one of the most critical aspects of the strategic management of conference centres. Excellent service pays off because it creates true customers (cf. 2.1).
- Due to intense competition and the hostility of environmental factors, service quality has become a cornerstone marketing strategy for companies. This highlights how important improving service quality is to organisations for its survival and growth since it could help to address the challenges faced in the competitive markets. This means that service-based companies are compelled to provide excellent services to all customers in order to have a sustainable competitive advantage (cf. 2.2.1).
- Customer satisfaction forms a very important part of service quality. To attain true customer satisfaction a company needs to achieve quality not only by eliminating the causes for direct complaints but they need to provide their products/service with excellent, attractive quality and provide delight to the customer (cf. 2.3).
- The achievement of true customer satisfaction involves: customer orientated culture and organisation that focuses on the customer; employee empowerment, process ownership; team building; and partnering with customers and suppliers (cf. 2.3.1).
- There is enough theoretical evidence to prove that a satisfied customer or conference user is more likely to return. Satisfied customers that have experienced good service with high quality will more likely be inclined to return, compared to dissatisfied customers (cf. 2.3.1). They will also be more likely to recommend the product to others.

5.2.2 Conclusions with regard to the identification and analyses of service quality models and dimensions, as well as service expectations.

- Service quality has been defined differently by different people and there is no consensus as to one standardised definition. Most definitions however include expectations and perceptions as key terms (cf. 2.4).
- The definition by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) was adopted, which defines service quality as the discrepancy between customers' expectations of a service and the customers' perception of the service offering (cf. 2.4).
- Grönroos (1982) and Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) have proposed that customer's perception of service quality is based on the comparison of their expectations (what they feel service providers should offer) with their perceptions of the performance of the service provider (cf. 2.4)
- Great customer service is the ability to meet the needs and requirements or the expectations of the customers. Conference venues can attract their customers by offering exciting price and/or promotions but if they are not able to offer proper customer service, customers will not return (cf. 2.6).
- Service expectations are formed through, word-of-mouth messages and advertisements. (cf. 2.4.1)
- Dissatisfaction occur when the facilities and services associated with the industry are not available or not in proper working order. A relevant example would be the availability of WiFi at the facility. If WiFi is not available or even offered, customers are likely to feel dissatisfied, because WiFi is standard service at any tourist or conference facility (cf. 2.6).
- Measuring service quality has been one of the most recurrent topics in management literature. Clearly there was a need to develop valid instruments for the systematic evaluation of a companies' performance from the customer point of view; and the association between perceived service quality and other key organisational outcomes (cf. 2.4).
- It was clear from the literature that various models have been developed to measure service quality, namely: The perceived service quality model, Kano's model of customer satisfaction, the Haywood-Farmer model and the Expectancy-disconfirmation model (cf. 2.4)

- For the purpose of this study the model and measuring instrument of Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) were adapted to suit the needs of this study. The focus is on measuring the fourth gap of the model to determine a possible discrepancy between expected service and perceived service from the customer's perspective. (cf. 2.4.3).

5.2.3 Conclusions regarding conference tourism and the importance of service quality in this context

- The conference industry, in comparison with many other industries, is still very young. Conference tourism falls within the business tourism sector and caters for the high quality, high cost and high yield end of the market. Conference visitors are considered as big spenders and hosting a number of conferences can thus improve the economic benefits for the destination (cf. 3.1).
- The growth of this industry was significant and the continuous growth is evident. The top three conference destinations are the United States of America, Germany and Spain. The top three conference cities are Paris, Vienna and Madrid (cf. 3.2).
- This growth was also evident in South Africa and this country is ranked 18th on the global listing of world conference destinations. The top three cities are Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town (cf. 3.3).
- Research on conference tourism, especially in South Africa is scarce. One should however keep in mind that this part of the industry is still in its infancy.
- Conferences are considered as a means to present information, data and statistics but also creating a learning experience, social platform and building relationships with peers (cf. 3.4).
- The measurement of service quality in a conference context is also scarce especially from the conference delegate's perspective. (cf. 3.6).
- It was however evident that good service quality, above all else, is the primary factor in an organisation's ability to sustain growth and increase profitability over the long term. (cf. 3.6).
- Employee participation plays an important role in quality service and it is thus important to give the employees the best training, efficient facilities and logical procedures to enable job performance. (cf. 3.6)
- Effective employees lead to satisfied and loyal clients (cf. 3.6).

- Organising conferences include various facets such as setting clear objectives, managing the budget, selecting and setting up the venue, making the necessary travel arrangements and developing the programme (cf. 3.7).

5.2.4 Conclusions with regard to the survey

The primary objective was to determine the service expectations of conference delegates in relation to the service delivered at Quest Conference Estate. Five hundred delegates attending conferences or meetings at Quest Conference Estate were asked to complete a questionnaire of which 397 questionnaires were completed and returned. Section A of the questionnaire, was compiled to determine the socio-demographic information of the delegates. Section B, was to determine what the delegates were expecting the service to be at Quest Conference Estate. This section was to be completed, before the start of the conference. Section B, focused on measuring the perceived service levels after the conference.

The following important conclusions are made from the survey.

- According to the socio-demographic information obtained, an average profile of a conference delegate, attending a conference at Quest Conference Estate is as follow (cf. 4.2.1.1 – 4.2.1.5):
 - Males between the age of 31 and 40 years.
 - Married and lives in Gauteng
 - Obtained a diploma or a degree and attends a conference five times or more per year.
- Regarding service expectations the following aspects were very highly rated (in order of importance): (cf. 4.2.2):
 - Food and beverages served be hygienic, adequate and sufficient.
 - The equipment of Quest Conference Estate will work properly without any breakdowns.
 - Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure environment.
 - Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised.
 - Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner.

- Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate for the inconvenience.

- Regarding perceived service the following aspects were very highly rated (in order of importance): (cf. 4.2.3):
 - Employees always treat guests in a friendly manner.
 - Quest Conference Estate provides its guests a safe and secure environment.
 - It is easy to access Quest Conference Estate.
 - Food and beverages are hygienic, adequate and sufficient.
 - Quest Conference Estate provides the services as promised.
 - Employees are always willing to serve guests.
 - Quest Conference Estate and its facilities have operating hours convenient to all their guests.
 - Employees are always available when needed.

- Respondents had very high expectations in terms of food and beverages, equipment at the centre and safety and security. These are all aspects that require input from personnel and can be managed to perfection. It is clear that these are probably the most important items delegates consider when choosing a conference or conference location.
- After the conference delegates rated the friendliness of employees, the safety and security of the Conference Estate and the accessibility on a high level.
- The gap scores revealed small significant differences for 25 of the service aspects.
- The most significant differences between expectations and perceptions were found for accurate record keeping; handling of guest complaints; and the effective working of equipment. Respondents had higher expectations of these two aspects than what they experienced.
- No significant differences were found for visually appealing buildings and facilities; individualised attention given to guests that makes them feel special; the capacity of the venue and the operating hours of the centre.

- The gap scores between the service dimensions namely tangibles, adequacy, understanding, assurance and convenience revealed higher expectations on all these dimensions than what were experienced.
- The regression analyses revealed that in terms of expectations Understanding makes the strongest unique contribution to overall service quality.
- The regression analyses revealed that in terms of perceived service Understanding makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the overall quality, followed by tangibles and convenience.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations will be done in two sections. The first section will be recommendations regarding the research and the second section will be for future research.

5.3.1 Recommendations regarding the research

The expected service and perceived service can be brought closer together by offering services that is expected at conference venues. Service delivery should also be at consistently high levels, because clients will in future expect the same levels of service delivery as they have experienced previously.

Recommendations based on the information obtained in the literature review:

- As stated in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.3), most markets are very competitive, and to survive, a business needs to produce products and services of very good quality that yield highly satisfied and loyal customers. Based on this it is recommended that a tailor-made, detailed service survey is designed and utilised by conference centres to determine expectations and perceptions.
- As stated in Chapter 3 (cf. 3.7), conference delegates consider the image of the venue as important and thus the physical product remains one of the most important elements in the conference packages. Facilities include the physical “product” – bedrooms, meeting rooms, technology, dining areas, etc. – to give a competitive edge. Taking this in mind it is recommended that management at Quest Conference Estate should ensure facilities are upgraded and of good

quality. This might include upgrading of technology, painting of conference venues and so forth.

- Chapter 2 (cf. 2.4.1), highlights the factors that can influence a business's corporate image, such as technical and functional quality. It is thus recommended that an on-site IT-support team is available during business hours to assist delegates with technical problems.
- In Chapter 2 (cf. 2.4.1), it is stated that there are six criteria to ensure good perceived service quality; for example professional & skills, attitude and behaviour of contact personnel and recovery immediately when something goes wrong. This statement is also supported by Chapter 3 (cf. 3.6), which explains that quality service also stems from employee participation. The task of management is to make sure the frontline employees are trained and motivated to deal with customers in a professional, efficient manner that will enhance pride and give the customers what is expected. It makes sense to give the employees the best training, efficient facilities and logical procedures that will enable job performance. It is thus recommended that waiters and supervisors attending to the needs of delegates are knowledgeable in order to attend to complaints by providing adequate training. They also need to appear professional and neatly dressed in corporate uniform to stand out, so that delegates will know whom to ask for assistance. Supervisors should go for training on a regular basis, to keep up with the changing technology and courses that will enhance their people skills and client service.
- Chapter 1 (cf. 1.2), Table 1.1, indicates five important dimensions relevant to increase service quality in any business. One of these dimensions, namely assurance, takes the needs of clients in terms of the venue, rooms, food, parking and safety into consideration. This is also supported by Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.2), which also states that the elements of service quality is to inspire trust and confidence by providing a courteous and secure service. Thus it is recommended that the management of Quest Conference Estate ensure that all the employees know exactly what to do in times of an emergency. Specific tasks should be given to specific employees to do, if such emergencies should arise.

Regular drills should also be done to practise the procedures and to ensure that every employee will know what to do in case of an emergency.

Recommendations based on the empirical analyses:

- In Chapter 4 (cf. 4.2.1.3), it was found that 62% of delegates attending a conference at Quest Conference Estate is married. Thus, management might consider implementing activities to occupy and accommodate the spouses of the delegates, while they are attending the conference, as this can lead to additional marketing, more spending and higher visitor numbers.
- It is recommended that management of Quest Conference Estate consider all 29 attributes in the improvement of their service quality (cf. 4.2.2).
- More specifically Quest Conference Estate should improve the following aspects first: accurate record keeping; handling of guest complaints and ensuring technical equipment is in working order. This will require formal training and management. (cf. 4.2.2).
- Respondents expectations and perceptions are mostly influenced by the Estates ability to be flexible, by the belief that employees will have the knowledge to assist with information, by the belief that they will be treated in a friendly manner, by the belief that the employees will understand their specific needs and that the Estate will be accessible for guests with disabilities. It is thus recommended that personnel become aware of the conference delegate as an individual and that he/she have certain requirements when visiting the Estate. This just shows again that the personal element in the tourism product should not be underestimated as people enjoy the individual attention.

5.3.2 Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations are made for future research:

- This type of research should be done on a regular basis at conference centres so that the gaps can be identified and resolved.
- It might be considered to follow a qualitative approach with a few customers to determine exactly how they feel the gap between the expected services and perceived services should be bridged. In other words further research can be carried out on how the service quality at Quest Conference Estate can be improved.

- Quest Conference Estate is situated in Gauteng. In order to have a more comprehensive and realistic picture of the conference industry the study should be expanded to include conference venues in other provinces.
- A future study might consider a comparison between the expected and perceived service levels of first-time versus regular conference delegates. The regular delegates might be at the point where they are used to everything and tend to notice only the negative, whereas a first time delegate's expectations might not be as high.

5.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, conclusions were made based on the findings. The study also demonstrated that all the research questions have been answered. The chapter has also noted that possible recommendations have been made for both Quest Conference Estate and for future research.

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APPENDIX A

SERVICE QUALITY OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE

Dear respondent,

The purpose of this research is to determine the service quality levels of Quest Conference Estate in Vanderbijlpark. This information can assist this company in improving service quality where needed and stay competitive as well as aware of the needs of guests.

Firstly the questionnaire measures to which extent you think organisations offering conference services should possess the features described by each statement. Secondly, the questionnaire measures your feelings about Quest Conference Estate specifically.

Your input is very important and can make a significant contribution to the survey. This questionnaire will take about 8-10 minutes to complete. The data will contribute towards a Masters degree in Tourism Management for Eloise McCallaghan at North-West University.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you

E McCallaghan
Magister student
083 559 6272

Prof E Slabbert
Study leader
083 321 6338

SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick the appropriate option per question

1. Gender?	Male	1
	Female	2
2. In which year were you born?		19 _____
3. Marital status?	Married	
	Not married	
	Divorced	
	Widow/er	
	Living together	
4. In which province do you live?	Gauteng	
	KwaZulu-Natal	
	Eastern Cape	
	Western Cape	
	Northern Cape	
	Limpopo	
	Mpumalanga	
	Free State	
	Northwest	
5. Country of residence? (If outside RSA)		
6. Please indicate your highest level of education.	No school	
	Matric	
	Diploma, Degree	
	Post Graduate	
	Professional	
	Other (specify)	
7. How frequent do you visit conference venues?	Less than once a year	
	Once a year	
	Twice a year	
	Three times a year	
	Four times a year	
	Five times or more a year	
	Other (specify)	

SECTION B: EXPECTATIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE

This table focuses on your EXPECTATIONS of Quest Conference Estate <i>before</i> utilising the services	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
8. Quest Conference Estate will have visually appealing buildings and facilities	1	2	3	4	5
9. The service units of Quest Conference Estate will have adequate capacity (dining rooms, meeting rooms, venues, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Quest Conference Estate will have modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, communication devices, furniture, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
11. The atmosphere and equipment will be comfortable and appropriate for purpose of visit (comfortable, clean, and tranquil).	1	2	3	4	5
12. The equipment of Quest Conference Estate will work properly without causing breakdowns	1	2	3	4	5
13. Materials associated with the services will be adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
14. Food and beverages served will be hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	1	2	3	4	5
15. Employees and waiters of Quest Conference Estate will appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	1	2	3	4	5
16. Quest Conference Estate will provide the services as promised	1	2	3	4	5
17. Quest Conference Estate will perform services right the first time	1	2	3	4	5
18. Employees will provide prompt service	1	2	3	4	5
19. Quest Conference Estate will provide services at the time it promises to do so	1	2	3	4	5
20. Employees will always be willing to serve guests	1	2	3	4	5
21. Employees will always be available when needed	1	2	3	4	5
22. Quest Conference Estate will keep accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
23. Quest Conference Estate will resolve guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensate for the inconvenience	1	2	3	4	5
24. Quest Conference Estate will provide flexibility in services according to guest demands	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION B: EXPECTATIONS OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE

This table focuses on your EXPECTATIONS of Quest Conference Estate <i>before</i> utilising the services	Not at all important	Not important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
25. Quest Conference Estate will provide consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	1	2	3	4	5
26. Employees will have knowledge to provide information and assistance they would require	1	2	3	4	5
27. Employees will always treat guests in a friendly manner	1	2	3	4	5
28. Employees of Quest Conference Estate will understand the specific needs of guests	1	2	3	4	5
29. Quest Conference Estate will also be convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled)					
30. Employees will give guests individualised attention that makes them feel special	1	2	3	4	5
31. Quest Conference Estate and its facilities will have operating hours convenient to all their guests	1	2	3	4	5
32. Quest Conference Estate will provide its guests a safe and secure environment		2	3	4	5
33. Guests will have confidence in employees		2	3	4	5
34. Employees will have in-depth occupational knowledge (communications skills, professional skills, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
35. It will be easy to access Quest Conference Estate (transportation, car parking area, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
36. Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate will be easy (reaching information via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C: EXPERIENCE OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE

This table reflects your actual EXPERIENCE of Quest Conference Estate and should be completed <i>after</i> utilising the services & facilities	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Extremely good
37. Quest Conference Estate has visually appealing buildings and facilities	1	2	3	4	5
38. The service units of the guesthouse have adequate capacity (dining rooms, venues, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
39. Quest Conference Estate has modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, furniture, communication devices, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
40. The atmosphere and equipment are comfortable and appropriate for purpose of the visit (comfortable, clean, and tranquil).	1	2	3	4	5
41. The equipment of Quest Conference Estate works properly without causing breakdowns	1	2	3	4	5
42. Materials associated with the services are adequate (pens, writing pads, water etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
43. Food and beverages served are hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	1	2	3	4	5
44. Employees of Quest Conference Estate appears neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	1	2	3	4	5
45. Quest Conference Estate provides the services as promised	1	2	3	4	5
46. Quest Conference Estate performs services right the first time	1	2	3	4	5
47. Employees provide prompt service	1	2	3	4	5
48. Quest Conference Estate provided services at the time it promises to do so	1	2	3	4	5
49. Employees are always willing to serve guests	1	2	3	4	5
50. Employees are always available when needed	1	2	3	4	5
51. Quest Conference Estate keeps accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
52. Quest Conference Estate resolved guest complaints fast and in a sincere way and compensated for the inconvenience	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C: EXPERIENCE OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE

This table reflects your actual EXPERIENCE of Quest Conference Estate and should be completed <i>after</i> utilising the services & facilities	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Extremely good
53. Quest Conference Estate provides flexibility in services according to guest demands	1	2	3	4	5
54. Quest Conference Estate provides consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	1	2	3	4	5
55. Employees have knowledge to provide information and assistance to guests in areas they would require	1	2	3	4	5
56. Employees always treat guests in a friendly manner	1	2	3	4	5
57. Employees of Quest Conference Estate understand the specific needs of guests	1	2	3	4	5
58. Quest Conference Estate is also convenient for disabled guests (necessary arrangements made for the disabled)	1	2	3	4	5
59. Employees give guests individualised attention that makes them feel special	1	2	3	4	5
60. Quest Conference Estate and its facilities have operating hours convenient to all their guests	1	2	3	4	5
61. Quest Conference Estate provides its guests a safe and secure environment	1	2	3	4	5
62. Employees instil confidence in guests	1	2	3	4	5
63. Employees have in-depth occupational knowledge (professional skills, communication skills, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
64. It is easy to access Quest Conference Estate (transportation, car parking area, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
65. Getting information about the facilities and services of Quest Conference Estate is easy (reaching information via phone, internet, direction signs, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D: ASSESSMENT OF THE OVERALL SERVICE QUALITY OF QUEST CONFERENCE ESTATE

	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Extremely good
66. Overall, how would you rate the quality of service you received at Quest Conference Estate?	1	2	3	4	5

67. Would you recommend this facility to others?	Yes	No
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THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY