Managing the service experience:

A study of young people's

managed outdoor adventure leisure.

Keith Edward Donne

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Finally, two songs have offered me useful guidance. The first was a reminder when I occasionally lost my way:

"The search you half remember setting out on at the start,
is burning like an ember in your heart...
...time's running out."
(Browne, 1986).

The second was a caution to me as a researcher:

"I've got a pen in my pocket, does that make me a writer?
Standing on a mountain doesn't make me higher,
Putting on gloves doesn't make you a fighter,
And a study of the world doesn't make it science."
(Weller, 1997).

This thesis is my own study of the world. I have served a lengthy research 'apprenticeship' (Mullins & Kiley, 2002) to contribute to a body of knowledge. I hope that is science.

Abstract

The provision of outdoor adventure leisure experiences for young people is a complex service task and it requires the careful management of participants' heterogeneous needs in a physically demanding and dynamic risk environment. Research into the quality of this experience and its management is limited. It typically presents an adult perspective of young people's needs, without reference to the young people themselves. Practitioners and researchers alike acknowledge that the few studies conducted with young people to date suffer from the lack of clear theoretical and empirical underpinning, therefore this thesis, which draws on the conceptual basis for SERVQUAL, has a clear theoretical foundation. Also, many extant studies are quantitative and do not elicit richer, qualitative data from these young people and thus there is little deep understanding of their experiences to guide management.

The literature on service quality links to that on customer satisfaction: in this thesis, the two are explicitly conjoined as a precursor to the field research here. A key contribution made by this thesis is to demonstrate that the main drivers of participants' satisfaction are based on elements not previously identified with clarity. These elements are their interactions with staff, their interactions with one another in their own peer 'socialscape' and their own performance in developing skilled leisure consumption. The explicit identification of a 'socialscape' is a particular feature of the research findings here.

This thesis analyses qualitative perceptions of service quality from participants, employees and management, and evaluates how service quality and customer satisfaction are managed in a specific organisational context in outdoor adventure leisure. Firstly, watersports participants were interviewed before, observed during, and interviewed after their courses, to establish whether they felt their expectations were met and how this might have been achieved. Secondly, staff were interviewed to establish their perceptions of young people's experiences of the service, and the critical aspects of managing these experiences appropriately.

The critical aspect of managing these experiences is that instructors must have specific personal qualities, summarised in this thesis as 'intrinsic service values', and be able to work in an empowered culture, where the changing physical service environment requires them to make flexible, autonomous decisions to ensure participants have an appropriate experience. There are additional findings, which conclude that the ADVENTUREQUAL Conceptual Gap Model is a more appropriate reconceptualisation of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model, to inform this study of young people's outdoor adventure leisure. This thesis thus provides both conceptual development and understanding, and managerial insight in a specific context.

Table of Contents

Chapter Four: Management Imperatives in the Outdoor Adventure Leisure Service Encounter

Chapter Five: Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Chapter Six: An Analytical Framework for Data Gathering

Primary Data Gathering Section

Chapter Seven: Research Methodology

Chapter Eight: Qualitative Data Gathering Methods

Chapter Nine: From Outsider to Quasi-Insider at Wodin Watersports

Chapter Ten: The Data Gathering Journey and Analysis

Presentation and Discussion of Results Section

Chapter Eleven: Participant's Expectations and Their Determinants

Chapter Twelve: Participants' Perceptions

Chapter Thirteen: Employee and Management Perceptions of Participants' Expectations and Perceptions

Chapter Fifteen: Conclusions and Recommendations

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is an inductive investigation of service quality and customer satisfaction management at Wodin Watersports (WW), outdoor adventure centre for young people. The investigation concerns the related concepts of managing service quality and customer satisfaction, using the principle of disconfirmation. The concepts are applied in this outdoor adventure context, to determine young people's perceptions of their experiences at WW. Employee and management perceptions are also considered, to determine whether perceptual gaps exist in their understanding of young people's experiences, and the way these experiences are managed at WW. The SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) is developed as a theoretical framework to integrate all of these perceptions into a coherent evaluation of service quality and customer satisfaction issues at the centre.

A key outcome of this thesis is to establish the extent to which the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model is an appropriate framework to apply to a study of service quality in outdoor adventure leisure. Its generic form may need to be refined to provide a more insightful understanding of this subject. An additional intention is to respond to a call from researchers, for over a decade, that young people's perceptions of their outdoor adventure leisure experiences are under-represented in academic literature. Acknowledging that these experiences are being viewed through an adult lens in this thesis, the intention is to enable young people to articulate their perceptions and then use these perceptions to identify issues of service quality and customer satisfaction at WW, to inform WW management's understanding of its service design and delivery.

WW provides young people with organised leisure activities which are usually described by the phrase 'outdoor adventure'. This is a generic term coined by Hunt (1987, 1995) in his study of opportunities for young people (under eighteen years old) to participate in outdoor-based adventurous pursuits. It is used to define all activities with a "...*strong physical basis...*" which also imply "...*the presence of hazard to the participant."* (Hunt, 1995:16-17). Such activities are water-based; for example, canoeing, sailing and windsurfing, or land-based - climbing, abseiling and mountain biking.

The personal significance of this thesis to me as a researcher is explained next in this chapter, since Rose (1997) suggests that the identity and position of the researcher should be made visible, because knowledge creation is shaped by the circumstances in which it is produced. Outdoor adventure leisure is an individually experienced

1

phenomenon and service quality and customer satisfaction in this context should be viewed through participants' eyes. Therefore, previous research in young people's adventure leisure is critically discussed, identifying that a gap exists in that body of knowledge. WW is then introduced as the collaborating organisation, followed by an explanation of the academic significance of the thesis, and the overall aims and research questions of this study. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the organisation of the thesis.

1.2 The Personal Significance of this Thesis

Lofland & Lofland (1995) assert that it is most often a researcher's personal circumstances which provide a research topic and Maxwell (1998) states that it is necessary from the outset of a research project to establish and acknowledge one's personal purpose for conducting a study, which I shall now explain.

I have participated in outdoor adventure leisure activities for over thirty years and enjoy both the experience of pitting my own personal competence against situational uncertainty, and simply spending time outdoors in the natural world. As a sixteen year old my first paid job was as a kayak instructor, but I then entered the civil engineering profession until, in my mid-twenties, I realised that designing and building steel and concrete structures was not how I wanted to contribute to the world. I then made a significant career change and began working for a company providing children's outdoor adventure activities, a move driven by my personal outdoor adventure interests.

At this company I eventually became frustrated by other managers' attitudes towards service provision, since they viewed the company's business as a range of uniform 'products', not heterogeneously experienced services (although this language is something I learned later). For example the 'Multi-Activity product', was simply the combination of resources which created the service capacity to process a volume of young people through a range of adventure activities as efficiently as possible. I felt that this management attitude paid scant attention to the experiential nature of these activities, despite the company's promotional literature stating that they provided *"A superb experience for children: fun and adventure in a framework of safety."* (Company X brochures, 1986-2004).

Senior management placed great emphases on creating systems and procedures, and instructional staff were trained to use the same format and content for their activity sessions. It was intended that, for example, a kayak activity session, should be delivered in exactly the same way at every one of the company's activity centres across the UK and

Northern Europe. This was in order to generate economies of scale in resource management and employee training, to reduce operating costs.

Many of those senior managers had never worked as outdoor adventure activity instructors. They did not fully understand how young people needed nurturing through these experiences to ensure that they did have a 'superb experience'. They also had no understanding that the individual attitude and personality of the instructor could be instrumental in making these outdoor adventure experiences so enjoyable. Without this understanding, these managers continued to develop standardised adventure activity 'products', which could be delivered by any employee in a uniform way. They ignored the basic premise that an adventure experience is a subjective state of mind for participants (Priest & Baillie, 1987) and, thus, an individually experienced and heterogeneous 'product'.

I spent some years arguing strongly against this standardised approach, until, at another junction in my career, I left the company to study for a Master's degree, and develop my understanding of services management concepts, which interested me greatly. In doing this, I realised that I should apply these services management principles to the outdoor adventure activities management context. Soon after completing the Master's degree, I became a part-time inspector of quality and safety standards at adventure activity centres for the Wales Tourist Board (WTB) and the British Activity Holiday Association (BAHA) accreditation bodies. Almost as soon as I joined these inspectorates in 1993, four teenagers lost their lives in a kayaking accident in Lyme Bay, Dorset, and I was commissioned to develop a new code of practice and inspection scheme for the BAHA (British Activity Holiday Association Codes of Practice 1993-2005). At the same time, I helped with the WTB's inspection scheme criteria development. Although these schemes required a degree of standardisation, this was done with a 'light touch' and most criteria were specified at a threshold level, rather than being fully prescriptive as my previous employers had been attempting. However, I still felt that a tension existed in trying to standardise the management provision of young people's individually experienced outdoor adventure activities (Donne, 1996).

I then became a full-time academic at Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education and the opportunity arose to study services management principles in the young people's adventure context. However, the study required a focus and Section 1.5 explains how this was developed in collaboration with WW. This thesis has evolved from my understanding and experience that most young people enjoy their adventure leisure experiences. I agree with Mortlock (1994:96) that "...*young people have an instinct for adventure...*" and concur with Driscoll's (1995) assertion that in outdoor adventure, young

3

people meet and overcome challenges that they do not meet every day, this being its essence. However, in my experience as a participant, instructor and manager, the quality of young people's adventure experiences, and their resulting satisfaction, is dependent upon how the young people are managed in the service process, assuming that appropriate resources are in place. Therefore, the management of service quality and satisfaction in young people's outdoor adventure leisure activities is the focus of this study.

1.3 Young People's Adventure Leisure Experiences

'Adventure leisure' is leisure in the natural environment with some degree of uncertainty or risk, which may be physical or psychological, over which the participant has some degree of influence (Mitchell, 1983; Carpenter & Priest, 1989). In addition, Priest & Baillie (1987) suggest that uncertainties in the adventure experience will be specific to the individual and situation, emphasising the notion that it is heterogeneous (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995; Wearing & Wearing, 1990; Williams, 1977). Hunt (1995) encapsulates well this notion of the individuality of an adventure experience by stating:

> "...adventure may be of the mind, of the spirit, of the imagination, as well as a physical experience...it should depend on the efforts, the judgement and commitment of participants"
> (Hunt, 1995:18).

This concept of individually experienced leisure consumption, where the adventure element provides uncertainty, can be linked to Bateson's (1985a) assertion that managing uncertainty in service delivery is a key concern in service quality management. Also, Morris & Johnston (1987) argue that there is inherent variability in a service process where the customer is involved in production, which differentiates service operations from manufacturing and makes service quality more difficult to manage. Williams & Buswell (2003) then add that leisure and tourism consumers co-create their experiences, perceiving them differently, and therefore need careful and 'empathetic' management.

In outdoor adventure leisure, the participant is a fundamental ingredient in the process of producing their own service experience; therefore, to manage service quality and customer satisfaction effectively, a customer-oriented, rather than a management-oriented approach should be taken (Carlzon, 1987; Chase, 1978; Martin & Horne, 1993), since in a service, the customer is buying management promises of satisfaction (Levitt, 1981). Rawlinson-Plant (1992) and Donne (1995) contextualise this point for young people's outdoor adventure leisure, calling for management to view their outdoor adventure provision through the eyes of the participants. This study proceeds to model 'service quality' through a process of induction, based on the views of these service participants. The SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model (Parasuraman et al., 1985) is

4

critically reviewed as a theoretical framework and further refined for the adventure leisure context.

1.4 A Dearth of Research into Young People's Adventure Leisure

Much of the research that exists into outdoor adventure leisure experiences relates to adults, rather than young people. Sax (1980), Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 2000) and Arnould & Price (1993) all focus on the psychological effects of adult adventure and Kandampully & Duddy (1997) consider the quality of the jet boating adventure experience, from an adult perspective.

The first significant study of young participants' outdoor adventure experiences was by Fletcher (1971), who conducted a quantitative survey of Outward Bound participants. However, he states that much of the richness and individuality of the outdoor adventure experience is lost by gathering aggregate data. He consequently presents this as what he calls a 'technical piece of work', but adds a more detailed, reflexive and humanistic commentary from his own perspective, which he says is more appropriate to capture the differences in the experiences studied.

Later, Hopkins & Putnam's (1993) work describes four case studies of children's outdoor adventure, and does include three short quotes from participants, but it ultimately relies on adult narratives about these young people's experiences. These authors also cite a number of minor studies by Kelly & Baer (1968), Hopkins (1972), Ewert (1982) and Hopkins (1982), which provide limited qualitative data, with little input from young people.

Hunt (1995) then chooses to elicit only the views of outdoor adventure providers on the value and quality of outdoor adventure, rather than explore this with the young participants themselves, and he concludes that participants must be consulted in future studies. Anderson (1995; 1996) does so in her survey of UK children's watersports participation. That study includes both questionnaires and interviews, but she acknowledges that the aim of the study was to produce a broad audit of participation and she does not analyse young people's experiences in any depth. Anderson recommends that further research should focus in-depth on the satisfaction and the quality of first time watersports participants' experience.

A small-scale qualitative study of primary school children's motivations for taking part in canoeing activities was carried out by MacDonald (1995). This work involved participant observation and unstructured questioning of these subjects, whilst the researcher performed the role of a canoe instructor. This motivational study does not address the

managed service process, but it is one of the few extant studies which seek a deeper understanding of young people's perspectives of outdoor adventure leisure.

Barrett & Greenaway (1995) state that most existing research into outdoor adventure is methodologically flawed because it uses inappropriate methods and ignores the subjectivity of an adventure experience. They continue to say that the most appropriate way forward is to use humanistic and qualitative research approaches. Fletcher (1971) obviously wished that he had conducted a qualitative, interpretive study, but such an approach to research was little understood at that time and adopting the positivist/scientific paradigm was the research norm.

To date, no studies exist which seek an insightful understanding of service quality and customer satisfaction management in managed outdoor adventure leisure from young people's perspectives. Collins' (1996:8) argument still holds true that: *"There is a need to identify what groups and individuals need, not what outdoor adventure providers think they need"* and that outdoor adventure should start from people's needs, as defined by them, in order that they can be met appropriately.

Existing research suggests, therefore, that participants should be consulted directly to establish their perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction in organised outdoor adventure leisure activities, to understand how that service process should be managed. In the following section I shall explain how I gained access to participants through a collaborating organisation.

1.5 Wodin Watersports: The Collaborating Organisation

In the early stages of this thesis, I was unsure which organisations might provide me with access to participants, without my work as a part-time inspector of outdoor adventure centres compromising the study. Added to this, my full-time work commitments would limit my opportunities for data gathering. Therefore, I believed that ease of access was critical, since, as Clark & Causer (1991) state, a study's feasibility with respect to time and other resources and constraints can affect the research design significantly. They continue that it should be practicable relative to its level (master's or doctorate) and, importantly for this thesis, should take account of it being a part-time study.

Whilst considering this access issue, I had a serendipitous meeting with the manager of WW, which provided sailing, canoeing, kayaking and windsurfing for young people under eighteen years old. It emerged that the WW manager sought a greater insight into what quality and satisfaction meant to the young novices taking part in these watersports activities, since he had identified this customer segment as a key future revenue source

to develop. The insights he sought supported Anderson's (1996) call for in-depth research into young people's perceptions of quality and satisfaction in their watersports experiences as beginners.

The WW manager said that ad-hoc descriptive comments were often made by participants, for example, 'sailing was brilliant', but he had little deeper understanding of *why* the sailing was 'brilliant'. Similarly, he was unsure why the sailing might not have been 'brilliant' for others in the same activity group. The manager was seeking a depth of understanding that he understood a questionnaire survey could not provide, but neither he nor his management team had sufficient understanding of how they could conduct such a study.

The WW manager's concern aligned with the general thrust of my research ideas at that stage, and helpfully, Bryman (1989) recommends that a researcher should be opportunistic in such collaborative circumstances, even if it means adapting the study purpose, since access is often difficult to negotiate in organisation-based research. That author states three key criteria for choosing a research site, any of which may apply:

1. *People are willing to co-operate*
2. *The location is convenient to the researcher*
3. *The researcher already has some contacts or prior knowledge of the context*
   (Burgess, 1984:59).

Applying these criteria to WW:

1. The Manager was keen to co-operate, because he was unsure how to conduct research into the quality of his centre's watersports provision.
2. The location was relatively convenient for me.
3. I had prior knowledge of the context through both my work and leisure activities.

To supplement these criteria, the centre was outside of my activity centre inspection remit, so that any concerns of potential bias or professional compromise would not exist. Also, the appropriateness of conducting a single site study is confirmed by Burgess (1984) and Yin (1994).

All of these conditions suggested that I should locate the study at WW, but it was important, according to Bryman (1989), that I established a clarity of purpose with the WW manager, so that we both understood and agreed each other's expectations of the study. I found that this negotiation was as important as gaining access to the centre, since I was prevailing upon the manager's goodwill and, as Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1996) state, in management research within an organisation, the research purpose must be politically acceptable to the stakeholder(s) providing access for the researcher.

However, before proceeding any further from this initial meeting, I investigated the significance and relevance of a watersports study, as distinct from other potential outdoor adventure activities. Firstly, in a UK-wide survey on outdoor leisure participation, the Scottish Enterprise Partnership (1994) found that watersports was the second most popular activity. Since then, Gratton & Taylor (2000) have confirmed that through the 1990s there was a significant growth in watersports participation as a result of the increase in families' disposable income. Watersports has, therefore, become a mainstream adventure leisure activity and, with increased participation, there naturally follows an increased public awareness of, and demand for, high standards of organised provision.

Expectations of the adventure leisure experience in watersports are thus raised and a study of quality and satisfaction perceptions was therefore appropriate for the managed watersports context. This purpose reflected my original aspirations for the study and became the agreed focus with the WW manager. Emphasis was to be placed on how the service process was experienced by novice participants and managed by WW employees and management. This would require participant's perceptions of their experiences and staff perceptions of how they provided these experiences.

The WW manager had a real world problem, meaning that this would not be a study conducted purely through academic interest, as Driver's (1989) leisure research typology suggests. Burton (1996:7) explains that the most significant benefit of research such as this oriented towards real world problem solving is *"...enhanced problem definition"*. He argues that the different perspectives and insights of researcher and practitioner should be combined to define a research question and can provide an alternative perspective on a management problem, and could develop a new approach to studying the problem.

A further, obvious point is that of access to data which would be otherwise unavailable. Burton concludes that when conducted through genuine mutual need, problem-oriented research can provide both researcher and practitioner with unique insights into each other's world, thus an important objective of leisure research should be to build such

bridges of understanding. The significance of this study to WW management is apparent: its academic significance will now be explained.

1.6 The Academic Significance of the Study

Gummesson (1994:94) calls for academic research into services which is relevant to practitioners, and valid in that it captures reality "...*to get close to the gist of a phenomenon in order to develop insights and eventually wisdom.*" The outdoor adventure phenomenon being studied is the experience of young people in a service provided for them by adults. However, according to Matthews & Limb (1999), children's needs, aspirations and behaviour are different to those of adults, yet they cannot influence their own life environment because decisions are made for them by adults who do not seek their views. Robinson (1997) suggests that more specifically in leisure provision, children's feedback is under-represented because service quality is typically defined by adults. Young people's perspectives should therefore be sought in this study.

To conclude the argument in this chapter, Barrett & Greenaway's (1995) observations of research into young people's experiences of outdoor adventure should be re-emphasised as being still relevant a decade later. They argue that prior research is methodologically weak, inconclusive, uncritical, quantitative and ad-hoc, pays little attention to young people's own accounts and that there is a void between practice and research. Rickinson *et al.* (2004) confirm those views, saying that there is negligible research on the experience of children in outdoor adventure activities, and that the methodological rigour of existing research needs to be improved, as it is typically poorly conceptualised and designed.

There is clearly a need to research young people's own accounts of their adventure leisure experiences and how they are managed, with conceptual and methodological rigour, to make an insightful contribution to that body of knowledge. A gap exists in our understanding of young people's perceptions of their managed service experience in outdoor adventure leisure and this thesis seeks to address that gap. In doing so, it adapts relevant services principles to provide a conceptual underpinning and suggests refinements to extant theory which contribute to the broader services literature. In addition, conducting research into a real management issue at WW is a good opportunity to integrate academic research and industry practice more closely.

1.7 Research Aims and Questions

This thesis seeks to investigate the quality of novice participants' service experiences at WW centre, and how these experiences are managed to satisfy participants, using the

SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model as a theoretical framework. The thesis has three overarching aims, with eight specific research questions:

Research Aim #1

To review critically the appropriateness of the generic SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model for investigating service quality and participant satisfaction in outdoor adventure leisure:

i.   Are the determinants of expectations appropriate and comprehensive?
ii.   Are all potential perceptual gaps explicitly represented?
iii.   What is the relationship between service quality and satisfaction?

Research Aim #2

To examine novice participants' expectations and experiences of managed outdoor adventure leisure, using the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model and any incorporated refinements:

i.   What are participants' expectations of their experience?
ii.   How are these expectations derived?
iii.   How do participants' perceptions of their experience compare to their prior expectations?

Research Aim #3

To evaluate critically management and staff perceptions of novice participants' watersports experiences, using the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model and any incorporated refinements:

i.   To what extent do management and staff understand participants' expectations and perceptions of their experience?
ii.   What are the key elements of service design and delivery which contribute to participants' satisfaction?

1.8 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into three overall sections: a critical review of relevant literature (Chapters Two to Six), a justification and explanation of primary data gathering activities (Chapters Seven to Ten), and a presentation and critical evaluation of those data (Chapters Eleven to Fifteen). These sections are now explained in more detail.

In Chapter Two, adventure leisure is conceptualised as a service and the challenges of providing that service as a managed process are then analysed. Chapter Three presents a critical review of the service encounter and how outdoor adventure leisure participants co-produce their experiences through developing skilled leisure consumption. Adventure leisure experiences are conceptualised using appropriate theory and the emotional responses to these experiences are critically reviewed. This chapter then explores the extent to which service customers cognitively evaluate their experiences. In Chapter Four the integrated principles of service design and delivery are discussed with respect to outdoor adventure leisure, and important management imperatives are identified for that context. Chapter Five is a critical review of the concepts of service quality and satisfaction, suggesting a new, conjoined relationship between them to inform this study further. However, there is no intention to prove that relationship empirically. Chapter Six concludes the Review of Literature section by integrating key issues from the previous chapters and proposing a refined version of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model, as a framework for primary data gathering and analysis in this study.

In Chapter Seven, the adoption of an interpretivist position, incorporating a qualitative approach, is justified. Chapter Eight seeks to rationalise the use of qualitative methods within that approach and examine the important ethical considerations for conducting research with young people. Chapter Nine is an explanation of how access to the WW centre, and acceptance by the WW staff, were negotiated. Also highlighted are how potential threats to access and staff acceptance were managed. To conclude this Primary Data Gathering section, an explanation of how the data were gathered and analysed is provided in Chapter Ten.

The Presentation and Discussion of Results section initially pre-structures the discussion on all potential aspects of participants' expectations in Chapter Eleven. Chapter Twelve then develops an inductive analysis on the key perceptions of participants' experiences, linked to their expectations, allowing these themes to emerge from the data. In Chapter Thirteen WW management and staff perceptions of participants' expectations and perceptions are analysed, based on the inductive emergence of the themes in Chapter Twelve, to confirm whether these were congruent with participants' views. Using emerging data themes, in Chapter Fourteen the theoretical criteria for service design proposed at the end of Chapter Four are reconceptualised as a structure to discuss critically service design and delivery at WW.

Finally, Chapter Fifteen presents conclusions on the key findings of this study. The contribution to knowledge is stated explicitly and recommendations are made for further research.

Review of Literature Section

The previous chapter introduced the rationale for this thesis and explained its aims and research questions. The purpose in this section of the thesis is to establish a theoretical framework for the study, by reviewing services management literature in the context of outdoor adventure leisure. In Chapter Two, outdoor adventure leisure is conceptualised as a service, different approaches to classifying that service are critically reviewed and the importance of the servicescape and 'socialscape' in the outdoor adventure leisure context are identified. Chapter Three then examines the participant as a fundamental element of service production in outdoor adventure leisure, and how their experiences and emotions are influenced by encounters with people, systems and objects, and by their own performance. The chapter then concludes by discussing whether outdoor adventure leisure participants are always be able to evaluate service experiences cognitively. In Chapter Four the key imperatives faced by outdoor adventure leisure management in providing an appropriate service for participants are explored. Service design is analysed as an overarching activity and the importance of employees to the service is emphasised. The notion of organisational attitude and behaviour is then developed and the chapter concludes with a framework of organisational practices, which should result in excellent service quality management. Chapter Five presents a review of different theoretical perspectives of service quality and customer satisfaction, to suggest a relationship between the two concepts. Different service quality frameworks and attributes are also critically discussed to identify the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model as an appropriate analytical framework for this thesis. Finally, in Chapter Six of the Literature Section, a refined version of the original SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model is proposed as the analytical framework for primary data gathering, incorporating additional gaps and three further determinants of expectations/perceptions.

The discussion of literature in this section is critical, but where academic arguments have been well rehearsed over time and are accepted in the body of subject knowledge, they will be summarised, rather than repeated in full.

Chapter Two

Defining and Classifying Outdoor Adventure Leisure as a Service

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review critically different methods of service classification and conceptualise adventure leisure as a service. The uniquely defining aspects of the complex physical outdoor adventure leisure service environment are identified and the importance of the social environment in which the service takes place is emphasised, since both of these environments must be managed carefully in outdoor adventure leisure to ensure an appropriate experience for participants.

2.2 Outdoor Adventure Leisure Conceptualised as a Service

As a starting point for considering service management issues in outdoor adventure leisure, it is important to understand the nature of services (Lindquist & Persson, 1993), as distinct from goods. Despite Levitt's (1972:41) assertion that "...there are no such things as service industries...", the unique characteristics of services have particular consequences for management in service companies (Gronroos 1990; Lovelock 1992a) and therefore adventure leisure at WW. Berry (1980) summarises the difference clearly, defining a good as an object or a thing and a service as a performance or a deed, with Rust et al. (1996) concurring, and adding that service performances are 'ephemeral'. Certainly, outdoor adventure leisure is a performance carried out together by instructors and participants, creating a transient experience for each.

Researchers extend this further into the specific characteristics of a service performance, to provide more insight into the challenges faced by service managers. There is agreement that production and consumption are simultaneous, with the consumer being integral to (or inseparable from) the production process, for example watersports instruction and participation, and that a service cannot be made to inventory, making it transient and perishable (Armistead, 1985a). Another attribute of service intangibility, that it cannot be touched or felt, is noted by Morris & Johnston (1987), Levitt (1981) and Lovelock (1992a), and the notions of variability (Mitchell & Greatorex, 1993) and heterogeneity (Gummesson, 1991) are also relevant to outdoor adventure leisure, where the service can never be exactly reproduced.

Of the services characteristics discussed so far, Rust et al. (1996) state that intangibility is the key differentiating feature from goods, reflecting Levitt's (1981) comment that service customers are actually buying promises of products - in the case of outdoor adventure

leisure, experiences - which they cannot test in advance and which become intangible post-service consumption remembrances. This leads into the more commonly agreed notion that the presence of the customer in the service is the essential difference (Bitner *et al.,* 1997; Gummesson, 1991). Toffler (1980) calls this customer the 'prosumer', both producing and consuming the service experience and, in the leisure context, Laurent & Kapferer (1985) and Dimanche *et al.* (1991) argue that involvement is intrinsic to the experience, demonstrated at WW where participants' experiences cannot exist without participation, as Lovelock (1992a) states, in real time.

Chase (1978, 1981) uses direct customer contact with the service production as a principal dimension in his model of effectiveness, where no allowance is (or can be) made for the customer being entirely remote from the service production. Armistead (1985b) also asserts that customer involvement during production is a special feature of services and Johnston & Bryan (1993) explain that the main difference when processing customers, as opposed to goods, is the inherent variability and uncertainty caused by the physical, mental and emotional existence of the customer in the service itself. This extends Morris & Johnston's (1987:19) conclusion that the nature of people being processed is the defining feature of a service.

Finally, after Levitt (1972) and Sasser *et al.*'s (1982) observation that a service is a subjective experience for the consumer, Holbrook & Hirschman (1982:132) give an example of the leisure participant's perspective. They suggest it is *"...a steady flow of fantasies, feelings and fun..."*, which transform participants in some way (Dedeke, 2003) by its intrinsic nature, leading to the conclusion here that leisure is intangible, inseparable, transient, perishable, heterogeneous and not exactly reproducible. Therefore, consumption of leisure and thus, outdoor adventure leisure, displays the characteristics attributable to a service, rather than a good. It must be managed with consideration for the participants' experiences in that service.

Having considered the conceptualisation of the nature of the outdoor adventure leisure service, it can now be considered in combination with goods as a packaged management 'offering' to participants.

2.3 Outdoor Adventure Leisure as a Goods/Service 'Offering'

Outdoor adventure leisure provides a combination of goods and services to create value for participants, which Johnston & Bryan (1993) and Gummesson (1994) call an 'offering'. This is considered to be the package of attributes purchased by customers (Davidson, 1991; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001; Middleton, 1994).

Muhleman *et al.*'s (1992) dimensions of services also acknowledge this and allude to the nature of a service being both tangible and intangible but Armistead (1985b) instead tries to present a more precise breakdown of the service package. He suggests that, rather than it simply being a mix of goods and services, there is a more subtle composition of features and he identifies that a service package consists of:

1. *Physical items*, which can be purchased directly, which are changed during the production process, which are an integral part of the main service delivery or which are part of the environment where the service is produced.
2. *Service elements*, which include the nature of the contact, the service atmosphere and feelings created in the customer.

This builds on the notion of a continuum of intangibility (Sasser *et al.*, 1982; Shostack, 1977), where at one end physical goods have mainly tangible properties and at the other, services have mainly intangible properties.

There is no quantitative measure of the proportions attempted; instead, the model is illustrative and serves as a simple but useful analytical device for comparing different service packages. Its weakness is in one of the examples of a 'pure service' used in the text, which contradicts the premise of the package being a mixture of the features explained above. The author suggests that an orchestral concert is entirely composed of service elements, when he has already argued that there must be some physical items present, for example, comfortable seating, which contribute to the service experience. In outdoor adventure leisure, the key physical items are the activity-specific technical, and personal protective, equipment, and the service element centres on instructor/participant interactions.

Having identified the service offering as a package and previously identified that service consumption occurs simultaneously with its production, the notion of the service as a managed process can now be considered.

2.4 Outdoor Adventure Leisure as a Managed Process

Schmenner (1995) states that manufacturing and services are both distinct processes, since they both convert inputs to outputs. Whereas manufacturing processes material inputs, a service essentially processes people, being 'humanistic' (Levitt, 1972). In the production of an offering, Morris & Johnston (1987) state that three types of inputs are processed: materials, information and customers. They suggest this forms a continuum in the operations planning process, from the high certainty/low variability of materials, where all outputs can be specified, to the low certainty/high variability of customers, where only

tangible items can be specified and the intangible exists at different levels of consciousness. This difference in operations process, according to the authors, provides a connotation of services which encompasses all non-manufacturing operations, and the latter category typifies the outdoor adventure leisure offering.

On a more philosophical level, Gummesson (1994) presents three management paradigms - manufacturing, bureaucratic-legal and service - which he says are values that guide thought and behaviour, rather than defining organisational types. Of these paradigms, he advocates that whilst it is possible for a service organisation to adopt the values and behaviours of the first two paradigms, a successful service organisation will be oriented towards the customer and the customer interface, and at the core of service delivery process thinking should predominate. To emphasis this further, Gummesson refers to three of the '7Ps' of Marketing: participants, physical evidence and process (Booms & Bitner, 1981), supporting Brown *et al*.'s (1994) belief in the marketing importance of service process management.

Johnston (1994) develops this argument further by citing Eiglier & Langeard (1984), who say that an equivalent word for 'production' does not exist to encapsulate the creation of a service. They propose the term 'servuction' for a model of service production (see also Bateson, 1985b), which Davies *et al*. (1999) later refine to include the customer process in the servuction system. This makes better linguistic sense than the alternative 'prodice', and the term is becoming adopted by the service literature. Regardless of terminology, the key principle is that the service at WW is a process to be managed and this can be considered when trying to classify the outdoor adventure leisure service, as the following section seeks to explain.

2.5 Classifying the Outdoor Adventure Leisure Service

It is possible to categorise manufacturing operations by the process adopted and resultant volume of goods produced, which Hill (1991, 2000) calls 'process choice', incorporating five categories: project, job shop, batch (small and large), production line and continuous process. The value of such categorisation, argue Silvestro *et al*. (1992), is that it unifies industries and sectors to share common practice and means that manufacturers can have a better understanding of their processes and develop appropriate strategies. Schmenner (1995:13) links this principle to services and recommends that "...*service operations managers can apply the mentality of industrial engineering to improve what they do...*", specifically in terms of quality, production and customer satisfaction. The development of different service classification systems will now be discussed.

An early attempt to classify any organisation comes from Wild (1971), who uses the four categories of manufacturing, service, supply and transport, which Armistead (1985b) observes are difficult to apply usefully, since organisations have an element of at least two of these categories in their activities. Armistead refines this by using the categories as nodes for an 'Operations Tetrahedron' and suggests that each node is a pure form of the type. However, having already argued that pure categories are hard to apply, Armistead (1985b) then introduces Maister's (1983) framework for categorising service activities. This framework is developed from Levitt's (1972) original idea that a service activity is composed of an employee interacting directly with customers in the 'front office' (for example outdoor adventure leisure instructors), and supporting activities being conducted out of sight of customers in a 'back office' (for example, outdoor adventure leisure administrators).

Chase (1978) uses the degree of customer contact in a service to determine the controllability of its outcome and this, too, is incorporated into Maister's (1983) framework, which, therefore, uses two dimensions:

i)   whether the significant value is added in the front or back office, and
ii)   whether service activities are standardised or customerized (note this word becomes 'customized' in later research).

This results in four service categories: job shop, factory, mass service and professional service. Muhlemann *et al.* (1992) extend this list with a category they call 'personal', but do so in summarising earlier literature and do not explain how the category can be derived using these dimensions.

In outdoor adventure leisure at WW, most value is added by the activity instructors directly interacting with participants in the 'front office'. The activities are 'customerized', in that participants are typically part of an activity group, but that group size may vary and it will be composed of individuals with heterogeneous abilities and personalities, all needing specific guidance from the instructor to progress. On this basis, outdoor adventure leisure at WW would be classified as a Job Shop.

Silvestro *et al.* (1992) summarise the main dimensions that have been used in different attempts at service classification and conclude that no previously suggested classification systems have been as useful as those in production management literature, stating there is a "...*miscellany of different approaches lacking a cohesive framework...*" (p66). The authors then continue by proposing their own system, based on that used in manufacturing, namely, volume of production. They acknowledge that in a service, volume can change enormously, with little or no process change, and suggest a

refinement in the volume of customers processed by a service unit in one day. This, the authors argue, makes Chase's (1978) 'contact time' more tightly defined, since his dimension does not distinguish between low frequency/high duration and high frequency/low duration, two potentially different forms of contact. Silvestro et al. (1992) present the results of an empirical study, which plots graphically different services on six dimensions, ranked high to low. They then identify a trend of three clustered organisation types, with a correlation to the volume dimension proposed:

1.   professional services (low volume)
2.   service shop (medium volume)
3.   mass services (high volume)

The medium volume service at WW would be classified as a service shop, but the weakness in this analytical framework is that there are a number of anomalous organisations which do not fit the model on all six dimensions. The authors add a caveat that there is an overlap between consecutive types, but ignore the (admittedly, few) contradictory data which show professional service attributes in a mass service. Although almost conclusive, this model adds to Silvestro et al.'s (1992) already stated miscellany of approaches.

As a refinement of Silvestro et al.'s (1992) work, Johnston & Clark (2001) propose a Volume-Variety matrix, which considers the service process in terms of the volume of customers processed per day, relative to high or low variety in the production process. Johnston & Clark assume that variety can be characterised by the level of contact time, the degree of customisation, the amount of discretion involved in providing the service, whether there is a product or capability focus and the front/back office mix. They conclude with four service types, defined by High/Low descriptions on both dimensions:

1.   Professional Services (High Variety/Low Volume);
2.   Professional Service Shops (Medium-High Variety/Low-Medium Volume);
3.   Mass Service Shops (Low-Medium Variety/ Medium-High Volume);
4.   Mass Services (Low Variety/High Volume);

With a refined definition of medium-high variety and low-medium volume, WW could be classified in this case as a Professional Service Shop, but Johnston & Clark (2001) agree that a common problem of classifying organisations with a system like this is that many lie some where in the middle and types (2) and (3) above need clearer definition. They argue that force fitting a service into a classification is not helpful and only considers 'extreme cases'. However, despite the apparent incompleteness of this analytical framework, its real value seems to lie in forcing one to consider the underlying assumptions and issues

of a particular service in order to classify it, rather than the other way round, which can lead to a greater understanding of that service type. Verma (2000) notes that due to the diversity of services it can be difficult to generalise usefully about managing service operations; therefore an understanding of the nature of a particular service is more useful than its classification.

A service must be managed in some physical service environment and because a lake and associated facilities are fundamental to outdoor adventure leisure watersports provision, the principles of a 'servicescape' are now discussed.

2.6 The Servicescape

The physical surroundings of a service environment, or the servicescape (Bitner, 1990, 1992), gives clues to consumers as to what the service entails and can help to set their expectations for the service experience (Aubert-Gamet, 1997). In outdoor adventure leisure, the servicescape is a critical aspect of the service, in that managed activities must take place in conditions appropriate to the participants' abilities, with particular regard to the type of facility and the weather (Adventure Activities Licensing Authority, 2004). For example, WW would not legally be allowed to introduce beginners to sailing in tidal water with dangerous currents and strong winds, but the organisation's relatively sheltered inland lake, with only sporadically extreme weather patterns, is acceptable.

The servicescape has also been identified as an important element of customers' evaluation of a service (Varley & Crowther, 1998). Bitner (1990) notes that where customers experience a disorganised service environment, the service provider's competence and efficiency are in question and contribute to perceptions of poor service levels. However, if customers perceive that in a service failure the service provider has no control over the cause, they are typically less dissatisfied than if the failure could clearly have been avoided. She says further on the servicescape that customers continue to seek tangible representations of their experience through, for example, noise, odours, temperature, colours, textures and comfort of the facilities offered, which can be added to Parasuraman *et al.*'s (1985) tangible item examples of equipment, personnel and communications materials.

Johns & Howard (1998) suggest that in the hospitality sector, tangible items in the servicescape can act as icons or signs to consumers that their needs are understood and being addressed. They give an example of restaurants providing children's high chairs, implying a child-friendly attitude, an understanding of the needs of family groups and a concern for comfort for all consumers. This example of high chairs reinforces Fick & Ritchie's (1991) comment that tangibles are sector-specific, using their own tourism

research as an example, and underlines again the heterogeneous nature of services. Tangibles in outdoor adventure leisure are indeed sector-specific; the use of personal protective equipment and watercraft are integral elements of the service encounter.

Specifically in the leisure context, Iso-Ahola (1976) much earlier posits that both personal and situational factors form one's experience of leisure. Unger (1984) further recommends that situational factors, such as weather and time of day, create variations in consumers' leisure perceptions and should, therefore, be managed by the service provider in order to enhance their leisure experience. Clearly, the weather itself cannot be controlled but, for example, planning contingent activities to allow for variation would be a sensible management approach.

Wakefield & Blodgett (1994) also consider the influence of the servicescape in leisure services and find that, after the initial attraction to the leisure service, the servicescape keeps consumers in that service and can positively affect the repurchase decision. This would seem particularly applicable to the extended service encounter in outdoor adventure leisure (Arnould & Price, 1993), where a longer temporal exposure to a service gives participants more opportunity to evaluate their surroundings. Wakefield & Blodgett (1999) confirm this view in the leisure context and suggest that the longer a sports consumer is in the service, the more sensitive they are to the aesthetics of the servicescape.

A general tool for analysing servicescapes is proposed by Bitner (1992) in her Framework for Understanding Environment-user Relationships in Service Organisations, which tries to address all factors in the servicescape that can influence a customer's response and behaviour towards the service. Bitner's (1992) environmental dimensions are tabulated for easier reference below:

Ambient conditions (1)	Space/function (2)	Signs, symbols and artefacts (3)
temperature	layout	signage
air quality	equipment	personal artefacts
noise	furnishings	style of decor
music	etc.	etc.
odo[u]r		
etc.		

Table 2.1 Bitner's (1992) dimensions of the servicescape.

The use of 'etc.' in each category should be noted here, since it implies that the author acknowledges her generalised framework may need to be made service-specific, with elements being added as appropriate. In addition, it could be argued that there is an overlap here with the 'tangibles' of a service in categories (2) and (3), especially as it has been stated already that these are service-specific. The usefulness of this framework is that it provides a structured approach to analysing tangibles.

Wakefield & Blodgett (1996) continue their work on repurchase decisions and adapt Bitner's (1992) framework to propose dimensions which underpin a customer's perceived quality of the servicescape. This creates an internal satisfaction response and likely re-patronage of the service. However, their study develops dimensions which relate to a context of three spectator amusements (American football, baseball and casinos) and completely ignores ambient conditions, which could clearly have an influence on participants' perceptions in the outdoor adventure leisure context. Therefore, Bitner's (1992) framework seems more comprehensive and generalisable to a broader range of services as it includes ambient conditions.

Having established that the physical servicescape is a critical element of the service in outdoor adventure leisure, it can be argued that other actors within that servicescape can influence participants' experiences; therefore this is now explained in terms of a 'socialscape'.

2.7 The Socialscape

A further refinement to the servicescape should be considered here, since participants experience managed outdoor adventure leisure services with other people, not in isolation. Aubert-Gamet & Cova (1999) suggest that the physical service environment has a 'sociospatial' element, which Donne (2004) calls the socialscape. This includes anybody who comes into contact with the customer in the service encounter, whether they are fellow service participants, or others who are not part of the service process but who may have an effect on the service experience. Swan *et al.* (1998) suggest that in most service quality and satisfaction research, consumers are *"...placed in solitary confinement"* (p59), where the study *"...focuses on the individual and not people doing things together."* (p60), and show in their own work that the social aspect of the service experience can provide a more insightful interpretation than any other attribute. Therefore, the socialscape should be considered here as an important aspect of the servicescape, since interaction with other participants and instructors is likely to be high. Also, Holyfield (1999) states that the social context of an outdoor adventure experience heightens the emotions and hence the quality of the experience.

Unger's (1984) research finds that the social situation generally has the most positive effect on leisure participants' perceptions of their experiences, in that people enjoy their service experience more if they can interact with other participants, regardless of other intrinsic satisfiers in the service. Also, Ewert (1989) finds that young people typically participate in outdoor adventure activities to share a fun experience with their friends. Canziani (1997) agrees with the principle and adds that people not only want to socialise with others consuming the service, they may even depend on socialising with these people in that service, which could be true at WW, where the adventure experience is shared with others.

Priest & Gass (1997) add to this argument by giving an example of how people kayaking together reinforces in them feelings of personal satisfaction and pleasure and Bettencourt (1997) notes that fellow participants in a service may even help other participants directly during service delivery. This is supported by Ewert's (1989) observation that co-operative behaviour between young people in adventure leisure activities is often very important.

In this chapter, managed outdoor adventure leisure has been conceptualised as a service and different approaches to its classification have been critically reviewed, emphasising the importance of the servicescape and 'socialscape'. In the next Chapter, participants' service experience as a managed encounter is explored, to identify the key variables which must be managed in this encounter.

Chapter Three

The Outdoor Adventure Leisure Service Experience

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the outdoor adventure leisure service was conceptualised and key aspects of participants interacting with the service were identified. In outdoor adventure leisure these encounters are with instructors and the physical and social environment. The manifestation of encounters with people and nature, rather than objects or designed systems, can be difficult to predict, since instructors and participants will act with, and react to, each other and the physical environment, as the service proceeds. The potential variability of these actions, reactions and environmental conditions makes this encounter a complex phenomenon to be managed successfully. Therefore, in this chapter, literature relating to participants' involvement in the outdoor adventure leisure service encounter is critically reviewed, to identify the key variables which staff must manage to ensure an appropriate experience for participants. Firstly services are analysed as managed encounters, followed by an evaluation of how particular sources of critical incidents may cause participants to respond emotionally to the outdoor adventure leisure service experience, with their own performance being significant in this. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the extent to which participants in outdoor adventure leisure would be cognitively aware of their expectations and perceptions of watersports experiences.

3.2 Outdoor Adventure Leisure as a Managed Encounter

According to Johnston (1994), operations management is concerned with managing the process of producing goods and services, in other words, managing the delivery system. Because *"Service experiences are the outcomes of interactions between organisations, related systems/processes, service employees and customers"* (Bitner *et al.* 1997:193), management at WW must, therefore, be concerned with managing these interactions. Schmenner (1995) calls such interactions 'service encounters' and essentially uses Sasser *et al.*'s (1982) three causal relationships - service concept, delivery system, service levels - to create his own three-way relationship of the service encounter, using different terms: service task, service delivery system and service standards. The author says that each of the three attributes need to be defined, but should also have added that they must be properly managed to ensure a satisfactory service encounter.

Lovelock (1992c) takes an alternative perspective, stating that three organisational functions which work together to create and deliver a service - marketing, operations and human resources - can be called the 'Service Management Trinity'. He argues that other

functions do not have the same level of direct interaction with customers during the service encounter, having less significance to the production process, and that the three functions must be centred around the customer to be wholly effective. The importance of this framework is to highlight the integration of the functions with each other and with customers. It is useful to distinguish the functions and their key activities from one another, but it is more applicable to larger organisations which operate these functions separately. For a small organisation, where the same people are involved in all of the functions, the separation is artificial. Indeed, where Lovelock (1992c) emphasises the importance of minimising 'interfunctional conflict', such conflict at WW would only exist within the minds of individual employees! However, the 'trinity' does show that the outdoor adventure leisure participant should be the central element of an organisational system geared to producing a service, and that all aspects of that system have an influence on the participant at some time, whether in the back or front office. At WW all staff were in contact with participants in different ways, therefore this centralising of participants in the service should be apparent in employees' behaviour and will be addressed in the next section.

3.3 The Participant in the Outdoor Adventure Leisure Service

The participant must play a physically active part in creating the outdoor adventure leisure service and thus has a significant influence on their own experience of that service, whether consciously or not. However, an important management challenge is to influence each participant's production activity, so that they contribute to their own positive watersports experience. The 'front office' instructor is clearly the key person to do this in personal interactions with participants, which will now be discussed as 'Moments of Truth'.

3.3.1 Moments of Truth in Outdoor Adventure Leisure

The instances where the service participant directly encounters the service system (people or procedures), Carlzon (1987) has called 'Moments of Truth'. He explains that each encounter produces a moment of truth where a customer judges the organisation's performance in serving his/her needs (see also Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 1998; Kandampully et al., 2001; Williams & Buswell, 2003). Voss (2003) calls this 'the experience transaction' of participation in a service and adds that moments of truth can have a positive or negative effect on the quality of the experience. Normann (2000) calls this a 'virtuous circle'; therefore, if it is applied to outdoor adventure leisure, employees' positive actions should encourage a positive reaction from participants, creating mutually positive feelings and a consequent positive service interaction. Clearly the obverse would be true, although Normann does not mention this.

Otto & Ritchie (1996) suggest that this interaction has a degree of emotional charge which determines customers' reactions during the service experience, with Bettencourt & Gwinner (1996) stating that interacting with service staff on the same level is a focal point for evaluation. Wurdinger (1997) emphasises this point specifically in outdoor adventure. Holyfield (1999) then puts this in the context of white water rafting and suggests that the interactive exchange with employees is a key factor in enhancing the participant's experience of the service.

Shemwell *et al.* (1998) go further and propose that in a service with an ongoing dyadic relationship (such as that between outdoor adventure leisure instructors and participants), this interaction encourages a mutual dependence to create the service and strong emotional bonds can form for the service duration. In outdoor adventure leisure, this mutual dependence could be skewed towards participants depending on instructors for their physical and emotional safety, with clear potential for such emotional bonding.

Svensson (2001, 2003) believes that a customer's judgement of a service is based on this interactive process between customer and provider, which affects the expectations of both, and adds that a 'continuous response of approval' can enhance a service employee's performance, yet negative or neutral responses in a service interaction can detrimentally affect the customer's judgement of the service. As Swan and Bowers (1998:63) state, interactions are *"instances of joint activity...interpreting the situation and adjusting to each other..."* and recovering service breakdowns in particular usually involves negotiation, and sometimes humour, between the customer and service employee. In the outdoor adventure leisure service encounter, where participation is necessary, the interactive variables of the encounter would require joint activity, interpretation and adjustment, not simply in service breakdown recovery, but throughout the service process.

Accepting that all moments of truth between an instructor and participants can potentially inform the latter group's evaluation of a service, some moments may be more critical than others in this evaluation. The next section considers the notion of critical incidents as 'critical moments of truth'.

3.3.2 Critical Moments of Truth

Extending the notion of customer participation in the service, Bitner *et al.* (1985) have developed the theory that critical incidents in a service have a significant impact on a customer's satisfaction. The critical incident principle was first introduced by Flanagan (1954) in his research with the U.S. Air Force and has since been adapted to analyse service consumers' experiences. A critical incident is one that *"...deviates significantly,*

either positively or negatively, from what is normal or expected" (Edvarsson, 1992:18), and can *"...cause customers to distinguish very satisfactory service encounters from very unsatisfactory ones"* (Bitner *et al.* (1990:17). Given that some moment of truth service interactions may be insignificant, as they are often expected by customers, a critical incident could thus be called a 'Critical Moment of Truth', which would influence a customer's evaluation of the service. Howat & Murray (2002) argue that understanding critical incidents in sport and leisure enables managers to improve the quality of their service provision. It is important that management and employees are able to identify and manage critical incidents to a positive outcome.

Studies of critical incidents tend to assume that they can be recounted in rich detail and thus, cognitively evaluated. This cognitive evaluation issue and its limitations are discussed later in Section 3.8. However, a second assumption is that a critical incident only involves a customer's interaction with service employees, reflecting Kandampully & Duddy's (1997) observations on superior service quality. This is a limited view, since Bitner *et al.* (1997) later propose that interaction with the service employees *or* service process can create a critical incident. Alternatively, Wels-Lips *et al.* (1998) suggest 'other people or objects' instead of the service process and use Lovelock's (1996) four service elements as the 'prime loci' of critical incidents in their research. The authors' results then provide a classification of seven prime loci around which critical incidents can manifest themselves:

1. Contact staff
2. Customer
3. Tangibles
4. Servicescape
5. Other customers
6. Service Organisation
7. External influences.

It would seem that this is a comprehensive treatment; however, the authors acknowledge that the 'external Influences' locus only considers the marketing-controlled environment: those external aspects over which the service organisation can have some degree of influence. They suggest that it may not be worth considering non-controllable influences such as the national economy or the weather, but do not explain this convenient assumption. For completeness, 'external influences' have no such boundary, since non-controllable factors such as the weather could also create critical incidents in outdoor adventure leisure.

An alternative view is that of Edvarsson & Strandvik's (2000:83) study of hotel guests' "...*top of the mind memories of service interaction...*", where they propose four different categories of critical incident, based on their source in the service:

Act - an individual interaction
Routine - procedural/systemic
Structural - tangible service aspects
Strategies - service design and policies

Although these four categories can accommodate Wels-Lips *et al.*'s (1998) seven prime loci, the prime loci provide the service manager with a more extensive analytical framework for identifying potential critical incidents. Despite this, Edvarsson & Strandvik (2000) make an important observation that the criticality of critical incidents needs to be understood more clearly, proposing dimensions of time and situation as for doing this. Whichever dimensions are used, in outdoor adventure leisure the criticality *of individual participants' critical incidents* needs to be understood as individually experienced 'critical moments of truth', where the essence of a critical incident is that it evokes a positive or negative feeling in these leisure participants.

The experience of outdoor adventure leisure participants is atypical of many services, in that it often takes place over a period of days and the participant has both intense, and prolonged exposure to the service system. This can be called an extended service encounter and it is clear that the longer a participant is in that service system, the more scope there is for them to experience critical incidents, or critical moments of truth.

3.3.3 Critical Incidents in the Extended Service Encounter

Arnould & Price (1993) posit that critical incidents in temporally extended encounters have more influence on customers than critical incidents in brief encounter services. De Ruyter & Bloemer (1999) propose that such extended service encounters have three defining elements: the spatial proximity of both service provider and customer, an affective or emotional content and a significant temporal duration. In outdoor adventure leisure each of these elements is apparent, given the personal interaction of participants and instructors, the potentially affective influence of the activity experience and the time that participants spend in the activity. However, the question arises of how to define the minimum temporal limit for this concept and, therefore, when to categorise a service encounter as 'extended'.

Stauss & Weinlich (1997) suggest a research technique that links critical incidents to 'sequential incidents' and follows the process of consumer interaction with the service. In

doing this, the method also considers 'uncritical' incidents and the incident context: a temporally extended service encounter. The importance of critical incidents in extended service encounters is underlined by Voss (2003), who suggests that the potential for achieving customer satisfaction increases as the number of service interactions increases, although, logically, this could also have a negative correlation if poorly managed. Dubé & Menon (2000) take the alternative view that in extended service transactions, customers do not necessarily remember every experience and then analyse each one to appraise their own satisfaction. Rather, that judgement of the service is strongly influenced by peak and final moments, in other words, the critical moments of truth notion proposed here.

The impact of critical moments of truth on participants can be conceptualised using Gray's (1987) much earlier recreation research, which identifies four stressors:

- intensity of the experience;
- social interaction;
- novelty of the activity or environment;
- perceived threats from specific situations.

These stressors can be argued to create critical moments of truth, even if they are not necessarily observable by others. A reaction to the intensity of the experience could be a critical moment of truth, of which the participant only is aware, and which could affect their intrinsic disposition. Therefore, it could manifest itself in a purely private, psychological way, something not explicitly considered by service quality research so far, but which could be incorporated into the 'customer' category of Wels-Lips et al.'s (1998) prime loci.

To conclude this argument it is useful here to integrate the works of Gray (1987) and Wels-Lips et al. (1998), to propose a detailed set of prime loci that provides a framework for understanding critical moments of truth in the outdoor adventure leisure context. The servicescape will include the activity and its environment, but not employees and other customers, as they are included in their own right. 'Other customers' is changed to 'other users', since in the outdoor adventure leisure environment it is possible that anybody could be using similar or adjacent facilities. The servicescape is further refined to 'controllable' and 'non-controllable' items (for example, the weather). Participants' perceptions of their own performance and feelings are included because of the intensity of the experience, and a nine-point classification of sources of critical moments of truth is thus proposed below:

1. Service employees
2. Customer's own actions/performance
3. Customer's changing disposition during the experience
4. Tangibles
5. Controllable servicescape
6. Non-controllable servicescape
7. Other users in the servicescape
8. Service organisation/management
9. Influences of the Marketing Environment

Although these sources may be useful for identifying critical moments of truth, as stated earlier, their criticality resides in outdoor adventure leisure participants' minds. This may vary both between each person and in the mind of the same person at different stages of the service encounter. Participants may adjust the levels of service performance they are prepared to accept, based on their actions, reactions and variable physical environment. For example, there may be an expectation of spending two full days windsurfing on a lake, but if the weather is too extreme the expectation might be altered to spending as much time as possible windsurfing, given the weather conditions. A broad expectation is thus narrowed within what is called a zone of tolerance, and this concept is discussed in the next section.

3.4 Zones of Tolerance

Galloway (1999) notes that expectations are dynamic and can often be adjusted as the consumer goes through the service process, or they simply may not be precise at any stage. This point echoes the assertion by Berry & Parasuraman (1991), Liljander & Strandvik (1993), Zeithaml et al. (1993) and others, that an expectation of a service experience cannot be represented by a singular point on a scale, since customers are unlikely to be able to specify such a mental state. Instead, it is an interval zone, with an upper and lower limit, called the zone of tolerance, which Kasper et al. (1999) define as the extent to which consumers will accommodate heterogeneity in a service. Parasuraman et al. (1994) suggest two zones of tolerance for consumers' expectations: 'desired' performance and 'adequate' performance, where the former is based on an ideal, or excellent standard, and the latter is a more realistic appraisal of what would be acceptable. Rust et al. (1996) also suggest there are different types of consumer expectations of service standards, and that they fall into three categories: will achieve, should achieve and the ideal standard.

In the same vein, Johnston (1995b) summarises the work of various authors on zones of tolerance descriptors and suggests that there are four main zones which follow on from

each other in consumers' pre-performance expectations, namely, minimum tolerable, adequate, desirable and ideal standards. He then continues with his own proposal that there are three zones of tolerance of the outcome:

1. More than acceptable outcome leading to customer delight
2. Acceptable outcome leading to customer satisfaction
3. Less than acceptable outcome leading to customer dissatisfaction

Johnston has added the 'delight' level, but seems to ignore the 'zone of indifference', suggested by Woodruff et al. (1983) and Cadotte et al. (1987), as a neutral outcome. They argue that this state is probably the most common in a service, but do not justify the point. Johnston may be ascribing neutrality to 'satisfaction', but this is not made explicit.

Johnston's descriptors of dissatisfaction, satisfaction and delight, imply that some emotion may be created within the customer, and 'delight' suggests that strong emotions can be created. The following section, therefore, develops the idea that a participant experiences emotions during the outdoor adventure leisure service, with the state of mood on entry into the service as a starting point.

3.5 Participants' Emotional Responses to Services

When an outdoor adventure leisure participant enters a service situation, they do so in some state of mood, which Hanna & Wozniak (2001) suggest is a temporary feeling with unclear determinants. However, they also state that this mood can be changed by the customer reacting psychologically to stimuli in the service, in other words, experiencing emotion, and that a positive mood is more likely to result in a positive attitude towards the service. De Ruyter & Bloemer (1999) add that during an extended service encounter, a positive mood induced by emotional experiences may distract consumers from any phases of dissatisfaction that they experience. In view of this, participants' emotional responses to services are now considered in this section.

The notion of people responding emotionally to their environment is rooted in Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) work, which conceptualises 'environmental psychology', and argues that physical and social stimuli in a person's environment directly affect their emotional state, influencing subsequent behaviour. The authors propose a framework for studying this, where emotional responses can be analysed using the three dimensions of 'pleasure', 'arousal' and 'dominance' (PAD), either positively or negatively. Pleasure is a self-reported feeling of happiness, arousal is a physiological state on a continuum between sleep and 'frantic excitement', and dominance relates to a feeling of freedom or constraint to act in different ways.

The previous discussion of zones of tolerance has suggested that an outdoor adventure leisure participant's private feelings about that service would be an important factor in their overall service evaluation. To emphasise this point, Hui & Bateson (1991) explain that the consumer's service experience includes the emotional feelings developed during the service encounter, which Schneider & Bowen (1995) suggest is an emotional contract the consumer makes with the service provider.

Diener (1992) asserts that satisfaction is a purely emotional response to a service experience and, more specifically to leisure, Beard & Ragheb (1980) find that satisfaction with a leisure experience is (simply) the positive emotional feelings generated by an individual as a result of their engaging in a leisure activity. The correlation is suggested that increased positive feelings represent increased satisfaction with the service, whereas Dubé & Menon (2000) more recently find that where customers can attribute negative emotions about the service to either their own performance or non-controllable variables in the service situation, satisfaction with the service and provider can be positively influenced. This is due to the customer accepting honestly that the service provider has no control over these variables, rather than looking for other causes to blame for their negative feelings. Two examples of this in outdoor adventure leisure could be a participant's own inability to develop their physical skills, or extreme weather conditions, where an instructor in each case makes particular efforts to mitigate against a poor service experience for participants.

According to Abrahams (1986), the leisure experience is spontaneous and unrehearsed and in the outdoor adventure leisure context, the adventure experience is argued by Mortlock (1994) to be purely a state of mind and being. However, Tawse & Keogh (1998) state that physiological changes occur in the body during active leisure, suggesting that adventure leisure is both a state of mind and body. Holyfield (1999) demonstrates that the emotions of novice white water rafters is heightened in the experience due to their bodies being an integral part of that experience.

The physiological changes alluded to by Tawse & Keogh are well documented in the field of neurochemistry and are summarised by Schueller (2000), who explains that extreme emotion causes a surge in adrenalin, with its associated effects. Any unusual exertion or crisis situation, such as an adventure leisure experience, triggers hormone activity in the body, which releases adrenalin into the bloodstream and causes the heart to beat harder and faster. This consequently increases blood flow around the body and the airways of the lungs dilate to enable a higher oxygen intake. In addition, an endorphin called dopamine is released into the blood and the result of this body activity is a temporary rush

of energy and enhanced mental alertness, with the dopamine stimulating a feeling of pleasure, which is different for everybody.

The physiological and psychological facets of the adventure experience can be seen from this explanation, where the former is an antecedent of the latter. However, this thesis is concerned with the process of service evaluation as a social science construct and, whilst acknowledging the physiological antecedent, does not seek to explore that strand.

As outdoor adventure leisure services can create emotions in participants, these emotions need to be described.

3.6 Descriptors of Emotional Responses to Services

Voss (2003) states that the result of an exceptional service experience can cover a range of emotions, from exhilaration to fear. Oliver (1993) takes the view that satisfaction can be explained using emotional descriptors, which relate directly to what an outdoor adventure leisure participant might experience during that service. The author lists the descriptors as Interest, Joy, Anger, Disgust, Contempt, Shame, Guilt, Sadness and Fear.

These descriptors of feelings in a service experience are not fully under conscious control. They are the *consequence* of a service transaction, rather than the contributing elements that other researchers have focused on. Therefore, a service provider must consider how these feelings are being induced. In addition, only two of these descriptors suggest a positive emotion (interest and joy), whereas the other seven all portray a negative emotion, thus skewed towards dissatisfaction. However, Oliver (1993) states that positive and negative experiences are not necessarily inversely correlated, adding that positive affect can have a more significant influence than negative affect, but he concludes that their asymmetry is not understood.

Liljander and Strandvik's (1997) study alternatively adopts Izard's Differential Emotions Scale (DESII) of human emotions and reduces them from ten to seven emotions resulting from a service experience: Happy, Hopeful, Positively Surprised, Angry, Depressed, Guilty and Humiliated. They state that goal-directed emotions typically influence satisfaction, since these focus on the outcome of the service, but that emotional reactions which are not goal-directed have a lesser effect. The authors further assert that although some negative emotion may be tolerated in a consumer's overall evaluation, in their study the strongly negative emotions of Anger and Humiliation, which were directly attributable to the service provider, influenced satisfaction more significantly than any positive emotion. As with Oliver's work, this also contains more negative (four) than positive (three) descriptors and thus reinforces his comment on their lack of symmetry.

Anderson (1995, 1996) in the results of her study of youth watersports participation in the UK, finds that the dominant contributions to participants' enjoyment of their experiences were feelings of exhilaration/excitement, fun/enjoyment, freedom and novelty (note that Anderson herself combines the first two feeling sets). These responses demonstrate that participants' emotional feelings play the most significant role in their overall evaluation of the service. The descriptors used here by participants can be seen to represent 'hedonic consumption' experiences of leisure (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), where high levels of emotional intensity and new feelings exist in the experience, which provide joy from, and/or absorption in, the activity. Arnould & Price (1993:41) also say that these emotional outcomes of a such a service are "*...embedded in relationships between customer and service provider*". These works reflect Kleiber *et al.*'s (1986) assertion that adolescents seek leisure experiences that always provide them with a feeling of pleasure and can be derived either with or without physical demand or effort. Likewise, MacDonald's (1995) study of primary school canoeists found that enjoyment and fun were the drivers for participation and, obversely, the lack of these was the key reason for ceasing participation. In addition, he argued that feedback on performance and interaction were critical for building children's confidence and further enabling their enjoyment and fun.

Although using similar terminology in part, none of these authors has drawn on Mehrabian & Russell's (1974) notion of PAD, or its developments, to conceptualise further these descriptors of emotion, which may have been helpful. Russell (1980) develops PAD into a 'Circumplex Model of Affect', where he uses Pleasure-Displeasure and Arousal-Sleepiness (PA) as bipolar categories, ignoring the Dominance category. Later related studies include that by Morris (1995), who initially asserts the value of a graphic representation of all three PAD scales, but only analyses Pleasure and Arousal in his findings. Sherman *et al.*, (1997) then also acknowledge PAD, but suggest that Dominance is of little value in retail environment studies. Wirtz & Bateson (1998) integrate the Circumplex Model with the disconfirmation principle to study satisfaction with homebanking facilities and propose that the emotion evoked by disconfirmation can be identified by using the PA scales. However, Wakefield & Blodgett's (1999) research into hedonic sports consumption concludes that such consumers generally seek arousal or pleasure, without acknowledging that both are possible using the multi-dimensional PAD or PA frameworks.

Extending Russell's (1980) work, Bagozzi *et al.* (1999) suggest alternative descriptors of the Pleasure and Arousal categories: Happy-Sad and Nervous-Relaxed, respectively. This illustrates that a participant could be simultaneously 'happy and nervous', or

33

'unhappy and relaxed', emotional states which would seem contradictory. However, describing these states in Russell's language as 'pleased and aroused' or 'displeased and sleepy' lacks clarity and Bagozzi *et al.*'s terms may be more helpful for describing outdoor adventure leisure emotions.

It has been argued that a participant's performance in a service induces emotions about their experience (Dubé & Menon, 2000). The next section considers the notion of a participant developing personal competence in the outdoor adventure leisure service.

3.7 Participants' Own Performance in Outdoor Adventure Leisure

Most service quality literature focuses on the performance of the service organisation and its employees in providing a service, whilst ignoring the role the customer plays as co-producer in creating that service (Bateson, 2002). It seems logical, therefore, that in services where such co-production is important to the process and outcome, the customer's own performance should also be considered as a contributing agent to service quality. Specifically in the leisure and tourism context, Laurent & Kapferer (1985) and Dimanche *et al.* (1991) suggest that the degree of customer involvement in the service is an important antecedent to satisfaction. Therefore, in outdoor adventure leisure, it can be assumed that the degree of involvement might vary. For example, at any activity centre organising watersports, it is possible that for two similar sailing courses, the level of participation could be different, measured by the absolute time spent 'doing' the activity, rather than learning about the principles, or watching others where equipment might be shared. Kellogg *et al.* (1997) state that this determinant should be considered by leisure and tourism service providers as a variable to be managed carefully. These authors go further and assert that satisfaction could be directly proportional to the amount of effort expended in the service by a participant.

Williams (1989) considers both process and outcome. He suggests that if learning from a recreation experience is an important motive for participation, a participant is more likely to be satisfied if they have clear markers in the service process, where they can identify personal development through improving their own performance in some way. He also considers the service outcome in terms of goal attainment, where participants learning through a recreation experience will be more satisfied if the final learning goal is achieved. In outdoor adventure leisure, participants typically aim for a particular level of competence; therefore achieving this may have a significant influence on their service evaluation.

Ryan (1995) develops this competence argument, saying that in leisure and tourism the importance of the activity for self-enhancement should be considered by participants,

34

since their needs and expected outcomes can impact on overall satisfaction. This reflects Botterill's (1987) assertion that in leisure and tourism, satisfaction is often created by defining and developing the self. Alternatively, Varley & Crowther (1998) suggest the notion of a double life 'spare time selves', where the leisure experience can transform someone into a new persona whenever participating in that leisure form.

Ryan (1995) also introduces the intervening variable of 'skill' in an activity, as a function of the participant's innate ability, experience and learning development, which if not fully utilised can induce frustration from *"...a sense of helplessness arising from an inability to exercise control."* (p47). Similarly, Hui & Bateson (1991) observe that where a consumer perceives that they have more control of a service, a more pleasant experience is likely to ensue. Lentell & Morris (1995) then add to the argument that skilled service consumption (see also Gratton & Taylor, 2000) often leads to increased effort by the participant in a leisure activity, which in turn can maximise their enjoyment.

Canziani (1997) suggests that the competency of customers in a service is a function of their knowledge, skills, motivation and the service process tasks they undertake. Priest & Baillie (1987) also use the term 'competence' to summarise the synergy of skill, knowledge, attitude, behaviour, confidence and experience, which brings satisfaction when used to avoid risk or preventing some form of loss - physical or mental - in an outdoor adventure activity. This is a more comprehensive treatment and moves beyond tangible, measurable skill to include the (less tangible) attitude and confidence, which can change in outdoor adventure, even from minute to minute. Therefore, it can be argued that if a participant in outdoor adventure leisure is able to synergise 'competent' service consumption, by learning to exercise control and prevent any form of loss, they will be more satisfied with the experience. However, Ewert (1989) and Holyfield (1999) both note that novice participants in outdoor adventure often underestimate the physical and emotional demands that are placed on them, through the necessary degree of engagement with the activity.

The dimension of exercising competence in an outdoor adventure activity has been used by a number of authors in the development of experiential theoretical concepts, culminating in Martin & Priest's (1986) 'Adventure Experience Paradigm'.

3.7.1 The Adventure Experience Paradigm

Ellis (1973) posits that the human brain needs on-going stimulation, and that an adventurous experience provides such stimulation in a fixed period of time, resulting in a mental state of arousal. Adventure leisure experiences can create high states of arousal, due to the brain receiving large amounts of information in a short period of time, and there

is a level of 'optimal arousal' at which an adventure leisure participant's competence in the activity is maximised. Where the participant is over-aroused this competence is reduced; likewise under-arousal (or boredom) also reduces a participant's competence. The principle is that people need appropriate conditions to perform at their best and such conditions differ with the environment and the individual. Ellis' work has a clear link with Mehrabian & Russell (1974) and Russell (1980) (discussed earlier), but neither of these authors acknowledges this.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 2000) then uses the dimensions of 'skill to perform an act' and 'opportunity to exercise this skill at its limits' in a study across a broad cross-section of society, which included rock climbers. His findings suggest that people can experience a state of being he called 'flow', when completely immersed in a chosen activity. Flow is conceptualised as the balance between the limits of one's skill and the opportunity to perform an act. In a study which focuses on the adventure experience, flow is explained as being a totally engrossing experience in an adventure setting, which exists without worry or boredom, and has intrinsic rewards that make the experience autotelic: so enjoyable, it must be repeated (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

In a state of flow, the two dimensions are balanced; where competence is high and opportunity is low, boredom exists, but where competence is low but opportunity is high, anxiety exists. A flow experience in an adventure activity involves a merging of physical action and consciousness, where one has a heightened awareness of the inner self, but a lessened sense of the physical self in that activity. This agrees with Samdahl & Kleiber's (1989) discussion of Csikszentmihalyi's earlier work, which suggests that there can be a loss of self-awareness in a leisure experience and they cite Mead's (1934) 'I' as a driver of this. The 'I' is a spontaneous expression of the self in response to the immediate environment, whereas the 'Me' views and evaluates the self as objectively as possible. This separation of the psychological self provides outdoor adventure leisure managers with a further challenge: to manage participants and their immediate environment, such that the 'I' acts to co-produce an enjoyable experience, in order for the 'Me' to make a rational evaluation of that experience.

Mortlock (1994) makes use of the personal competence dimension from 'optimal arousal' and 'flow', but compares that with risk perceptions and fear. He proposes four stages of an adventure experience, starting with play, where there is a high level of competence and low perceived risk and little fear, moving through adventure, frontier adventure and mis-adventure, as perceived risk and fear increase and associated competence decreases. However, mis-adventure has a wide range of consequences for participants, from simply failing to be able to do something, to a fatal injury. The Adventure Experience

Paradigm (Martin & Priest, 1986; Priest & Baillie 1987; Priest & Gass, 1997) also considers adventure in terms of the competence and risk dimensions, but does not acknowledge feelings of fear. This concept is synthesised from the earlier theorists discussed here, where their 'peak adventure' is similar to Mortlock's (1994) 'frontier adventure', analogous to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 2000) 'flow' and can be assumed to occur only when a state of 'optimal arousal' is present (Ellis, 1973). However, the use of the word 'paradigm' in the title seems inappropriate for what is essentially a framework for conceptualising psychological experiences.

The role of management and staff in outdoor adventure leisure, therefore, is to manipulate participants' perceptions of risk, but keep real risk low or at an acceptable level, and it must be 'custom fit' to each individual in their group watersports activity (Priest & Gass 1997). However, Rosman (1989) argues that the adventure experience can be destroyed by too much control and manipulation. Therefore management and service staff must achieve the correct balance for every individual, since, as Ewert (1989) suggests, 'peak experience' has a positive effect on the quality of the outdoor adventure experience.

Developing the Adventure Experience Paradigm further, Carpenter & Priest (1989) have produced a typology of adventure participants, using the same dimensions of competence and risk, and adding the potential gap between perception and reality, to create nine types of adventurers. Risk or competence can be under-perceived, correctly perceived, or over-perceived, and the resulting types range from being naïve and innocent to fearless and arrogant. The ideal adventurer type is astute, where both competence and risk are correctly perceived, but if outdoor adventure leisure organisations are manipulating risk perceptions, this type is unlikely to be represented in people trying watersports activities for the first time, such as those being studied in this research.

Priest & Gass (1997) illustrate this typology with kayaking as an example of an adventure activity, where a higher perceived competence will positively affect a participant's personal satisfaction, provided it is correctly perceived. In addition, if this perception is reinforced by significant others, such as fellow participants, then the feeling of satisfaction and pleasure with the experience is reinforced. However, the authors could have included the kayak instructor as a significant other in this scenario, since this employee is providing the watersports service and has a direct and significant influence on participants' experiences.

Priest & Gass (1997) also state the converse in this kayaking example, where an inability to perform can negatively influence participants' satisfaction. This could result from the

kayaker's own performance, or be a result of external influences, for example, a breakdown in the service delivery system. Therefore, in line with Dubé & Menon's (2000) observation, the internal attribution of such failure by a participant would not necessarily lead to dissatisfaction with the provider-managed aspect of the service, only with their own performance in co-producing the service. However, attributing failure to external, provider-managed, sources would clearly lead to dissatisfaction with that provider's service.

In summary, outdoor adventure leisure providers enable participants to co-create their own service experience, through developing competence in a potentially dangerous outdoor adventure environment, which is unique in services consumer behaviour. As a result, it presents a highly complex challenge to management, to ensure that participants are able to contribute to their own satisfaction through developing their 'skilled consumption' of the service, but also to attribute this directly to instructors who help them to develop these skills.

A further aspect of the outdoor adventure leisure offering is that it is not simply a service to be consumed through developing competence, but an experience which may add value to a participant's life through the experience of trying to develop that competence, to whatever level they choose. The next section will explore how adventure leisure could be considered to add such value, whilst acknowledging that novice participants at WW would not necessarily be seeking this outcome.

3.7.2 Meaningful Adventure Leisure Consumption

Dimanche & Samdahl (1994) argue that in leisure and tourism, consumers both consume a service and express themselves in some way. Prior to this a number of authors have commented on the latter notion of self-expression. For example, Neulinger (1981a) asserts that taking responsibility for one's actions in leisure can have a lasting impact on an individual's personal traits, and Cooper (1989:66) states that leisure allows the individual's personality *"...to unfold in a self-expressive way"*. Cross (1993) suggests that the consumption of goods and services can give meaning to an individual and Godbey (1994) and Torkildsen (1999) agree that leisure participation can establish meaning to people through their own actions. Haywood *et al.* (1995) observe that people can seek identity through leisure, Kelly (1996:45) states that leisure provides the *"...freedom to become something more than we have yet become"* and Shivers & de Lisle (1997:104) more grandly assert that *"...the individual can develop complementary modes of behaviour that help to develop a complete person."* Finally, Bull *et al.* (2003) usefully summarise that self-fulfilment can be achieved through exercising individual freedom in leisure.

Outdoor adventure leisure in particular provides an opportunity for self-expression and development, according to Priest & Gass (1997). In adventure leisure, de Ruyter & Bloemer (1999:321) give the example of deep sea diving lessons which, they argue, have a *"sustained and expressive content"*. The latter attribute helps customers to realise personal values, or 'instrumental goals', which give meaning to the service experience. These authors state that most services research ignores how a service experience can be instrumental in developing a customer's own values which, according to Oliver (1996), make a positive contribution to their life.

This gap in research is summarised by Barrett & Greenaway's (1995:31) statement on young people's outdoor adventure leisure: *"For many young people, experiences in the outdoors involve a spiritual dimension, which enhances the experience"* and Arnould & Price (1993:34) contextualise the view further for this thesis, that *"Water provides a catalyst for a profound experience for some people..."*, when discussing white water rafting experiences. Finally, Yaffey (1993:9-10) extends these philosophical pronouncements and observes that for participants in outdoor adventure, *"The outdoors is the best provider of value experiences..."* when interacting with the world's values and *"Nature is the ultimate source of all values...not only fundamental, but eternal"*. All of this demonstrates that outdoor adventure leisure participants are not merely consumers of a service, but may seek to express themselves as individuals and develop/attain personal values within that service. Hightower *et al.* (2002) call this notion of the personal relevance of a good or service 'enduring involvement'.

Despite these arguments, Stebbins (1996) and Ruskin *et al.* (2003) distinguish between casual and serious leisure. Consumption of the former provides casual participants with short-term, diversionary, intrinsic rewards (fun), and consumption of the latter can be central to the lives of serious hobbyists, amateurs, and professionals in their career, influencing their lifestyle and self-perceived identity. The participants at WW were novices and in Stebbins' terms their participation could be categorised as casual leisure, seeking fun without deeper meaning, clearly linking to the notion of hedonic leisure (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). However, since the arguments for self-expression are well rehearsed, it has been important to acknowledge their potential relevance to this study.

It is thus unclear whether outdoor adventure leisure participants at WW would deliberately seek to express themselves or attain personal values, or simply engage in casual leisure. Therefore, no clear conclusion can be reached here and primary data are required to inform this discussion in the WW context.

WW participants may have had fully or partially formed expectations of either seeking casual fun or developing personal values, either made explicit or not. Or they may instead have had hopes or aspirations for the service outcome, without clear definitions or boundaries or previous experience on which to formulate clear expectations. This is now developed in the following section, which considers the extent to which an outdoor adventure leisure participant might have clear expectations of that service and whether they could make a cognitive evaluation on this basis.

3.8 Cognitive Evaluation of Services

In order to study participants' perspectives of service quality and satisfaction at WW, it must be assumed that they have some cognition of their expectations and perceptions of the service they experience. Indeed, Edvarsson, (1996:49) states of service consumers: "...what they do not perceive does not exist...". However, there is some debate over the degree of conscious evaluation that a consumer carries out.

Oliver (1980, 1981) and Tse & Wilton (1988) take the view that customers do form clear expectations of a service and, from a reasoned analysis of important elements of that service, make a rational judgement on whether their expectations have been met and this is a key assumption in studies of service quality. See for example, Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, 1991), Zeithaml et al. (1990), and, specifically in the leisure sector, Akan (1995), Augustyn & Ho (1998), Ekinci & Riley (1997), Fick & Ritchie (1991), Gabbie & O'Neil (1996), Wong Ooi Mei et al. (1999), Tawse & Keogh (1998), Tribe & Snaith (1998), Williams (1998).

However, Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) argue that this cognitive model of service consumption is not wholly appropriate, especially in the leisure context. It ignores consumptive phenomena such as emotional responses and playful leisure, where there is no particular outcome, other than the intrinsic satisfaction of engaging in a freely chosen leisure activity. Further, Brown (1989:416) states that "...[outdoor] *recreationalists demand activities, settings, experiences and benefits with varying degrees of consciousness...*", suggesting that we cannot always explicate what we are seeking from an outdoor adventure leisure experience. Fick & Ritchie (1991:5) support this in their study of different tourism sectors, the most relevant here to WW being ski-ing, saying that participants "...*may not internalise their judgements about expectations and perceptions...*" in a way that they can be expressed to others. Cooper & Lockwood (1992) go further, noting that recreationalists rarely dissect their experience, instead, they view it as a whole.

Zeithaml (1981) discusses how consumers seek and use information to make purchase decisions. She suggests that consumers of a service are more likely to seek pre-purchase information from personal sources (word of mouth), because this is the most effective way of determining the likely experience qualities of that service. Such word of mouth information must inevitably be laden with value judgements, therefore Zeithaml's work draws on what Begg *et al.* (1991) term 'normative economics', where consumers make purchase decisions based on value judgements.

Zeithaml adapts Nelson's (1970) and Darby & Karni's (1973) economic classifications of consumer goods and services, and proposes that a consumer's ability to evaluate service attributes depends on the dominance of one of three sets of information-based properties, or qualities:

i.   Search Qualities: service attributes which can be searched for in advance, typically tangible items, such as appearance of staff and facilities.

ii. Experience Qualities: service attributes which can only be specified during or after the service because it is more experience- than facilities-based, typically intangible items relating to the experience.

iii. Credence Qualities: service attributes which a consumer cannot identify because they do not possess the technical knowledge to be aware of the attributes' existence.

She continues that these properties are linked on a continuum of easy/difficult to evaluate, and suggests that most services are high in experience or credence qualities.

Mackay & Crompton (1988:44) extend this idea further by explaining that managed recreation activities *"...due to their intangibility, are low in search properties and high in experience properties..."* and, where a high degree of technical competence is required of the service provider, the activity will have high credence properties. The authors add examples to illustrate this argument and a combination of these properties with examples is summarised in Table 3.1 below.

High in **Search** properties ↓	High in **Experience** properties ↓	High in **Credence** properties ↓
Can evaluate service attributes before entering the service .↓	Can only evaluate service attributes during and/or after the service ↓	Cannot evaluate service attributes, even after the service ↓
Examples: parks maintenance, swimming pools	Examples: special events, day camps	Examples: scuba lessons, rock climbing
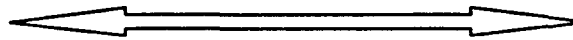
Easy to evaluate ⟸══════════════⟹ **Hard to evaluate**

Table 3.1 Summary of Zeithaml's (1981) and Mackay & Crompton's (1988) service properties and recreation-based examples.

These examples of activities high in credence properties do not fully reflect Zeithaml's suggestion that they are likely to be expert professional services, where a consumer has little technical understanding on which to base an evaluation, for example, a medical diagnosis or legal services. The very processes of scuba diving and rock climbing involve developing skills in these activities, therefore a participant would acquire sufficient technical understanding to evaluate their experience of these activities. However, more appropriate examples are problematic to identify because recreation participants do not rely on technical experts to provide them with a passive experience.

Table 3.1 is a useful framework to analyse the extent to which participants would be able to evaluate service attributes at WW, although it may be difficult to identify which information properties feature most highly in the service without evidence from participants. However, an intuitive analysis based on the literature discussed so far would suggest that although there are some search properties (staff and facilities) and some credence properties (higher level technical attributes which customers would not perceive), it is most likely to be high in experience properties and can only be evaluated during or after the experience of the service.

More than a decade after arguing that a customer judges a service based on expectations compared to perceptions (disconfirmation), Oliver (1993:419) hedges this view and states that forming expectations and comparing them with service performance "...*are conscious judgements that consumers make or don't make"*. It could be argued that Oliver is compromising his earlier stance on cognition, but he seems to be acknowledging here the heterogeneity of service customers. Schneider & Bowen (1995) have a similar, but modified perspective, that service consumers have a 'cognitive schema' of likely

experiences, but are not always aware of their own expectations. The authors also suggest that, following an unsatisfactory service experience, it is not always possible to identify the source of dissatisfaction.

Johnson & Mathews (1997) suggest a related, but alternative idea, that service customers do not like to be dissatisfied and often adjust their expectations or perceptions after the experience to avoid dissatisfaction, either consciously or sub-consciously. Therefore, customers might create expectations *ex-post facto* and the authors recommend that researchers should seek customer expectations prior to the service encounter, to prevent respondents from doing this.

Johns & Howard's (1998:261) study of service quality in restaurants adopts the cognitive stance, stating "...*consumers have a mental checklist of expectations, against which they tick off item quality*". Yet, their study findings contradict this assertion, in that the key attribute of customer delight was that of *unexpected* staff friendliness, which was clearly not on their mental checklist, and was an emotional response to a service interaction. The authors also suggest that episodes, or incidents, in the service can act as signs or icons of quality for consumers, which is supported by Edvarsson & Strandvik (2000:83) in the negative sense, that critical incidents in the service allow consumers to reflect on where their expectation levels "...*have been violated...*", and enable them to explicate these as top of the mind memories of the service interaction.

However, customers may not have had clear expectations to reflect upon, especially if they are first time service users (O'Neill & Palmer, 2003), and Johnston & Lyth (1991) argue that if a service attribute is not expected, but is perceived, the service performance cannot be evaluated with respect to a non-existent expectation. Further, Ekinci & Riley (1997) and Tribe & Snaith (1998) suggest that a customer may even place importance on a service attribute, but not necessarily expect to experience it during the service, which would similarly seem to prevent evaluation using disconfirmation.

Arnould & Price (1993) propose that participants' expectations of 'the extraordinary experience' of white water rafting showed little deliberation and were vague, as they were unsure of what the experience would entail, often because a family member or friend had organised the activity for them. This can be further contextualised by Howard & Madrigal (1990), who find that young people in highly active participant recreation programmes do not necessarily choose what they do themselves. Instead, it is unclear whether the decision is based on the young person's preferred recreation activity, or the convenience of its time and place to their mother, so that her children are safely and constructively occupied when she cannot give them her own time.

Finally, the issue of customer cognition is neatly summarised by Ojasalo (2001), who suggests that consumers may or may not have expectations and they may or may not be aware of them. He introduces a range of expectation types which he calls implicit, precise and fuzzy, together with a second dimension of them being realistic or unrealistic. Firstly, implicit expectations would concern those attributes which are expected to be present as a matter of course, but which would only be noticed if they were missing, and are thus hidden in the consumer's mind. Secondly, precise expectations concern attributes which would both be clearly expected and articulated by the consumer. Thirdly, fuzzy expectations clarify the issue here of cognition: the consumer may have undefined or vague expectations which only become apparent through their own sense that something is wrong, but they do not know what, or that improvement is needed but they cannot say why or how. More importantly, any expectation may be realistic or unrealistic, and Chase & Stewart's (1994) use of the term 'service fail-safing' in this context identifies that the service provider must have mechanisms in place to transform unrealistic into realistic expectations, whilst understanding what realistic expectations are. Ojasalo's (2001) work, although based on professional services, could resonate with any service type, such as outdoor adventure leisure, as it reconciles the different academic views on expectations into a simple typology.

This Chapter has examined services as managed encounters and a list of critical moment of truth sources has been synthesised, which should cause participants to respond emotionally to the outdoor adventure leisure service experience. It has also been acknowledged that participants may not necessarily make a cognitive evaluation of that experience. The next Chapter presents a critical discussion of the imperatives which outdoor adventure leisure management must consider in order to meet participants' needs appropriately.

Chapter Four

Management Imperatives in the Outdoor Adventure Leisure Service Encounter

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter sources of critical moments of truth and the reactions of customers in the managed service encounter were examined, with a concluding discussion on the extent to which outdoor adventure leisure participants may cognitively evaluate their experience. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key management issues in the effective design and delivery of managed outdoor adventure leisure. It firstly introduces service design as an overarching activity and then emphasises the importance of employees to the service. The notion of organisational attitude and behaviour is then developed. The chapter concludes with a framework for organisational practices which, if extant, could result in excellent service quality.

4.2 Service Design

Service management encompasses many and varied elements and Verma (2000) has researched four service industries to investigate their different management challenges, using Schmenner's (1986) Service Process Matrix as an analytical framework. Each industry represents one of Schmenner's service types: fast food (service factory), automobile repair (service shop), retail sales (mass service) and legal services (professional services), and the Service Process Matrix proposes that each service type has its own particular management challenges. The author acknowledges that statistical testing has not been used to derive generalisable patterns, but he uses a simple modal calculation to propose that the priority management challenges that managers face across these industries are:

- maintaining service quality;
- staff recruitment;
- staff training.

In an outdoor adventure leisure organisation, these challenges are heightened by participants having a significant role in co-producing the service and this role must be managed by staff. Also, an instructor will be acting to develop participants' capability to produce and consume the service with increasing competence, with the aim of enhancing their service experience.

From the dynamics of this co-production relationship it can be seen that for outdoor adventure leisure, Verma's list should explicitly include the challenge of managing

customers' experiences during service consumption. In particular, Voss (2003) suggests that customers want to be surprised by the unexpected, as it can improve satisfaction levels. However, he continues to say that managers need to balance spontaneity with control. This is where service design becomes important. Johnston & Clark (2001:208) explain further that the personal interactions in a service must ultimately be left to the employee (allowing scope for Voss' 'spontaneity') but service design is useful for *"...removing some of the uncertainty surrounding the service encounter".* In addition, Gummesson (1994) makes the point that poor service design can have a negative impact on service delivery; therefore design must be well thought through.

The management of an outdoor adventure leisure facility can be problematic because of the uncertainty of risk, the unpredictable physical environment and the variability of participants' skills levels, which Grainger-Jones (1999) states must all be accommodated simultaneously. In particular, according to Donne & Jordan (1997), the added legal imperative of assuring the physical and psychological well being of young people in water-based adventure activities makes the management task extremely complex. This supports Johnston & Clark's (2001:399) observation that complexity in operational management is a result of the *"...number of interrelated parts in an operation").*

Williams & Buswell (2003:96) suggest that the *"...complexity of customer needs..."* alluded to by Grainger-Jones can be addressed by a *"...unified service system..."* and they propose a model of service design and delivery. This creates the 'service concept' and translates that concept into an operational 'service system', which is then implemented in the 'service process' (front line delivery) and finally creates 'service value' for consumers. The service value outcome then re-informs the service concept to close the feedback loop. This model has similarities with the principles of Quality Function Deployment (Ghobadian & Terry, 1995), which derive service quality attributes from customers' needs and use them to establish a specification for service delivery and service outcome.

Alternatively, Mayer *et al.* (2003:621) call this service overview the 'service process', defined as the *"design and control of the customer's experience during service delivery...the steps, tasks and mechanisms...necessary for the service to occur",* which, despite their terminology not aligning with Williams & Buswell (2003), actually summarises the latter authors' proposed model.

Mayer *et al.* (2003) separate their Service Process into two sub-processes:

1. The Process of Service Assembly (PSA), which is structurally fixed by management's design of elements such as the servicescape and use of technology.

2. The Process of Service Delivery (PSD), which is situationally variable due to the interaction of employees and consumers, characterised by the degree of customer participation and the SERVQUAL multi-attributes of employee empathy and assurance.

These two sub-processes relate directly to Williams & Buswell's (2003) Service System and Service Process, but the latter authors' model is a more comprehensive depiction, supported by Staughton & Williams' (1994) assertion that service design and delivery should match market expectations, and O'Neill & Palmer's (2003) concern that the customer should be involved in all stages of service design. In outdoor adventure leisure the participant/employee interaction is significant and must be well managed by the employee to satisfy participants; therefore the employee assumes a central role for both the customer and the service organisation.

4.3 The Importance of Service Employees in Outdoor Adventure Leisure

Service quality has long been considered to be the responsibility of every employee (Johnston, 1987; Leonard & Sasser, 1982) since, according to Ferguson *et al.* (1999:59), where a service entails high customer participation and interaction with employees *"...the service personnel are the service...".* This degree of interaction and participation prevails in managed outdoor adventure leisure and, as Ferguson *et al.* (1999:59) continue, the *"...attitude, language and skills* [of service employees] *are an integral part of the service".* Wirtz & Bateson (1999:82) state further that service quality depends on *"...the technical and social capabilities of service employees...",* which echoes the earlier assertion by Pitt & Jeantrout (1994) that employee skills are a key dimension of expectations management. Also, Akan (1995) says that in the hospitality context, courtesy and employee competence are the most important attributes expected by customers, as they dictate the quality of the employee-customer interaction, and strongly influence the customer's resulting emotional response, or satisfaction.

In a study of consumers actively engaged in a range of 'brief' and 'extended' services, Price *et al.* (1995a) propose five 'indices of service provider performance', which they suggest are key dimensions on which service employees can satisfy consumers:

1. Mutual understanding (demonstrating empathy and understanding by 'connecting with customers' lives').

2. Extra attention (enacting unexpected, unsolicited helpful behaviour).

3.   Authenticity (being genuine and displaying authentic emotions).

4.   Competence (demonstrating the ability to deliver the service).

5.   Minimum standards of civility (treating consumers with a threshold level of respect).

Of these indices, the researchers find that 'extra attention' (2) is most critical in making extended service encounters special for consumers.

From this, it is clear that the service employee in a high interaction service plays a crucial role in assuring the quality of a customer's experience. Fletcher (1971) emphasises this in his work on Outward Bound schools, where success was due to staff-participant relationships. The author gives no criteria for 'success' but does state that the Outward Bound instructor has the most important effect on the quality of participants' experience, in terms of having the patience to instruct and the energy to enthuse participants. Kalisch (1979) agrees with this and emphasises that of all of the elements involved in the Outward Bound situation, the relationship and interaction between instructor and participants is key to the latter group having a positive experience. In addition, Barrett & Greenaway (1995:21) suggest that vital attributes of an effective instructor are being *"...able to empathise with the participants, and communicate a consistent and caring respect for them"*. Finally, Arnould & Price (1993) state that 'boundary open' service encounters, such as those in outdoor adventure leisure, are more like relationships than simple transactions, in that feelings are shared by all who are actively involved in providing and consuming the service. Therefore employee attributes of empathy, responsiveness and assurance are the major influences on satisfaction.

Schneider & Bowen (1995) make a similar observation of service employees in more general terms, where the authors define two key employee roles: information gatekeeper (an instructor's technical role) and impression managers (an instructor's enthusing role). Both Arnould & Price (1993) and Kandampully & Duddy (1997) identify this latter attribute in their respective studies on white water rafting and jet boating. They confirm that an employee with personality who is subsequently taught the necessary technical skills becomes an impresario, whose role is to help *"...participants to transform experiences into treasured memories of personal growth, challenges overcome, teamwork and perseverance..."* which can be called *"...an interactive gestalt."* (Arnould & Price, 1993:24).

To support this *gestalt* assumption, Chandon *et al.* (1997) believe that within the service interaction it is difficult for employees to separate their subjective feelings from objective service delivery. This must be especially true in outdoor adventure leisure, where the

employee-participant relationship has more time to develop. However, for the participant to perceive good service quality, it is necessary for the employee to manage this relationship appropriately. Yaffey (1993) discusses the notion of virtuous conduct by service employees in the outdoor adventure leisure sector and considers 'virtue' in the Ancient Greek sense, that it is in some people's nature *"...to want to make a difference in the quality of their life and the life of others."* (p8). Active pursuit of this 'virtuous conduct', therefore, influences the quality of participants' experience in outdoor adventure activities.

Virtue is also discussed by McNamee (1995), who proposes that, as individuals, we have our own personal ethics for behaviour which have two different bases:

- what one should **do** (rule-based);
- how one should **be** (virtue-based).

Although both of these ethic sets have a place in the way employees manage service interactions and relationships, the virtue-based approach is, by definition (and linguistically), better aligned with virtuous conduct. Gummesson (1991) takes a similar stance in the broader service context and asserts that the 'Love Factor' is a crucial component of service quality, where front line employees must have a caring personality and genuine empathy and compassion for the service consumer. Møller (1987) has a more fundamental view that personal quality begets all quality, in other words, service employees must have intrinsic skills, attributes and values which enable them to deliver a service that meets or exceeds consumers' expectations. In Lytle *et al.*'s (1998) terms, this is a 'service orientation' and they specify helpfulness, thoughtfulness, considerateness and co-operativeness as key employee attributes. Therefore, since leisure participants have heterogeneous expectations of their experiences (Robinson, 1997), standardised interactions in managed outdoor adventure leisure may not be appropriate, nor indeed possible, in such a dynamic and complex service setting.

Outdoor adventure leisure employees, therefore, require the flexibility in the service system to use their intrinsic skills, attributes and values in the most relevant manner or style, to create a *"...comfortable service environment for the customer's satisfaction..."* (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996:4), which is required when the service context is highly involved with complex interactions. Williams & Buswell (2003:197) state further that the style of communication in this encounter should be *"...accommodating, informal and personal..."*, However, Johnston & Clark (2001) caution that it can be stressful for employees to have to display a continuously positive attitude as part of the service ethic. Townsend (2004) also argues that leisure employees have a significant responsibility to ensure positive customer interactions, which requires the expenditure of much emotional

labour. Thus, as O'Neill *et al.* (2000) conclude, service managers must support front-line staff to be able to carry out their roles effectively, and not hinder them with bureaucracy.

4.4 Service Scripts

In the organisational behaviour literature, Goiai & Poole (1984) introduce the idea that employees have a knowledge of behaviours and their sequences in organisational situations, which are internalised as mental scripts to guide future behaviour. These scripts are developed cognitively, but once memorised, are usually implemented unconsciously in familiar situations. A distinction is also made between 'cognitive scripts', which are a mental representation of behaviour, and 'behavioural scripts', which are the observable performances of activated cognitive scripts.

Applying scripting principles to service encounters, Solomon *et al.* (1985) explain that face to face service situations can be complex and unpredictable dyadic interactions between different actors, and that employees develop a script for consistent behaviour relevant to their service role. The authors suggest that employees must exhibit a range of behaviours in order to satisfy customers, but this suggested need for flexibility and adaptability seems to be incongruent with the principle of scripted, consistent behaviour. Lord & Kernan (1987) then develop the argument that employee scripts must often have multiple paths and sequences to achieve goals, suggesting that these scripts must include decision nodes and behaviour options for employees to be flexible and adaptable. Further, the authors state that more experienced employees would have a 'greater repertoire' of scripts and that these can be elaborated on to include new experiences as they occur.

Tansik and Smith (1991) argue that a high total number of scripts to deal with different situations is a feature of services with high levels of customer-induced uncertainty (such as outdoor adventure leisure). They say further that these scripts are typically complex, with many sub-routines, and in meeting customers' demands the service employee needs "*...a near constant level of alertness...*" (p44) in the use of such scripts. Price *et al.* (1995b) add that in an extended service encounter, scripts can be interrupted by uncontrollable and unpredictable events, catalysed either by people or the service environment; therefore, such scripts will be elaborate. However, whilst acknowledging that this is due to unpredictable aspects of the extended service encounter, Price *et al.* could have stated more explicitly that the elaboration in these scripts should allow for contingent decision-making to manage unpredictability.

Other authors develop scripting principles further and suggest that in addition to service employees, customers may also have mental scripts on appropriate interaction behaviour and the language of employee and customer during a service encounter (for example,

Rust *et al.*,1996). Management therefore must understand the expected scripts for different scenes of interaction in the service and anticipate how service design and delivery can ensure they are played out correctly. Indeed, Berry (1995) suggests that services are performances and Varley & Crowther (1998:2) add that in leisure, ritual scripts *"...guide participants in leisure performances."* Voss (2003) asserts that to create significant experiences in leisure provision, the experiences should be managed as theatre, with a stage set, props, actors and sound/light (represented by the outdoor adventure leisure servicescape). A script would therefore seem to be an integral ingredient of the show.

However, Bateson (2002) cautions that the service performance depends upon the extent and quality of the mental script and a novice consumer of the service may have no guiding script. Outdoor adventure leisure employees with novice participants will be both performers with, and scriptwriters for, these participants, and have a very important role in setting their expectations as the service develops. Finally while Williams & Buswell (2003) agree that script theory is helpful for managing service encounters, they suggest that a continuum of script types must exist across different service contexts. This seems a sensible observation, since different services entail different degrees of interaction with people or systems. Therefore, since higher levels of interaction must increase the variability of human reactions, if an outdoor adventure leisure employee is to be given the flexibility to act to meet customer needs, any associated script should not be prescribed, but a multiple-pathed framework for behaviour.

Having discussed scripting in services, the next section seeks to analyse the importance of the pervasive attitudes and behaviours of employees in supporting the service encounter.

4.5 Organisational Attitude and Behaviour to Support the Service Encounter

Service quality is considered to be a strategic management imperative (see for example, Gronroos, 1990; Kasper *et al.*, 1999; Lovelock, 1996 & Rust *et al.*, 1996) and, as such, Gummesson (1990) recommends that an holistic management approach is needed to address this imperative, by engendering quality attitudes to service in every employee. Donne (1997) concurs with this view stating that in the outdoor adventure leisure context, the attitude of the service organisation's management and employees is fundamental for improving service delivery.

Normann (2000:218) argues that an appropriate organisational culture and ethos should ensure that a customer is 'infected' by employees demonstrating a commitment to service quality, because the employees see their own work role emotionally as part of their

lifestyle. Beech & Chadwick (2004:88) define this culture as 'a common psychological framework' to interpret and react to phenomena. Horovitz & Panak (1992) state that patterns, legends, examples and symbols of behaviour reinforce a culture when demonstrated by managers, and act as a behavioural guide for new employees to the organisation. An example of such symbolic behaviour in outdoor adventure leisure could be represented by management working as occasional instructors to exemplify operating standards.

Other authors sharing this view include Berry *et al.* (1994:32), who maintain that such a culture requires employees to be *"...challenged to perform to their potential..."*, and Robinson (1998), who asserts that in the leisure industry a quality culture is more important than standardised practices and procedures, which employees can execute by rote. In unpredictable servicescapes, employees have to react to changing circumstances and it may not be possible to specify standard procedures for every situation (Gummesson, 1990). Therefore, it is important that outdoor adventure leisure employees are encouraged to exercise their judgement to satisfy participants in the most appropriate way and a quality culture would then develop. However, Bendell *et al.* (1993) argue that where this is not the case, a cultural shift would be needed to ensure that everyone in the organisation is working together to meeting customers' needs. In this way, maintaining a critical awareness of service processes becomes a core value within the organisation's culture.

Schneider & Bowen's (1995) study finds that employees who are given flexibility to choose the style in which they deliver a service are typically happier in their work, resulting in a positive impact on customers' experiences. The researchers suggest that informal training and learning the organisational culture is the way in which service managers can give this flexibility, whilst still assuring themselves on behavioural standards. In a similar vein, Gummesson (1990) and Walker (1995) make the observation that managers must recognise that service systems do break down and cannot always deal with the unexpected; therefore, front line employees must be empowered with the flexibility to deal with such circumstances.

The concept of empowerment, to the extent that it is relevant to the context of this thesis, is considered next. To review fully the empowerment literature is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is the notion of empowerment as a permitted, flexible response to customers that is most germane here.

4.6 Employee Empowerment

The concept of employee empowerment has arisen from the management literature on leadership behaviour and the problems associated with democratic management control. For example, Tannenbaum & Schmidt (1973) state that employees often wish to 'exert influence' in management decision-making and managers should, indeed, use the knowledge and experience of these employees to make decisions. The thrust of this article is that managers should define a problem and then delegate employees to seek solutions. Jones & Davies (1991) and Scarnati & Scarnati (2002) likewise view empowerment as mainly delegation, and Eccles (1993) asserts that without reciprocal management disempowerment, employee empowerment is only delegation. He continues that empowerment requires managers to give an employee final responsibility for their own performance.

Lashley (1996) argues that empowerment lacks clear definition, but goes on to suggest that it means staff taking responsibility to delight customers, accepting that this has differing forms from basic participation to fuller involvement and commitment. He also states that empowerment seeks to "...*engage employees at an emotional level.*" (p335), but does not provide illustrative examples to demonstrate this application.

Honold (1997) has conducted a review of employee empowerment literature and finds, like Lashley, that due to its multiple dimensionality, a clear definition is difficult to find. She argues somewhat unhelpfully that the concept should be defined by individual organisations, according to their own needs, but does suggest that the key principle is the sharing of power and control between management and employees, for organisational effectiveness. Criticisms of this principle are that it can be a form of employee manipulation by management, employees may not wish to share such power, employees may be given responsibility without authority, and it may only apply superficially to less important, symbolic organisational activities.

Boshoff & Leong's (1998) research into service recovery in banking and airlines discusses empowerment without defining the concept. However, the authors do suggest that an empowered employee has the discretion to use their initiative and imagination to deal with unexpected situations. Similarly, Hjalager (2001) states that empowered staff take the initiative for raising quality levels in tourism and customers in a critical service encounter will normally experience excellent service if the employee is empowered.

A single, clear definition of empowerment seems elusive, which may explain Beirne's (1999) findings that implementing empowerment initiatives can fail through weak leadership, ambiguous communications over responsibilities and accountable employees

lacking trust in management support. He is critical of the lack of literature-based guidance on defining and operationalising empowerment, but offers no contribution to this, because of what he calls the 'messy complexity' of the subject.

4.7 Empowerment in Context

Mullins (2003:258) observes that hospitality employees must *"...take personal pride in successful service encounters and feel pride and concern for the customer experience"*. Williams & Buswell (2003:196) similarly suggest that leisure, and tourism employees must have *"...a sense of ownership of the service encounter..."* and add that the nature of leisure and tourism service encounters requires empowered autonomous decision-making by employees to manage those encounters (an example of this could be an outdoor adventure leisure instructor assessing participants' abilities). Lashley & Lee-Ross (2003:163) agree but also state that managing the leisure encounter requires different levels of discretion in decision-making and employees must feel *"...a sense of personal autonomy, effectiveness and control..."* in order for them to be effective in satisfying customers. Also, Haksever *et al.* (2000) state that the more complex a service, the more important empowerment becomes. In particular, where the operating environment is uncertain - for example in changing weather conditions – employees need the discretion to be able to respond appropriately. From this observation it is clear that the front-line outdoor adventure leisure employees must use their discretion to manage participants' experiences; therefore they should, as Chernish (2001) states, be trusted with the authority and resources to take responsibility for managing these appropriately.

However, Chernish adds that employee empowerment can only exist through management practice and behaviour, not rhetoric, an approach that Kanter (1994) previously calls integrative management. This encourages innovation and creativity through an egalitarian meritocracy where employees are included in decision-making and given autonomy in their jobs, so that they take responsibility for their work and meet management's high performance expectations. To achieve this level of commitment, trust and communication are vital together with *"...a team-oriented environment, which engenders support and co-operation to solve problems together and generates mutual respect"* (Low, 1998:43). This integrative behaviour, where people are seeking to make a positive contribution to their own and other people's lives, shows that empowering employees is consistent with the principle of virtuous conduct in adventure leisure, in this case, virtuous conduct by management.

In order to develop and maintain an empowering, service-oriented culture, where *"The stronger the culture...the easier it will be to give consistent service to customers"* (Horovitz & Panak, 1992:21), organisations must invest in training their employees and

management (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996), since this ensures that all those trained should understand the shared cultural values and can commit to them. To support this, Green and Stevens' (1999) study identifies that employees at one leisure centre rated induction and in-service training as the most important guidance for being able to do their job effectively, itself an indicator of the shared value of being committed to working effectively. Also, Robinson (2004) suggests that leisure employees should be supported through their initial induction phase by a 'buddy' colleague, because they would need guidance to, according to Schein (1992:13), *"...decipher the norms and assumptions that are operating..."*. The buddy would have an important role here in determining how fully the new employee embraced organisational norms and assumptions, since Belbin (1998) warns that discrepancies can exist between people's stated values and their actual behaviour.

This induction is especially apposite when considering Witt & Muhlemann's (1994) argument that the traditional concept of formal training to develop technical skills and understanding is insufficient for leisure and tourism employees. They state that good inter-personal skills, competence and an appropriate attitude to exercise judgement during a service interaction are needed. Management should, therefore, screen new employees at the recruitment and selection stage for personal characteristics and the attitude to exercise empowered discretion in their intended role (Kelley, 1993). Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (1998) take this further and state that in order to take responsibility to respond to customer needs in an empowered service culture, employees need to have the personal attributes of flexibility, a tolerance of ambiguity, the reflexive ability to adjust their behaviour in different situations and an empathy for customers, with empathy being the most important attribute and clearly linking to the notion of virtuous conduct.

The limited time available to develop these intrinsic skills and attitudes is an important issue in outdoor adventure leisure, since many staff are employed on temporary or seasonal contracts. Staff turnover could thus constrain management's efforts to acculturate these employees and a more transient, non-committal attitude could develop. Camison (1996) recognises this and recommends that to achieve high quality service, organisations should try to keep temporary and seasonal staff for as long as possible, since such staff recruited for short periods can display little empathy towards customers, who will notice the behaviour (Senior, 1992). In addition, poor communication channels between management and staff can have the same effect and, in extreme cases, employees can *"...become more loyal to the customer than the organisation."* (Senior, 1992:47). If this leads to a satisfied customer, then, in the short run, management may not be concerned or even aware of such behaviour. However, in the long run, a

disaffected employee can be problematic and have a detrimental effect on the organisation's service performance.

Effective internal communication throughout an organisation is an essential element of a culture which encourages high service quality (Cooper & Lockwood 1992), and it demonstrates that employees, as well as customers, are respected by management (Horovitz & Panak, 1992). This, then, is the conduit through which management should explicate its views on quality attributes and performance standards, so that staff do not make their own subjective, and potentially incorrect, interpretation of these. In this way, and with appropriate support systems, management can guide employees, both technically and personally, to nurture organisational goals. In a small organisation, the management team could do this through being a *"...visible and active ingredient of daily operations..."* (Kandampully & Duddy, 1997:223), enabling them to communicate more directly with staff.

Normann (2000) also recommends that managers should adopt a high profile, since there are many platforms from which they could communicate. For example, Schein (1992) suggests that deliberate role modelling emphasises management's desired culture. Also, Honold (1997) states that in a culture of empowerment, appropriate employee behaviour is encouraged by role modelled leadership behaviour, which Goiai & Poole (1984) believe to be very influential.

By maintaining a higher profile in this way, managers can also gain a better awareness of customer expectations and perceptions of a service. Williams' (1998) study finds that operational staff are more critical of service performance than their managers, suggesting that they have a clearer understanding of these at the consumer interface, and Augustyn & Ho (1998:74) reinforce this with their study, stating:

> *"Management think they know what the expectations of their customers are...In most cases, managements' perceptions of customers' expectations is different from real expectations of the customers".*

4.8 A Framework for Effective Services Management

To conclude this chapter, Lytle *et al.*'s (1998) research with senior executives across twelve service industries recommends that an 'organizational service orientation' is a way of achieving effective service performance. They explain this approach as the distinctive organisational practices – including empowerment - and employee attitudes and behaviours which result in excellent service quality. The organizational service orientation requires management attention to ten key aspects of organisational behaviour (SERV*OR dimensions), separated into the four categories of 'servant leadership practices', 'service

encounter practices', 'human resource management practices' and 'service system practices' (see Figure 4.1 below):

Servant Leadership Practices	Service Encounter Practices
Servant leadership – *managers leading by example.* Service vision – *a clear strategic vision driven by management.*	Customer treatment – *positively influencing customer perceptions of the service.* Employee empowerment – *able to exercise discretion to meet customer needs.*
HRM Practices	Service System Practices
Service training – *improving employee skills, especially customer interface skills.* Service rewards – *appropriate recognition and reward of employee performance.*	Service failure prevention – *proactive practices to avoid service failure.* Service recovery – *effective responses to recover service failure.* Service technology – *how it is used to create customer value.* Service standards communications – *standards understood by all employees.*

Figure 4.1 Key aspects of organisational behaviour (adapted from Lytle et al., 1998:464).

Despite this comprehensive range of aspects, Lytle *et al.* (1998) conclude that the list should be extended to include values and beliefs. However, this cultural underpinning should be implicitly engendered by the service vision and servant leadership behaviour, thus pervading all aspects of the organisation and not identified as a singular aspect.

There are a number of limitations to the categorisation and implied priority of these ten elements. A more coherent analytical framework of eight organisational aspects without meta-categorisation would be:

1. Service vision.
2. Servant leadership, incorporating standards setting and communications.
3. Employee empowerment in customer treatment.
4. Service failure prevention
5. Service recovery.
6. Service technology.
7. Service training.
8. Service rewards.

Firstly, an organisation's vision should be the starting point for its culture formation (Schein, 1992); therefore 'service vision' should be the initial item to consider. Secondly,

management should establish and communicate standards (Normann, 2000) through 'servant leadership', rather than through an impersonal system. There is no explicit SERV*OR dimension of 'setting service standards'; therefore it should be integrated with 'service standards communications' within the 'servant 'leadership' aspect. Finally, it has been argued above that employee empowerment should lead to an improved customer experience in the service encounter (Lashley & Lee-Ross, 2003); therefore the aspects of 'employee empowerment' and 'customer treatment' should be considered together. The remaining five aspects of 'service recovery', 'service technology', 'service training' and 'service rewards' all remain discrete as Lytle *et al.* suggest.

The key imperatives for outdoor adventure leisure management are service design, staff recruitment and a culture of empowering employees to exercise discretion in satisfying customers. In the next chapter, different academic perspectives of service quality and satisfaction are discussed and a relationship is proposed between the two concepts for a clearer understanding of their meaning. That relationship is not empirically tested in this thesis, but should primary data support its existence, this will be acknowledged. Frameworks for understanding, and the different attributes of, service quality, are also considered.

Chapter Five
Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the management imperatives of the complex outdoor adventure leisure service were discussed. This chapter seeks firstly to establish that these imperatives for managing outdoor adventure leisure experiences must be considered from participants' perspectives. The relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality is then reviewed, since a conclusion on the arguments of this continuing academic debate may inform this study. Different concepts and attributes for understanding the application of service quality and satisfaction principles are then reviewed to identify an analytical framework, which is refined in Chapter Six to inform primary data gathering and analysis.

5.2 The Customer Perspective of the Service Experience

Irons (1994) states that concentrating on the customer's experience is a strategic issue for service organisations and Robinson (1997) draws on earlier literature to highlight the importance of a customer-orientation when implementing a total quality culture in public leisure services. Williams & Buswell (2003:47) suggest further that a customer-orientation is appropriate in the leisure and tourism sector, where *"...customers are central not only to the organisation but also to all aspects of the operational procedures"*.

However, Chase (1978) notes that a high customer contact service type (such as managed outdoor adventure leisure) is more difficult to control than a low contact service, due to the greater time spent by the customer in the service production system. Lovelock (1992a) then identifies the key service variable as intangible human responses from service provider and customer as the service proceeds, and asserts that this is where quality management problems exist for service managers.

According to Canziani (1997) and Johnson & Mathews (1997), employee discretion (variability of employee behaviour) in service delivery is anathema to quality. Therefore standards and procedures are put in place to control service delivery, but the problem of such standardising is that during the service process service personnel can then lose *"...their spontaneity and flexibility to address individual customer needs..."* (Rust *et al.*, 1996:9). Therefore, in trying to standardise employee behaviour at the customer interface, managers can constrain employees' opportunity to act to meet customers' needs. As Gummesson (1991) argues, service quality cannot simply be the output of a rational, logical and impersonal production system. This is particularly true in outdoor adventure

leisure, where the customer/service employee interaction is almost continuous and participants actively contribute to their own satisfaction (Bitner *et al.*, 1997) in simultaneously producing and consuming their service experience.

Edvarsson & Mattsson (1993) assert that it is crucial to understand this service experience to be able to understand service quality. Becker (1996) adds that taking the customer's perspective of service quality is the commonest approach used by the services marketing discipline, because service quality is a perception which customers evaluate subjectively, relative to their individual wants and needs. Otto & Ritchie (1996) further underscore this point by suggesting that managers in leisure and tourism need to understand customers' subjective reactions and feelings when designing and delivering their service package.

However, Cooper and Lockwood (1992) and Ross (1993) observe that in leisure and tourism, 'good service' is not simply the actions and behaviour of the service provider, but the way in which customers perceive and interpret them. This view is supported by Knutson (2001). More specifically in the outdoor adventure leisure context, Williams (1989) suggests that the interpretation of such behaviours is subjective, where people respond very differently to a similar experience and therefore create their own individual perceptions. Kandampully & Duddy's (1997) white water jet boating study supports this, finding that the key quality feature was the emotional differences experienced by customers in all interactions with its employees.

This argument for a customer-oriented perspective toward service provision can be concluded by Faché's (2000) observation that service customers have increasingly informed and sophisticated needs and wants; therefore service employees must consider the customer's perspective if they are to perform effectively.

Two key terms are used in services literature when conceptualising service performance, those of satisfaction and service quality. However, because there is no real consensus on their meaning and potential relationship, the next two sections firstly establish a broad definition of each concept and then critically review these different perspectives with respect to each other. A new relationship between quality and satisfaction is suggested for a clearer understanding of the concepts, and, although the relationship is not directly tested in this thesis, any supporting empirical evidence will be acknowledged in the Presentation and Discussion of Results.

5.3 The Concepts of Satisfaction and Service Quality

According to Galloway (1999), much academic literature uses the terms 'service quality' and 'satisfaction' rather loosely around the general theme of quality and he notes that there are differing definitions and terminology in use. Arguments exist on the extent to which they differ and these are summarised by Brown *et al.* (1994:34) who state, *"While service satisfaction and service quality are clearly related, researchers do not share common definitions of the terms"*. This is reinforced by Johnston (1995a). Further, Lindquist & Persson (1993) even argue for continued ambiguity in this, saying that concepts and meanings should be clearly articulated for each individual service situation, as no two services are alike. Articulating such terms of reference is sensible, but simply perpetuating ambiguity, rather than encouraging agreement and coherence, seems counter-productive to services management research. An example of such unhelpful ambiguity is demonstrated by Mattsson (1992) who states that satisfaction results from expectancy disconfirmation, as one element of overall service quality. However, he then argues in Edvarsson & Mattsson (1993), that *service quality* stems from expectancy disconfirmation. The word 'satisfaction' is inexplicably avoided in this later, joint work.

In a leisure context, Beard & Ragheb (1980:20) state that satisfaction is *"...the positive perceptions or feelings which an individual forms, elicits, or gains as a result of engaging in leisure"*. Crompton & MacKay (1988) suggest that satisfaction in recreation is a psychological outcome for a participant, relating pre-consumption expectations with perceptions of the recreational experience i.e. disconfirmation. Williams (1989) also has a similar view of satisfaction in recreation, in that it relates to the effectiveness of the service in meeting participants' needs, and is perceived directly by the participant, or, in Diener's (1992) terms, satisfaction resides in an individual's experience. Taking kayaking as an example of outdoor adventure leisure, Mortlock (1994:112) reflects on his own experiences of the activity, where he talks of kayak trips where he had what he called peak experiences beyond what he had expected and found himself *"...intrinsically satisfied..."* with *"...the deepest feeling of peace and harmony..."*.

'Satisfaction' in the outdoor adventure leisure context can be summarised as an intrinsic, affective reward, subjectively experienced by the adventure leisure participant, a view supported by Haywood *et al.* (1995) in describing leisure satisfaction.

'Quality' in the recreation experience predates the more classical consumer research literature included above. For example, Bultena & Klessig (1969) make the same assertion that the 'quality' of the experience depends on the congruence of a participant's aspirations and their perception of the experience. La Page (1983) agrees and uses the disconfirmation terminology of meeting or exceeding consumers' expectations, later

proposed by Berry & Parasuraman (1991), Gronroos (1990) and Parasuraman *et al.* (1985, 1988, 1991).

To summarise these arguments, service quality in outdoor adventure leisure is typically determined by participants' cognitive judgements of disconfirmation. The different academic perspectives of service quality and satisfaction will now be reviewed and a new relationship between the concepts will be suggested to inform this study.

5.4 The Relationship Between Satisfaction and Service Quality

Despite Galloway's (1999) observation that academic disagreement exists on the definitions of service quality and satisfaction, it is helpful to discuss these different definitions and relationships, to determine whether a relationship can be established to inform this thesis.

Cronin & Taylor (1992; 1994) introduce the idea that either satisfaction is an antecedent of quality, or *vice-versa*. Liljander & Strandvik (1993; 1995) and Chaddee & Mattsson (1995) argue for the former view, that satisfaction is an emotional response to transactions within the service, in Mano & Oliver's (1993:465) terms "...*a complex human response with both cognitive and affective components*", whereas a quality judgement is a customer's overall evaluation of the service and service provider. Bitner *et al.*'s (1990) work on critical incidents in services underpins this notion of satisfaction, where 'satisfying' or 'dissatisfying' incidents are transactions within the service.

However, Chong *et al.* (1997) take the opposing view to Liljander & Strandvik (1993; 1995) and Chaddee & Mattsson (1995), saying that service quality is a customer's objective judgement, based on attributes of the service, and is a pre-requisite for satisfaction. This is supported by Cronin *et al.*'s (2000) study, which found that *cognitive* evaluation (quality) precedes an *emotional* response (satisfaction). Otto & Ritchie (1996) agree and differentiate between the quality of service (QOS) and quality of experience (QOE). They state that QOS is an objective, functional and cognitive assessment, based on individual service attributes, and QOE is a subjective, experiential and affective assessment, based on the *Gestalt* of the whole service experience. Kasper *et al.* (1999) also agree with this principle, but use the terms differently, arguing that quality is the objective assessment (QOS) and satisfaction is the consumer's subjective, emotional response to whether expectations have been met (QOE). They conclude that *overall* satisfaction is derived from both a quality and transactional satisfaction evaluation, which is also supported by Crompton (1999). This could therefore be expressed as:

$$\text{Overall Satisfaction} = f(\text{quality, satisfaction})$$

where:

quality	=	attributes - based cognitive judgement of the service
satisfaction	=	an emotional response to the service experience.

Oliver's (1996) 'end states of satisfaction' can then be applied to categorise a customer's emotional responses as contentment, pleasure, relief, novelty or surprise, and these can act as both satisfaction and *overall* satisfaction outcomes.

From the relationship function shown above, it is confusing to use the term 'satisfaction' twice and it is worth considering Pitt & Jeantrout's (1994) attempt at clarification, by calling the consumer's overall evaluation of the service the 'attitude', supported by Sureschander *et al.* (2002). Alternatively, Galloway (1999) uses 'attractiveness' in a similar way, but with respect to whether a consumer would repurchase the service in the future, an important service performance criterion emphasised by Lee *et al.* (2000).

An alternative link between quality and satisfaction is proposed by Zeithaml *et al.* (1993), using expectancy disconfirmation to differentiate the terms as follows:

i)   satisfaction is achieved when the service experience at least matches the customer's expectations on what they *predict* of the service;

ii)   quality is achieved when the service experience at least matches the customer's *desired* service expectations.

Point (ii) is then developed further by Tan & Pawitra (2001), who state that service quality compares the service level received against that desired and that which a customer is willing to accept. This 'willingness to accept' construct suggests some implicit or explicit negotiation with respect to the service provider's offering and Dedeke (2003) proposes an argument related to this, that service quality should be conceptualised by meeting and exceeding 'mutually agreed results' between the customer and service provider, which they called 'the fulfilment orientation'. They suggest an extended 'relativistic' disconfirmation paradigm which compares the gap between mutually agreed results and delivered results:

$$\text{Service Quality} = \frac{[\acute{e}_e + \acute{e}_u - R_e - \check{l}_u]}{[\acute{e}_e - R_e]} \quad \text{[Service Received]} \\ \quad\quad\quad\quad\quad\quad \text{[Service Agreed]}$$

where:

$\acute{e}_e$	=	quality of delivered mutually agreed results
$\acute{e}_u$	=	quality of delivered unexpected results
R_e	=	quality lost through undelivered mutually agreed results
$\acute{I}_u$	=	quality lost through delivered unexpected 'damages'.

The authors do not define their meaning of 'quality' or 'results' in this formula, instead stating that it is a conceptualising framework. Therefore, on this basis, it should be possible to conceptualise satisfaction with the same formula by simply replacing the word 'quality' with 'satisfaction', but a distinction between the two concepts would remain elusive, since Sureschander *et al.* (2002) assert that service quality and satisfaction are distinct, yet related concepts. They concur with Ojasalo (2001) and Wisniewski's (2001) conclusion that service quality is an antecedent of satisfaction, and extend previous definitions of satisfaction as being transactional-based, to satisfaction being a summation of both the service encounter and experience transactions. This links back to the 'overall satisfaction' expression above and agrees with Bitner & Hubbert's (1994) separation of the two notions of satisfaction.

Lee *et al.* (2000) take this stance on service quality as an antecedent of satisfaction further. They adopt Assael's (1995:185) definition of 'perception' to define service quality as the *"...selection, organization, and interpretation of marketing and environment stimuli into a coherent picture"* (Lee *et al.*, 2000:222), thus implying that service quality perception is simply the outcome of an analysis of service attributes evidence received by the customer. They then argue that this evidence is analysed transactionally and globally, such that a transactional service quality judgement informs the global judgement of the service. The authors also utilise Oliver's (1989:1) definition of 'satisfaction' as being *"...an evaluative, affective or emotional response"*, concluding that overall satisfaction (the response to the service quality judgement) must result from both transactional and global perceptions of service quality.

This is a logical argument, which Sureschander *et al.* (2002) could have acknowledged to support their assertion on the distinction and relationship between satisfaction and service quality. It can be developed further here by incorporating transactional satisfaction into the argument and a basic framework can be proposed in this thesis, to summarise the transactional/global relationship between satisfaction and service quality, especially relevant to the extended service encounter in outdoor adventure leisure:

```
      Transactional Service Quality Perceptions

              ↓                      ↓

Overall Service Quality Perceptions    Transactional Satisfaction Outcome

              ↓                      ↓

              Overall Satisfaction Outcome
```
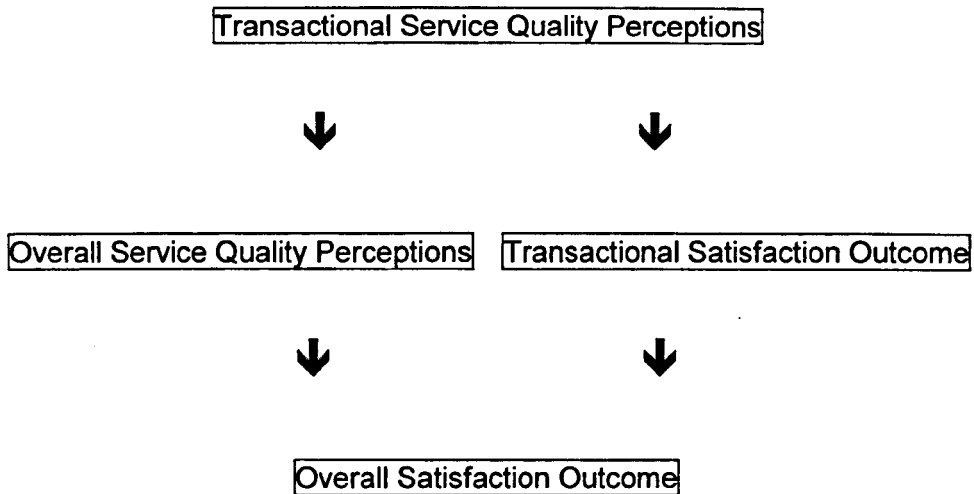
Figure 5.1: A proposed framework of the relationship between satisfaction and service quality.

The 'model' adopts Lee *et al.'s* (2000) definition of terms and assumes that service quality is both transactional and global and an antecedent of satisfaction, which is also both transactional and global. The potentially confusing terminology is thus removed by explicitly using 'transactional' and 'overall' to differentiate meaning clearly. In the outdoor adventure leisure service encounter, transactional satisfaction is particularly important. It represents the customer's attitude towards continuing in the service and making a repurchase decision for the next transactional experience, acknowledging that optimal levels of satisfaction cannot always be maintained (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999). There is no intention to demonstrate empirically the relationship proposed in this framework, but should it be proven in the study's findings, it will be acknowledged.

To summarise the quality/satisfaction academic debate, there are three common themes:

1.   Expectancy disconfirmation informs a customer's judgement of the performance of a service in *some* way.

2.   A customer's judgement of the performance of a service is informed by perceptions of the attributes of the service and the feelings it evokes within that customer.

3.   Quality and satisfaction, however the terms are defined, reside in the customer's mind as heterogeneous perceptions, since, as Williams (1989:432) points out in the recreation context, *"...the ultimate arbiter...is the participant - happiness lies within the self"*.

Yu & Dean (2001) support Williams, stating that the emotional component (happiness) of the service experience is very important and that managers need to understand how people actually feel in a service experience.

5.5   Frameworks for Interpreting Service Quality

Gronroos (1984) proposes a model which considers the technical quality of the service content (what is provided) and the functional quality of the service process (how it is provided), acknowledging that consumers judge the whole service experience, not just the final result of the service. He then adds these two elements to the customer's image of the service and/or provider, and makes a further link to perceived quality as expectancy disconfirmation. Figure 5.2 below shows this model:

		Expected Service
Technical Quality		↓
	→ **Image** →	**Perceived Service Quality**
Functional Quality		↑
		Perceived Service
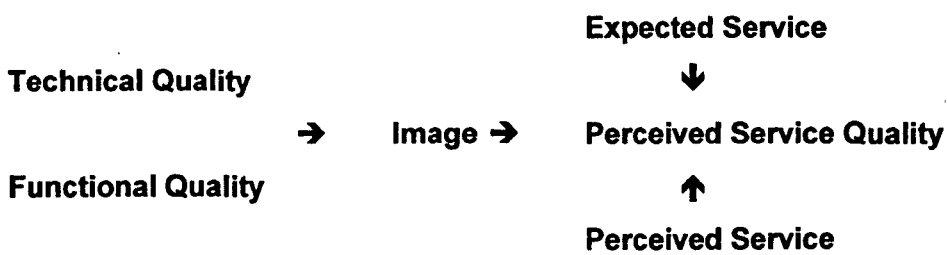
Figure 5.2 A model of perceived quality (Gronroos, 1984:79) not exactly reproduced.

Academic debate surrounds the notion that customers evaluate service performance in terms of disconfirmation. However, many authors do accept this view (see, for example, Armistead, 1985b; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Churchill & Suprenant, 1982; Luk & Layton, 2002; Mackay & Crompton, 1988; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1980; 1981; 1993; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Robledo, 2001; Sharpley & Forster, 2003; Tan & Pawitra, 2001; Teas, 1993; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Walker, 1995; Webb, 2000). In particular, from a management perspective, Kasper *et al.* (1999:203) recommend that "...*looking for gaps between expectations and perceptions is crucial to detect what should be improved (or not)...*" in the service process.

Parasuraman *et al.*'s (1985) work on SERVQUAL is a significant development in service quality literature, based on disconfirmation principles, to provide an insight to the managed process of service quality. They conducted a focus group study of consumers across a range of service industries in the U.S. and proposed the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model, which theorised potential quality gaps in service provision, with ten generic dimensions of service quality. These dimensions were later condensed to five and a 22-item questionnaire (known as the SERVQUAL instrument) was developed to test these dimensions empirically.

The SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model is an important theoretical underpinning for this thesis (see Chapter Six) and is now explained. The principle of the Conceptual Gap Model is that at different stages of a service there are four potential quality 'gaps', any or all of which can impact on the fifth gap, which is the customer's expectancy disconfirmation. The gap model is typically used to identify perceptual quality gaps, but given the relationship suggested in the previous section, it could logically serve to identify perceptual satisfaction gaps.

Gap 1 concerns management's perceptions of customer expectations, which is translated into a potential Gap 2, service design specification. Gap 3 is then the possible difference between service design and real time delivery by front line employees and Gap 4 relates to how fully and accurately the service organisation communicates its offering to the customer. Finally, Gap 5 is the disconfirmation between expectations and perceptions, informed by the previous four gaps. In addition to these perceptual gaps, the authors find that customers' personal wants and needs, past experience, word of mouth communication and external communication from the service provider are all potential determinants of customer expectations (see Figure 5.3).
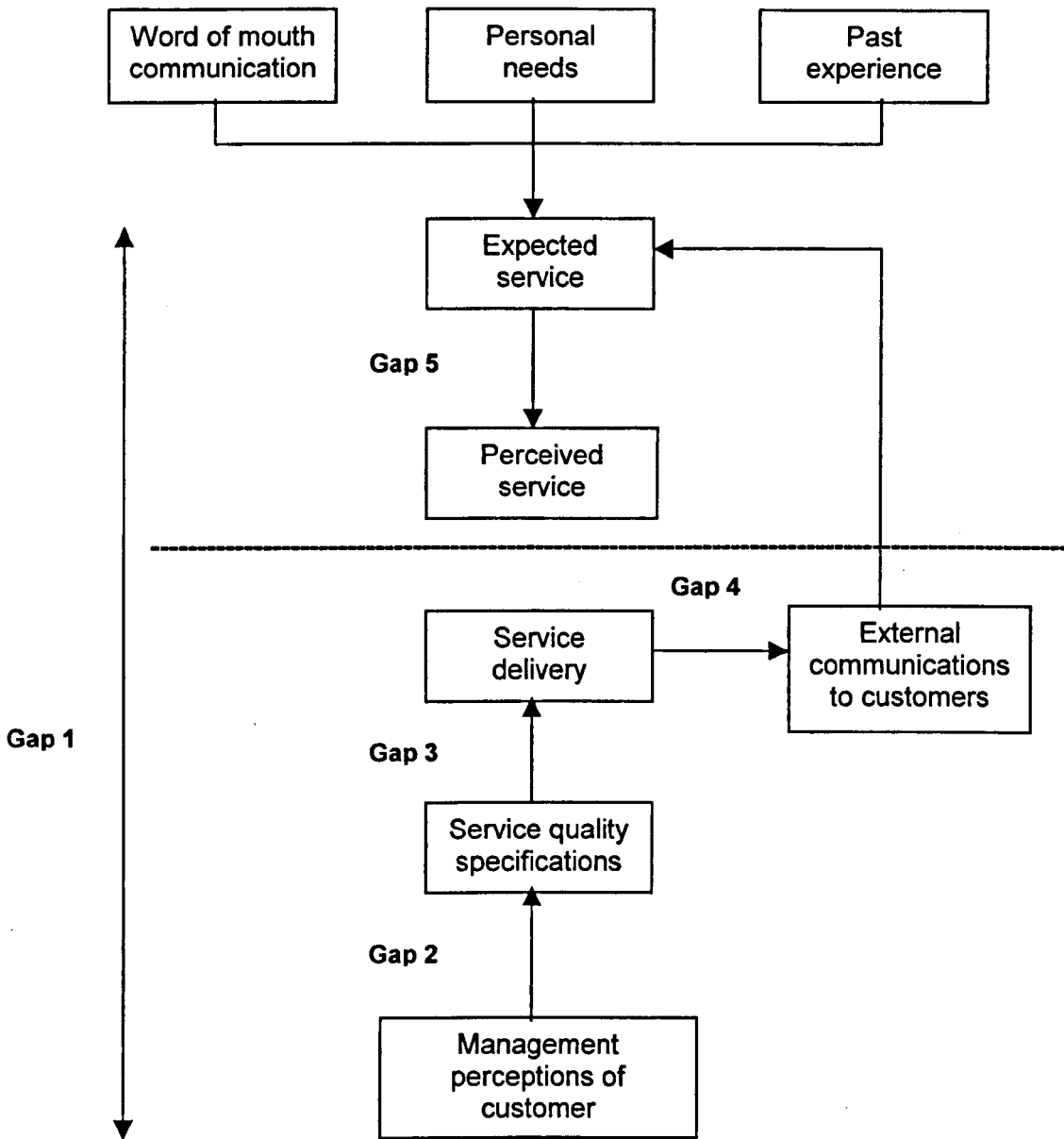
Figure 5.3 The SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model (Parasuraman et al., 1990).

The SERVQUAL instrument and Conceptual Gap Model have been used and developed further in services management research (see later sections of this Chapter for a more detailed discussion), but academic disagreement remains over different aspects of the 'SERVQUAL approach'. For example: Cronin & Taylor (1992, 1994), Ekinci & Riley (1997), and O'Neill *et al.* (2000) suggest that the nature of expectations is unclear and that a performance-only measure approach is more appropriate; and Luk & Layton (2002) argue that the expectations-perceptions construct lacks supporting empirical evidence. Many researchers agree that the multi-attribute dimensions are not generalisable to all industries (for example, Carman, 1990; Imrie *et al.*, 2002; Johnston, 1995a), and there are concerns over the SERVQUAL instrument. For example, Teas (1993) questions the meaning of the gap scores, demonstrating how the same scores can be derived from different responses to a question, and Wisnieski (2002) states that it is complex to

implement. Buttle (1996) summarises a number of these criticisms, and specifically questions the validity of the instrument. However, he recommends in-depth case analyses of particular services to establish whether customers do evaluate services in terms of expectations and perceptions, thus lending support to the relevance of the Conceptual Gap Model to this thesis.

Two further possible quality frameworks are proposed by Lehtinen & Lehtinen (1991), but they do not argue strongly for either one and seem to present the frameworks simply as options to consider. The first is what the authors call a 'Three-dimensional Approach', which considers the physical quality (tangible elements), interactive quality (personal interactions) and corporate quality (image/brand) of the service. The second is a Two-dimensional Approach', which broadly considers the service process and the service output and can be seen as more conceptual or strategic than other service quality models.

Lindquist & Persson (1993:19) also propose a strategic model for analysing service quality, which is based on the premise that a service consists of "...*actions performed within a relationship...*" between the consumer and service provider. The PENTAD framework is suggested and, if any of the five elements are not present in a service quality narrative, this will be an area of service quality ambiguity. When combined, the five elements present a 'complete statement' of the service action, illustrated as follows with the PENTAD elements in parentheses:

A human action (ACT)
involves one or more persons (AGENTS)
who act or interact in a situation (SCENE)
using some means or instrument (AGENCY)
with some form of intention or goal (PURPOSE)

(adapted from Lindquist & Persson, 1993:19)

Although this is a useful and logical conceptualisation, the authors do not do not explicitly justify how each element contributes to service quality on specific dimensions. For example, there is no prescription of an exemplar service ACT; therefore such dimensions would need to be defined to operationalise the framework.

Of the frameworks discussed here, the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model has been most used and developed in services research. The different variations on the approach will now be discussed to rationalise the relevance of the gap model as a framework for

data gathering in this thesis. Generic applications of both the 22-item SERVQUAL measurement instrument and the conceptual gap model are firstly considered, since the assumptions underpinning these refinements can inform a study in any context. This is then followed by the Gap Model's application to the leisure context.

5.6 Developments and Variants of the SERVQUAL Approach

Gronroos (1988) suggests 'service recovery' as an important addition to SERVQUAL's dimensions, supported by Johnson & Mathews' (1997) study in the food service industry. However, this is ignored by Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) and other subsequent authors, since service recovery could be considered as 'responsiveness' or 'flexibility'.

As an alternative to the SERVQUAL approach, LeBlanc & Nguyen (1988) suggest a service quality model where perceived quality is a function of corporate image, the internal organisation, the physical environment, contact personnel and the degree of customer satisfaction. This has not featured significantly elsewhere, but the elements noted could all be seen to fall within the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model, where the service is specified and delivered through the first four elements, with the fifth, customer satisfaction, being the desired service outcome.

An important assumption of the SERVQUAL instrument is that it seeks a customer's best or ideal expectations of the service, and encourages reflections of this *after* the service experience. This first issue has been addressed by Zeithaml *et al.*'s (1993) 'predicted' and 'desired' expectations, which create a zone of tolerance. However, Teas (1993) argues that a post-experience focus on expectations could be problematic, supporting Mattsson (1992), who finds that an ideal standard can be subconsciously raised as an individual learns more about a service. On a similar basis, Cronin & Taylor's (1992) study uses their 'performance only' model, SERVPERF, and identifies that expectations need not be considered after the service experience, merely the consumer's rating of performance, as they believe this to be the only determinant of satisfaction.

Taking a different view, Chandon *et al.* (1997) do not acknowledge the conceptual gap model at all when they suggest that every service process follows four key steps. However, these steps represent the first four potential gaps of the gap model and the fifth gap does not feature in their framework.

5.7 SERVQUAL Applied to the Leisure Context

In leisure and recreation research, Asubonteng *et al.* (1996) state that the SERVQUAL instrument had been little used to that date, being mainly applied in healthcare. However, they recommend the qualitative use of the Conceptual Gap Model to educate employees

and management in how they can contribute to improving quality. MacKay & Crompton (1988) introduce a model of service quality in recreation, based on the determinants of expectations in the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model and they add a further determinant, which they call the 'Concept of Equity' defined as "...*the level of service the user thinks should reflect his or her situation if justice prevails, given how much is invested relative to others*" (p47). The authors relate this specifically to the governance of recreation services providing equitable opportunities for all of the public who wish to participate. In fact, the equity principle may be relevant to this study, since it is unlikely that outdoor adventure leisure organisations would invest different resources for different participants' greater or lesser benefit in the same service. Therefore, the determinant should be included in a refinement of the Conceptual Gap Model.

Williams (1998) uses the SERVQUAL instrument to measure quality in six different types of U.K. leisure facility and finds, contrary to Donnelly *et al.* (1995), that it is not generally applicable. However, she agrees with Parasuraman *et al.* (1991) that it provides a starting point for studying service quality. Importantly for this thesis, Williams (1998) goes beyond a quantitative analysis of disconfirmation, and interviews management and staff to obtain qualitative data, which she then uses to analyse the other four gaps in the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model. She finds in this study that employees are more critical of the service than either consumers or management, which implies that management may have less awareness of the service than employees. This suggests the existence of a further perceptual gap in the Conceptual Gap Model, supported by Luk & Layton (2002), who recommend that this further gap should be included in a more comprehensive model.

Tawse & Keogh (1998) use the direct measurement SERVPERF technique to test SERVQUAL's conceptual quality gaps in three leisure centres, using both a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative focus groups, finding that all five gaps exist. However, this study seems to be flawed in its assumptions, in that the authors have sought consumers' expectations and perceptions; therefore they were not strictly using SERVPERF's performance-only assumptions.

O'Neill *et al.* (2000) develop an adjusted SERVPERF model which they call DIVEPERF, to test the five SERVQUAL dimensions in a study of scuba divers. They find that safety and trust and employee and equipment/facilities are most important to divers, and, very specifically, the welcome by employees on entering the service can create a positive emotion, or 'feelgood factor' for participants, which impacts on their expectations of the rest of the service. This factor would therefore influence DIVEPERF's perceptions-only evaluation, in that participants are implicitly accounting for their prior expectations, rather than focusing on perceptions alone.

Robledo's (2001) investigation also confirms that expectations must play some role in a customer's service evaluation, through using SERVPERF, SERVQUAL and SERVPEX questionnaires in the same study of three airlines. Robledo proposes that a single post-service questionnaire, SERVPEX, is more effective than both the SERVPERF and SERVQUAL instruments for measuring service quality, but that SERVPERF more effectively measures overall satisfaction, despite his assertion that expectations cannot be ignored. The study does not actually delve more deeply into customer's expectations as Robledo initially claims it should, but he qualifies this by recommending the use of an expectations questionnaire for future SERVPEX-based studies.

In addition to developments of the SERVQUAL instrument and its assumptions, researchers have tested the original multi-attribute dimensions for their generalisability and these developments are now discussed.

5.8 Development of the Service Quality Multi-Attributes

Parasuraman *et al.*'s (1985) SERVQUAL research derived generalised multi-attributes, or dimensions, of good service using the disconfirmation principle. Ten generic dimensions of service quality were initially proposed, before later being reduced to five dimensions. Table 5.1 (below) illustrates how this reduction from ten to five dimensions was made, by combining competence, courtesy, credibility and security as 'assurance' and access, communication and understanding as 'empathy'.

Original Ten Dimensions	Description of the Dimensions	Five Condensed Dimensions
Tangibles	Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications materials.	Tangibles
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.	Reliability
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.	Responsiveness
Competence	Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service.	Assurance
Courtesy	Politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact personnel.	
Credibility	Trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider.	
Security	Freedom from danger, risk or doubt.	
Access	Approachability and ease of contact.	Empathy
Communication	Keeping customers informed in language they understand and listening to them.	
Understanding/ knowing customers	Making the effort to know customers and their needs.	

Table 5.1 Dimensions of service quality summarised from Zeithaml et al. (1990)

Sasser *et al.* (1982) also consider quality attributes, without reference to disconfirmation, and find that there are seven which can be identified to influence service quality:

- security;
- consistency;
- attitude;
- completeness;
- condition of facilities;
- availability;
- training.

All of these attributes, except training, are considered from the customer's perspective, although 'training' could affect the performance of the other attributes, apart from 'condition of facilities'. However, an employee trained to identify and take action where facilities need improving can influence this attribute. Therefore, the authors imply that training underpins service quality, yet these seven attributes only correlate with four of the five SERVQUAL dimensions as table 5.2 below shows:

Sasser *et al.* (1982) Seven Quality Attributes	Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) Five Quality Attributes
Security Attitude Training	Assurance
Availability Completeness	Empathy
Consistency	Reliability
Condition of facilities	Tangibles

Table 5.2 Comparison of Service Quality Dimensions: Sasser et al. (1982) and Zeithaml et al. (1990).

This comparison demonstrates that Sasser *et al.* do not incorporate SERVQUAL's Responsiveness dimension, which suggests that the latter provides a more comprehensive list of attributes.

5.9 Attributes of Service Quality and Satisfaction in the Leisure Sector

In the 'leisure' sector, Fick & Ritchie (1991) have found that the SERVQUAL dimensions can be successfully applied to study service quality in ski areas, but that they are not so applicable for airlines, hotels or restaurants, and suggest adjustment to the service context where required. Taylor *et al.* (1993:80) explore SERVQUAL in the leisure context and find *"...some evidence for the generalizability..."* of the scale items, but caution that it is still suspect and the five-factor structure (SERVQUAL dimensions) need to be confirmed. Akan (1995) broadly confirms the five SERVQUAL dimensions in the hotel sector, but he also recommends modifying them for each specific service context, since his Turkey-based study would question whether SERVQUAL is not only cross-sectoral, but cross-cultural in its application (Kettinger *et al.*,1995). Although verifying the SERVQUAL dimensions, the results introduce additional hotel-specific attributes and contradict Berry *et al.* (1994) in terms of weighted priority. Akan (1995) finds that instead of reliability, courtesy and competence of staff are deemed most important by hotel customers, followed by communications and tangibles.

In a study of service quality in tourism, Otto & Ritchie (1996) develop their alternative 'construct domain' of dimensions, with four key factors emerging when respondents were asked what would satisfy them in a tourism encounter:

- hedonics;
- peace of mind;
- recognition;
- involvement.

The 'hedonics' factor matches Oliver's (1993) descriptor, the 'peace of mind' factor aligns with Johns and Howard's (1998) 'emotional comfort' and the original SERVQUAL dimension of security and 'recognition' is addressed by Johnston's (1995a) 'attentiveness'. However, the 'involvement' factor does not align with any previously proposed dimension, possibly because it is always assumed that customer involvement is a defining ingredient of a service. Kelly *et al.* (1992:207) state that customers *"...co-assure the quality of service during service encounters..."* and Bitner *et al.* (1997) find that some service customers simply find the act of participating intrinsically satisfying. That study does not seek to separate service quality from satisfaction and thus there is confusion between emotional responses to the service and the multi-attributes which provoke these responses.

Johnston (1995a) extends the range of the original ten SERVQUAL dimensions into eighteen 'determinants of customer satisfaction', rather than generic dimensions of service quality, stating that they can be classed as 'satisfiers' or 'dissatisfiers' and that, conceptually, they are not necessarily opposites. This acknowledges Herzberg *et al.*'s (1959) Motivating and Hygiene Factors of job satisfaction, where a motivating factor has a positive effect on employee satisfaction, but only the *absence* of a hygiene factor has a demotivating effect. This assumption is successfully applied to a study of customers' perceptions of service quality by Mersha & Adlakha (1992). The same relationship between satisfiers and dissatisfiers is not proposed by Johnston (1995a), but he does demonstrate that a non-obverse relationship could exist between these service quality determinants.

Herzberg *et al.*'s (1959) theory could have been explored in Johnston's (1995a) study, for its transferability from employee, to customer, satisfaction. For example, a watersports participant implicitly wishes to feel physically safe from drowning (security), which is an obvious hygiene factor. Yet if this is undermined by a near-drowning incident, the hygiene factor is removed and becomes a determinant of dissatisfaction by its absence, in other words, a dissatisfier.

Table 5.3 below compares the dimensions proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) and Zeithaml (1990) with the eighteen factors proposed by Johnston (1995a). It demonstrates that whether attributes of service quality or satisfiers/dissatisfiers, there are no unique dimensions between them and the latter can be encompassed by the former.

Johnston's (1995a) Eighteen Attributes	Parasuraman et al.'s (1985) Ten Attributes	Zeithaml et al.'s (1990) Five Attributes
Aesthetics Cleanliness Comfort Functionality	Tangibles	Tangibles
Reliability	Reliability	Reliability
Responsiveness Flexibility	Responsiveness	Responsiveness
Competence Integrity	Competence	Assurance
Courtesy Friendliness	Courtesy	
Credibility	Credibility	
Security	Security	
Access Availability	Access	Empathy
Communication	Communication	
Care Attentiveness	Understanding customers	

Table 5.3 A comparison of the service attribute dimensions proposed by Parasuraman (1985), Zeithaml et al. (1990) and Johnston (1995a).

Contrary to Zeithaml et al.'s (1990) reduction from ten dimensions to five, Johnston (1995a) argues that his eighteen determinants provide more precision in trying to understand the service encounter and are thus more useful to inform the service manager, supported by Jones et al.'s (1997) evaluation of service quality in small hotels and guest houses. One additional determinant Johnston alludes to, but does not explore, is whether the customer's own 'disposition' on entering the service could be a significant driver of their satisfaction, similarly suggested by Ryan (1995) and discussed earlier in Chapter Three.

Johns & Howard's (1998) foodservice industry study proposes separating Johnston's (1995a) 'comfort' element into 'physical' and 'emotional' types, reflecting Martin & Priest's (1986) explanation that the 'risk' element of outdoor adventure leisure can be either physical or psychological. However, to confuse Johnston's (1995a) assertion that satisfiers and dissatisfiers are not inversely related, Johns & Howard finds that 'friendliness' serves only as a satisfier (supporting the assertion), but 'aesthetics' is both the most important satisfier and dissatisfier, contradicting the non-inverse relationship idea.

This could be explained by different attributes being prevalent in different service contexts, or by the study's methodology, which utilises expectations data from the general public to compare with perceptions data from customers of a specific restaurant. It can be

argued that if disconfirmation can only exist within the customer's own perception, and their expectations and perceptions can change as the service process develops, then the expectations data should also be elicited from those customers experiencing the service. This would anchor the original expectations and highlight whether the service process has provoked any such change.

Ekinci & Riley (1997) use their performance-based model LODGSERV to assess service quality in resort hotels, where SERVQUAL's questionnaire items are customised to suit that sector. They compare the performance of the two instruments and find that the five SERVQUAL dimensions are not valid for this hotel segment, but do acknowledge that if LODGSERV was also used to measure expectations, it could possibly confirm those dimensions.

Tribe & Snaith (1998) also argue that the dimensions are inappropriate for tourism and that sector-specific multi-attributes need to be derived, proposing their HOLSAT model, which, more logically than SERVQUAL, requires consumer expectations to be explicated *before* the service experience. These are then correlated with the post-experience perceptions, in line with disconfirmation theory, to analyse customer satisfaction. The HOLSAT attributes derived were:

- physical resort and facilities;
- ambience;
- restaurants, bars, shops, nightlife;
- heritage and culture;
- accommodation.

There is no specific reference to service staff in these attributes, unless implied in the restaurants, bars, etc. category, and, in comparison, four of the five SERVQUAL dimensions are underpinned by this customer/employee interaction. This could be because the study finds that tourists tend to experience very brief encounters with service staff and have a more significant role to play themselves in creating their tourism experience.

Wong Ooi Mei *et al.* (1999) use the generic SERVQUAL five multi-attributes, but adapt the original questionnaire items for 3-5 star hotels, introducing their own customised SERVQUAL instrument, HOLSERV. For each SERVQUAL dimension, HOLSERV deletes three questionnaire items and adds eight which are hotel sector specific. The results do verify the five dimensions using this method, but, like Akan (1995), contradict Berry *et al.*'s (1994) proposed generic weightings. Instead, this study finds that the best predictors

of service quality in 3-5 star hotels are employees' responsiveness, assurance and empathy, which is also contrary to Akan's (1995) hotel study findings. This suggests that, in addition to such studies being adapted to the service context, the specific service situation itself may require such customised use of the five SERVQUAL dimensions.

Wakefield & Blodgett (1999) use the SERVQUAL instrument to study three leisure contexts (sports spectatorship, cinemas and children's play areas) and propose that the appearance of 'tangibles' in the servicescape has an important impact on consumers' evaluation of service quality. Lee et al. (2000) apply the multi-attribute dimensions to a private aerobics school, demonstrating that the attitude and behaviour of staff in customer interactions ('reliability', 'assurance', 'responsiveness' and 'empathy') are the key influences on customer's evaluations and that tangibles are the least important dimension. They conclude that tangibles are most important in facilities-oriented industries and least important in people-oriented industries, such as this aerobics school.

Wisniewski's (2001) research across a range of Scottish public sector service provision finds that, specifically for public leisure services, participants weight the dimensions differently. 'Tangible' items assume the greatest importance, supporting Lentell's (2000) study, and suggesting in Lee et al.'s (2000) terms that mass public leisure provision has a facilities-, rather than a people-orientation. However, given that public leisure provision can include small-scale aerobics classes provided by sub-contracted professional instructors, this separation is problematic and demonstrates that it is not reasonable to assume that attributes are generic across all service sectors. Instead, attributes and weightings are likely to be specific to the service context.

Tan & Pawitra's (2001) study of tourists' perceptions incorporates a dynamic feature of service attributes proposed by Kano et al. (1984), which is not acknowledged by the authors discussed here so far. The Kano Model assumes that at a single point in time, service attributes will be satisfiers, dissatisfiers, or neutral, in their effect on consumers. Then, at a later point in time, neutral attributes become dissatisfiers and satisfiers become neutral, requiring new satisfiers to be established before they then become neutral/dissatisfiers in the future. Tan & Pawitra (2001) find that this model emphasises the importance of continuous development and innovation of service attributes, but it is conceptual and does not specifically inform such development.

This evaluation of different perspectives of service attributes suggests that different attributes do or do not feature in different service contexts, and that they may be differently weighted in these contexts. This thesis does not set out to prove or disprove the existence of any one set of these attributes in outdoor adventure leisure, but to use

their different principles where appropriate in the Presentation and Discussion of Results section.

In this chapter different academic perspectives of service quality and satisfaction have led to a proposed relationship between the two concepts. Applications of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model have been considered and more perceptual gaps and determinants of expectations have been identified that should be incorporated into a refined model. Finally, different perspectives of service attributes have been evaluated to conclude that they are not always generalisable. The next chapter introduces the analytical framework for data gathering in this thesis as being a refinement of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model, theorised from the literature discussion so far.

Chapter Six

An Analytical Framework for Data Gathering

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the relationship between service quality and satisfaction and identified that the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model can be extended to include additional perceptual gaps and determinants of expectations. In this final chapter of the Review of Literature section it is argued that an extended version of the original SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model can be used as the analytical framework for this study. The extended model incorporates additional gaps, it includes two further determinants of expectations/perceptions and highlights that in an extended service encounter, it is important to understand how on-going, dynamic customer perceptions can influence customer expectations of the next transaction in the service, in order to manage them appropriately.

6.2 Rationale for the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model as an Analytical Framework

Gummesson (1994:83) comments on the measurement of satisfaction, saying *"Customer satisfaction research becomes myopic..."* because it is typically based on statistical studies *"...allegedly being more scientific..."* and it only generates knowledge of *"...a superficial layer of behaviour"*. Also, Stauss & Neuhaus (1997) argue against trying to measure satisfaction because it assumes the same satisfaction score implies that a customer has had a qualitatively identical experience. They state that the service experience is influenced by different *"...emotional, cognitive and intentional components..."* and these *"...lead to qualitatively different satisfaction types."* (p236). Their research supports this comment and finds that where customers have identical satisfaction scores, they articulate different emotions towards the service organisation, they formulate specific expectations about the service organisation and they have different reasons for choosing the service organisation. Consequently, as Dimanche & Samdahl (1994) report, in leisure and tourism, there is a need to focus on these intrinsic, subjective views.

Putting this specifically in the outdoor adventure leisure context, Fletcher's (1971) study of Outward Bound participants' experiences started out as a quantitative statistical analysis until the author found that such measurement levelled out averages and trends and lost the potential richness of some of his data. He thus decided to write his study up *"...in human terms..."*, to get underneath these statistical measurements because, he states, *"...90% of the truth about human beings relates to their separate and distinct individual*

characteristics..." and "*...statistics ignore that blend of value, attitude and imagination...*" (p2). Asubonteng *et al.* (1996) also agree that leisure managers should appreciate the importance of a qualitative understanding of how to enhance quality and Anderson (1996) says her own study of youth participation in watersports should have considered the in-depth quality of experience and satisfaction, rather than just generating broad statistical results.

This thesis seeks to present an insightful understanding of the quality of young people's experiences of managed watersports provision and how WW facilitates these experiences. It therefore requires an appropriate analytical framework to be summarised from this review of literature, to inform data gathering.

The most common approach to service quality analysis has been identified here as SERVQUAL and its variants, with differing assumptions such as disconfirmation- or performance-based studies, but the original multi-attributes are not always universally applicable to, nor comprehensive enough for, different service contexts.

Gabbie & O'Neill (1996) assert that the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model is one of the most valuable contributions to services literature and de Carvalho *et al.* (1999) argue that those who are critical of the SERVQUAL approach are more concerned with the limitations of the measurement instrument, not the conceptual gap model, which is robust in its assumptions. The SERVQUAL gap model is typically used by researchers to investigate perceptual service quality gaps. However, the relationship suggested in Chapter Five between service quality and satisfaction suggests that these concepts are conjoined and the conceptual gap model could also identify perceptual satisfaction gaps, thus having a broader application in services management research. .

Augustyn & Ho (1998) have used the SERVQUAL conceptual gap model to conduct a qualitative gap analysis of travel agents, which, although based on the authors' impressions, rather than making use of secondary or primary data, demonstrates that the model is a useful framework for analysing services. Similarly, Williams' (1998) study of leisure services utilises the gap model qualitatively and, despite Ferguson *et al.*'s (1999) observation that literature is lacking on perceptions of both customers and service personnel, Williams (1998) contradicts this to use the model explicitly to investigate both perspectives in her research.

The SERVQUAL approach requires disconfirmation data to be collected after the service has been experienced, but it is now clear from the review of literature that a customer's post-service evaluation of their pre-service expectations can be unreliable. Therefore,

adopting the HOLSAT approach of seeking customer expectations **before** the service is experienced will improve such reliability in this thesis.

Despite arguments supporting the robustness of the existing Conceptual Gap Model, attempts have been made to develop it further and Senior's (1992) study of roadside lodges suggests that management's perceptions of customer *perceptions* is missing from the gap model. Gap 1 of the model considers management's perceptions of customers' prior expectations, but the natural feedback loop on their perceptions, as highlighted by Senior, is not explicitly present. However, he does not then develop this further to extend the model. Similarly, Parasuraman *et al.* (1990), Lewis (1993), Luk & Layton (2002), Saleh & Ryan (1991), Staughton *et al.* (1997) and Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) acknowledge this relationship in their explanations of gap 1, but these authors do not attach to it the same importance as they do to the original definition of gap 1: management's perceptions of customer *expectations*. Given that this ought to be the natural conclusion of the service – understanding the customer's experience to inform service design development - the relationship will be given a distinct profile in the gap model here. This is underscored by a key driver of this thesis, that the WW manager sought a clearer understanding of the watersports participants' perceptions of their experiences.

Luk & Layton (2002) propose a perceptual gap where front-line employees often understand customer expectations better than managers. They also find that employees' perceptions of customer expectations were not always accurate, suggesting a second, related gap. However, in adding these two gaps to the conceptual model, Luk & Layton still do not explicitly address the issue of employees and managers understanding customer *perceptions* of the service. Therefore this is addressed in the refinement of the model proposed here, together with incorporating these authors' work. In order to avoid clumsy terminology, the model simply states 'Management Perceptions' and 'Employee Perceptions', where these address both customer expectations and perceptions.

Two additional determinants of pre-service expectations are also included: the 'concept of equity' (Mackay & Crompton, 1988), and 'mood on entry' to the service, suggested by Hanna & Wozniak (2001). Customers' perceptions of 'critical moments of truth' are also added, based on the nine-point classification synthesised in Chapter Three, which then influence the final factor, 'Customer Emotions' (Yu & Dean, 2001), which results from disconfirmation (Wirtz & Bateson, 1999). Customer emotions in turn inform their expectations of subsequent transactions and determine a repurchase decision of whether to continue and experience the next transaction (Pitt & Jeantrout, 1994). The refined gap model in Fig. 6.1 below demonstrates that these factors are cyclically dynamic, being

derived from customer perceptions of one transaction to inform expectations of the next transaction, repeated to the end of the service experience.

This analytical framework will be used to guide primary data gathering and analysis of service perceptions at WW. The framework identifies the possible determinants of participants' expectations and perceptions, it specifies the organisational activities of service design and delivery, and highlights where perceptual gaps might exist to influence service performance. Further, it integrates all of these aspects to demonstrate how they are related in the WW managed service situation.

WW management sought to understand, rather than measure, how customers and staff perceived these service aspects. They could then identify any perceptual gaps and ensure that their own perceptions were better informed for managing the service. The following Primary Data Gathering Section, consisting of four chapters, explains the methodological approach (Chapter Seven), the chosen data-gathering methods (Chapter Eight), issues of gaining and managing access to WW (Chapter Nine) and how the primary data were gathered and analysed (Chapter Ten).
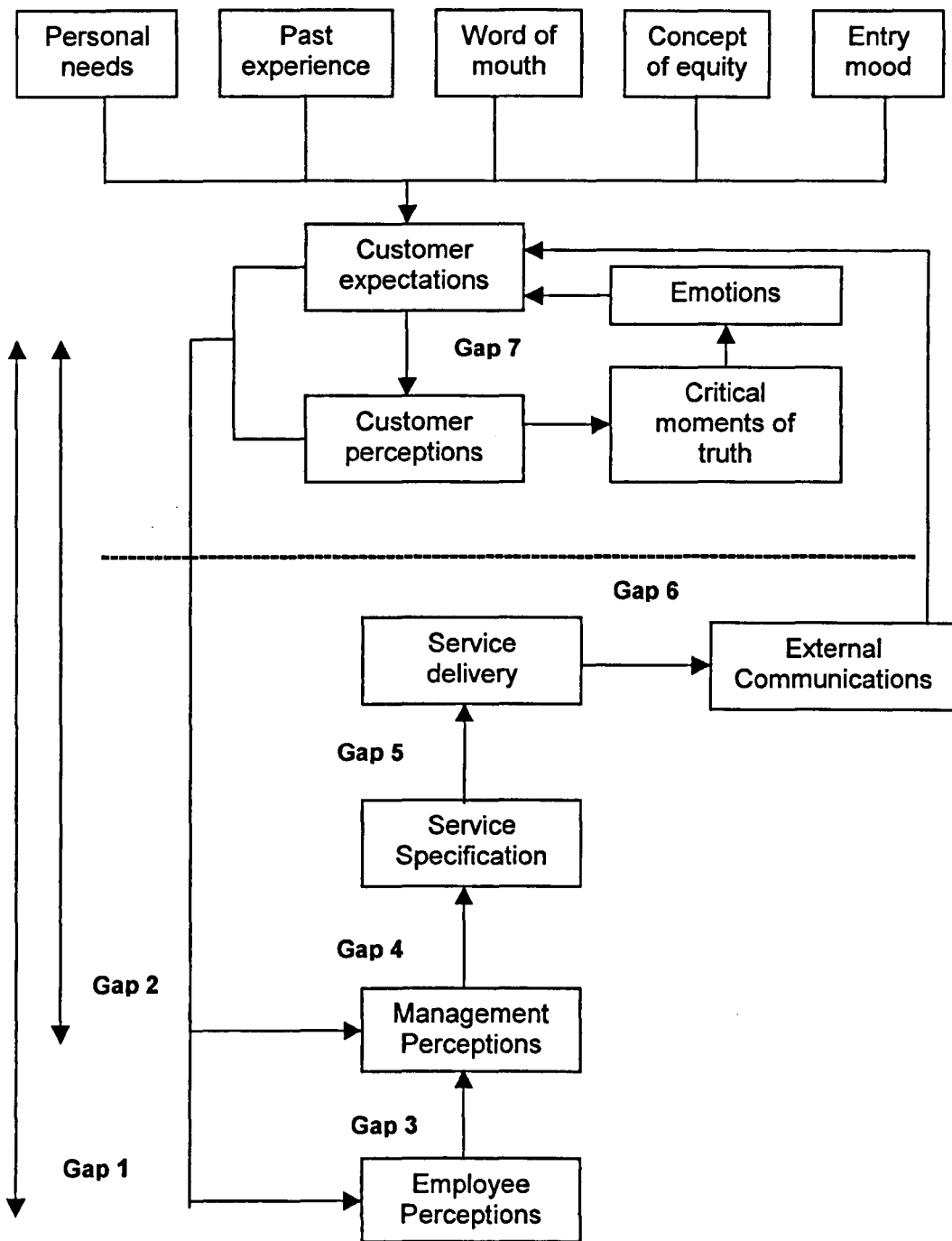
Figure 6.1 A refined SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model

Primary Data Gathering Section

The previous section has critically reviewed appropriate literature to propose a refined SERVQUAL conceptual gap model as the analytical framework for primary data gathering in this study at WW. The purpose of this section is to justify the adoption of an interpretivist paradigm, using a qualitative methodology and qualitative methods for this study. In Chapter Seven I argue for the appropriateness of the combined paradigm and qualitative methodology and in Chapter Eight I justify the particular choice of data gathering methods. I explain in Chapter Nine how managed access to, and gained acceptance at, WW and in Chapter Ten I explain how the primary data were gathered and analysed. The data gathering activity for this thesis was a profound experience for me as a researcher; therefore I have written this section in the first person singular to demonstrate my engagement with the data gathering process and the people therein. Also, I feel more comfortable using this writing style when reflecting upon my personal experiences.

Chapter Seven
Research Methodology

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to justify the methodology of the research, that is, the philosophical position that a researcher must consider when approaching such a study. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1996:21) argue that by not considering philosophical issues it *"...can seriously affect the quality of management research"*. They support this by stating that it helps to clarify research design and methods, it guides the researcher in the limitations of different approaches and can open up new designs beyond the researcher's previous experience.

Henwood & Pidgeon (1993:15) observe that a researcher's methodology is often erroneously associated with either data gathering methods or the nature of those data. Instead they suggest that *"...the gathering, analysis and interpretation of data is always conducted within some broader understanding..."* and that it this understanding which constitutes the research methodology. Guba & Lincoln (1994; 1998) reinforce the assertion that the data gathering method should be secondary to the assumptions which inform the researcher and Henderson (1991:19) points out that *"Without an understanding of the philosophy and beliefs that we hold about research...specifically leisure research...the studies we do will not have the same impact"*. Finally, May (1993) asserts

that methodological theory does not simply inform methods of data collection, but rather it sets out assumptions to inform the nature of the process, to help researchers gain deeper insights of the social world.

I am thus making the distinction here between research methodology as the philosophical approach to the study and research methods as the techniques I employed to gather data. This research methodology chapter justifies the interpretivist research paradigm I adopted in this thesis. It then rationalises the choice of a qualitative methodology and explains how symbolic interactionism assumptions contribute to the research design. The research methods I employed and the protocols followed are then explained in Chapter Eight.

7.2   Choosing a Research Paradigm

The basic tenets of a methodology are established within the framework of an overall paradigm, which Kuhn (1970:175) defines as *"...the entire constellation of beliefs, values, [and] techniques..."* upheld by a group of people, a definition supported by Guba & Lincoln (1998) as a system of beliefs or view of the world which directs the researcher. They further state that these beliefs are basic and must be taken at face value, as they cannot be proved or disproved. It is important to understand the assumptions behind the different research paradigms, since research decisions will be taken based on the aims of a project, and, more importantly in a social study, the researcher's own perceptions and philosophical attitudes of the world (Kolakowski, 1993). Henderson (1991) suggests that a paradigm is a fundamental conceptual framework with which one can make sense of the world, and to ignore its importance could lead the researcher astray, highlighting here the importance of adopting a paradigm appropriate to the aims of this thesis.

Gage (1989) uses the metaphor 'paradigm wars' to describe the debate which exists between advocates of the different world views of research, suggesting that such views are polarised and incommensurable with each other. This position is supported by Taylor & Bogdan (1984), Henderson (1991), Henwood & Pidgeon (1993), Silverman (1993) and Veal (1997), who maintain that there are two principal paradigms: positivism (also called the scientific paradigm) and interpretivism (also called the naturalistic paradigm) which are mutually exclusive. Despite Sarantakos' (1998) view that social scientists mis-use the term paradigm, he then describes a further paradigm of critical theory as a development of interpretivism and Guba & Lincoln (1998) and Schwandt (1998) suggest yet another, that of constructivism.

I shall now explain the assumptions of the two dominant paradigms – positivism and interpretivism – so that my worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) in this thesis is understood,

since Schwandt (1998) states that the paradigms differ in their consideration of the purpose of human inquiry and what can be known about human behaviour.

7.3 The Positivist or Scientific Paradigm

Positivism asserts the *"...unity of the scientific method..."* (Kolakowski, 1993:7) and was the original research paradigm, which emanated from the natural sciences as an approach, which can reduce all phenomena to follow scientific rules. It is hypothetico-deductive (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993), trying to verify hypotheses (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) or, logically, disprove null hypotheses, and seeking an explanation of regularities of physical events. The positivist investigates only what can be experienced or perceived through the senses, rather than abstract constructs, and through an objective, value-free detachment from the study object, aims to uncover universal laws of human behaviour (May, 1993).

However, Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1996) argue that it does not help to understand the significance people place on social actions, and that trying to predict events in the future can be illusory if based on historical patterns. Guba & Lincoln (1998) agree, stating that it ignores meaning and purpose by stripping away the context of the study in an effort to make it value-free and objective, which they argue is not possible, as the researcher will always influence the study subject in some way by the very interactive nature of social research. Sarantakos (1998) adds that social research must be conducted in its real life context or it becomes artificial, or 'dehumanised'. Kuhn (1970) suggests that a study may only be significant in its time, which May (1993) justifies by acknowledging the changing social environment.

An additional weakness of positivism is a problem of theory induction (Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 1996). Guba & Lincoln (1994) conclude that the paradigm has not managed to explain real world phenomena fully, since they explain that facts only exist interdependently within some theoretical framework, undermining the positivist's objective assumption that facts must be independent of theory.

In management terms, Hirschman (1986) highlights that a positivist paradigm is typically assumed when conducting research into Finance, Accounting and Operational Research, where quantification of results is required. However, she argues that for studies with a marketing basis, such as this thesis, the key issues of beliefs, behaviours, perceptions and values of people are socially constructed and an interpretivist research paradigm should be adopted.

7.4 The Interpretivist Paradigm

This non-positivist paradigm takes the view that social research data must be generated by interaction, either between research subjects or between researcher and subjects, in a natural setting. This suggests that there is a need for the researcher to understand the context of that setting as it influences an interaction, together with the interpretation made by the research subject of both the setting and the interaction (Henderson, 1991). In doing this, the researcher cannot remain completely detached or objective and can only analyse what the research subject *perceives* as facts, rather than make assumptions about the universality of observable facts. Positivist assumptions do not allow for such a stance; therefore the two paradigms would seem incompatible.

Fundamentally, the interpretivist's assumption of reality is that it is created in the mind of the individual, rather than existing independent of the consciousness. Guba & Lincoln (1998:110) suggest that this subjective perception of reality is influenced by *"...basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms..."* and that reality can never be perfectly understood. However, in practical research terms the reality of a leisure experience must exist in the mind of the participant, being a personal construct given meaning by its internal effect on an individual who tries to interpret the external context (Henderson, 1991; Samdahl, 1988)

Interpretivist research, therefore, seeks subjective meanings rather than objective observation of social actions, understood in a naturalistic context, interpreted as a result of interaction and the inter-subjectivity of shared meanings, which takes account of the interdependence of researcher and subject in the research process (Wolcott, 1992; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993; May 1993; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1996; Sarantakos, 1998). Here, then, the purpose of research is to interpret the social world inductively, emphasising meaning and understanding.

A weakness of interpretivism is that it cannot lead to grand theory development, because deriving immutable laws of social action is not possible due to the lack of representativeness of a locally contextualised, grounded research approach. May, (1993) supports this point by saying that the paradigm suffers from subjectivity and idealism. However, according to Henderson (1991) it is difficult to define leisure as a single, rigorous, universal model, which can be tested by positivist research. Researchers are therefore increasingly adopting the interpretive paradigm for studies on subjective leisure states or experiences.

7.5 Methodological Pragmatism

Kuhn (1970) advocates that researchers must adopt a single paradigm, which acts as a guide for dealing with possibly deviant data, already alluded to. But May (1993) argues that paradigms are not hermetically sealed schools of thought and the dynamic nature of the social sciences requires mediation and comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the paradigms.

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1996) suggest that despite the comprehensive list of assumptions for each paradigm, they cannot identify one philosopher who ascribes to every single assumption for one paradigm. They continue that many management researchers combine the different principles in a pragmatic way to match the research requirements, rather than fit the research to a paradigm. In other words, through such methodological pragmatism, they develop approaches which seek the middle ground and try to bridge the two paradigms. Hofstede (1980) in particular accepts that his study of organisational culture contains elements of both the interpretivist and positivist paradigms, which only became apparent in his reflections on the research process.

Although I have adopted an interpretivist view in this thesis, as the study developed, I found that certain assumptions of the paradigm became less appropriate. The most significant of these was the polarised interpretivist view that I should gather and analyse data with unstructured groundedness (Glazer & Strauss, 1967), to allow themes to naturally develop without a *priori* theory constraints. It became clear to me after reviewing the literature and conducting the pilot study, that the naturally emerging themes contributed to the potential enhancement of an existing theory and that I should use this as an initial structure for the main study. This would draw on an assumption from the hypothetico-deductive approach of positivism, but as a researcher I felt that it would have been untenable to ignore these findings for the sake of being a purist about a paradigm, which the discussion above argues is not always appropriate. Boyatzis (1998) calls this creating a conceptual bridge and, more vividly, a 'Satanic perversion', acknowledging that the worldview I have adopted in this thesis is not without precedent.

Having argued for adopting an interpretivist paradigm with some initial structuring, the next methodological level to consider is the research approach within the paradigm.

7.6 Research Approaches

Henderson, (1991) suggests a model that demonstrates the relationship between research paradigms, approaches and methods. In this she identifies the two research approaches as being quantitative and qualitative. Allan (1991), Clark & Causer (1991),

Ward-Schofield (1993), Miles & Huberman (1994) and Guba & Lincoln (1998) all agree with this distinction, and Robson (1993) suggests three traditional approaches: a purely quantitative experiment, a quantitative or qualitative survey and a qualitative case study. However, Bryman (1989) suggests that qualitative research *per se* can be confused with case study research and Yin (1994) states that the term 'case study' is often misused, since case studies have their own clear definition and set of distinguishing characteristics and often combine both qualitative and quantitative *methods* in the qualitative research approach. Therefore, Henderson's (1991) model is helpful and I shall now discuss quantitative and qualitative approaches, with reference to their appropriateness to this thesis.

7.6.1 The Quantitative Approach

The quantitative approach is closely allied to the positivist paradigm, in that it stems from research into the natural sciences and propounds that there is a single reality or truth, which can be explained by fixed laws identified deductively through facts that are observable by value-free interpretation (Gummesson, 2000; Sarantakos, 1998). The natural sciences traditionally emphasise quantification and reliability of results (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) and the quantitative methodology requires the researcher to develop functional relationships in precise mathematical terms, using statistical methods of analysis to synthesise homogeneous results. It seeks patterns in order to predict and control future phenomena, rather than question why or how the phenomena occur. A key assumption is that by controlling research variables, consistent results will be reliably achieved if the study is repeated under similar conditions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Given these assumptions, a quantitative approach would be inappropriate for this thesis. In the social environment of an outdoor adventure leisure centre, there are too many variables to control. For example, the context of the environment, previous experiences of individuals, the internal processes of participants and instructors and the interaction of these actors, which then influence further their internal processes and subsequent behaviour. Neulinger (1981b) summarises this by characterising leisure as internally experienced and, therefore, heterogeneous, such that the experience cannot be standardised and thus, by definition, cannot be exactly replicated in a quantitative study.

7.6.2 The Qualitative Approach

In the same way that a quantitative approach is linked to positivism, an interpretivist or critical theorist will adopt a qualitative approach, since the features of this approach align naturally with these paradigms.

The qualitative approach assumes that the social world is a human construct and reality can only be understood from a respondent's perspective of social interaction (Sarantakos, 1998). Allan (1991:180) further suggests that it provides *"...a view from the inside..."* and is exploratory in using informants' understandings to determine how or why a phenomenon exists. Bryman (1989:29) adds that a qualitative methodology emphasises *"...individuals' interpretations of their environments and of their own and others' behaviour..."* and that the researcher is trying to comprehend events from the perspective of the researched. Henderson (1991) says further that this approach allows respondents to put their own words and meanings to situations and it requires the researcher to interact with the respondents' social reality. Burgess (1984) and Allan (1991) argue that qualitative research requires the researcher to be more involved with, than removed from, data gathering sources. Also, to be more flexible in approach, rather than strictly adherent to a technique, to appreciate better the perspectives of the respondent sources. Using these perspectives, richer and more meaningful findings can be unearthed (Crimp & Wright, 1995).

In seeking depth of understanding, a qualitative perspective studies a small number of respondents and consequently does not aim to discern generalisable patterns. Instead, it is diagnostic, in that it seeks to discover what may account for certain kinds of behaviour and encourages a study to develop unique insights into the complexities of human behaviour, through observation and reflection (Chisnall, 1992). However, although I do not seek to generalise beyond the specific context of this thesis, should patterns emerge which may applicable to other contexts, they will be acknowledged.

A qualitative approach is concerned with developing theory inductively, considering the dynamic nature of the context of the phenomenon being studied, rather than making a static analysis of situational variables (Bryman, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). Qualitative methodology is most simply explained as a search for *Verstehen*, or the meaning and motives behind people's actions (Henwood & Pidgeon 1993; Miles & Huberman 1994; Weber 1968, cited in Henderson, 1991). Bell (1993) recommends this methodology where an insightful understanding of individuals' perceptions of particular situations is required and Van Manen (1977) states that it is appropriate for identifying people's perceptions, assumptions and presuppositions and relating them to the immediate social environment. Miles & Huberman (1994) say further that the methodology is most appropriate when analysing naturally occurring events in natural surroundings, such as those in this thesis.

Bryman (1989) suggests that the qualitative methodology is particularly relevant in organisational research, where the researcher becomes an insider to the organisation (as

I did) and tries, as far as possible, to use the language of the context to emphasise understanding in that context. He also suggests that there must be an inherent flexibility in such research to enable the inquirer to make best use of previously unforeseen opportunities as they emerge. Maxwell (1998) agrees with the former point and also with Reason's (1994) discussion on collaborative inquiry, such that collaborative action to understand meanings in organisational contexts should use a qualitative methodology. Maxwell (1998) additionally suggests that it should be used in exploratory research, which might identify unanticipated phenomena and require explanations for them.

Allan (1991) and Sarantakos (1998) consider that a qualitative approach is relevant when there is a need to consider the reality of social interaction from an individual's perspective and Henderson (1991:33) states that in leisure research, in order to comprehend issues in a subjectively experienced, *"...dynamic, organic, transformative concept like leisure..."* which is *"...difficult, if not impossible, to operationally define..."*, the positivist, quantitative approach is not appropriate. Instead she states: *"The qualitative approach offers new ways for understanding the whole of leisure behavior as well as the provision of leisure services..."* and she calls for more studies to be carried out in this way to develop a deeper understanding of the field of recreation, as I aim to do in this thesis.

Having established the methodology for this thesis, Jacobs (1988) recommends identifying next the theoretical assumptions which will guide the research process. This study is concerned with identifying what meanings participants and facilitators attach to service quality in watersports leisure activities. These meanings are based on an experience of action and interaction with others, in a service context which also influences these meanings. Therefore, a symbolic interactionist perspective would be an appropriate framework to enable these meanings to be interpreted and, according to Henderson (1991:46): *"Because of the focus on meaning...it has been most useful as a framework for the qualitative approach in research"*. Specifically, Samdahl (1988) recommends adopting this perspective to help understand the social meanings people place on leisure and argues that *"Leisure is a unique configuration of factors drawn from more pervasive processes of social interaction..."* and refers to Cooley's (1922) comment that people are strongly influenced by their social context.

7.7 Symbolic Interactionism

The symbolic interactionist assumes that the individual defines a situation in their own terms and engages in self-reflexive activity on their interactions with others, modifying language, symbols and meaning as the interaction develops (Denzin, 1992). In line with this, Blumer (1969) asserts that the individuals studied are the experts on their social interactions; therefore my objective should be to describe the individual's perspective and

what they view as important and unimportant. Blumer continues to say that it is important that the setting of the interaction is natural, not simulated; thus, I should enter the world of the researched to *"...see the situation as it is seen by the actor..."* (Blumer, 1969:56), expressed through language and other symbols. I should then take the description elicited and use that *"...as a point of departure for formulating an interpretation of what actors are up to"* (Guba & Lincoln, 1998:124).

The nature of outdoor adventure leisure activities at WW means that a participant would be interacting with both centre employees and fellow participants in the context of the centre and its activities. The participant would therefore form their perception of their experience through such interactions in this context, expressing this perception using the symbols and language they have learned. Equally, centre employees could only form their perceptions of the quality of service they are providing through interaction with colleagues and participants in the same context. The employees would also use common symbols and language to do this.

In order to investigate employee and participant perceptions of service quality, symbolic interactionism requires me to describe this from individual perspectives, identifying how actions and interactions influence the formation of meanings, and whether these meanings change through ongoing action and interaction. It was necessary, therefore, to gather primary data in the world of the research subjects, using their terms of reference in symbols and language.

In Chapter Six I explained that I have adopted a refined version of Zeithaml *et al.*'s (1990) SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model as an analytical framework in this study. The reason I have used the framework is to guide data gathering and analysis, since Miles & Huberman (1994:18) state that such a framework provides *"...a tentative theory of what is happening".* However, this is contrary to the purist view of inductive research, such that it should emerge without prestructuring from local groundedness (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). Against that view, Miles & Huberman (1994) argue that unstructured studies are suitable when there are no time or resource constraints, or when investigating complex, new phenomena, but that some pre-structuring is needed to avoid wasting time and resources if the phenomenon is known. Bryman (1989:166) also suggests that rather than using grounded theory, adopting a focus which incorporates *"...some semblance of structure..."* is a valid approach, such that data can be organised and tentatively conceptualised using that focus as a structural guide.

In this thesis I am applying the complex, but known, phenomenon of service quality to a new context and I have conducted the study on a part-time basis. Therefore, Miles &

Huberman's (1994) argument is important in allowing me some initial structure, on the basis that emerging issues may cause me to revise this, since Clark & Causer (1991) suggest that a planned and systematic approach should be combined with the flexibility to cope with unforeseen developments.

I have argued in this chapter for adopting an interpretivist research paradigm, with some degree of pre-structuring, and have justified the qualitative approach of the study. In the next chapter I seek to justify my selection of qualitative data gathering methods and explain the specific ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter Eight
Qualitative Data Gathering Methods

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained the philosophical stance of this study, which must be made clear before considering possible data gathering methods, since methodological principles will dictate the range of methods available and the assumptions underpinning their use. The purpose of this chapter is to justify and explain my use of particular research methods in the qualitative methodology, since Bryman (1988) argues that it is possible to use qualitative and/or quantitative data gathering methods within that methodology. I shall provide a critical explanation of the rationale and specific choice of qualitative methods for this thesis, and highlight the important ethical issues I considered when conducting research with young people.

8.2 The Rationale for Qualitative Data Gathering Methods

Bryman (1988) suggests that a range of different methods can be employed in a qualitative methodology, but rather than using as wide a range of methods as possible, I followed the advice offered by Miles & Huberman (1994). They recommend looking for what will be most useful to develop the research and, necessarily, consider for each study the 'peculiarities of the setting', which should, therefore, guide the choice of appropriate data gathering methods.

The analytical framework I adopted required me to gather primary data to provide an insightful understanding of individual's perceptions and meanings of particular situations (Bell, 1993). Van Maanen (1983) posits that to understand the meaning of social world phenomena, rather than measure their frequency, it is most appropriate to use qualitative data gathering techniques, which help respondents to reflect on their own world in depth and develop an awareness of *"...the way they construct reality"* (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1996:71). Wolcott (1992) also says that such data are relevant for analysing processes and underlying reasons. Chisnall (1992) states that qualitative methods enable the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of factors which may account for certain kinds of behaviour, and, as de Groot (1986) affirms, qualitative methods are useful when identifying the attitudinal dimension to a consumer activity and the language used to describe it.

In a complex leisure or tourism context (such as at WW), Ryan & Cliff (1997) argue that although quantitative techniques can produce results to inform the debate on the quality of service providers, the interaction of expectation, perception and satisfaction really

requires the use of qualitative methods to analyse service quality. I have therefore used qualitative methods in this study to emphasise *"...individuals' interpretations of their environments and of their own and others' behaviour."* (Bryman 1989:29).

8.3 Selection of Specific Data Gathering Methods

Garfinkel (1988) argues that the individual's reflections on events and assumptions, interpreted in their context, produces valid data. However, Baldwin & Baldwin (1986) contend that such data cannot be fully constructed by the individual, but result from prompting, where an interview can act as a prompting device.

Bryman's (1989) typology of organisational research has guided me to use a combination of interviews and participant observation as data sources, supported by Burgess' (1984) use of a multiple methods strategy in the study of an analogous school situation. To verify data within-method (Clark & Causer, 1991), I sought different participants' perceptions on similar issues, but where an individual's reflections on events would provide their own, singular perspective, I used participant observation, to verify data between-method. Jorgensen (1989) suggests that participant observation allows the researcher to gain access to otherwise inaccessible dimensions of human behaviour and May (1993) states that the researcher should experience the context of an interview account for a fuller understanding.

In addition, I used the critical incident technique (Bitner *et al.*, 1985; Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Edvarsson, 1992) during participant observation activities, noting 'critical moments of truth' (see Chapter Three) during the service encounter which could influence perceptions of that service encounter, positively or negatively. Then, during their interviews, I asked participants to reflect on critical moments of truth that they perceived and I used the observation notes, either to verify these accounts, or to encourage accurate reflection. This was because Clark & Causer (1991) observe that individuals' interview opinions and responses are not necessarily internally consistent. Also, Allan (1991) states that although it is reasonable to ask people for retrospective accounts of their experience, it is possible that their recollections may be affected by memory and be incomplete or unreliable. Therefore, using observation to inform this is important and Glancy (1988), Lofland & Lofland (1995) and Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1996) all concur with this approach.

Although I used these methods generically, I implemented them differently for the three research participant categories (watersports participants, employees and management), because of the data I required from each to achieve the study aims, as I shall outline below. The detailed account of how I gathered these data is presented in Chapter Ten.

i.   *Participants*

Participants provided data on the determinants and descriptions of their expectations, whether a gap existed between their expectations and perceptions of the service and why, and their perceptions of WW's external communications of its service offering.

ii.   *Management*

I gathered data on management perceptions of participants' expectations and perceptions, how these perceptions may or may not have influenced the setting of service standards and specifications, and management views on how effectively service specifications were translated to service delivery.

iii.   *Employees*

This group generated data which gave an alternative perspective on their own and management's understanding of customer expectations and perceptions, and how service specifications were established and implemented.

8.4 Limitations of Qualitative Methods

I shall now identify the limitations of qualitative research methods and explain how I sought to minimise their effects in this study.

8.4.1 Researcher Flexibility and Subjectivity

In using qualitative methods it is necessary for the researcher to maintain the flexibility to cope with developing circumstances and ideas (Clark & Causer, 1991; Maxwell, 1998). This is because data gathering, analysis, refinement of the research question and dealing with validity are all on going and part of an interlinked, dynamic web of activities which all impact on each other. This results in the criticism that qualitative methods are subjective and impressionistic (Allan, 1991; Chisnall, 1992; Sarantakos, 1998), and Guba & Lincoln (1994:108) raise the question of how safeguards can be established to prevent investigator bias, stating that *"...objectivity in its pure form is an unattainable state..."* in a qualitative study. They suggest that the researcher can take steps to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, if the limitations are understood.

Maxwell (1998) states that it is impossible to standardise the researcher; therefore by maintaining integrity at all times I should minimise researcher bias, but I had to define clearly the terms of this integrity. Reason (1988) believes that a stance of 'critical subjectivity' accounts for the researcher's subjectivity. It acknowledges the researcher's views and experiences, which may affect the study, without the researcher becoming so immersed as to be completely influenced by them. This introduces some degree of objective detachment for consistent behaviour, and implies that there should be a

continuum between subjectivity and objectivity, which is borne out by Easterby-Smith *et al.*'s (1996) observations on different assumptions of reality, from extreme subjectivity being a projection of human imagination, to extreme objectivity being a 'concrete' [social] structure. In addition, Patton (1990) suggests empathetic neutrality, where the researcher remains detached but tries to understand the respondents' perspective, so that subjectivity does not undermine the credibility of the study. I adopted a combined stance of critical subjectivity and empathetic neutrality in my attitude and behaviour to address this subjectivity criticism as far as it could be in a qualitative study.

8.4.2 Internal and External Validity

Kidder & Judd (1986) outline their view that there is a need to demonstrate both *Internal* and *External* validity in a study. They agree with Burgess (1984) that internal validity is concerned with the researcher's potential influence. Henwood & Pidgeon (1993) argue that this internal validity is achieved through rigorous justification of methods and research decisions. In view of this I documented every research decision in my research diary and used it as a reference, to ensure that I maintained consistent protocols in my personal behaviour and research decisions (Easterby-Smith *et al.,*1996).

An example of the use of methods to ensure for internal validity is Denzin's (1970) suggestion to use complementary data, multiple researchers, applying different theories to a situation or the configuration of the methodology. I made use of the last technique, where I applied the same method on different occasions and different methods to the same study subject, to reduce the effects of a single method bias (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). I used both of these principles to gather primary data identified by the research questions, which reflects Henderson's (1991) view that one should choose methods for their appropriateness to solve problems, not their 'abstract elegance', and use one to build on another.

My reactions to the study environment were impossible to eliminate completely, but Maxwell (1998) states that its influence on validity is greatly reduced when using participant observation techniques and, in the interview situation, by the researcher understanding how they might be influencing the respondent. Chapter Ten explains how I tried to minimise any influence I may have had on participants.

External validity must establish a domain to which a study's findings can be generalised and Gill & Johnson (1991) suggest that this can have two forms. The first is population validity, which enables generalisation to a larger population (see also Ward Schofield, 1993). The second is ecological validity, which enables generalisation to other social contexts or settings (see also Weiss, 1994). In this study I am not seeking to extrapolate

my findings to typify a larger population, but am sensitive to the possibility of generalising to other similar outdoor adventure leisure contexts.

A further issue I considered reflects Ryan's (1995) comments that in using quantitative methods, sampling techniques ensure the representativeness of the study sample and, hence, the reliability of the data produced. Kidder & Judd (1986) define reliability as demonstrating that the study is exactly replicable. Allan (1991) further argues that it is not possible to repeat qualitative research in all its detail because methods are flexible and tools develop as a study develops; therefore it is not verifiable. Also, replicability can be affected by a context change, or a respondent might not react in the same way in a repeated study, and different researchers have different perspectives affecting data gathering and analysis. However, Allan acknowledges that such research can be replicated in purpose, which is where, he says, the value of any future work based on a study such as this may lie.

Boyatzis (1998) suggests that reliability can be ensured within qualitative methods through the researcher's consistent judgement in decision making. This supports Yin's (1994) assertion to operationalise as many steps as possible. He suggests, for example, that by establishing procedures and protocols in the use of methods (as I did in this thesis), an auditor could exactly replicate a study in purpose, even if it did not produce similar results. Therefore, the main reliability issue, as de Groot (1986) affirms, is that replicating a qualitative study will not necessarily generate similar data.

A further criticism of qualitative methods is that they use small samples (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1996) and thus data cannot be generalisable beyond the specific context to establish their external validity (Burgess, 1994). In defence of this, Ward Schofield (1993:201) says that most qualitative researchers reject generalisation because it is *"...unimportant or unachievable, or both..."* because random sampling of respondents is not, and cannot, be made when researching a specific population. Miles & Huberman (1994) agree and state that qualitative research considers behaviour in specific, not general, situations and typically emphasises a particular case in context, therefore generalisability is inappropriate. However, Ward Schofield (1993) argues further that in choosing a research site that is typical of others on significant major dimensions (left to the researcher to decide), some degree of external generalisability could be assumed.

In this study context, the outdoor adventure leisure sector is very fragmented and a typical site would be difficult to identify; therefore, generalisation will be about the particular WW context. However, should issues emerge which could be generalised to other similar contexts, they will be acknowledged.

8.5 Ethical Considerations for Primary Data Gathering

Before gathering primary data with human research participants, I considered carefully the ethical issues which might arise, so that where possible I could take a clear and consistent approach to manage them.

Sarantakos (1998) states that users of research understand that malpractice can occur, with reference to a researcher's conduct. He asserts that ethical standards in professional research practice are important to establish, relating to the accuracy and truthfulness of data gathering and reporting, and the maintenance of the welfare and confidentiality of study subjects. In view of this, I followed the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education's ethical guidelines for research throughout the data-gathering phase of this study. However, these guidelines were only at the policy development stage during my primary data-gathering activities and I sought clearer, more detailed guidance on research with young people from broader literature, as I shall now explain.

8.6 Conducting Research With Young People

The key concept underpinning this section is encapsulated by Fine's (1987:228) statement that "...one should not assume that adults and children could comfortably interact in situations where equality was enforced". He continues that although reducing this 'power differential' is beneficial to a study, it cannot be completely eliminated and, actually, this should not be attempted, but by accepting this difference, a researcher is forced to acknowledge certain ethical issues. Rosaldo (1989) supports this and suggests that an adult conducting fieldwork with children is a positioned subject, in that they are in an implied position of power which can influence children's behaviour towards the researcher. She concludes even though the adult can behave in a way to minimise the effects of this, children will always be aware of the adult-child relationship. It was clear, then, that if I assumed that equality was perceived, I might have wrongly ignored the ethical issues of such a research relationship.

In particular, as a male, I was extremely sensitive to my gender in conducting research with young people, since, as Holmes (1998:27) observes, people are often suspicious of "...male adult-child interactions". Also, Warren (1988) recommends that fieldworkers must acknowledge the effect of their gender on study subjects to be able to minimise any effects of this.

In this study, I tried to reduce any effects of this adult-child relationship and adopted Fine (1987) and Fine & Sandstrom's (1988) 'friend' role, or what Mandell (1988) calls the 'least adult role', which the authors concur is the most widely used approach in such a situation.

In doing this is I used no authority in any interaction and tried to engender trust through my behaviour and attitude. In Fine & Sandstrom's (1988) terms, the adult must be positive in approach, must want to be in the child's company, must not deliver discipline and must show the child respect. These four principles underpinned my behaviour towards the young people throughout my study and, in all cases, the researcher-participant relationships I developed clearly reflected Holmes' (1998) experience that such an attitude eases enormously the process of gaining a child's trust

My further concerns were reflected in Fine's (1987:228) comments that an adult researcher *"...must consider the subjects' immaturity and the fact that they have not reached the age of legal responsibility..."* and he goes on to outline three important considerations when researching with children:

- the problems of informed consent and providing a comprehensible explanation to children in the study;
- the responsibility of the adult to manage situations that could harm the study subjects;
- the implications of the adult 'policing' children's behaviour.

Of these, only the first two issues were relevant to my study, since I had no role of authority at WW. Also, the relationship I nurtured with the young people being studied was, as already mentioned, that of 'least adult', or 'friend', where I deliberately chose not to police their behaviour.

On informed consent, Fine (1987) and Sarantakos (1998) specify this as a requirement for a researcher to explain to study subjects the purpose of a study and to gain their agreement to participate. The researcher must do this to protect the rights of children participating in a study (Seiber & Seiber, 1992), but a child may not be able, nor even want, to understand the purpose of a study; therefore, Holmes (1998) suggests that informed consent must first be sought from parents or guardians. I adopted this approach with the young participants, writing first to parents/guardians with an explanation of my study, and then telephoning to seek their consent and trust to speak to each child. I gave parents the fullest explanation of my study and encouraged them to ask questions to clarify any issues of concern. I told the young people a more basic version, which I elaborated upon if they questioned me. This was in line with Fine & Sandstrom's (1988) recommendation that the researcher must differentiate between what and how to tell, for example, the director of a nursery school and the children, in order to be straightforward and appropriate.

Secondly, on managing potentially harmful situations, Fine (1988) posits that an adult has a moral obligation to protect children, but having fixed rules for intervention is impossible where situations potentially harmful to children are observed. He states that: *"In the event of physical danger, the adult cannot play an entirely passive role..."* (Fine, 1988:230), even though this could alter the behaviour of the study subjects. Instead, he observes that the notion of an observer not influencing natural behaviour is idealistic, and that such occasions are rare in research. However, I believed that in the outdoor adventure activities context at WW, young people's safety was my priority because a safety failure could cause a fatality; therefore, I maintained a principle of no interference unless I observed a situation that could be harmful to a child or an instructor. The criteria for any action would be based on my experience of outdoor adventure centres and the particular circumstances of the incident. I fully understood that to interfere in such a sensitive aspect of the centre's operation might jeopardise the entire study, but I strongly agree with Holmes' (1998) assertion that children's physical, psychological and emotional well-being should be the paramount concern in any situation.

In this chapter I have critically discussed the choice of qualitative research methods for primary data gathering at WW, and explained the ethical issues I had to consider with regard to conducting research with young people. In the next chapter I shall explain how, before any data gathering was conducted, I spent time gaining access and acceptance at WW. This was to maximise the cooperation of the WW staff and to learn more about the specific context, so that I could choose the specific research methods appropriately.

Chapter Nine

From Outsider to Quasi-Insider at Wodin Watersports

9.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued for qualitative methods to be used in this study, and the ethical issues to be considered whilst primary data were gathered. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss critically the issue of gaining access to, and developing the trust and acceptance of, the WW employees, because the process required deliberate and sensitive management to ensure its success. Failure to achieve this could have seriously jeopardised my chance of basing the study at the centre, since, as Lofland & Lofland (1995) observe, potential research subjects have no obligations to help a researcher.

This chapter presents the role I chose to adopt at WW and then explains how I was able to nurture employee 'allies' to assist with being accepted by the other staff. Potential threats to this access at WW are then reviewed and I draw conclusions on the 'quasi-insider' role I assumed for the study.

9.2 Being Perceived as an Enthusiastic Learner

Walker (1980) observes that when research is conducted in schools, access to respondents must always be sponsored by someone in the chain of authority and recommends that the researcher should undergo a Police (Criminal Records Bureau) check for a possible criminal record. I agreed to this procedure with the WW management and the centre manager then allowed me physical access to the centre and its watersports participants. Henderson (1991) calls this access via a gatekeeper (the WW centre manager), who gives permission for the researcher to move around the site freely, asking questions and making field notes. Bryman (1988) supports this saying that it is vital that a prime contact in the organisation takes responsibility at the interface with the researcher, to provide them with legitimacy and to facilitate contact with other employees.

Henderson (1991) further states that the beginning of a study is a difficult time for a researcher and it is important to establish a clear role that people in the organisation understand. At WW I was an outsider seeking to be accepted by the staff at the centre; therefore I followed Henderson's advice to establish particular perceptions of my role, which will now be explained.

May (1993) states that a researcher into an organisation must try to become quickly aware of existing power bases and politics, and that when being introduced to employees by someone at senior management level, there can be suspicion at lower levels that one

is part of an imminent change strategy. Also, by simply being perceived as a researcher from outside the organisation, with no refinement to the role, Lofland & Lofland (1995) state that one runs the risk of merely being tolerated and humoured by employees in such a highly technical setting as WW. To avoid both suspicion and merely being humoured, I considered carefully how to adopt an appropriate role for interaction and behaviour during this study.

Lofland & Lofland (1995) believe that the 'knowledge' image that one projects can have an important effect on data gathering ability, and that rather than appear too knowledgeable, it can be more helpful to play the role of 'learner' or even 'incompetent', irrespective of one's skills and experience in the context. They further suggest that overplaying the incompetent when involved with 'elites' (in this study, the elites are the professional instructors) can have a negative effect. They suggest that a researcher must appear competent enough to study the chosen setting, which means at the very least becoming acquainted with organisational symbols, terminology, behavioural norms, personalities, dates and events. Then, acknowledging the expertise of the elites and demonstrating that much can be learned from them for the study, the researcher can play the part of an 'enthusiastic learner', remembering that they will be judged on their continuing behaviour in this, not simply their stated intentions.

In the context of WW, where safety was the prime consideration, any pretence of incompetence could have identified me as a liability, perceived as unsafe to be at the centre. However, in my experience of working as a kayak and canoe instructor, I knew that appearing too knowledgeable could have become confrontational. I understood that some centre staff might create implicit 'test' situations, where I would be expected to demonstrate my knowledge and experience to others, potentially raising barriers to accessing to their thoughts and feelings if I was too competent.

I had basic personal skills in sailing and windsurfing, and, in addition to my instructor experience, had competed at low-level kayak slalom and elite-level canoe slalom. Therefore, I decided that I would be an enthusiastic learner, with a basic understanding and competence in these different watersports. However, in order to be trusted with the autonomy to use a kayak during my observation activities, I acknowledged my low-level kayak slalom experience and British Canoe Union (BCU) personal skills qualification. This latter award was only for technical competence and existed beneath the instructor qualifications scheme in the BCU awards hierarchy.

I considered the enthusiastic learner role to be appropriate because it would not be necessary to develop any further technical competence or learn about sailing and

windsurfing and their language. Instead, the key task would be for me to learn enough about organisational symbols, norms and histories to gain the centre employees' trust, whilst at the same time, being vague about details of my watersports history.

Adopting this role reflects Mitchell's (1993) assertion that even a known investigator will keep aspects of a study hidden, and that covert issues are simply muted, rather than completely eradicated. This can also be reflected by study subjects, who may be given and accept a full explanation of the study aims, but who may not believe that the researcher is really who they say they are.

I felt that a further aspect of this enthusiastic learner role was to ensure that the centre manager did not feel under scrutiny in any way other than through the agreed study aims; therefore I chose not to reveal to him my inspection work for the British Activity Holiday Association. Although the scope of my work did not include WW, because the centre held a legal licence to operate, it may still have created an unnecessary tension for me to manage.

Having established the role I would adopt, I then visited the centre regularly over a six-month period to become familiar with organisational procedures, systems, symbols and actors and ultimately gain acceptance as a known researcher. However, on the first visit, my chosen role was nearly undermined by two instructors at the centre, both of whom I had taught at college four years earlier. However, I shall now explain how these staff became useful allies in gaining acceptance by other staff.

9.3 Insider Allies at Wodin Watersports

This was my second case of a serendipitous meeting and I had to manage the situation carefully to minimise any information they might pass on to their colleagues about my history. However, it gave me an excellent opportunity to establish these allies inside WW, who could potentially influence their colleagues' perceptions of me and my study. This would mean fully explaining the role I was adopting and trusting the confidence of the two instructors, but I felt that this compromise was necessary to help to secure the trust of the other centre staff.

I isolated the two instructors as soon as practicably possible after their coaching sessions and took them into my confidence, explaining why it was important to the study that they did not identify me as an ex-elite canoeist, so that I remained psychologically non-threatening to their colleagues. By showing the instructors this trust I also intended to allay any concerns that they may have had over my motives. Both instructors concurred that appearing non-threatening would be important and agreed that they trusted me fully,

based on our previous lecturer-student relationship. I found this reassuring, but I knew that even in their role as allies the instructors would not be able to stop themselves from saying *something* about our prior relationship; therefore we agreed that they would only refer to the academic aspect of our history.

Following my first visit to WW, I persuaded the management that my next visit should coincide with a staff meeting, so that I could be fully introduced to all employees, but that the centre manager would have explained the purpose and likely conduct of the study beforehand. I hoped that this would overcome some of the difficulties experienced by Burgess' (1984) study, where he recounts how when he first arrived at his school, he expected that everyone would be fully informed of the aims of his study, but this was not so. Instead, he had to develop a regular process of explaining his aims fully to every member of staff he was introduced to. Although time-consuming, this proved beneficial and he consequently found few difficulties in gaining acceptance for his study. His background as a teacher also enabled teachers to identify with him as an individual with common experience of the context.

Burgess' (1984) experience was helpful to me at WW because a similar situation occurred there, where nothing had been explained before my visit. Also, I was only briefly introduced by the centre manager at a morning staff meeting, because the important operational issues for the day's activities had to be discussed and, understandably, were given more attention. Although most employees outwardly nodded their acceptance of my presence, as I spent more time at the centre, it became obvious from their behaviour that I had to engage each employee individually to explain fully my research aims, and encourage their acceptance and co-operation.

At the initial stages of my introduction to the centre staff, my concerns over taking the two previously known instructors in to my confidence were nearly realised. Before the first meeting they had made our acquaintance known to their colleagues, alluding to me being 'sound' and saying that they would trust me 'on the water' (the lake), but without explaining why. Because of this somewhat enigmatic allusion, I subsequently found it necessary to field very specific, probing questions about my experience, which, if I answered fully, might have compromised my intended non-threatening stance. However, I soon realised that bland responses, rapid return questions about their own experiences, and being interested in their replies diverted the focus of discussion.

Burgess (1984) refers to acceptance of the researcher as initiation and resocialisation into an organisation and says that it has a key influence on the success of the research. He explains how in his own research he found that his day to day dress and behaviour were

important to him being accepted by teachers at the school where he based his work. This is also reflected by Patton (1990) saying that behaviour, rather than words, influences people's response to one as a researcher. May (1993) says of his research that he always had to act positively to allay suspicions about his objectives. Finally, Measor (1985) concludes that image management, especially dressing appropriately to the situation and its actors is important in qualitative research.

My industry background was useful during this period of resocialisation at WW, in that the style of dress at such centres is generally based on wearing technical outdoor clothing as a type of organisational uniform (Buchanan & Huczinski, 1997). Attempts are made to enhance status among peers by wearing the most up-to-date, technical apparel in a particular manner, which then becomes an implicit competition to sport the leading edge technology. One is accepted if wearing a dated uniform that has been technically superseded, but given a low status in deference to someone wearing the latest product. Therefore I dressed in this way as part of the acceptance rite. However, as Patton (1990 and May (1993) agree, managing the behavioural aspect of the acceptance rite required planning and careful implementation; otherwise access to respondents would have been threatened, as I shall now explain.

9.4 Threats to Access

During the early stages of building relationships at WW, it was important for me to anticipate what barriers might be encountered to prevent access to individuals or data. Shaffir & Stebbins (1991) emphasise that although it is not possible to anticipate all difficulties, an awareness of those most common and likely coping strategies will help the researcher to manage when they arise. Also, Lofland and Lofland (1995:57-61) identify four main threats to access that could be encountered in an organisation: factions, trade-offs, closed doors and insider understanding, which can be anticipated and these are explained below. However, I found at WW that apart from specific tactics with individuals, the main resource I used to overcome these barriers was spending seemingly unproductive time at the centre to build interpersonal relationships.

i.   *Factions*

A group of people have a collective view on issues that identifies them as part of that group. If the researcher expresses similar views it will locate them with that group, immediately alienating other groups and individuals. Maintaining neutrality can be a difficult task for the researcher and reflects again the importance of positive personal behaviour.

May's (1993) assertion that the political and social power bases of an organisation must be identified quickly has already been stated, and is particularly relevant here. As a male I

was immediately part of a gender faction, and had to publicly distance myself from any factional, gender-specific comments, to maintain my neutrality with all staff.

Also, some staff were naturally more sociable than others and tended to monopolise social debate during, for example, lunch times. It soon became clear that to be accepted by these people, I had to participate in this activity, so as not be perceived as aloof. However, at the same time, it was important that I did not marginalise those who sat back from such debates, and to try to engage with them on their social terms. In this way, rather than maintaining neutrality, I found that to gain acceptance, I had to try to be to be all things to all people, whilst still trying to retain a consistent personality. As I am a naturally quiet person in social groups, this required a significant effort on my part to manage successfully.

A critical point to conclude with here is that I decided never to express a negative personal opinion about anybody at the centre, no matter how much I was encouraged to do so by others. Sometimes, when individuals were being criticised by groups behind their back in my presence, it was necessary for me to take an opposite stance and say something positive about that individual, so that I would not automatically be assumed to agree with the group's opinion.

ii.   Trade Offs

A study subject may want to know what they will gain by co-operating with the research. If the gain is deemed by them to be inconsequential, they may not co-operate; therefore, the researcher must have additional arguments to convince the subject to participate.

This was clearly difficult because the staff had nothing specific to gain from my research. I made it clear from the beginning that there was no compunction for anyone to participate in the study and I agreed with the centre manager that because participation would be voluntary and confidential, there could be no sanctions by him against anyone who did not participate.

A key aspect of my relationship building at WW was to persuade individuals to be part of the study, and nearly everybody was willing, or even keen, to be involved. One individual did specifically ask what the trade off was, and I was unable to offer anything tangible in return. Instead, I gained his agreement by suggesting that he was clearly an expert in his role and his views and opinions would, therefore, be critical to the outcome of my study, which would ultimately be published. Also, I explained that my research openly relied on the goodwill of participants and, although this could never be assumed, I was trying to

encourage this by my own open and impartial behaviour. The instructor was left to decide without coercion, but I suspect that his decision may have been based on him not wanting to be left out, rather than his desire to participate.

iii. *Closed Doors*

These may be deliberate or a function of the organisation's internal structure, but can be encountered where the researcher is prevented from gaining access to a potential study subject. It is important to develop 'allies' inside the organisation, who may be able to metaphorically open these doors.

This barrier was only present with one employee who displayed defensive and uncooperative behaviour for much of my time on site. All of my efforts to approach this individual and develop a working relationship were thwarted until the study was nearly completed and just before I interviewed him, which proved to be a turning point in my presence as a researcher being accepted. Even so, the relationship required careful management with regular questions about his life, interests, experience and achievements, and it became apparent that this last topic was especially important in allowing him to establish a superior position over me. In addition, although I had been given free access by management to any area of the centre, off or on the water, I felt it important to always seek this individual's direct permission to gain entry to any part of the site, since he had a particular role daily operations, and ignoring this courtesy could have jeopardised his contribution. My requests for access were always cordially received, but he also clearly expected me to make them, in deference to his position at WW.

I spent a great deal of time observing this employee's behaviour, to try to understand how to gain his acceptance. It eventually emerged that this person had been very closely linked to WW from an early age and that he (wrongly) believed that my study was trying to prove poor practices, rather than inductively identify what practices existed and the impact they had.

I consulted my two ally instructors on this and they confirmed that this employee was very highly respected by all staff for his commitment to ensure that participants had a safe and enjoyable experience, through his own efforts to maintain high professional standards. It seemed to me, then, that this individual may have felt insulted by my study, but at no time did he make negative comments, even when I candidly invited him to do so.

iv. *Insider Understanding*

Outsiders to an organisation are usually too distant to a setting to be able to understand it as participants do. In order to explain general issues of 'what is going

on', it is necessary to develop 'allies' into 'informants', with a number of 'key informants', whose trustworthiness and ability to articulate their views are established early on, so that the researcher always has recourse to a reliable source of explanation. Lofland & Lofland underline this by recommending that it is imperative for outsiders to cultivate informants in this way.

My allies have already been mentioned, but their 'key informant' role was not simply confined to these two instructors. Two more members of staff became very interested in my research and on many occasions, without prompting, would offer me explanations of anything that they perceived I needed to be aware of as an outsider. Sometimes this was not necessary, but in nurturing these relationships, I always listened and offered thanks for their help. One of these people in particular was an important informant on the political and social tensions between different people at the centre.

Almost all of the other instructors developed into less regular informants as they became more aware of, and comfortable with, my neutrality. They were always willing to respond to any naïve or learner role question I had about events or people. This reflected their very positive attitude towards my study and I am extremely grateful for their acceptance.

My experience of gaining acceptance as a 'quasi-insider' was a rite of passage that enabled me to understand the WW people and context better, whilst not specifically gathering primary data, so that the scope and constraints for this data gathering could be understood. Taylor & Bogdan (1984) emphasise the importance of this stage of a study, stating that data collection is secondary to establishing a rapport with people, and that it can take a long time. They add that to develop an understanding of the context, the researcher should observe routines, rituals and norms and simply demonstrate a keen interest in what is going on.

9.5 Conclusions on My Adopted Role at Wodin Watersports

In order for my study to have credibility and value for the practitioners at WW it had to be perceived by them as an independent study, otherwise they could have argued that I might have had a commercial interest in the outcome. Davis (1973) calls this 'the dilemma of distance' in his somewhat simplistic proposition that a researcher will either adopt the role he calls a Martian, who seeks to understand the subject of research purely from the outside, or a Convert, who seeks understanding by immersing themselves completely into the world of the researched. This polarity is questioned by Lofland & Lofland (1995:23), who, whilst agreeing that the concept symbolises "...a tension that many researchers feel...", suggest that actually neither role is singularly valid and there must be a continuum of roles between the two. They go on to say that as an insider (Convert) to a social

setting, one has to establish some distance, because the researcher's activity in that setting has a higher order study objective. On the other hand, as an outsider (Martian), the researcher must try to reduce that social distance and get closer to the setting so that it is naturalistic. Despite this obvious wisdom, Lofland & Lofland (1995) give no specific guidance as to how far either way the researcher may acceptably go, other than both roles should be integrated as the research requires.

In these terms, I was an outsider with a detached involvement, who, over time, became a quasi-insider, but retained an involved detachment, so as not to be influenced by relationships that were developed with employees there. It can be argued that my presence was, in itself, a subjective influence, and that I was part of a social reality constructed in the minds of the employees with whom I interacted. However, I was very careful never to give opinions on any issue related to this thesis, nor try to influence others' thoughts or actions: my presence was as passive as possible.

In this chapter I have discussed the enthusiastic learner role I chose to adopt, and how I developed allies and minimised threats to my access at WW. The next chapter explains how I gathered primary data, once I had gained acceptance from the centre staff.

Chapter Ten
The Data Gathering Journey and Analysis

10.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained the role I adopted as a researcher at WW and how I minimised threats to my access to the centre. In this chapter I shall firstly explain how the sample of watersports participants was established. I shall then outline how participant interviews and participant observation, and management and employee interviews, were conducted. Finally I shall critically reflect on issues arising from the pilot study and conclude the chapter by explaining how I analysed the primary data.

10.2 The Sampling Approach

Before I could gather any data, it was necessary to identify an appropriate sample of participants. Sarantakos (1998) argues that sample size and selection for representativeness is not appropriate for qualitative data gathering, but that the suitability of study subjects to generate the required data, time imperatives and constraints, the type of event to be considered and the location for the study are important criteria for qualitative sampling. Study subjects are selected for typicality and homogeneity to increase confidence when examining specific cases or issues in a context, rather than using randomly variable elements (Maxwell, 1998). Also, Patton (1990) recommends that respondents must be selected for the importance of the information that they provide as a unique source.

Henderson (1991) and Sarantakos (1998) suggest the use of purposive, or purposeful sampling, where it is left up to the researcher to decide when a sufficient number of subjects have been studied, based on the researcher's intimate knowledge of the context and any emerging constraints, over which the researcher has no influence. Maxwell (1998) adds that purposeful sampling can achieve representativeness or typicality of setting, individuals or activities. Henderson (1991) further says that, for qualitative interviewing, the sample size will be dictated when new information stops and the same themes start to repeat themselves. A purposive approach to sampling was thus initially considered for this thesis, using Lofland & Lofland's (1995) suggestion that 20-50 interviews would be appropriate in terms of data management, and that 25 would be a typical figure, ensuring that potential subjects were screened to fit a sampling model, which was specified from the start.

10.3 The Sampling Model

Henderson (1991) advocates that for qualitative research it is important to establish a theoretical sampling model of respondents, which Maxwell (1998) agrees should achieve representativeness of study subjects, as a sample selected for their typicality and homogeneity in a context. Henderson & Rannells (1988) defined the theoretical sampling model they required before conducting their study, screening all potential respondents for specific characteristics, and I considered that such screening was appropriate at WW. However, the time I had spent in visiting and learning about the organisation, or 'resocialising' myself (Burgess, 1984), proved important in dictating how I developed the theoretical sampling model, as it could not be determined without reference to the logistical feasibility of data collection (Maxwell, 1998).

I have defined young people in this study as under-eighteen year olds, in line with Hunt's (1995) call for more research into the outdoor adventure leisure experiences of this age group. However, the lower age limit for the sampling model in was actually set at fourteen years old, to avoid the problems identified by Fine (1987) and Seiber & Seiber (1992) that younger children may have a lesser vocabulary and reflexive ability, which could limit the scope of the data. My experience at WW further refined the upper age limit to sixteen years old, because very few young people above this age attended watersports courses there.

Both male and female participants were targeted, but school groups accompanied by teachers during term time were not considered, because, in Neulinger's (1981b) terms, the activities were not freely chosen and thus could not be called 'leisure'. Consequently, I considered those courses attended by individuals who had ostensibly booked through their own choice, were not accompanied by adults, but may have been attending with others known to them. I reviewed records of the previous year's courses to ensure that a sufficient population of likely participants would be available.

The targeted two day 'Introduction' courses took place during school Summer holidays, which aligned with my time and resource constraints, and meant that I could take annual leave from my employer to conduct the data gathering. The WW management had identified this segment as a critical area for future revenues and believed that there was significant potential to either attract these participants for further courses, or put them off returning, depending on their experiences at WW.

Identifying the Wednesday/Thursday two-day courses, running from mid-July to the end of August, was helpful in planning the logistics of my proposed data gathering methods. They allowed me time to transcribe pre-course interview tapes to inform my participant

observation, which then informed my post-course interviews, which I could transcribe over a less compressed timescale. Also, I considered the geographical location of participants and a maximum distance of approximately 30 minutes' drive from the centre was deemed reasonable, since the centre records showed that most participants lived within that radius, and living 30 minutes' drive from the centre myself, I had to allow for journey time between interviews reducing the time for their transcription.

The courses had been established with a potential capacity of 80 participants, but poor weather that summer, combined with cancellations, produced a final total of 39 participants. Of these, nine were last minute bookings and could not be considered due to that short timescale. 30 participants were contacted through their parents/guardians and 20 finally agreed to take part in the study. The activity breakdown of these 20 participants was:

- sailing x 6;
- windsurfing x 6;
- kayaking x 5;
- canoeing x 3.

Reasons for non-participation included the parents deciding that the child would not want to be involved (x 3), parents being wary of the study (x 1), young people themselves deciding not to be involved (x 2), illness causing course cancellation (x 1) and families being on holiday immediately before or after the course (x 3). Clearly I arrived at a final number of participants by default through their availability, not though purposive sampling as I had originally planned.

To initiate awareness of the research amongst participants, I primed the WW administrator to establish whether a participant fitted the theoretical sampling model at the course booking stage. When bookings were received, the booker was asked whether they would allow their child to be involved in this study and, if so, I wrote to them within five working days, reconfirming this request. I then followed this up with a telephone call three working days after the letter had been sent, to seek their permission to arrange to interview the child at their house. During the week before the course, I wrote again to remind the participants of my research and telephoned three days later to arrange the interview days and times.

10.4 Interviewing Participants

I interviewed the participants prior to their course to establish their expectations, and then soon afterwards to determine whether these expectations had been met. I conducted the pre-course interviews during the two days before the course, to allow time for transcribing,

and the post-course interviews took place within 24 hours of the course finishing, so that participants' memories would be fresh in their minds. I conducted some post-course interviews at WW with their parent's approval before the participants went home, some took place the following morning, but I carried out the majority on the evening that the course finished.

Patton (1990) and Henderson (1991) agree that in-depth interviewing unearths very rich data on an individual's unique perspective of social reality and Moser & Kalton (1983:301) suggest that an informal approach to such interviewing obtains *"a more complete picture of, say, a person's attitude than a formal interview would"*. They identify a continuum from completely non-directive informal to highly structured formal interviews, where, in the authors' terms, a 'guided interview' of the type used in this thesis would sit near the informal end of this continuum, utilising questions on a general set of topics to encourage talk around these topics and allow for further probing by the interviewer. Patton (1990) has a similar view with his four-item scale, on which the 'interview guide' approach provides general areas of questioning and enables expansion as new material is uncovered.

These typologies link to the more classically used typology of structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Jones, 1991; May, 1993), which also range from formal to informal, respectively. In this study at WW, I used semi-structured interviews, which are appropriate when the researcher knows the interview purpose, general content and approximate sequence of themes (Jankowicz, 1991). Also, with particular reference to interviewing young people, Holmes (1998) states that structured interviews with children can be anxiety inducing, recommending that semi- or un-structured interviews should be conducted as informally as possible, an approach I adopted in this thesis.

At our first meeting it was important that I put each participant at their ease as quickly as possible, to develop trust and a rapport on which to base my interview. May (1993) suggests full and positive engagement with the interviewee; therefore, in Fine & Sandstrom's (1988) terms, I adopted the 'friend' role. I found that the most important 'friend' behaviour was to demonstrate respect for each individual's views and attitudes, remaining value-neutral myself, and making it clear that their opinions were driving my study: the young people were being consulted as individuals with a valid and credible commentary on their experiences. In Holmes' (1998:18) view, I thus became the learner, asking young people to teach me their *"...ways of knowing the world"*.

I treated the participants with courtesy as the fundamental protocol (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) and invited them to use my first name at all times (Fine, 1987). I gave high priority to Rosaldo's (1989) assertion that there is a need to reduce the implied element of power

in an adult-child interaction and I configured the interview environment to help this. Warren's (1988) comment on children not looking up at an adult and Holmes' (1998) reflections that she conducts her interviews at eye level, encouraged me to seek a similar seating arrangement. In most cases I achieved this by sitting opposite the participant in a low, comfortable chair, with an intervening coffee table, and adopting an appropriate posture to maintain the power-neutral principle. Parents were asked to be present in an adjacent room with the door open, so that they could be reassured of my behaviour, but could not interject with their own comments on the young person's thoughts.

Before each interview, I promised the participant confidentiality and guaranteed that anything discussed would only be used in this research and not discussed with anyone else, not even their parents, without their permission. I emphasised the principle of participant control by seeking permission to tape the interview and giving control of the tape recorder to the participants (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1996; Jankowicz, 1991, Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). I then told each participant that at any time, for any reason, they could terminate the interview and I would neither be offended nor change the promise of confidentiality. Finally, I showed each participant how to use the tape recorder and asked them to control the initial sound check, so that they had practised switching it off. Ultimately, none of the participants chose to terminate the interview and, as Jones (1991) and May (1993) suggest, they quickly forgot about the presence of the tape recorder.

I used open-ended questions in the interviews, allowing the content and sequence to vary with different participants and encouraging them to respond in their own words. In addition, I observed Jones' (1991) recommendation to make the interview as conversational as possible. I allowed for digressions, questioned more deeply and precisely when necessary and encouraged the participants to ask me questions, to make the occasion a real interaction with a fuller rapport.

However, during the pre-course interviews, I found that I had to work very hard to be accepted as a male researcher by the participants, reflecting Warren's (1988) argument that this can be a barrier when interviewing with children. Holmes (1998) also observes that male researchers have to work harder than female researchers in establishing a rapport, but she does state that male researchers should not be assumed to lack empathy or nurturing qualities in such situations. In fact, I can reasonably reflect that I had already developed these qualities in my previous work with young people.

I took care not to use academic language and abstract concepts during the interviews and my questions were framed as far as possible using appropriate language and understandable examples (Burgess, 1984; Henderson & Rannells, 1988). Inevitably, this

was not always achieved, but I found that by emphasising to participants the importance of me using language they understood, they were happier to seek clarification or even say outright 'I don't know what you mean'. Sometimes I had to tease this out and I found that paying attention to participants' non-verbal language in such situations was important in developing my understanding of an appropriate lexicon.

At the end of each pre-course interview, which typically lasted around 45 minutes, I offered each participant a copy of the tape, which all declined, and also the final editorial decision on whether any part of the interview should not be used. This was also declined and almost every participant said that they trusted me to transcribe accurately. Jones (1991) recommends transcribing interviews verbatim as soon as possible afterwards and, as the pre-course interviews informed possible in-course critical incidents and the post-course interview, it was imperative for me to transcribe the first interview before the course began.

I followed the same protocols for the post-course interviews, where the participants became more relaxed and keen to discuss their experiences. This was, perhaps, predictable, since we had already developed a rapport during the previous interview and participant observation activities, the latter being explained in the next section. Once I had transcribed the post-course interviews (see Appendix One for an example of a coded interview transcript) I wrote to each participant with my thanks. Although this was, in essence, a form letter, I included a positive comment to each individual on something specific they had told me about their lives, to convey that I respected them as people and valued their contribution to my study (see Figure 10.1 below for a schedule of the first two weeks of data-gathering activities).

	Data Gathering Week 0	Data Gathering Week 1
Monday	1. Write to parents of first week's participants.	1. Pre-course interviews. 2. Transcribe interviews. 3. Write to parents of next week's participants.
Tuesday		1. Pre-course interviews. 2. Transcribe interviews.
Wednesday		1. Participant observation.
Thursday	1. Telephone parents of first week's participants.	1. Participant observation. 2. Post-course interviews (evening). 3. Telephone parents of second week's participants.

Friday	Telephone parents of first week's participants (slippage).	1. Post-course interviews (day time). 2. Transcribe interviews. 3. Telephone parents of second week's participants (slippage).
Saturday		1. Transcribe interviews. 2. Write to participants with thanks.
Sunday		1. Transcribe interviews (slippage). 2. Write to participants with thanks (slippage).

Figure 10.1 Schedule of data gathering planning activities Week 0 and Week 1

10.5 Participant Observation of Watersports Courses

Different authors have analysed the observer's role in research and produced typologies which, although differ slightly, are all linked by one dimension: the degree of involvement the researcher has with the organisation's daily operations.

Gold (1969) suggests a continuum of four roles:

- complete participant (active involvement in all processes - covert);
- participant observer (as above but overtly a researcher);
- observer participant (passive involvement only in social group processes);
- complete observer (observes without taking any part).

Ryan (1995) recommends that these can be used very effectively in tourism field research. He ignores Robson's (1993) fifth proposed role of marginal participant, which is placed between participant observer and observer participant, and allows the observer participant some degree of participation in group happenings, rather than purely in social processes. Adler and Adler (1987) take an alternative view and see the researcher as either detached or involved, linking to Lofland & Lofland's (1995) idea of the unknown/known investigator, and suggest specific roles for both categories, each of which, predictably, forms a continuum. As a detached (known) researcher, the roles of:

- observer;
- observer-interactant;
- observer-interactant-participant .

directly correlate with Gold (1969) and Robson (1993) but vary in their terminology.

Bryman (1989) takes a broader view on organisational research and suggests four generic roles which he links to typical data gathering methods, but he uses the phrase 'participant observation' generically for all of these, which are:

- total participant as a member of one organisation;
- semi-participant with an indirect presence in an organisation;
- interview-based, studying up to five organisations;
- multi-site, studying up to ten organisations.

At WW, I managed the resocialisation process (Burgess, 1984) in order to establish an initial role as an observer participant in Gold's terms, an observer-interactant in Adler & Adler's terms, and a semi-participant in Bryman's terms.

When engaged in participant observation, Allan (1991) recommends that a researcher should anticipate potential problems by establishing procedures and lines of communications, which for this study I based on the safety management principles overarching WW's operations. I was given complete autonomy and trust at the centre, but I established a daily procedure which kept key people informed of my activities. This was not a requirement made explicit by the centre manager, but was based on my own experience of safety management in the outdoor adventure context.

Every day, I 'checked in' at the centre's Reception and identified my contact instructor's name, met briefly with the manager or assistant manager to explain my plan for the day, then agreed this plan with the duty manager responsible for waterfront operations, at the same time checking on specific daily safety issues/weather conditions. After that I made contact with the instructor taking the study subject(s) that day, seeking permission for my observation activities, and finding out exactly how and where on the lake the instructor planned to coach his course. This was a very useful time because the instructors were always keen to talk about their work and offer suggestions as to how the observation activity could be optimised that day. This decision encompassed many variables and required me to operate flexibly, due to changing weather conditions, different instructors' coaching styles, safety cover on the water and the type of equipment that was to be used.

My original intention was to be present with, but separate from, the participants on the water during their courses, but this was not possible for all courses, due to the variables already mentioned. I used an alternative tactic of observing from a rescue boat, because sometimes an instructor would decide to coach from a dedicated powerboat. The third

option involved me observing study subjects from dry land, typically in bad weather conditions when the participants were kept close to the bank of the lake.

I had to make a daily decision on how to observe participants for both the morning session and the afternoon session, and this meant that I had to vary my role on Gold's participant observer continuum, depending on circumstances and the best available means of gathering relevant data. Jones' (1991) principle of intuitively developing an individualised approach to interview techniques was therefore extended to participant observation.

I included the critical incidents identified for each participant in the question themes for the post-course interview, together with issues to check from the pre-course interview.

Given that water was a predominant feature of the activity environment, I had to decide upon an effective means of making field notes. The centre used walkie-talkies in waterproof plastic covers for communication over distance and I adapted this idea for using a hand-held tape recorder in a sealable plastic bag. Despite the distracting rustling sound of the bag when transcribing the tape, this technique worked well.

10.6 Interviewing Management and Staff

Sampling principles have already been discussed here, in terms of homogeneity and internal representativeness of a sample. However, whereas the sample of young people developed from the participant population, the WW manager had already asked his eleven staff to be involved, making a sample of thirteen, including the manager and his assistant manager. Although this seemed convenient, it was important to ensure that no employee was coerced into being interviewed, otherwise the interview content may have been unreliable, therefore I discussed this with each individual informally first.

I explained that both the interview content and the decision to participate were confidential between the employee and me, despite the manager's request for all to be involved. Therefore, if the employee chose not to be interviewed, the manager would not be informed and the employee would not risk any form of sanction. Two employees expressed surprise at this, since they had assumed that management was driving the study and they had to participate. This was where the time I had previously invested to gain acceptance proved beneficial, because all employees responded positively to this promise of confidentiality and agreed to be interviewed, even the individual who had previously been uncooperative.

The centre manager dictated that I could only interview the WW staff after mid-September because their workload was high before that. He was then prepared to allocate time

during their working day, because this study was making a contribution to his centre management. In light of this contribution, he asked me not to interview them in their own time away from the centre.

I interviewed the staff at different times during their working day, depending on their duties. In fact, some still had a significant workload and they preferred to stay late after work to do this in a more relaxed frame of mind. I interviewed the two managers last because they had the least availability, with their interviews being rearranged a number of times due to work pressures.

I adopted similar protocols to those employed in the interviews with course participants, except that rapport development was less necessary. However, in some cases it was helpful to mention that the participant's expertise was making a significant contribution to the study, especially with the previously uncooperative employee. I offered all participants the final editorial decision on their transcript and eleven took this opportunity, making useful additional annotations to extend the meaning of some of their comments.

I conducted a pilot study before the main study, but Allan (1991) recommends that the researcher must make a decision on which aspects of the research design to pilot and to what extent, since it is not possible or appropriate to enact a mini-version of the entire study. I had already developed expertise in interviewing adults in other organisational research, therefore I decided I would test the methods used to gather data from young people. However, I did treat the first employee interview was as a pilot, to anticipate any problems with further interviews.

10.7 The Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study to test the effectiveness of the configuration of my data gathering methods (Maxwell, 1998) and I then used my reflections on this to identify any potential problems with implementing the main study, as Sarantakos (1998) recommends. Pilot studies are concerned with resolving administrative and organisational issues of a study, in particular, testing methods and the research instrument (Clark & Causer, 1991), where in this case, I was the research instrument and had to be well practised in all aspects of the data collection. Maxwell (1998) extends this argument, saying that a better understanding of the people being studied can be arrived at when pilot testing methods or ideas.

A more comprehensive view supporting the rationale behind the WW pilot study is proposed by Moser & Kalton (1983), who believe that the key issues are to estimate the cost and duration of the study, to test methods, estimate response level, become familiar

with the research environment, practise before the main study and test respondents' attitude to the study. I conducted this study on a part-time basis, with little time flexibility; therefore it was vital that the data collection process was not interrupted by problems that could have been predicted in advance.

The process of identifying and contacting a participant sample has already been explained and the parents of twelve participants agreed in principle at this stage, but two lived over two hours' drive from the researcher's house and were, therefore, deselected. Of the remaining ten, two were unable to make a pre-course interview, being away on holiday until the night before their course, and one fell ill on the day of the course and was unable to attend. This left seven study subjects remaining: three on one course and four on courses in the proceeding weeks. I planned the timings for interviews, transcription, participant observation and travel and found already that I would have to manage my time with the three initial participants very efficiently.

10.8 Reflections on the Pilot Study

The most significant issues to consider for the main study were the data gathering logistics, my interviewing technique and two specific aspects of ethical behaviour.

I originally planned to limit the sample of main study participants to eight participants per week to interview, observe and interview again, including travelling and transcribing time. However, the pilot study demonstrated that this would be too ambitious, given the time and timing required of each activity; therefore I limited the main study to a maximum of four participants per course.

Despite being intensive and extremely tiring to implement, the configuration of methods worked well, with data development and progression from the pre-course interview, through participant observation and into the post-course interview. However, the first pre-course interview was almost disastrous, as it lasted only fifteen minutes with the most hesitant and unreflexive participant of the entire study. This was exacerbated by me allowing too much diversion from data themes during the first three interviews, concentrating more on developing a rapport with the participants. Consequently, those interviews often lost direction. I learned from the pilot interviews that this rapport would, in fact, develop naturally as the participants were given time and actively encouraged to speak in a more focused way about the data themes.

At the end of each post-course interview, I asked participants for their candid comments on the way the research had been carried out. All had appreciated they way in which I was obviously interested in their views and opinions without judging them, and most were

surprised that I did not behave like the adult figures of authority they usually had contact with. Most agreed that the pre-course interview was awkward initially, until they became comfortable with articulating their thoughts freely, and they appreciated my informal approach. The participants particularly enjoyed the post-course interview, reflecting on their experiences and re-living particular incidents in a way that they would never usually do with their parents. Some had even been looking forward to that interview to be able to tell someone about their experiences! Some also said that I still occasionally used 'long words', which I should try to avoid for the main study.

I also asked participants whether they felt they had behaved differently because they were being observed, but all said that as soon as soon as their activity started, they forgot about my presence until they saw me at lunchtime or at the end of the day.

10.9 Two Research Decisions Which Tested My Ethical Protocols

I had to make two important ethical research decisions during the pilot study, one which I had anticipated, and one which I had not. Both required careful resolution, as I shall now explain.

One morning, I observed from the shore a windsurfing participant in the middle of the lake, taking longer than usual trying to get back on her sailboard in cold and windy conditions. It was apparent that she was losing strength and beginning to panic in choppy water, and both her instructor and the nearest rescue boat were involved in rescuing others, so were not aware of her situation. She was not in the study sample and I saw her by chance, but felt that the child's safety could be compromised if I did not act, and thus drew it the Duty Manager's attention, who radioed another rescue boat for immediate assistance. The child was quickly rescued and spent a little time in the rescue boat to recover before continuing her activity. At lunchtime I apologised to the Duty Manager and Centre Manager for interfering in the operations, but both agreed that the child's safety was most important and felt that it was not an issue of interference. The Duty Manager then advised the windsurfing instructor to 'reef' participants' sails (make them smaller) after lunch, to be more manageable in such weather conditions, but this was not simply as a result of my intervention.

This scenario had been anticipated and I understood that in acting I was potentially jeopardising my access to WW, but inaction would have compromised the child's safety and this would have been unacceptable (Holmes, 1998). In fact, the incident further cemented my acceptance at WW, as it was a practical demonstration of my reliability in that environment.

The second unanticipated ethical dilemma arose when the parent of a child in the sample telephoned WW on the afternoon of the last day and asked whether I could take her son home in my car, because her other pre-school child was being sick and we were due to conduct the post-course interview that evening anyway. Although prepared to help, I first discussed with the parent my concerns that I was a male adult researcher, little known to her, and I could be perceived as a danger to her child's safety, a notion that I felt very uncomfortable with. The parent explained that she had no other obvious solution and she considered that because I had submitted to a police check and was connected with WW, she could trust me. I finally agreed to do this, but first explained to the WW centre manager the details of this discussion and also recorded them in my research diary, before driving the twenty-minute journey.

Having discussed how the primary data were gathered I shall now explain how these data were analysed.

10.10 Analysing the Primary Data

There were two categories of primary data to analyse, participants' pre- and post-course interviews and staff/management interviews. However, the participant interviewing process was more complex, in that the pre-course interview informed participant observation, which then informed the post-course interview, which I shall now explain.

10.10.1 Interviews and Participant Observation

The process of interview-participant observation-interview took place in a compressed timescale and I followed the procedure listed below:

1. Conduct pre-course interview.
2. Transcribe interview from tape without coding text units (time constraints).
3. Identify key issues for participant observation.
4. Conduct participant observation.
5. Read pre-course interview and participant observation notes to identify issues for post-course interview.
6. Conduct post-course interview.
7. Transcribe interview and code text units.
8. Code pre-course interview in text units.

The interviews were the two key data sources here, since I used the participant observation field notes as an *aide-mémoire* of critical moments of truth for conducting the post-course interview. In fact, as the post-course interviews progressed, I found that the participant observation notes were only required occasionally, since participant's

memories of their experiences were very clear and very few critical moments of truth actually occurred that they could not remember. The participant observation activity was, therefore, less helpful than I originally expected.

I coded all staff and management interviews with units of text as I transcribed them, since this timescale was less compressed.

10.10.2 Analysing Interview Data

The interpretivist approach explained in Chapter Seven informed the approach to data analysis, since it allowed me some degree of pre-structuring, but also enabled data themes to emerge inductively. The first stage of the analysis was to derive and code key themes and sub-themes from the literature review, to act as an initial framework for analysing interview text units. In the coding process, I also allocated codes for blank themes, to allow them to be named as they emerged from the data. I thus established an overall list of themes and sub-themes and each sub-theme was then set up as a Microsoft Word document, with a coded title and space for interview text units to be added to the document. In some cases, where a sub-theme had further lower order sub-themes, I separated and coded them in the same document, to keep a clearer overview and a manageable number (see Appendix Two for an example of a data theme Word document).

During the next stage, I re-checked all interview transcripts to make sure that I had allocated appropriate text units, and I made some adjustments to ensure that a coded unit related to one theme only. Also, as the analysis proceeded, I undertook more refinements after this initial check. Two sets of data files then existed to start the analysis process, one document for each literature sub-theme and one for each coded interview.

I proceeded with the analysis as follows:
1. Open copy of interview document on PC screen.
2. Open the likely sub-theme documents the interview would cover (ten to be just manageable on a PC screen).
3. Cut and paste the interview quote and text unit reference to the sub-theme document.
4. Where interview quotes left in that document, cut and paste to further existing sub-themes, or create new coded sub-themes as appropriate.
5. Add newly coded sub-themes to overview sub-theme list.
6. Repeat for all interviews.

This was a very time-consuming process, which required rigorous organisation and structure. However, it ensured that I scrutinised every interview text unit and either allocated it to a theme derived from the literature review, or to an emergent theme. Once I had produced the complete set of coarse sub-theme documents, I then made further refinements by reallocating text units to more appropriate sub-themes, or by generating more sub-themes. I repeated this process twice more to produce the final set of refined sub-theme documents, which I then screened with respect to the thesis aims, for inclusion in the discussion of results.

In this chapter I have explained the approach I took to sampling, interviewing and observing participants at WW to gather primary data, and have reflected on key issues to emerge from the pilot study. I have then concluded by explaining how I organised and analysed the primary data. In the next section of the thesis I shall present and discuss the results of this analysis in four chapters, which analyse participants' expectations and perceptions of their experience at WW (Chapters Eleven and Twelve), staff and managements' perceptions of these issues (Chapter Thirteen) and the key aspects of service design and delivery that facilitated participants' experiences (Chapter Fourteen).

Presentation and Discussion of Results Section

The previous section has explained the methodological approach, specific methods employed, access and ethical issues considered for primary data gathering at WW. The purpose of this next section is to present and critically analyse the primary data gathered during that fieldwork, using the literature discussed earlier in this thesis. The section consists of four chapters and uses the refined Conceptual Gap Model (Chapter Six) as an overall framework for analysis. The section develops from an initially structured analysis of participants' expectations, to an evolvingly structured analysis of all actors' perceptions and service design issues. This thesis has adopted an interpretivist perspective, but it does not seek to develop unconstrained grounded theory, since to meet the research aims pragmatically, purely interpretivist assumptions would not all be appropriate (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1996); therefore a degree of structure has been necessary as a starting point.

Chapter Eleven identifies participants' expectations of their WW experience and the factors which influenced these, using the determinants posited in the refined Conceptual Gap Model (Chapter Six) as its structure. The purpose of this chapter is to determine whether participants had clear expectations and what had influenced their formation, whether clear or not. In Chapter Twelve participants' perceptions of their experience at WW are analysed, to determine whether these at least matched their expectations, and which aspects of the experience evoked in them a change in disposition towards being satisfied or dissatisfied. Chapter Thirteen proceeds with an analysis of management and employees' understanding of participants' expectations and perceptions and how they were formed, to evaluate whether these were congruent with participants' and each others' views. Finally, Chapter Fourteen identifies which elements of service design and delivery had the most significant influence on participants' experiences at WW, to evaluate design and delivery of that managed process.

There are three categories of interview respondent in this section and, for clarity for the reader, quotations from each have been allocated a different font as follows:
- participants: ***bold italics***;
- management: **bold normal font**;
- employees: *italics*.

Chapter Eleven

Participants' Expectations and Their Determinants

11.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse participants' expectations of their outdoor adventure leisure experience, and how significant the determinants of these expectations were. It is structured using the determinants in the refined Conceptual Gap Model (Chapter Six), but also incorporates the proposed sources of 'critical moments of truth' (Chapter Three) into the 'needs and wants' determinant. An additional determinant of expectations emerges from the data at the end of the chapter, and this is proposed as a further refinement of the Conceptual Gap Model.

11.2 Participants' Expectations

Seventeen of the twenty participants believed that they had no expectations prior to the course, all stating that they had not thought about what to expect, contradicting Oliver (1981) and Tse & Wilton (1988), but supporting Arnould & Price (1993) in the adventure leisure context, with CR, responding typically: *"I haven't thought about it really...I don't know"*. However, three participants then tried to be helpful and suggest some ideas based on a description of the activity, but these were rather contrived and could not be called expectations, being exemplified by KL's comment: *"...a boat with a sail, I suppose!"*. These vague or undefined fuzzy expectations (Ojasalo, 2001) reflect Schneider & Bowen's (1995) notion of a broad 'cognitive schema' of likely experiences. Also, they support Hirschman & Holbrook's (1982) argument that in leisure, there may be no cognitive expectation of the emotional response to the intrinsic satisfaction of engagement, and the conclusion by Brown (1989) and Fick & Ritchie (1991) that we are not always conscious of what we seek from outdoor recreation experiences.

Rather than having clear expectations of adventure leisure, participants such as those at WW, may have had hopes and aspirations of how they would like their experience to be, but these may have been partially formed, or nebulous. This becomes apparent as the determinants of expectations from the refined Conceptual Gap Model in Chapter Six are analysed, to determine how they might influence a *lack* of expectations.

11.3 Participants' Needs and Wants

The review of literature suggests nine prime sources of critical moments of truth during a service encounter, and participants' needs and wants from their service experience can be analysed using a refinement of these sources. It became clear from the interview data that most participants were seeking satisfaction through changing their emotional

disposition during their service experience (Diener, 1992) as a direct result of their engagement in creating the leisure experience (Beard & Ragheb, 1980); therefore, these two potential critical moment of truth sources are combined for the analysis in this chapter. In addition, it is problematic to separate the 'influences of the marketing environment' from the expectations determinant 'external communications'; therefore these will be combined as 'external communications'. The reconceptualised sources of critical moments of truth in the following sections will therefore be:

1. Service employees.
2. Participants' own actions changing their disposition.
3. Tangible appearances.
4. The controllable servicescape.
5. The non-controllable servicescape.
6. Participants' socialscape.
7. The service organisation and management competence.

11.3.1 Service Employees

The two key attributes required of service employees were their technical and social skills, suggested by Wirtz & Bateson (1999), which when activated, Schneider & Bowen (1995) call the roles of 'information gatekeepers' (the instructing role) and 'impression managers' (the enthusing role). However, the participants' view was that instructors 'should' have the technical skills, and they only 'hoped' for the social skills, suggesting that a wider zone of tolerance existed for the latter.

Over half the participants believed that their instructors should have a good technical knowledge of the activity in line with Schneider & Bowen's (1995) gatekeeper role. CR said, *"They should know quite a bit about it, just be instructors, really. They would be teaching me so they should know what they are doing"*. In addition to this, most of these participants had a realistic view on the level of competence an instructor should possess, where AS said they should *"Know enough to be able to teach you, maybe a bit more, because no-one can know everything"* and GW was more specific: *"Well, they should know maybe one or two levels more than they're teaching us, but they don't need to know everything"*.

None of these data on instructor competence makes specific reference to competence or qualifications, rather, the participants talked about what the instructors 'should know'. They were aware that the instructors should have some formal qualification, but this seemed abstract to them, as they had no real idea of what the qualifications would entail; therefore they articulated their need in terms they understood.

The social skills hoped for by participants in Schneider & Bowen's (1995) impression manager's role attracted far more comments than the technical skills, agreeing with Ferguson *et al.'s* (1999) suggestion that in a high participation service such as at WW, employees' attitude and language are integral parts of the service (see also, Lee *et al.*, 2000). This focus on the importance of impression management emphasises that the relationship and interaction between instructors and participants in outdoor adventure would be crucial to producing a positive experience for participants (Holyfield, 1999; Kalisch, 1979), and that such an interaction would potentially contain some emotional charge (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Wurdinger, 1997).

Thirteen participants hoped that their instructors would be friendly and good fun, summarised by Bettencourt & Gwinner (1996) as interacting on the same level and illustrated by PM stating: *"Well, friendly, good fun to be with. Well, serious as well, so you, sort of, learn the things, but also out there so that you can have a good time"*, and SJ saying *"...talk to you, not just tell you what to do and helping you out if you get stuck"*.

Fifteen participants stated concerns about understanding and respect from instructors, identifying behaviour they hoped would and would not be displayed. For example, HM said, *"I hope they have respect for you not knowing. They can't expect you to do something you don't understand. They ought to treat us as beginners – as we are – just be friendly, really"* and AL agreed: *"Not moody, like, because you've done something wrong"*. CP was more specific, saying, *"I hope they don't pick on you because you are not doing that well. They encourage you, help out if you do something wrong. Encouraging and not putting you down"*. Other similar hopes were expressed: *"Nice and not just do this and do that"* (AB), and *"I wouldn't want them to be shouting at me"* (CR), demonstrating that this hope for empathy and caring respect from instructors identified by Barrett & Greenaway (1995) was clearly very important.

11.3.2 Participants' Own Actions Changing Their Disposition

Young people seek leisure experiences which give them feelings of pleasure (Kleiber *et al.*, 1986); therefore they seek to change their disposition through experiencing leisure, and the interview data on participants' needs and wants from their own performances supported this assertion. Almost all of the participants stated that they were hoping to experience some combination of freedom, excitement and a feeling of control over what they were doing, with only one respondent demurring because he did not initially want to go to WW.

The participants used words such as 'exhilaration', 'excitement' and 'freedom' to describe the changing disposition they hoped to experience, which reflects Anderson's (1996) findings. Also, many aspired to control their service experience (Hui & Bateson, 1991) through skilled leisure consumption (Lentell & Morris, 1995; Gratton & Taylor, 2000), as the following comments demonstrate:

> *"...just the excitement of sailing fast across the water and being in control"* (CS).

> *"...exciting, sailing in control in choppy water, you know, beating the water with your skill"* (JD).

> *"You're, sort of, in control and you can just do what you want for...you're just out there. It's the freedom"* (GW).

> *"You're kind of, out there on your own, you're kind of, very independent and in control, I don't know, you've got, like, a sense of excitement from it"* (CB).

The emotions identified here can be categorised as arousal and dominance (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), suggesting that in this context, the original PAD categories are more relevant than Russell's (1980) circumplex model of pleasure and arousal.

In addition, four participants were keen to use their opportunity to practise skilled consumption for their own self-enhancement (Ryan, 1995), and experience a sense of newness (Arnould & Price, 1993) as a novice participant, to make a positive contribution to their lives (Oliver, 1996). For example, TW said, *"Actually be able to do something I've never done before"* and PM agreed, adding *"...it means I've learned a new skill that not everyone has learned"*, suggesting that he was using this leisure activity to define his own identity (Godbey, 1994) through developing himself as an individual (Botterill, 1987).

These aspirations for meaningful adventure leisure experiences were echoed by four more participants who hoped to realise personal values (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999) by, for example, *"...learning to do things properly, and well"* (SH). SJ agreed with SH, saying, *"To try it properly, not just messing about"*, and TG extended this meaning into fulfilment through self-expression (Priest & Gass, 1997), stating, *"...it's not the kind of thing you can just get on and do straight away. You have to put some work in, yes, it's quite fulfilling"*.

The participants initially seemed to be seeking feelings of pleasure (Anderson, 1996; Kleiber *et al.*, 1986, Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, Russell, 1980), in hedonic leisure consumption (Arnould & Price, 1993, Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). However, it was also evident that nearly half the

participants hoped to express themselves in some way. This supports Dimanche & Samdhal's (1994) argument that leisure consumption feelings and self-expression are not mutually exclusive and Hightower *et al.*'s (2002) suggestion that hedonic leisure consumption can also involve some degree of enduring involvement.

11.3.3 Tangible Appearances

The appearance of the site was only considered by six participants, all of whom felt that it would give them a good impression if it looked clean and well-organised, supporting Johns & Howard (1998). This was typified by CB who said, *"I think it ought to look quite clean and smart, it was when I've been before"* and CR, who said, *"Just boats lined up against the water's edge, I suppose."*

Half the participants commented on the appearance of the watersports equipment they were likely to use (boats and personal protective equipment). Two of these were ambivalent, saying, *"I don't really care what it looks like, as long as I get a boat to use"* (KL) and *"It doesn't really bother me whether it's old or new"* (AS). PM had an unrealistic hope stating, *"Well, I generally like to use new equipment, because it looks better, so I hope it is".* However, Chase & Stewart's (1997) comment on service fail-safing suggests that PM's unrealistic hope should somehow have been made realistic by WW management or staff, but as his interview took place the day before his course, this was unlikely to happen before he arrived at the centre. If PM's hope had, instead, been a precise expectation, he would have been dissatisfied by his perceptions of this tangible quality indicator.

Six of the participants had realistic hopes about the appearance of the equipment, for example, *"I hope it's all up-to-date and hasn't got holes and looks tacky or stuff."* (HH) and *"Well, not absolutely brand new, but I hope they're* [wetsuits] *not falling apart or anything...a good standard, you know, safety..."* (CB). A seventh respondent stated, *"I should think it's old and battered, because it's in the water all the time"* (CR), a comment which could be interpreted as mere cynicism, but when questioned further, CR was clearly making a logical assumption on the amount of use the equipment would get.

The appearance of employees was not considered important to most participants, with HM stating *"I'm not worried, really".* However, five thought that the image of instructors was important and they should be smart and well equipped with good quality personal protective equipment. TW summarised this stating his desire that instructors should have *"Good gear, all the wetsuits, buoyancy aids, just looking like they know what they're doing",* a realistic expectation at WW.

These data on tangible attributes support Fick & Ritchie's (1991) statement that tangible items are sector-specific, such that the personal protective equipment and watercraft provided at WW would only be required in adventure leisure watersports. Also, tangible attributes would have different degrees of importance and they are clearly not the most important to the participants in this study. This suggests that WW was not facilities-oriented, but people-oriented (Lee *et al.*, 2000), despite the centre's facilities being critical to the service.

11.3.4 The Controllable Servicescape

The pre-course interviews elicited comments from only three participants on the controllable servicescape, suggesting that most had no hopes or expectations regarding the functionality of the facilities and equipment, despite half of them giving some consideration to the appearance of these tangible items (see above).

CP hoped that personal artefacts (Bitner, 1990, 1992) would include appropriate personal protective equipment, expressing this hope as a question during the interview: *"A lifejacket. Well, should you be allowed out on the water if you don't have one? Wetsuits, hopefully, and helmets?"*, highlighting a fuzzy hope, based on no prior experience at WW, but clearly some understanding of the likely servicescape.

GW and CB both said that they hoped for comfortable facilities (Bitner, 1992, 1990) on the lakeside, with GW stating, *"Somewhere to sit down afterwards when you're waiting to be picked up. Somewhere to put your clothes when you're changing. Nice showers with hot water!"* and CB concurring over changing room facilities, *"Warm, I don't know, hot showers, because you get can cold outside"*. WW would thus positively influence the repurchase decision (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994) of these two participants, by ensuring that their perceptions of the changing room facilities met such precise hopes.

11.3.5 The Non-controllable Servicescape

All participants commented on how the weather could be a critical influence on their enjoyment at WW, but only three ignored its unpredictability and stated unequivocally that they wanted windy conditions for their sailing courses, with SH summarising why for all of them: *"...so I can go faster and it will be really exciting"*. However, the remaining seventeen participants acknowledged weather variability and expressed a range of conditions they hoped would, or would not, occur, based on their own zones of tolerance (Galloway, 1999; Kasper *et al.*, 1999). Seven of the participants asserted their weather aspirations positively, with AS saying, *"I hope it's going to be sunny, you know, nice*

and warm" for her kayak course and CB stating of her sailing course, *"It will be good if there's a fresh breeze to be able to sail and I don't mind what it's like otherwise"*.

Some participants had clear reasoning for their hopes and could give more detailed scenarios, for example, *"If it was like this* [sunny, with some wind] *on the first day and then on the second day more windy when I've got the hang of it"* (PM) and *"Well, if it was windy on one day and not the other, providing we did all the technical things when there wasn't any, well, that's OK"* (GW). GW's comment here demonstrates that even as a fourteen year old with little past experience of managed outdoor adventure leisure, he understood how the weather variable could be managed at WW, to ensure that he was satisfied with his sailing course. Further, CS commented that learning to sail in calm weather conditions would make him *"A bit disappointed, I expect, but there will still be other things to learn"* and he made a thoughtful statement to show that he also understood this particular challenge faced by WW management, saying, *"...I guess it's just beyond our control"* (CS).

The twelve sailing and windsurfing participants had clearly formed a cognitive understanding of the importance of wind conditions and how these could affect their enjoyment, but only three of the eight canoeists and kayakers felt that the weather was important. AS is already quoted above regarding warm weather and KH, expressing the same sentiment in a different way said, *"Getting cold will be really annoying and we won't enjoy it so much"*. The implication of these comments is that windy, and therefore, potentially cold, conditions were hoped for by most sailors and windsurfers, but calm and warm conditions were hoped for by some canoeists and kayakers, where all four activities were taking place on the same lake at the same time. This tension could have resulted in different participant groups being simultaneously satisfied and dissatisfied, depending on their chosen activity. However, the participants in this study seemed to understand that canoeing and kayaking were less weather-dependent than sailing and windsurfing, suggesting that participants in these two activity pairings would have different zones of tolerance of the uncontrollable weather conditions inherent at WW.

The participants had fuzzy hopes (Ojasalo, 2001) regarding the likely weather conditions, but from these hopes one precise expectation was clear, that they would have to accept the potentially unpredictable prevailing weather conditions.

11.3.6 Participants' Socialscape

Fourteen participants stated that their main reason for going to WW was to share an experience with a friend or sibling. This reflects Swan & Bower's (1998) observation that whereas most service quality and satisfaction studies consider customers in solitary

confinement, the social aspect of the service experience is an important determinant of customer satisfaction, and was exemplified by GW saying, *"I'm going because my friend's going"*.

In addition, five participants said that an important reason for going was to meet new people and possibly make new friends. HM, for example, who was already going with her friend, said *"I like to meet new people, make new friends, and it's kind of a good opportunity to do that"*, supporting Unger's (1984) argument that the social situation can have the most positive effect on a leisure experience, and Priest & Gass' (1997) demonstration of how people kayaking together reinforces feelings of personal satisfaction.

Twelve participants explained in more detail their hopes of fellow participants, the two important themes being friendliness and having fun together, where there is a dependence on socialising with other service participants (Canziani, 1997). This is illustrated well by CB's statement: *"I want them to be generally friendly, no nastiness to anyone, but, if you can, just like, get on, although you're all different types of people, well, that makes it more fun, really, doesn't it?"*.

A further aspect of this social interaction was noted by two participants, who concurred with Bettencourt's (1997) assertion that customers may need to help each other directly during service delivery. TW expected *"...to help each other out if we're in trouble"* which develops Bettencourt's argument further at WW, where participants often had an important physical dependence on each other.

11.3.7 The Service Organisation and Management Competence

In the outdoor adventure leisure environment at WW the fundamental management imperative was to demonstrate a duty of care through ensuring the physical and mental safety of young participants, where staff were acting in *loco parentis* (Donne & Jordan, 1997). Although this was not understood by participants as being a legal requirement, they all expected that safety would be managed effectively as a hygiene factor within the WW service system. For example, CB commented: *"Obviously there's a slight risk, but I don't think it's going to be serious because they're always going to be keeping an eye on you and, like, everyone's looking out for everyone else"*.

This was a unanimous and precise expectation that safety would be well managed at WW, where any perception of it not being so could have serious implications. In the worst case, a real breakdown in safety management could have resulted in injury or death to participants or staff, with a legal case for WW to answer amidst inevitable media

exposure. Alternatively, where participants perceived a safety breakdown, real or not, without injury occurring, this might still have become known locally through word of mouth and even media coverage. Therefore, any perception that this safety management expectation had not been met at WW, could have had a significance influence on future revenues.

11.4 Participants' Past Experience of Watersports

The three participants who expressed 'precise' expectations (Ojasalo, 2001), did so in relation to their past experience at WW. CB stated *"I think I shall find the atmosphere down there very relaxing"*, explaining further that this was important to her and she clearly expected the experience to make a positive contribution to her life (Oliver, 1996). GW said of the personal protective equipment used: *"Well, I expect it to be in good condition, because most of the stuff there is..."*, demonstrating that he was cognisant of these tangible signs of service quality (Lentell, 2000; Wisniewski, 2001). Also, HH had been on a similar course elsewhere, which he did not enjoy due to the limited time spent doing the activity on the water. However, at WW he expected this to be different, as he explained: *"But when I booked this one they said that you spend most of your time on the water, so this time I expect it would be better"*, reflecting Kellogg *et al.*'s (1997) argument that increased effort (time) expended doing an activity results in increased satisfaction for participants.

Most of the participants had no experience at all of the particular activity in which they would take part, but many had some experience of watersports; therefore they were not strictly novice 'watersports' participants. However, if the notion of first time users is applied to the specific activity level, rather than watersports in general, O'Neill & Palmer's (2003) assertion that unclear expectations can result from no past experience is valid.

11.5 The Concept of Equity With Other Participants

Mackay & Crompton (1988) propose that recreationalists expect providers to meet customer requirements equitably and two participants demonstrated sensitivity to the concept with 'implicit' expectations (Ojasalo, 2001), which would be noticed if not present. HH observed that his instructor would have *"...to look at everyone. He's got teach everyone the same thing"* and CB stated, *"...you're all learning the same things and no-one's getting any more than anyone else, so everybody ends up the same...you should get what you pay for"*.

This confirms the relevance of equity as a determinant of customer expectations at WW, but a further issue of equity was raised by AL and GW. They were concerned that their instructor would have different, and more expensive, personal protective equipment to

them and AL complained, *"It makes you, like, you know, jealous!"*. Although AL then agreed that, *"It's probably because it's their own..."*, he was still not happy with his own explanation and continued with a false argument to try to justify his comment, saying, *"...you should still get good quality kayaks because they must have loads of people going there"*.

AL's comment was apposite for WW, because instructors typically did provide their own equipment, for reasons of comfort, utility, robustness or style, and participants could have perceived that they were using inferior equipment, influencing their tangible quality judgement. Therefore, Mackay & Crompton's equity criterion can be expanded to include 'perceived equity' between service employees and customers, in service contexts where employees and customers use similar equipment during service delivery.

11.6 Participants' Entry Mood
Seventeen participants were able to identify that they were in a particular pre-course mood, all hoping to have fun and enjoyment (Anderson, 1995, 1996; MacDonald, 1995) from the activity, encapsulated by AL's comment, *"Well, have fun, be able to try it and just enjoy it, really"*.

Only one respondent (AB) was not looking forward to going to WW and when asked he said, *"Not really. Yeah, you just get all cold. No I don't know if it will be that good. I'm not sure because, well, I'm not sure I want to do it, I haven't got a reason, really"*. In fact, during the interview, AB made it clear that he strongly resented his mother booking him on to the windsurfing course without asking him first, but he asked that his comments on this were excluded from the final interview transcript. He said that he would have chosen kayaking instead, commenting on windsurfing, *"I think it's a cross between surfing and sailing. I really hated sailing, I just didn't like it, I really hated it. All you do is sit in boats and go about, that's it"*. He then continued on kayaking, *"It's just enjoyable for me. I like physically paddling about and learning to do things, Eskimo rolls and things like that"*. AB's entry mood was therefore influenced by his past experience and not being consulted by his mother before she booked the course.

Two participants expressed a neutral mood about their impending courses, both for the reason that they wanted something to do in the holidays, and they simply saw this as another holiday activity, with no need for further thought. HH said, *"We'll be out all day and it's something to do in the holidays"* and JD stated, *"I've been home for the past few weeks on my school holidays. Bored. It's a good way of getting out of the house and doing something"*. Both participants had much previous experience of other watersports and some in their particular course activity, suggesting that entry mood could

exist with a dynamic zone of tolerance (Kasper *et al.*, 1999), where positive or negative entry moods become neutralised the more they are experienced.

However, this would contradict Barrett & Greenaway's (1995) assertion that outdoor adventure has an enhancing, spiritual dimension for young people, which should logically engender a positive entry mood. It is possible, therefore, that during their previous watersports experiences, HH and JD may not have experienced a state of Optimal Arousal (Ellis, 1973), or Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 2000), where lesser states of each imply some degree of boredom, which may influence future entry moods. Flow, in particular, should be autotelic (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) - so enjoyable that it must be repeated – suggesting a positive future entry mood.

The remaining seventeen participants, who had less previous watersports experience than HH and JD, said that they were looking forward to their courses, in many cases, quite excitedly, although five agreed with HH and JD that it was another holiday activity to avoid boredom. Despite this, all seventeen felt that the novelty of the activity and its environment (Gray, 1987) was a key factor in setting their mood, illustrated by SH who said, *"It's not something I would normally do. I do see it as more special, definitely a little bit more special"*.

Despite their mood of positive anticipation, six of these seventeen participants expressed a view that they were also nervous, worried or uncomfortable, about what they would experience in four of the prime sources of critical moments of truth developed here, namely:

1. Service employees;
2. The non-controllable servicescape;
3. Participants' own actions/performance;
4. Participants' new socialscape.

AL was concerned about the service employees, stating, *"Well, in the boating last time the instructor just raced off ahead, miles away, and we were miles behind and if we'd capsized badly and hurt ourselves they wouldn't have known"*, whereas, TG was worried about the non-controllable servicescape, saying *"It's OK if it's raining, but if it's really stormy I won't be able to stand up! It's the high winds I won't like"*.

Two participants lacked confidence in their ability to develop their skilled consumption, reflected by PM observing, *"I don't want to turn up and not be able to do anything. I'm a bit worried that I'm completely hopeless; that would be a waste of time"*. This supports Ryan's (1995) observation that frustration can occur in such situations. A further

three participants were worried about their changing disposition as a result of 'unskilled' consumption, such that they would be embarrassed in front of the instructor and other participants if they made a mistake. For example, HM said *"I don't want to be seen to be getting it wrong. Yes, that's the thing, it's embarrassing"*. This links participants' concerns over their personal actions, with concerns over how fellow participants in the socialscape would perceive these actions.

It was possible, then, for participants at WW to be happy about their impending experience, but also to be in an uncomfortable, nervous or worried mood at the same time. This was clearly a tension for them, but it can be explained by the simultaneous existence of pleasure and arousal emotions (Bagozzi, *et al.*, 1999; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Russell, 1980). However, Hanna & Wozniak (2001) explain entry mood as a temporary feeling and a quote from HM demonstrates how, at WW, her concerns over the socialscape would not be permanent:

> *"I just don't like going on the first day and not knowing anybody and them not knowing me and I just feel uncomfortable. Everyone just sits in a circle looking nervous and uncomfortable. Well, it's on the first day, because you don't know everyone and especially if they have come with someone it can be quite difficult. You're just, like, sent up to a room and they introduce you to everybody. You have the chance to talk and get to know each other better and it's OK really".*

HM's description of the introduction process was based on her previous experience of getting to know fellow participants on such a course, and concurs with Hanna & Wozniak that the feeling is only temporary. However, it is more significant in contradicting Hanna & Wozniak's assertion that entry mood is a determinant of expectations, since these interview data suggest that the participants' entry moods were actually set by their expectations, and would be adjusted in their changing disposition once they entered the service.

11.7 Word of Mouth Influencing Expectations

Three participants had never heard of WW, and the only one of these who had a negative comment to make, AB, stated: *"I just don't think it will be that good, because all the people I've heard from say they didn't really like it, they just found it hard"*. However, it became apparent during the pre-course interview that he did not want to attend the course and his mother was making him do so; therefore AB's response may have been influenced by this.

The remaining seventeen participants had positive perceptions of the centre from friends and family. For example, AL said, *"Some boys at school have been. They liked it and said it was fun and they wanted to come again"* and PM stated more emphatically,

"They said the courses were good. I thought Wow! I'd like to do all that!". This comment suggests that PM had 'implicit' expectations of the course (Ojasalo, 2001) and he would notice if he did not do all that his friends had suggested he might.

11.8 External Communications Influencing Expectations

Prior to being booked onto their courses, only two participants had seen WW publicity material using *"...posters and things"* (CP), six had not seen such material and the remaining twelve participants were not sure. However, only three participants had never heard of WW, one of whom did not live locally; therefore, as HH stated, *"It's obviously a well known one, it's well known around here"*. This suggests that WW had little need to advertise to raise local awareness of its service, and that the word of mouth medium discussed in the previous section was effective in achieving this.

Despite these participants' awareness of the centre, this lack of detailed external communications materials may have contributed to their inability to form clear expectations of their impending experience at WW. However, an additional factor may have been that many of the participants were not involved in the purchase decision themselves and, thus, may not have been sufficiently informed, or interested, to form clear expectations, as the next section explores.

After a customer made a course booking at WW they were sent written confirmation and further information about their course and the centre. Only three participants had seen this information and said that they were happy with the content. The remaining participants knew which watersports activity they would be doing, but ten had concerns that they did not know enough about their course in advance and would have liked more information. For example, TH stated, *"They haven't sent us anything explaining about it in more detail, what it's going to be. It would have been nice. I can't remember seeing anything which tells you this properly"*.

The participants had different ideas about the information they would have liked, which fell into two categories. The first concerned the other participants and staff, for example, AB would have liked to know who was on the course *"...so you can get to know their names easier. Maybe, like, send a photo of everyone, so you can recognise them when you are there"*. PM also commented, *"I would have liked the letter to say the size of group and what instructor you're getting, just so you know who to find when you arrive"*. These expectations were unrealistic for WW to achieve, since new customers could arrive on the morning of the course, and the occasional use of a pool of part-time instructors meant that individual staff could not always be guaranteed more than a few days in advance of the course. To help participants to identify their instructor when

they arrived there was a large photograph board on the wall at the WW reception, but this was obviously not known prior to arrival.

The second category related to the structure and content of the course, for example, HM said he would have liked to know *"...just a bit more about the structure of the day. Something like that to give a brief insight and you know what you'll be doing"*, supported by AS, who said, *"It would have been good to get something to say what kind of things we would be doing"*. TW wanted to know *"...some basics on, how to, you know, steer"*, and TE agreed with him stating, *"Because it's not easy to pick up...But if there were basic instructions it might stay in your memory a bit more"*. These were realistic expectations and could easily have been accommodated in WW's customer information.

It is clear that most participants had not seen the post-booking information sent out by WW and could not, therefore, use this information to establish clear expectations. However, it was likely that participants' parents had seen this information and this potential information filter is discussed in the next section.

11.9 The Parent Influencing Participants' Expectations

The interview data showed that a further determinant of participants' expectations could have been the final purchase decision-maker, since only one respondent (HH) organised everything himself. Ten of the twenty participants said that their mother booked the course and then told them afterwards. For example, KL stated, *"She just told me I'm going on it! And it's half-term and she works...she just wants me out of the house!" My mum said it should be fun, so I guess that's what I want to do"*. Nine of the remaining participants had expressed a desire to go themselves, but even so, their mothers organised appropriate dates and made the payment, illustrated by SH saying, *"She 'phoned up, got the information and booked"*.

All except one of these purchase decisions were therefore based on convenience to the mother or family activities (Howard & Madrigal, 1990) and with nearly all participants having little or no involvement in the final purchase activity, it can be concluded that this contributed to their unclear expectations. The purchase decision maker, namely the mother in this study, was potentially filtering the information that participants received about the centre prior to their courses and should, therefore, be incorporated into the Conceptual Gap Model as an additional determinant of their children's expectations.

11.10 Chapter Summary

The key findings of this chapter are summarised below.

1. Most participants said that they had no clear expectations of their experience at WW. Most expressed fuzzy hopes and aspirations influenced by:

    -   unclear wants and needs;
    -   little or no past experience of the activity or WW;
    -   having had no sight of WW's external communications;
    -   their mother making the purchase decision for them.

    This last influence is, therefore, an additional determinant of expectations.

2. The three participants who had clear expectations were influenced by past experience and clearer wants and needs. Two also confirmed the concept of equity with fellow participants as a determinant of their expectations.

3. Participants' most important hopes and concerns were based on four sources of critical moments of truth:

    -   employees;
    -   their own performance/actions;
    -   the socialscape;
    -   the non-controllable servicescape (weather).

4. Participants' entry mood was determined by their hopes and concerns from the same critical moment of truth sources, rather than their entry mood informing hopes and concerns as the refined Conceptual Gap Model had originally proposed. Therefore, entry mood is not a determinant of expectations, rather, expectations determine entry mood.

Chapter Twelve

Participants' Perceptions

12.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter participants' expectations were analysed and it was found that rather than being clear, they were instead fuzzy hopes and concerns over four potential sources of critical moments of truth: employee behaviour, their own performance, the socialscape and the non-controllable servicescape. In this chapter participants' overall perceptions of their experience at WW are analysed and their ability to evaluate these experiences cognitively is explored. Then, developing the structure inductively, the remainder of the chapter is an analysis of participants' perceptions of their experience of four main critical moment of truth sources, to determine whether disconfirmation existed. Perceptions of the tangible appearance of the centre and safety management are also included, since they had little significance as expectations, hopes or concerns, but featured in participants' perceptions. Throughout the chapter, my participant observation and research diary notes are used to add thicker description to the interview data.

12.2 Cognitive Evaluation of the WW Experience

Early in the post-course interviews, participants were asked to reflect overall on whether their experience at WW had exceeded their expectations, followed by a more detailed discussion of their memories. Three were unable to form a cognitive judgement at this stage of the interview, illustrated by DK's vague comment, *"No real idea. None, really, er, I don't know"*. However, all three later described aspects of their WW course in detail and gave clear indications that they had enjoyed their course, but were still unable to evaluate the experience as a whole. None of these participants had clear pre-course expectations or hopes as first time service users (O'Neill & Palmer, 2003), supporting Fick & Ritchie's (1991) argument that it may be difficult for participants to express a judgement of their expectations and perceptions, and being characterised by KL's statement, *"I don't know. Well, I wasn't expecting much really, because I didn't know what would happen. I was thinking I'm going sailing and I hope it's fun"*. However, Cooper & Lockwood's (1992) assertion that recreationalists rarely dissect their experiences is contradicted here, since these participants could only attempt any form of evaluation later by using specific memories as reference points.

One respondent (AS) initially gave a neutral evaluation of her experience: *"It was what I expected because I had done some of it before"*, and this evaluation remained neutral for much of the interview. In fact, it became apparent that AS was neutral about nearly all aspects of the course, despite saying that she had had fun and, in her pre-course

interview, stating that her most important hope was to *"...have a good laugh"*. However, during the post-course interview AS eventually stated that she had had an important expectation *"To learn something new"*, but that this had not been fulfilled, since some of the course repeated what she had done before. She said, *"The first day I was a bit bored, but the second was better because we were doing capsizing and I liked that"*, but later contradicted herself by adding,

> *"Well, I really liked the part on the first day when we...started doing really silly things on the kayaks, sitting on the very back, sitting on the tail, sitting a long way back without flipping over and two people facing each other and steering. That was all fun, playing around",*

thus meeting her original hope. AS was not prepared, or able, to say how important the unmet expectation was to her and concluded that, *"The whole thing was what I expected it to be"*, implying that it was unimportant, The additional interview notes on this at the end suggest otherwise: "AS seemed to be being polite about how disappointed she was and, after her initial comment, was reluctant to say how important that really was".

It is possible that the pre-course interview could have acted as a 'word of mouth' determinant to prompt AS to develop this expectation of learning something new, but she seemed to believe that it had always existed, whether stated or not. In addition, through her previous kayaking experience, AS could have over-perceived her competence (Carpenter & Priest, 1989) during the course and wrongly believed that she was capable of learning new manoeuvres. This changing disposition in the extended service encounter could then have encouraged her to develop new, unrealistic expectations of what she thought she should be learning, which would not be met.

The remaining sixteen participants all felt that their perceptions of their courses were better than their pre-course expectations, even though most had expressed hopes, rather than expectations. At this post-course interview stage it is possible that the participants were more familiar with the interview process and language, and considered hopes and expectations concepts interchangeably. Alternatively, as Johnson & Mathews (1997) suggest, service customers do not like to be dissatisfied and the participants might, consciously or subconsciously, have adjusted, clarified or created post-experience expectations to avoid dissatisfaction. For example, SH said, *"It was better. I suppose actually going out and doing something is better than just thinking about it"*, suggesting that he wanted it to be better than he expected and was searching for a reason to justify this.

In more instances, however, the data supported Voss' (2003) observation that service customers like to be surprised and Johns & Howard's (1998) study findings that an unexpected attribute was important for customer delight. *"I loved it and I want to do it again! It was brilliant! I thought we learned more stuff than we would"* was PM's eulogy over the autotelic nature of his experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) and HM added, *"Better. I didn't think there would be so much messing around. I thought there would be more, er, learning, only learning, and being tested, so that was good"*. A particular episode that I observed HM enjoying was a paired exercise to practice getting on a sailboard and standing up in balance for as long as possible, before falling in. HM learned to balance on both feet very quickly and she used the remaining time to jump into the water in different, funny ways, to amuse her partner and herself.

It should be noted that the *'messing around'* to which HM refers involved structured play in the different watersports, to develop participants' confidence in their environment, themselves and each other.

Of these sixteen participants, three specifically related their perceptions back to hopes and expectations they had expressed in their pre-course interviews. CS had hoped he would be in control and subsequently said, *"It was better than I expected, sailing on my own with S standing on the side giving me instructions, but me in control. I thought we'd always be with an instructor"*. TW achieved his aspiration to be able to do something new: *"Just learning something you've never done before and enjoying it and wanting to come back and do more"*, highlighting like PM the autotelic nature of his experience. In these comments, both participants demonstrated their interchangeable interpretation of hopes, aspirations and expectations.

HH was one of the few to have specific expectations, set by staff at WW when he booked his course himself. He was promised more time sailing than he had experienced previously elsewhere and confirmed this, saying, *"Much better. The fact that the amount of sailing we did, there was loads and I was really tired at the end. It was better, the amount of time on the water"*. HH clearly had this intention from the beginning, because he was always the first person in his group to be underway sailing in the morning and after lunch, and always the last person to land and de-rig his boat at the end of the day.

Finally, one respondent, AB had not wanted to go to WW because his mother had booked him on a course he would not have chosen, and because he had a very vague impression of what his windsurfing activity would entail. In fact, he was extremely positive after the course and said, *"It was better than I expected, much better...because I thought it*

would be really boring and cold and just really hard, but it was quite easy and really fun". AB was very sullen during the first morning of his course when the group was learning the basic principles of windsurfing and the instructor (DB) regularly asked him questions to check his understanding, receiving terse replies. This culminated in AB sitting alone on his sailboard at 'the sunken island' (a shallow reef area where the water was knee-deep), whilst the other course members tried to sail their boards for the first time, combining the different skills they had practised so far. He did not want to join in with this activity but was finally persuaded by DB to do so. AB managed to turn his board at the first attempt, whilst the others around him were struggling, and he stayed balanced on his board longer than anyone else. AB's previous sullenness turned into a huge grin as he realised he was finding windsurfing easy, and his demeanour changed positively for the rest of the course.

AB's course at WW was high in intangible experience properties, which Zeithaml (1981) and Mackay & Crompton (1988) argue can only be accurately evaluated during or after the experience of participating, explaining why his perceptions were so different to his expectations.

12.3 Expectations/Perceptions Disconfirmation

Participants identified four key sources of hopes and concerns for their adventure leisure experiences, which would change their disposition during the service process at WW. These sources have previously been given generic sub-headings in this thesis, but they will now be made more specific in the remaining analysis, to illustrate more clearly their significance, in terms of: service employees as information gatekeepers and impression managers; participants co-producing their experience; participants experiencing a new socialscape; and variable weather conditions. Two further critical moment of truth sources will also be discussed - the tangible appearance of the activity centre and safety management - since these were not important prior hopes or concerns, but did influence participants' perceptions.

12.4 Service Employees as Information Gatekeepers and Impression Managers

12.4.1 Information Gatekeepers

Over half the participants had stated a hope that their instructor should have a 'good knowledge' of the activity, without separating this from displaying competence. Seventeen commented positively on their perceptions of the information gatekeeping and impression management roles (Schneider & Bowen, 1995), or, as Arnould & Price (1993) suggest, the instructor as an 'impresario' in both of these roles. PM's perceptions of his instructor's skills were that *"He was really good at what he did"* and KL was more specific, saying,

"She told us why we got stuck and how to avoid doing that again". On the importance of their instructors' behaviour and use of language (Ferguson *et al.*, 1999), CR said of his instructor, *"She was confident in everything she did"*, GW stated *"She sounded as though she knew what she was doing, so you didn't start to think 'does she know what she's doing?' "* and SJ observed, *"He was obviously a kayak instructor because he kept referring to kayaks, not canoes"*.

12.4.2 Impression Managers

HH also expressed positive surprise (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997) that he had not expected his instructor, J, to put extra time and effort into enhancing the quality of his experience. Price *et al.* (1995) state that this notion of providing 'extras' is the key aspect of service employee behaviour which makes an extended encounter special, illustrated by HH's comment:

> *"He was always teaching us something. Halfway through lunch he'd bring over rope and get us to do some knots, or teach us something on the whiteboard if we had a minute to spare"*.

J had mentioned to me that HH wanted to do as much sailing as possible and it seemed that his enthusiasm encouraged J to make an extra effort: the instructor sat with HH and his two (new) friends during both lunchtimes and taught them how tie new knots. J tried to include the rest of the group, but they were not interested and he therefore concentrated on these three participants.

This instructor's behaviour was a good example of what Yaffey (1993) calls the virtuous conduct of outdoor adventure instructors, with behaviour based on a virtue- rather than rule-based ethic (McNamee, 1995). J's intrinsic skills, attributes and values enabled him to exceed HH's expectations, since there was no organisational requirement for him to provide this extra aspect of the service. J demonstrated how the personal quality of an employee begets all quality (Møller, 1987) and emphasised how boundary open service encounters (Arnould & Price, 1993) like that at WW, are more like inter-personal relationships, which are necessary to assure the quality of an outdoor adventure experience (Fletcher, 1971).

Participants' hopes for their relationships with instructors were important to them prior to their courses, and they hoped that these would be manifested in their instructors' positive behaviour towards them as individuals. Participants' key hopes were that their instructors would be friendly (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996) and that they would act with courtesy (Akan, 1995) and respect (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995), all of which were evident in sixteen participants' perceptions and can be exemplified by CB's observation: *"I didn't*

expect our instructor to be so nice. I thought L was really nice. She was really friendly, she was lovely, she reassured you about everything".

CB appeared very nervous when she arrived on the first morning and this continued until late morning, when she experienced a capsize. The instructor, L, had been encouraging CB more so than most others during the morning and was quickly able to effect a rescue and return CB to her boat. Following this episode, CB seemed to relax and she became more confident for the remainder of the course.

Participants' perceptions of instructors can be explained in terms of helpfulness, thoughtfulness, considerateness and co-operativeness, which Lytle *et al.* (1998) assert are the key attributes of employees with a 'service orientation'. This suggests that the staff at WW had a caring personality and a genuine empathy and compassion for these young people in their charge, which Gummesson (1991) describes as the 'Love Factor': a genuine desire to provide the service for these recipients. In addition, as Swan & Bowers (1998) point out, such service interactions often occur with humour, a point made explicitly by DK: *"He seemed quite nice and joking. He was good to get along with".*

None of the participants commented negatively on their relationship with their instructor, but two – AS and KL - gave a neutral response when asked. Of these, KL was clearly focussed on her task of learning to sail, because she only interacted with the instructor to ask technical sailing questions and did not engage in general conversation. KL said of her instructor, *"They were OK. I didn't really notice them that much because when I was on the water I was concentrating on the sailing"*, and AS simply said, *"He was OK. He was, just, fine".* The neutral responses from AS have already been discussed in this chapter and it is possible that in not having an important expectation met, she adjusted her perceptions of other facets of the service she experienced. Instead, AS felt that her expectation of learning had been violated (Edvarsson & Strandvik, 2000) and although Johnson & Mathews (1997) suggest that perceptions are often adjusted after a service experience to avoid dissatisfaction, AS may have done this to avoid satisfaction. However, AS' reaction to her instructor, J, is particularly incongruent, since HH and SJ made very positive comments about him (above).

Six participants made a specific comment on the responsiveness of their instructor (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), explaining that rather than always be given help immediately, *"...they just waited for us to try to sort ourselves out, then if we couldn't, they came to help"* (KL), which they considered to be appropriate. However, three other participants felt that their instructor was not responsive enough to their needs at times and linked this to being treated equitably with the other participants. For example, on one occasion, KH

had been paddling around in circles for nearly twenty minutes when trying to paddle forwards in a straight line. The instructor was rescuing others who had capsized and was unable to help her. She finally threw down her paddle in exasperation and shouted 'Oh help me someone!', sitting there for a few more minutes until her instructor became available to give her guidance. Despite that incident, KH summarised the three participants' acceptance of variable instructor responsiveness, saying, *"I suppose he had a big group to look after"*.

This was a perception of a transaction in the extended service encounter (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999) at WW, which induced temporarily negative emotions in KH (Hanna & Wozniak, 2001) and would have set her expectations and consequent 'entry mood' for the next transaction in the extended encounter. This suggests a dynamic relationship of participants' perceptions changing their disposition, which then influenced their expectations and consequent entry mood for the next transaction in the service. However, overall, these participants stated that they had enjoyed their experience at WW, therefore, their disposition must have been changed positively by one or more subsequent transactions, reinforcing the argument for this relationship to exist. In addition, this reinforces the proposal in Chapter Five that a transactional evaluation of service quality produces transactional satisfaction, which then informs an overall evaluation of service quality. Transactional satisfaction and overall service quality evaluation then inform overall satisfaction with the service.

There were three key issues to arise from participants' perceptions of their instructors. Firstly, the instructors displayed the important personal attributes of 'virtuous conduct' to enhance participants' lives. Secondly, they demonstrated 'personal quality' in terms of helpfulness, thoughtfulness, considerateness and co-operative ness (Lytle *et al.*, 1998), and thirdly, they exhibited 'the love factor' in genuinely wanting to provide this service for WW participants.

12.5 Participants Co-producing a Changing Disposition

The degree of a customer's involvement in co-producing a service influences their satisfaction (Dimanche *et al.*, 1991; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Therefore at WW, where there was a mutual dependence between participants and instructor to create the service (Shemwell *et al.,*1998), participants' own actions and performance in their adventure activity would be important to them.

Ten participants commented on how their emotions changed as a result of spontaneous and unrehearsed leisure experiences, giving them enjoyment (Abrahams, 1986), and reflecting on the 'I' (Mead, 1934). This can be explained by Tawse & Keogh's (1998)

argument that adventure leisure is an experiential state of mind and being, not simply the outcome of an experience. Nearly all of these participants made reference to their experiences of unplanned capsizes of their boats, illustrated by the following three quotes which reinforce Kleiber et al.'s (1986) argument that adolescents seek feelings of pleasure from their leisure:

> *"Er, great fun on the last day, I capsized a lot, which was the fun about it, I think...Yesterday, it was still fun, but it was not as good as today" (CR).*

> *"I didn't want to get cold and wet, but it happened, and you know even though it's cold and wet, but you don't want to be, you just see the funny side, it's just fun. Just general messing around that's a bit strange when you think back, but it's fun and you're just having a great time, for no particular reason" (HM).*

> *"It was brilliant fun! Falling in was also great fun, going along and suddenly you're in the water, great fun!" (TW).*

After falling in accidentally for the first time, TW continued to do so deliberately. He would sail close to one of the other course participants, shouting that he could not steer away, and then avoid collision by capsizing to make that person laugh at his supposed incompetence. He always avoided collision and his 'victim' always laughed!

The water element of the servicescape was fundamental to participants' experience (Arnould & Price, 1993) and, although Yaffey (1993) has proposed that the outdoors is the best provider of value experiences in an educational context, fun (MacDonald, 1995) was clearly a valued experience in these participants' minds. This was illustrated by CP saying *"I love the water, just getting completely soaking, I like getting wet!"*. HH also remarked, *"I think I was just happy because I was on the water and that's what I wanted"*, referring back to his specific expectation of spending a lot of time on the water and supporting Kellogg et al.'s (1997) argument that, in his case, the absolute time spent 'doing' the activity is important in leisure and tourism consumption.

One respondent, AS, agreed with HM above, that simply playing around in her boat was fun: *"Sitting with your feet out of the cockpit in the water and two people sitting facing each other and steering. That was all fun, playing around"*, which can be analysed as 'Exploration/Experimentation' in the Adventure Experience Paradigm (Priest & Gass, 1997), where risk was very low and AS' competence was also low.

The early inability of some participants to utilise their skill variable induced frustration (Ryan, 1995), but as the extended service encounter developed and participants became more adept at their activity, this disposition changed to be more positive, as TG explained in her evaluation of the 'Me' (Mead, 1934):

"I got stuck in the weed and I found it really hard to get back again. I was going back faster than I was going forward! It was really annoying...Yesterday afternoon was really good because the wind wasn't that high, but it was good enough to get going, so we were going backwards and forwards and that was really good that we'd actually done it. After trying so hard for so long, to actually get on the board and go somewhere, that was a really good feeling. It was really good that I learned how to do everything".

TG demonstrated here that she initially experienced a negative emotion over being unable to exercise the skills she was learning, and on the fourth occasion that she became stuck in the weeds, she cried with frustration before being towed out. However, once TG became more skilled at both creating and consuming the experience at WW, her enjoyment was increased (Lentell & Morris, 1995; Gratton & Taylor, 2000).

Other participants had less extreme experiences, finding that with some effort they could develop their skills more easily for a pleasurable experience (Kleiber *et al.*, 1986), illustrated by HM:

"I don't know, we didn't really find it that difficult to get going and then once you're in time and keeping rhythm, then that's easy to go from A to B as quick as possible. We're kind of chuffed".

On the last afternoon, HM and her sailing partner demonstrate this 'rhythm' by sailing a continuous course around two buoys for over an hour. They managed to keep the boat moving in the turns, something which they had not done previously, and only exhaustion forced them to stop and rest.

Three participants found that they expended less effort in becoming skilled, and were surprised (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997) with their own competence. They were more effusive in their comments than those expending more effort, which may have been due to this internal attribution of service performance (Dubé & Menon, 2000):

"I watched and was amazed how easy it was when I came to do it" (CS).

"Just picking up the speed, really, bombing it, bombing it around the place and learning quicker than I thought...I liked turning fast and getting good at it" (TW).

"I got the hang of windsurfing quicker than everyone else. I was able to do more advanced stuff and he taught me how to do flare gybes" (PM).

PM learned very quickly and seemed to have the innate ability to execute a manoeuvre after only a few trial attempts. The advanced 'flare gybe' that he refers to is a good example, happening near the end of the second day when he had become significantly

more skilled than the rest of the group. PM managed to do this on only the third attempt and he started yelping with delight, sounding like a small puppy at play!

Seven further participants were able to comment on specific indicators of their skilled production and consumption, which Williams (1989) suggests leads to satisfaction when identified. Two had experienced impatience early on in their sailing course, because they had to spend time learning basic principles before actually trying to sail. However, their disposition changed to enjoyment once the sailing started, as KL's comment indicates:

> *"I didn't really pay attention to that bit, I was just impatient to get onto the real thing!...I really enjoyed sailing back from the island because it was the first time I had actually sailed myself".*

On this occasion, KL was sailing towards the shore, laughing with her partner in the boat and repeatedly saying that they were both 'cool'. She then saw me ashore observing this scene and waved, shouting 'Look Keith, I'm doing it! I'm actually doing it!': her enjoyment was obvious.

The other participants also reflected on incidents where they met or exceeded the expectations they had set during their courses. They illustrated that perceptions of their experiences changed their disposition and therefore their changing expectations in the whole service encounter, supporting the argument here that expectations, entry mood, perceptions and changing disposition are cyclically linked. For example, AB said:

> *"A couple of times when I was actually sailing, I didn't fall in and I was able to turn and do that without falling in. I really didn't expect that to happen, I'm pleased about that".*

12.6 Participants Co-Producing the Adventure Experience

All of the participants who reflected on these incidents were improving their competence to carry out more advanced manoeuvres at higher speeds, slightly increasing the risk of personal injury. These adventure experiences thus developed beyond Priest & Gass' (1997) 'Exploration/Experimentation' and can be analysed as 'Adventure'.

During data gathering, participants' reflections in terms of achieving 'Peak Adventure' (Priest & Gass, 1997) were minimal, and very few could articulate whether they had experienced this. However, CS provided the richest memory of a peak adventure experience, where he was clearly working at the limit of his competence to manage the risk in his activity and remain in control for a more enjoyable experience (Hui & Bateson, 1991):

"The wind was on the sail, you could feel the power of the boat and you were in control. It was pretty good! The sail filled up, so you let it out and leaned over more, then you let it out a bit more and leaned again; it felt good getting some speed up. It was great to feel it all balancing".

After a break ashore on the second morning and having become competent in the basic control of his boat, CS was told by his instructor to try to lean out, arch his back and dip his head in the water as the boat sailed along. The first time CS tried he simply fell overboard, because he had forgotten to use the foot straps to hold himself in the boat! Then, having experienced the angle at which the boat would finally capsize, he quickly became adept at balancing his body weight against the wind to heel the boat (tilt it over to one side) as he sailed along.

This was a dynamic experience in which CS used his competence to develop from adventure to peak adventure to enhance his emotional disposition, as did GW, saying: *"When you're sailing the boat and it heels up and it's fun going along leaning out. You just go faster and it seems more thrilling to lean out over the water".*

Both of these experiences can also be analysed in terms of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 2000), such that CS and GW were physically balancing their boats on their sides against the wind, using their own skills to adjust the balance as the wind and water conditions changed, often within seconds. The servicescape conditions provided their opportunity to perform and they balanced this with their ability to perform, suggesting a 'flow' experience.

In a specific incident, JD recalled a particular manoeuvre which he described coincidentally as 'flowing', demonstrating that he, too experienced 'flow':

"I think this was more of a flowing turn. You just swept it round and it went itself, you didn't have to push it. It was really smooth. I think that was one of the best moments, really, turning round that quick".

JD was practising this for most of the final afternoon of the course, clearly trying to make his turns 'flow' as smoothly as possible. I watched him experimenting with turning tightly around buoys on the lake whilst maintaining his speed, and he was eventually able to do this every time. JD's *coup de grâce* doing this then came as he sailed to shore at the end of his course. He aimed straight for the jetty at speed and turned tightly at the last minute, to finish alongside in a perfect position to disembark. Everyone on the jetty cheered and applauded and JD just lay back in his boat to bask in this glory. Importantly, he remembered to hold on to the jetty so that the boat did not drift away as he enjoyed the accolade.

In each of these cases of 'flow', the participants were receiving immediate feedback on their actions from the servicescape conditions, their actions and awareness seemed to merge in pure concentration, their field of stimulus was centred on the manoeuvres, they clearly had a heightened awareness of themselves in the manoeuvres, they were in control and their experiences were autotelic (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

The extended service encounter at WW evoked changing emotions in participants, due to the intensity of such a recreation experience (Gray, 1987). A key emotion for most was excitement, identified by Anderson (1996), and illustrated by TW: *"Well, if you caught the wind just as a gust was coming, you really pick up speed...just, like, exciting, hanging on for your life!"*.

The psychological and physiological effects of the intense experiences at WW combined (Schueller, 2000) to give these adolescents the feelings of pleasure they sought in their leisure (Kleiber *et al.*, 1986). This supports Tawse & Keogh's (1998) assertion that adventure leisure is a state of mind and body experience (as these participants' comments illustrate).

12.7 Participants Co-Producing the Developing Self

Botterill (1985) has suggested that satisfaction in leisure and tourism is often created by defining and developing the self and this was apparent in a number of participants' comments. Four stated that their disposition of confidence changed as they became more competent in their activity, a goal which they had not anticipated, but which gave their service experience meaning (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999) and is explained by DK:

> *"Well the gybing was hard. I did it in a funny way where the back of the boat went under water and it got a bit scary but I managed to sort it out...It was a good new thing to learn, it gives you confidence to do things in the water...I thought I'm never going to get round this corner, but it went OK, it was quite easy. It was good for my confidence"*.

DK's reflection on gaining confidence in the water resonates with his broader development during the time I interviewed and observed him. In the pre-course interview he was very hesitant with his responses, seeming unsure and nervous of how I would react, and all of his comments were far briefer than that included above. During his course he developed a friendship with two other participants, but did not join in with the wider group 'banter', saying nothing on these occasions. However, at the end of the course in the debrief meeting that his instructor conducted, DK was publicly vocal about what he had learned and even expressed an opinion about the handling characteristics of the two different boats he had sailed. I found that in the post-course interview his hesitance with me had disappeared and he recounted his experiences confidently and at greater length.

Further, on the notion of developing the self, CS' comments echoed Barrett & Greenaway's (1995) assertion that outdoor adventure experiences have an enhancing, spiritual dimension, as he explained:

> *"Well, being outdoors you've got all the space and all the scenery and that. It's just a good place to be...I did the course because I don't like being in boats and now I do...I've learned a bit of patience, not to rush things all the time because it could all end up in the water! Maybe for other situations too.*

CS was the only participant to recognise that his own personal values had changed during the course, where his aim to enjoy being in boats was deliberate and practical, but learning to exercise patience was unplanned, yet profound (Arnould & Price, 1993).

Finally, three participants said that their experience at WW had catalysed a strong interest in continuing with their activity, with AL saying, *"I want to take it further, now, because I really enjoyed this kayaking and I'll hopefully get a second-hand boat"*, and PM expressing a desire to continue the activity specifically at WW: *"I would like to maybe start the new sport here"*. TH went even further and said, *"I might try to become an instructor"*, of the three reflecting most Godbey's (1994) observation that leisure activities can help people to develop their own identity, and positioning his experience as a formative introduction to an enduring involvement (Hightower *et al.*, 2002) in serious leisure (Ruskin *et al.*, 2003; Stebbins, 1996). PM's ability to acquire windsurfing skills quickly has already been highlighted in Section 12.5.

12.8 Participants Experiencing a New Socialscape

An important potential source of critical moments of truth identified by participants was the new social environment they would experience, which, as one element of the servicescape, is presented as the 'socialscape' in this thesis. The four critical socialscape aspects of uncomfortable introductions, enjoying the socialscape, mutual dependence and the 'anti-socialscape' are now discussed.

12.8.1 Uncomfortable Introductions

During the pre-course interviews, twelve participants expressed their hopes for socialising with other course participants (Canziani, 1997), that they would be friendly and have fun together. Ten post-course interviewees commented on how, at the beginning of their courses, they initially felt uncomfortable in the process of getting to know other people in their group, but once engaged in their activity on the lake, this happened more easily. CS said, *"We were all a bit shy, didn't know what to say to each other, but we eventually got talking out on the lake"*, supported by SH's comment:

"A bit nervous, I didn't know anybody. I suppose we didn't know each other and didn't really know what to say to each other. Once we got sailing and crashing into each other everyone was talking".

SH's behaviour at the beginning of his course was a good example of how most participants behaved politely towards each other early on. Once afloat on the first morning, for the first twenty minutes his most frequent utterance was 'sorry' when he collided with, or even sailed too close to, someone else! Then, once he realised that everyone else was faring the same, SH stopped apologising and just joked to the others over his own incompetence.

HM agreed with SH and said , *"I felt a bit out of place, really, at first, because of all the other people. But then, once you get used to everybody you all accept each other and it's OK".*

The most awkward time I observed on nearly every occasion was when groups first gathered to meet for their instructor. This usually happened in the 'crew room' (WW's classroom facility), and chairs were laid out in a horseshoe pattern so that participants could all see each other. In HM's case, there were enough chairs for each person to sit with an empty chair on either side – which they did – and no-one spoke. Instead, they exchanged nervous nods and smiles of acknowledgement until the instructor appeared and began the introductions.

Only JD said that he did not feel uncomfortable at the beginning, recounting how he had made friends easily, early on the first day:

> *"When I got there in the morning, I got there quite early and I started talking to a boy who might be on our course, but he wasn't. Then as soon as me, H and G got together upstairs, K asked us if we'd windsurfed before. H said 'Yes', G said 'No' and I said 'Yes' and we just got talking then about where we'd done it and when and how we'd liked it and things like that. I got on really well with all of them...and the others when they arrived".*

This was the only occasion when I observed an instant rapport developing between a sub-group of participants. Then, as JD says, others were immediately included as they arrived and the crew room was buzzing with conversation at the beginning of the course; a singular event in my time at WW!

TG had said before the course that although she was going with two other friends, she would, nevertheless, chat to everyone because she might make new friends, which she clearly saw as enhancing her experience at WW (Holyfield, 1999; Unger, 1984). This is supported by her post-course comment:

"I felt sorry for J, because we three knew each other and he was quite quiet, because for a long time we all just sort of smiled at each other a lot and said 'do you want a hand?' ",

demonstrating the effort she had put in to socialise outside her immediate circle of friends. This particular friendship with J developed quite obviously and TG ended up spending more time in his company than with her two friends. Whenever the course required pairs to work together, TG would exclusively help/be helped by J, and they always sat next to each other at lunch or during classroom sessions. On the second morning, TG was afloat before J, and I observed her deliberately taking longer than necessary to check her sail and rigging until he joined her, so that they could sail off together. When they said goodbye at the end of the course it was brief and courteous, but TG was rather upset after J had gone. During the post-course interview I tried to explore this relationship with TG, as I felt it had been important to her. However, she clearly did not wish to discuss it, averting her eyes when I mentioned JD and talking only in general terms about the others in her group.

Eight participants said that their instructor could have introduced them all properly at the beginning of the course to reduce their emotional discomfort and KH rationally suggested:

"...in a way, the beginning was all getting to know each other...we got on OK, but maybe it would have been good, because it took some time to talk to the others properly, like we knew them".

12.8.2 Enjoying The Socialscape

Once the course was underway and participants became acquainted with each other, their hopes of friendliness and having fun were being realised. When asked about their fellow-participants, five participants simply said they were *'fine'* and seven said they were *'OK',* suggesting that the hopes of these twelve had been transformed from a satisfier to a neutral factor (Kano 1984, Tan & Pawitra, 2001) as their service experience developed in the extended encounter at WW. The social imperative on courses at WW was thus dynamic for many, where the process of establishing a good relationship with someone without emotional discomfort was more critical than the continued relationship, once formed. However, should that relationship have been removed, it would then be noticed by participants as a hygiene factor that was missing (Mersha & Adlakha, 1992) and could have had a negative influence on their satisfaction.

The eight remaining participants were very positive about their fellow-participants, with HM saying of her group, *"They were quite cool, I liked them, a really good atmosphere",* and CB of hers, *"It was a lovely group, everyone was really friendly. I wasn't expecting our group to be as strongly bonded as it was".* CS said that his

157

knowing everyone and sitting round chatting. On the water saying hello to each other, just, getting along" and JD demonstrated how his disposition had changed dramatically as a result of his perceptions:

> *"The first day I wasn't too sure, I didn't know whether I was going to like it and I didn't know how it would last two days, and so on. But, this morning, I was really raring to go, raring to get out on the water and meet the others. Yes I really enjoyed today, I felt really happy all day".*

My observations of JD during the second day support his reflections, because he was, indeed, happy all day. He did not become frustrated when he was struggling to learn an advanced sailing manoeuvre (a gybe turn), and he even laughed when he dropped his sandwich on the ground at lunchtime.

Some participants gave more detailed descriptions of how their experience of enjoying all WW watersports with others (not just kayaking, as in Priest & Gass' 1997 example), emphasised feelings of personal satisfaction. This reflects Arnould & Price's (1993) argument that the watersports environment can catalyse memorable experiences for some people, illustrated by GW:

> *"Very easy-going and friendly people, they didn't get too up tight. Then I got up, tacked down again and C did a tack and capsized when the girl ran into his boat. I went ha-ha! and then capsized myself, quite amusing, actually".*

Just before C capsized, the girl mentioned by GW was shouting at C, worried that she was going to hit his boat, but as C surfaced from his ducking, he was laughing, which prompted both the girl and GW to laugh with him. GW then deliberately jumped in the water too – he did not capsize as he says – and after some playful splashing, he helped C to raise his capsized boat.

12.8.3 Mutual Dependence

If the concept of social dependence in the socialscape is developed further, TW's expectation that participants would *"...help each other out if we're in trouble..."* during their service experience was realised by ten participants, highlighting Bettencourt's (1997) assertion that customers often help each other during service delivery, and that it was important physical reality at WW. TW further illustrated this: *"I helped them out. If they were struggling and D was with someone else, you'd just help them get their sail on their board"* and TG remarked, *"This morning, everyone just went and got all the boards and sails and, like, everyone helped everyone else. It was as though no-one was doing their own"*. Section 12.8.1 explains how TG and J only helped each other, despite this generalised statement.

A further aspect of this dependence on other participants was that of exercising their newly acquired skilled consumption safely. Only JD commented on this, saying:

> *"I think in a group of people like that you have to get on with them. You also have to trust them, as well, because if you don't trust someone when they are sailing past you, you know it can get quite hairy".*

A participant's incompetence could, therefore, have had a significant effect on others' satisfaction, and possibly even their physical well being.

12.8.4 The Antisocialscape

Four participants said that they did not get on with everyone in their group, effectively calling them antisocial and despite having previously been very positive about their fellow participants. For example, HM said, *"One of them I really didn't get on with because he was a bit of a brat. He just didn't co-operate with anybody or anything and was kind of in his own little land and then, I just didn't like him".* Most of the group ignored this boy and his behaviour became more extreme as he sought attention, until on the second morning one of the girls in his group told him to 'stop being a silly little boy'. He was clearly taken aback by this and became more co-operative, but was still merely tolerated by the rest of the group.

PM also singled out one individual, stating, *"I wasn't too keen on one person. He rammed you and tried to get you in the water, and I was trying to get on. Overall, they were only small things, really".* PM's last sentence is important here because although Ewert (1989) states that co-operative behaviour is important between young people in adventure leisure, even a negative disposition created by fellow participants may have been insignificant in the extended encounter at WW, since other factors clearly influenced this disposition positively.

12.9 The Influence of Variable Weather Conditions

During these summer courses, the wind speed was variable, from no wind at all, to conditions where sail-based activities would have been dangerous for novices. However, these were distributed over the two days of each course, and appropriate wind conditions were typically present in the main and, apart from the wind, the weather was generally sunny, with occasional rain. An additional aspect of the servicescape was the growing weed colony in one corner of the lake, where anyone struggling to control their craft would be blown by the prevailing South-Westerly wind.

Only two participants indicated that rainy weather changed their disposition, which, in turn, influenced their expectations of the remainder of that day. HH said, *"That was great! Better than I expected because I though it would probably rain"* and AS said, *"I*

expected the rain would ruin it, but that stopped as soon as we went out". Not only did the rain stop that morning, the clouds drifted away before lunch and the afternoon was very warm and sunny, influencing AS' disposition for the rest of the day.

When there had been little wind, SH felt that this had helped him, saying, *"But it helped to learn in a bit less wind"*, but he and three other participants were frustrated at not being able to sail in these conditions.

When there was consistent wind, a number of sailing and windsurfing participants said that this improved their experience, for example, KH said, *"It was quite windy. It probably made it a bit better, it was faster and more enjoyable"* and TW agreed, *"Well, yesterday it was good and today it was good, so we had a good day. But sometimes the wind did turn off, but it did pick up as well"*.

More often, there were mixed wind conditions throughout the two days of a course, which changed participants' dispositions during that extended encounter at WW. CR explained this: *"Yesterday, it was still fun, but it was not as good as today. It was much more windy today and yesterday the weather was a bit dull, not so much wind"*. The day that CR alludes to was one of the best days of weather in a poor Summer, with consistent wind, no gusting, and warm sunshine. Everyone at the centre seemed to be in a good mood and even the usually rather serious senior managers were joking with each other. On this day I was reminded that perfect weather conditions always enhanced my enjoyment of working in this environment.

Only one kayaker, AS, had mentioned the weather, since they were least affected by it and the active nature of their activity meant they would stay warm, but not dry. Most comments about the wind came from the sailors, especially when there was little of it, demonstrating its importance to their enjoyment.

The variable weather clearly presented challenges to WW management, in trying to provide each of these watersports simultaneously, knowing that participants' perceptions of their experiences would be affected differently by the same weather conditions.

12.10 The Tangible Appearance of the WW Centre – An Unrealised Expectation

Despite having had no significant hopes of the appearance of the activity centre, nineteen of the participants said that they immediately formed a good impression when they arrived, because of its appearance. This showed how their perceptions changed their emotional disposition and informed their expectations of the next series of service

160

transactions at WW. CP considered that WW looked like a *"Very tidy, very organised place"* and TW said, *"The first thing I saw was the Toppers in a line and they were in really good condition and I thought this should be good".*

The first time I visited WW I had the same impression as TW. Even in my experience of over 150 outdoor adventure centres, this one looked impressive from the moment I drove through the gate. The Topper sailing boats were in a good state of repair and all lined up in a neat row, each one with its with sail tightly furled and I could hear the sound of steel stays gently 'pinging' against their masts in the wind. Beyond the Toppers were smaller Optimist craft, similarly aligned, and then came the racks for canoes and kayaks. These craft were stacked upside down by model and colour and also appeared to be in good condition. The four main rescue boats were all similar 'Dory' models, with hulls looking white and pristine, and they were moored on the lake about 30m from the jetty opposite the canoe racks. Even the pink mooring buoys were new and vividly coloured, rather than having faded in the sunshine over time. My own expectations of the centre were thus raised as a result of its appearance.

Only six of the nineteen participants had commented previously when asked about their expectations; therefore thirteen were pleasantly surprised, although not quite moved to Voss' (2003) 'delight'.

CB saw this conspicuous organisation as a tangible representation of good safety management, saying:

> *"They looked smart, not old things, the equipment looked safe and new, I felt, like, quite confident in everything...that it was going to be well run, that the emphasis was on safety".*

In addition to the display of boats at the WW entrance, CB alludes here to the personal protective equipment provided for participants. The wetsuits were in very good condition and hung inside-out on coat hangers in the storeroom to allow the neoprene material to dry. At the end of the day, they were washed in a tub of disinfected water by the user, to ensure they would be free from bacteria for the next user, and to extend the life of the neoprene. Also, any evidence of repair showed that it had been done thoroughly and professionally. Helmets and buoyancy aids were nearly new and, like the buoys on the lake, showed no sign of their pigment fading in the sunlight. All buoyancy aids were weight–tested in water at the beginning of the year and any that failed were removed from service. I would have felt safe using any relevant item of personal protective equipment at WW.

Both of the statements above by CP and CB demonstrate that in an extended service encounter, a consumer's perception of each transaction can change their disposition to determine their expectations and set their entry mood for the next phase of the service, suggesting a cyclical relationship.

The participants' statements also support the proposed relationship between service quality and satisfaction (Chapter Five), since their transactional evaluation of a tangible service quality attribute evoked feelings of transactional satisfaction. Aggregated transactional service quality evaluations then informed an overall service quality evaluation, which, combined with aggregated transactional feelings of satisfaction, produced overall satisfaction.

12.11 Reassurance Through Safety Management

Participants all had a clear expectation that safety would be well-managed at WW, and all confirmed that this was their perception, as illustrated by GW and AS stating, *"Well, everyone that was out had the safety boat with them and you got a lot of safety equipment, like"* (GW) and *"No it was all safe. There were so many people around to help"* (AS).

Safety cover on the lake was comprehensive, with instructors being the first local 'layer' of protection for a group, and four rigid-hulled rescue boats patrolling the lake when at capacity. A further two inflatable boats were available to deploy if necessary. All instructors carried walkie-talkies that were linked to each other, the rescue boats and the Duty Manager, who was stationed on the jetty with binoculars to oversee the whole operation. Any request for assistance by an instructor was always responded to immediately, typically because the rescue boat drivers monitored all lake activities and could often anticipate problems in advance.

During one course there was an incident where a girl capsized badly and was caught underneath her boat, although she was able to breathe in the airspace it created, clearly experiencing 'misadventure' (Priest & Gass, 1997). Two participants commented on this incident, with CB explaining her perceptions of the incident:

> *"I suppose you go on a course knowing there's a risk in everything, but it made me feel a bit scared, but then, if she'd been rushed off to hospital I'd have thought 'Oh god!' but nothing could have stopped it, it was just one of those things that happens, you know? If L [the instructor] had been next to her she would have gone under, so it's just one of those things. I didn't feel that it wasn't safe, because I felt safe all the time. It was just one of those things, you don't go along thinking you can never get hurt".*

CB stated here that she felt 'scared' when it happened, one of Oliver's (1996) emotional descriptors, but this was clearly only a temporary feeling (Hanna & Wozniak, 2001), since CB then honestly attributed her negative emotion to a variable beyond anyone's control – even if the instructor had been close by – and that, in spite of this negative emotion (Dubé & Menon, 2000), she always felt safe on her course. CB's expectations of safety management in the proceeding transactions of her extended service encounter at WW were not, therefore, affected.

The second respondent, CR, reacted to the incident without emotion:

> *"S had a bad capsize, the one with the ginger hair. Apparently she went underneath the boat and she got a bit claustrophobic and, as you know, when you go underneath a boat you feel like you're under there for a long time but you're actually under there for a short time. So, she just got a bit tight and she was taken ashore. It didn't bother me".*

CR's allusion to experiencing no emotion over seeing the capsize, demonstrates that like CB, he understood the potential risks inherent in this adventure activity, but that they must be accepted and managed.

12.12 Chapter Summary

The key findings of this chapter are summarised below.

1. All participants except one felt that their hopes/expectations had been exceeded overall. This one respondent was neutral in her evaluation, but did reflect on transactions in the service which she felt were better than she had hoped.

2. Participants found an opportunity for both hedonic consumption and self-expression through their outdoor adventure leisure experience.

3. Participants' disposition changed frequently throughout the experience as a result of their own actions, demonstrating that adventure leisure is an experiential state of mind and being, not simply an outcome:
    -   as participants became more skilled at creating and consuming the service they were experiencing, their enjoyment increased;
    -   the key emotion experienced by most participants was excitement;
    -   very few participants experienced flow or peak adventure, but those who did, intimated that it was autotelic.

4. Employees exhibited a caring personality, empathy and compassion, treating participants with the respect they had hoped for in an inter-personal relationship. This changed most participants' disposition and allayed their initial concerns.

5. The socialscape changed participants' disposition during their service experience and most felt awkward at the initial relationship forming stage. However, as they became more familiar with each other, mutual social, and in some cases, physical, dependence for a satisfactory service experience developed.

163

6.	The appearance of tangibles had not been considered by participants prior to their courses, but nearly all participants commented on how the organised appearance of the centre had positively changed their entry mood, demonstrating a cyclical relationship between transactional expectations, entry mood, perceptions, changing disposition and the next transactional expectations.

7.	The conjoined relationship between transactional and overall service quality and satisfaction suggested in Chapter Five can be demonstrated by some participants' evaluations of transactional and overall service quality and satisfaction.

Chapter Thirteen

Employee and Management Perceptions of Participants' Expectations and Perceptions

13.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter participants' perceptions of their experience at WW were analysed and the key influences on these were identified as the four critical moment of truth sources, service employees, participants' own actions, the socialscape and variable weather conditions. The purpose of this chapter is to explore WW management and staff perceptions of participants' expectations and perceptions, and identify whether they believed that disconfirmation existed between them. The key expectations that management and staff considered important to participants are reviewed and their perceptions of the four key sources of critical moments of truth, which emerged in the previous chapter, are discussed.

13.2 Forming Perceptions of Participants' Expectations and Perceptions

The extended Conceptual Gap Model in Chapter Six includes potential gaps relating to management and employees' perceptions of participants' experiences, but before evaluating these perceptions, the way in which they were formed should first be analysed, since this could have influenced the accuracy of these perceptions.

13.2.1 'Fanmail' Feedback

The senior manager, GLo, explained that feedback from participants was qualitative and *ad-hoc*, in terms of letters and verbal comments, and restated his concern which informed this thesis, that he did not understand their experiences in any depth from this feedback:

> **"S and C will often feed on ad-hoc comments and we do get other unsolicited feedback from 'Thank you' notes and letters. There's a wadge of letters in the staffroom, and from bits of that you would think 'What is it they're saying?'. These are probably the most value - being unsolicited – but it's still not clear exactly what we're doing to get these back".**

These letters typically identified the instructors as having an important influence on the young people's experiences, but the other manager, JP, was dismissive of these letters, suggesting that they lacked credibility, and provided little management insight: **"Oh, we get letters like that...which is useful, but doesn't tell us much".**

Most instructors mentioned receiving letters of thanks from participants, with SJ saying, *"The kids tend to write to individual instructors, not everyone, because they don't know everyone"*. However, PS expressed concerns that these letters only expressed positive sentiments and, like JP, was dismissive of their content because it lacked any negative

comments. Towards the end of this study, it became apparent that, rather than inductively seeking the 'what' and 'how' of service quality at WW, as originally agreed, management had a hidden agenda to prove - almost glorify – profoundly negative issues in their service provision, without celebrating the many positive aspects. They seemed cynical that participants' feedback was so positive and were not prepared to consider that this feedback was a real reflection of their service delivery.

13.2.2 The Need to 'Get Close' for Feedback

JP said more about qualitative feedback by saying, **"It's just hearsay, talking to parents, that sort of thing, I mean I talked to someone the other day, it's just chatting to people, one to one conversation, that's all"**. This time he was being dismissive of the value of qualitative feedback, due to a lack of understanding of the validity of the conversational method by which it was gathered.

This informal conversational method was mentioned by most instructors as their way of gaining feedback on their activity sessions, with GL saying, *"When I chat to the kids I know they all feel safe"*. However, LM suggested that it was not easy to do: *"It's fairly difficult to get feedback on what they're experiencing, because their memory is usually of what they did last, which is usually jumping off the jetty at the end!"*.

LM seemed to consider here that seeking feedback was only important at the end of such an activity session, yet in this extended service encounter, frequent feedback should have been sought to enable the instructor to make adjustments as the encounter progressed. GLo called this 'getting close' and he re-emphasised his desire to understand participants' experiences in more depth by doing this: **"If we did spend more time getting close, we may learn more things about ourselves and the clients ...by finding out the 'how?' of what we're doing..."**.

GLo's concern that instructors needed to 'spend more time getting close' was justified, since five participants could not remember being asked about their experiences and ten stated that they had not been asked. Of these ten participants, eight expressed surprise at the question, saying that they would not expect to be asked about this, because, as AL said, *"I suppose no-one asks you that sort of thing"*. Only CB offered a possible explanation: *"Er, no more than when you're a child, really"*, supporting Matthews & Limb's (1999) argument that adults do not seek children's views on issues which affect their lives, and Robinson's (1997) observation that adults define service quality in leisure on behalf of, but with little reference to, children.

The remaining five participants said that they had been asked about their experiences, but only superficially, to ask whether they were having 'fun'. This showed that instructors understood the importance to participants of having fun, but very little beyond that, unless they were gaining their understanding of participants' perceptions more implicitly as they developed their relationship during the service. I observed instructors regularly checking for technical understanding, but none solicited deeper responses with respect to the service experience. Four members of staff said that they also used observation as they instructed to contribute to their understanding of participants' experiences and for two instructors this was implicit in the way they worked. For example, RW said:

> *"I often see the smiling faces out on the water when they're having fun and everything's working for them, but also you get the worried faces when they're looking a bit scared...If they come off the water and are very quiet and just go and get changed, then I think they have not enjoyed it".*

RW's comment demonstrates his use of observation, but it is unclear why he did not then ask those quiet participants about their experience, rather than assume they had not enjoyed it and do nothing more himself. This would have enabled him to 'get close' for a greater understanding, as GLo would have encouraged.

The two administrators, CR and SC, also felt that observation was an implicit part of their work, with SC explaining:

> *"...I pick up things about the kids by my own observation...you can tell when a child walks through that door whether they have enjoyed themselves or not by their body language, you know, joking and messing around with their instructor, chatting to their peers".*

This contributed to her own daily understanding, but she did not discuss her observations with the management team, unless there was an incident, since she assumed they already knew what she was observing. CR was one of the longest serving members of staff and she made a point of talking to course participants whenever she could. She was also qualified to administer first aid and usually looked after anyone who came ashore with a problem, physical or emotional. This helped her to develop a very good understanding of what they were experiencing, but CR's views on this were rarely sought by GLo and JP.

13.2.3 Writing In-depth Feedback is Boring

One of the aims of this thesis is to gain an in-depth understanding of young people's satisfaction with the quality of their experiences at WW, because the manager perceived that there was no singular mechanism for doing this. He understood that a questionnaire at the end of each course would only provide this depth if it required participants to write reflexive prose on their experiences, and he had been considering implementing this.

However, GLo had clearly not anticipated that all young people interviewed said they would not be prepared to write such comments. For example, PM said, *"I couldn't be bothered"* and HH declared, *"Because it's more like schoolwork and I'm on holiday!"*. Sixteen participants said that they would complete a tick box questionnaire, but would not write in-depth comments, with AL saying, *"It would take too long"*, AB saying *"I don't really want to write that sort of stuff. I can't be bothered"* and AS providing a more reasoned response: *"I would get bored...because I can never think of what to write!"*.

These comments suggest that WW management did not understand participants' views on giving feedback, although the instructors perceived this correctly, with GJ summarising their view, *"They don't want to fill them in, though – too boring"*.

A further operational constraint was that at the end of a course there was very little time to seek feedback, although some instructors did manage to conduct a debriefing meeting, usually to recap on how the learning outcomes of the course had been achieved by each participant. When all the equipment had been put away and participants had showered and changed into dry clothes they went straight home, because these activities generally took longer than the time allocated by WW. It may have been possible to finish courses earlier to accommodate seeking feedback, but on days where this happened due to bad weather, any extra time gained was always inexplicably consumed by these end of day activities. This mechanism would not, therefore, be effective.

13.2.4 Needing Time to Seek Participants' Feedback?

It was clear that the management team was unlikely to gather in-depth written feedback from participants; therefore it needed to reflect on the effectiveness of the informal qualitative methods already in place and develop a better understanding of their potential usefulness. In contrast to management, WW staff believed that their informal qualitative approach was the most effective to understand young people's experiences, as explained by PS, who then concluded that the time available to do this was a limiting constraint:

> *"I think informally we probably get a truer response than if we had a formal tick box forms or something. I just think it's a little bit more genuine, more heartfelt, that you sit down with someone and actually explains...and also you've got the chance to talk to someone face to face, you could almost draw the answers out: 'Have you had a good time' and they say 'Yes', you can then try to find out why, but we don't get the time to do this".*

SJ agreed with PS, saying, *"You don't necessarily sit down and ask questions because there isn't always time, it's just general 'Did you enjoy that? Did you have fun?' "*. This explains why the instructor questioning mentioned previously may have seemed superficial.

Both PS and SJ agreed with the value of qualitative feedback, but concluded that time constraints prevented this from being sought at the end of a course, only considering a single, end of experience interaction. It was apparent to me that the other instructors engaged in a continuous dialogue, where service employee and customer interact and adjust to each other in a negotiated joint activity (Swan & Bowers, 1998).

13.2.5 Valuing Qualitative Feedback

The physical and temporal environment of the watersports activities at WW was not conducive to seeking participants' detailed thoughts of their expectations or perceptions through a single, formal feedback mechanism. The approach of most instructors in using ongoing, informal qualitative conversation and observation provided them with accurate perceptions, which management needed to understand were appropriately derived. This was reflected by CB, a very eloquent fourteen year old who felt that an unstructured or semi-structured, qualitative approach would be most appropriate:

> "We should be asked more about what we think, kind of more emphasis on what we want to get out of things. I think maybe this way is a much better way of trying to get their views, because people don't want to sit there writing. It's just, like, tiring and so many things come into your head and you can't be bothered to write it all down. But if you're talking, it all just comes out and you can say everything you want to say about it. Yeah, I'm saying far more than I would on paper".

CB's comment suggests that a continuous, multi-faceted, qualitative feedback mechanism could be effected by the necessary instructor-participant interactions in the extended service encounter. However, WW management did not understand the value of this 'informal' approach and how it could be exploited to enhance their perceptions of participants' expectations and perceptions of the service experience. These management and staff perceptions are analysed next, starting with participants' expectations.

13.3 Perceptions of Participants' Expectations

Most of the participants had displayed fuzzy, or undefined, expectations (Ojasalo, 2001) and both members of the management team demonstrated their understanding of this fuzziness. GLo said, **"There isn't that level of sophistication of shopping around, or looking...and some of that stems, unfortunately, from them not having a clear view on what they're trying to purchase"** and JP concurred, saying, **"...their expectations...they're not necessarily expressed"**. However, the management team did show a limited understanding that the participants had hopes, rather than expectations, for their experiences, which were more clearly articulated.

Seven staff showed a similar understanding to the management team, summarised by GL's comment, *"I don't honestly think a lot of them know what they want"*. Examples were

given that participants expected the activities to be easier than they were, or anticipated emulating adventurous images portrayed in the media, for example, DB said:

> *"A lot of them think that's what it is, that windsurfing is easy. You get occasionally the boys, who have seen a bit of television, people doing wave leaping and so on and they say 'That's what I want to do' ".*

DB continued that he would then have to explain the realities of the activity to participants, demonstrating that he was the service fail-safing mechanism (Chase & Stewart, 1997) for transforming unrealistic to realistic expectations.

However, none of the participants had over-anticipated the ease of taking part in their activity, in fact, five had been nervous that they would not be competent enough, and none mentioned unrealistic notions fuelled by media imagery. These instructors, therefore, whilst understanding that participants may have had vague expectations, seemed to be over-stating how unrealistic they could be.

The remaining four employees said that they did not know what expectations participants had, but two were sensitive to their own instructor role, saying, *"I don't know if they have any. I don't know what they're expecting of an instructor"* (SJ) and *"It would be nice to know what their expectations are of me"* (GL). These are surprising responses from two full-time, experienced employees - especially GL, who received more 'fanmail' than any other instructor but was embarrassed by both its volume and content - since instructors' competence and social skills were amongst participants' most clearly defined expectations and hopes, respectively.

13.3.1 Looking for the Wrong Expectations

One manager, GLo, explained that at the beginning of an activity session instructors should try to clarify participants' expectations to ensure that these would be met, but these expectations were necessarily focussed on practical, physical aspects of the activity session and not the instructor or the socialscape, which were significant concerns for participants. The instructors all concurred with GLo with, for example, JJ stating:

> *"We do negotiate with them at the beginning of a session on what they are going to do, so if they say they don't want to do X, Y and Z, then that helps, because we don't make them do anything they don't want to do".*

JJ's final statement shows that she was trying to create a comfortable service environment for participants (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996) and her caring, empathetic approach was always apparent when she was instructing. JJ conducted this negotiation at group, rather than individual, level, which assumed participants had homogenised wants and needs, yet Matthews & Limb (1999) argue that adults should not homogenise children

in social groupings, because they are individually diverse, and state simply that there is no 'universal child'.

DB's interview transcript highlighted that he did seek comments from individuals, demonstrating that he understood these were typically heterogeneous and often polarised. This reflects an underlying assumption of the key adventure leisure theories of Optimal Arousal (Ellis, 1973), Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 2000) and the Adventure Experience Paradigm (Martin & Priest, 1986), that the experience is subjectively felt by individuals. However, despite DB's assertion, he did not seek individuals' comments at any time when I observed him instructing and he had added this note to his transcript for me at the editorial stage.

Having discussed management and instructors' overall perceptions of participants' 'expectations', the specific expectations they perceived are now explored.

13.3.2 Participants' Hopes of Their Instructor

Five instructors mentioned their perceptions of participants' hopes of them, with JB making a general statement, *"Well, yes, sometimes, you always have children who are inquisitive about what their instructor's going to be like"*. GJ identified hopes about instructor competence, *"...they're trying to suss out how good a sailor you are"* and, despite saying he would like to know participants' expectations of him, GL said, *"Sometimes the girls say 'I hope he's good-looking', or the older kids expect you to be good at what you're teaching"*, showing that he understood how his attitude and competence was integral to this high interaction service (Ferguson *et al.*, 1999). RW summarised this twofold role (Wirtz & Bateson, 1999) by explaining his perceptions of participants' key hopes: *"...they [participant] would hope they [instructor] would be a nice friendly face, welcome them, show them the ropes, somebody they can rely on for information and help, really"*.

This combination of being welcoming, friendly and reliable, encapsulates well RW's approach with young people at WW. I never heard him raise his voice to be authoritarian, rather, he maintained group control and engendered respect by developing a relationship with each participant.

A further important hope perceived by instructors and management was centred on how participants' own actions or performance would affect their own disposition, which is now discussed.

13.3.3 Participants' Hopes of Themselves

All management and staff demonstrated they understood that having fun and enjoyment was important for participants. GLo said that they hoped for, "**...a fun and enjoyable experience**", and JJ said, *"They hope it will be a laugh"*, with RW concurring, *"...just to have fun, really, they want to be here and have a laugh"*. However, although these novice participants were seeking some degree of self-expression (Godbey, 1994; Priest & Gass, 1997), this was only acknowledged by one instructor.

A further hope identified by both managers and some instructors, reflected Kellogg *et al.'s* (1997) argument regarding the absolute time doing the activity. GLo said, "**...just spending time sailing is what they're looking for**" and DB similarly observed, *"I think it's their expectation that they'll do as much as they can in the time allowed"*. These views were supported by participant HH's expectation of maximising his time spent sailing, but none of the other participants stated that this was an important hope, suggesting that it was his unique view, and contradicting Kellogg *et al.* (1997).

DB also stated, *"...like all children, they want instant success"*, yet participant TG had stated clearly that she knew these were not the kind of activities where competence was developed straightaway. Nearly half the participants expressed a hope that they would be able to realise their own values of developing appropriate competence by the end of the course (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999). DB was generalising here about the young participant's expectations, illustrating what he thought they hoped for, rather than identifying from them what they hoped for (Collins, 1996; Donne, 1995; Rawlinson-Plant, 1992), further supporting my observation that he did not seek individual expectations, despite asserting that he did.

Some instructors understood that the novelty of the experience (Anderson, 1996) was important for participants, although this was not commented upon by management. SJ explained how he knew this: *"When you say 'Why have you come along?' they say 'Oh, it's a break from what we normally do, it's a bit different'.* LM provided a deeper insight, further contradicting the 'absolute time doing' argument, by suggesting that the unrehearsed nature of this leisure experience (Abrahams, 1986) was often more important than the specific activity:

> *"It's very easy to forget they may never have worn a wetsuit, felt a wetsuit, and it's part of the experience to put on a wetsuit. So it may seem strange that they want to do something that's going to mean less sailing time, but it's easy to forget that it's part of the novelty of the activity. But, again, it's part of the experience, jumping in to the lake rather than a pool, and wearing clothes when they're jumping in".*

Seventeen participants had said that the novelty of the activity and activity environment had been a key factor in them looking forward to their impending experience at WW;

therefore, LM had a more accurate perception of these participants' hopes than both managers and the instructor, DB.

13.3.4 Incomplete Perceptions of Participants' Entry Mood

This disposition caused by participants' expectations could have been positive or negative. However, management and staff all focussed on the negative mood of being concerned or nervous, despite having previously considered that participants were seeking fun and enjoyment, which should have put them in a positive entry mood. This, is explained by nervous arousal co-existing with happiness (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

Management correctly perceived that participants were mainly concerned about the socialscape, as GLo stated:

> "...getting on with the rest of the group are important issues to them: 'What's the rest of the group going to be like? Will I get on with them? Will we be good friends?' ".

The other manager, JP agreed with GLo, saying:

> "But I do think that what was the thing that concerned them most? It was the other people in the group...Who they were and would they like them and would they get on with them".

However, JP later contradicted himself by saying, **"What concerns them most is...'What's my instructor going to be like?' Thereafter they're not concerned about anything".** JP obviously understood that the socialscape and employees were the key sources of participants' concerns, but he was unequivocal that each was the most important and may either have been resolving that tension in his own mind, or exercising different trains of thought during the interview. My experience of JP over two years was that he would make a dogmatic statement, but then contradict this later with an equally dogmatic, yet opposite assertion; therefore this trait was being illustrated in the interview.

GLo supported JP's comment about instructors by saying, **"Not being shouted at by the instructor are important issues to them, their hopes and fears are 'is my instructor going to be a nice person, be nice to me?' ".** However, neither GLo nor JP showed any understanding of participants' concerns over their own ability to develop their skilled consumption, where five of them had expressed such concerns in their pre-course interviews.

WW staff exhibited an understanding of the concerns that participants may have had regarding the socialscape and their instructors, with eight saying many were nervous at

the beginning, and only six of these offering their perceptions of why. One administrator, SC, was aware of participants' concerns over their instructor, saying, *"...and you get some who come in and are very nervous and parents will come up and saying 'Is the instructor OK?'"*.

Finally, one instructor said *"I actually say 'Has anyone got any worries?' and I'm after an answer"* (PS). However, I observed PS saying this to a number of different groups and each time the course participants avoided his eyes and did not respond. It was clear that they were unlikely to express key concerns about him or the other group members in that forum; therefore his questioning was counter-productive and the style was actively discouraging participants from responding.

13.3.5 Parents as Determinants of Participants' Expectations

The WW management and staff all perceived correctly Howard & Madrigal's (1990) assertion that parents, especially the mother, were the key decision-makers when young people took part in outdoor adventure courses. Manager JP offered a plausible reason for this: **"Parents like young people to be out there and active, doing something, something sporting, usually, being involved with others in the process of doing it"**.

However, staff displayed more cynicism and nearly all perceived that on the novice courses, parents were typically seeking what PS called *"...a glorified baby-sitting service"*. CR went further, saying, *"Well, very often it's because their mum books them on courses...and sometimes it's not even discussed"*. The outcome of such scenarios was that some young people resented being sent to WW, and did not always fully engage with the activities. Both PS and JP's views were confirmed to me when I met parents during my interviewing activities. Most initially supported JP's comment, but all eventually agreed that WW provided a childcare option for them and one said that it was the cheapest daily childcare she could arrange!

In the sample for this study, nine participants had discussed going to WW with their parents and ten said that their mother had made the booking without consulting them first. AB was the only one of these to resent being sent on a course he did not choose, but he did engage with it fully and ultimately enjoyed his experience at WW.

Although it would seem that parents were showing a lack of consideration for their children's needs, GJ observed that parents often made such decisions on their children's' behalf to motivate them to participate, which may have explained AB's demeanour:

> *"Children, I think, sometimes do need to be pushed a little to get them motivated. They're often afraid to try things and if they had the excuse that mum made them,*

they've got over the first hurdle of choosing to go and get on with, most of the time, enjoying it".

The WW management and staff, therefore, understood that parents were a likely determinant of participants' expectations and it is evident that this determinant should be added to the Conceptual Gap Model in Chapter Six for this context.

Having discussed employee and management perceptions of customers' expectations, the next section identifies employee and management perceptions of the four sources of critical moments of truth, identified by the participants.

13.4 Employee and Management Perceptions of Participants' Perceptions

The four critical moment of truth sources of employees, participants' skilled leisure consumption, the socialscape and the weather, are discussed in this section, with tangibles and safety management also included as areas of inaccurate staff perceptions. Conclusions are then drawn on whether staff and management perceived any disconfirmation between participants' expectations and perceptions.

13.4.1 Employees as Information Gatekeepers and Impression Managers

GLo demonstrated that he understood participants' positive perceptions of their relationship with their instructors, through the latter displaying a caring personality and empathy (Gummesson, 1991) in their instructional style and behaviour. However, with respect to information gatekeeping (Schneider & Bowen, 1995), four staff commented on the potential variability between instructors' technical performance, rather than their relationship with participants, which may have been GLo's unstated concern. LM said:

> *"...I think the quality the punters get, has a big bearing on which instructor they get...because of the level of fun and knowledge and what they go away with and what they gain from the session".*

To support this, three participants had stated that they felt their instructor had occasionally given them less help than they needed and were obviously disappointed by this, reinforcing the argument for including 'the concept of equity' (Mackay & Crompton, 1988) in the refined Conceptual Gap Model. However, they understood that others in their group may have needed more help at different times and were satisfied with the instructor's attitude towards them (see KH's statement in Section 12.4.2). PS attempted to explain this acceptance by indicating that participants were aware when instructors were not necessarily performing at their best and accommodated this within their zone of tolerance:
"...they can sense when you're having an off day...that's what's so good about working with kids, they'll take you for what you are".

This suggests that if the instructor's attitude was appropriate throughout the service encounter at WW, occasional negative incidents may not have been critical to participants' overall satisfaction, since, according to de Ruyter & Bloemer, (1999) optimal levels of satisfaction cannot always be maintained.

13.4.2 Fun and Skilled Leisure Consumption

The WW Management correctly perceived that participants' active involvement in co-producing their adventure experience was an important determinant of satisfaction (Shemwell *et al.*, 1999). This central role in co-creating the service experience meant that participants had some influence on generating the feelings of fun and enjoyment they experienced and all of the instructors perceived that participants had these feelings. JB said, *"Just the amount of fun we give them in the sessions, really"* and LM agreed, making a further comment on the novelty (Anderson, 1996) of the whole experience:

> *"It's just a fun activity...Everything is new to them: putting on helmets, buoyancy aids, and getting an understanding of why they're doing it all. It's not how much technical stuff you get out of it, but how much fun they get...".*

More specifically, one manager and six instructors believed that jumping off the jetty fully clothed at the end of the course was the most fun and memorable aspect of participants' experience. This was summarised by GJ: *"Jumping off the jetty!...you could spend thousands of pounds on kit, but at the end of the day all they want to do is jump off the jetty".*

Jumping off the jetty at the end of a course was a ritual that nearly every young person at WW took part in, still wearing full personal protective equipment. Until that moment participants had been following strict rules of behaviour at WW, and jumping into the water from the jetty was strictly forbidden. Now, they were actively being encouraged to break that rule and they did so with enthusiasm and gusto, as they ran and jumped until they were too exhausted to continue. Two instructors always supervised this activity and would only become involved if participants' behaviour was dangerous.

However, none of the participants had mentioned jetty jumping as a critical moment of truth in their experience, even TG, who held hands with J as they jumped (see Section 12.8.1 for the explanation of this relationship. Rather, it was an activity they did at the end, and was simply transactional in the overall service encounter. All staff, therefore, incorrectly perceived the importance of this jetty jumping activity.

Four participants said that they felt they had developed increased confidence in themselves and this was perceived by at least half the WW staff. In particular, the administrator, CR, observed, *"...what they've got at the end of the day, the confidence,*

you can see it in their faces, demonstrating that although she would seem to have little direct contact with participants, CR was nevertheless sensitive to their experiences at the centre. Despite CR's essentially back office role, she looked after young people who came off the water through illness or injury and therefore had well informed perceptions as a result.

To summarise management and staff perceptions of this developing skilled consumption, all understood that having fun was a key aspect of participants' satisfaction, but most misperceived the importance of skilled consumption, to help participants develop themselves in a broader sense, through, for example increasing self-confidence.

13.4.3 Participants' New Socialscape

The WW staff did not mention the peer socialscape when considering participants' expectations, but they all understood that it was an important factor in participants' perceptions of their experiences (Unger, 1984). Two perceived correctly that some participants were nervous at the beginning until they established friendships with others, and all staff perceived the importance of social co-operation and friendliness. GJ commented on this but was the only instructor to allude to the physical interdependence perceived by some participants (Bettencourt, 1997): *"They end up helping each other to put things away, without me telling them. They'll help others working together"*.

Despite this understanding of participants' new socialscape, none of the instructors and management said that they actively tried to reduce the social awkwardness at the beginning of the course, which eight participants suggested would have helped to ease the introduction process. This implies that either the instructors and management did not perceive how uncomfortable the introduction period was, or they understood and chose not to incorporate it into service design and delivery, demonstrating a gap in either case.

13.4.4 Variable Weather Conditions

All WW staff believed that the variable weather conditions were an important factor in participants' perceptions of their experiences at the centre and most participants made some comment on the weather. They mainly observed that it was variable over the two day courses, and that if there was too much or too little wind on one day, conditions were normally good on the other, which was consistent with my experience at WW over two years. One instructor, SJ, reflected on a sailing group he had taken in such conditions and demonstrated his understanding of these perceptions:

> *"They were really not interested at all at first, but after day one, they were really buzzing, they thought it was great, but the next day the wind was zero and they thought it was boring. But there's not a lot you can do about the weather"*.

177

Although SJ's last sentence seems obvious, his colleague JJ had a more positive perception of the impact of changing weather conditions, saying, *"If the weather's bad they don't mind if you change things but still do something they enjoy"*. This was supported by participant CB's positive post-course interview perceptions of sailing as a group in a larger boat with her instructor in control in high winds and rain. CB's instructor, LM, had taken the decision to do this after consulting her group and the Duty Manager, rather than spend time ashore recapping on sailing theory. She explained that they would only be passengers, taking occasional turns as crew to manage the small jib sail, but suggested it would be a different and enjoyable experience for them. The group agreed and through the wind and rain I could see participants' cold, white hands gripping the boat's gunwhale, their heads turned slightly to one side as they looked forward into the spray blown up from the bow, all grinning through gritted teeth so as not to swallow any water! This was a very successful contingency activity, underlined by CB's comments.

Overall, participants and instructors mainly commented on the effects of weather conditions if sailing was their main activity, where the kayakers and canoeists said very little, since their activities were less affected by changing weather, although high winds would have been problematic. This suggests a significant challenge in managing participants' experiences at WW, with different activities requiring different ideal weather conditions.

13.4.5 Tangible Appearances

Only two staff and one manager felt that the appearance of tangibles was important to participants. JP said of the site entrance: **"Somebody once said they knew we were organised because we had lined the boats up! So it is that impression of us as you walk in: we do consciously put the best boats at that end"** (see Section 12.10 for my own description of this), and DB said of equipment colour, *"I suppose all children like to use new things, they go for the bright colours because the colour is important to them"*.

In fact, nineteen participants had said they immediately formed a good impression when they arrived at WW, because it looked tidy and organised as JP stated, and participant CB felt that this indicated good safety management. However, no participant commented on equipment colours, suggesting this was less important than DB perceived, and SC clearly demonstrated an incorrect perception by disagreeing with both JP and DB, saying, *"I'm not sure whether the kids take any notice of the facilities or the kit"*. This suggests an incomplete perception of the initial importance of tangibles to participants, where few staff understood that the first impression of the site appearance was significant.

So far in this chapter staff and management's understanding of participants' expectations and perceptions have been analysed. The remainder of the chapter explores their perceptions of whether disconfirmation existed in participants' minds.

13.5. Perceptions of Participants' Disconfirmation

Management and staff at WW all correctly perceived that most participants' experienced positive disconfirmation (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). CR summarised the staff view by saying:

> *"We get it right more often than get it wrong...I think as people go there they think it's a lovely place, so once you've attracted people to the centre, I think their memories are generally good...I think if there have been nasty bits, they'll have forgotten them with all the good bits...",*

and RW agreed:

> *"Then when they go away from the centre they will have had a good time overall, but you can break that down and it will probably be little steps of 'That was good, I didn't expect that', and 'That wasn't so good, but this was'".*

One manager, JP, commented that participants were satisfied with their activities and then identified booking administration processes as the source of complaints. This clearly related only to parents making the purchase decision, suggesting that participant complaints were never received:

> **"...so the children are happy in what they're doing and in that way there's a lot of customer satisfaction...But mostly our complaints on bookings are on procedural administration cock-ups. It's an administrative thing: we don't get complaints about programmes".**

JP was stating in his unequivocal manner here that participants must have been satisfied if they did not complain. However, the post-course interview with participant AS suggested that she was dissatisfied with her course overall, and was either reluctant, or unable, to articulate the source of her dissatisfaction, even to a neutral interviewer in the non-threatening surroundings of her family home. It is thus unlikely that AS would have complained in the alien WW environment, especially if her instructor was implicated in the complaint. Therefore, this lack of complaints may have been influenced by, for example, a young person such as AS not having the confidence to complain face to face to an instructor, when her peers were clearly enjoying themselves.

Overall, both management and staff perceived accurately that most participants' expectations were at least met, but the manager JP seemed to have a complacent view that a lack of formal complaints from participants meant that disconfirmation did not exist. However, the other manager was more circumspect about this, as evidenced by his hidden agenda emerging near the end of the study.

13.6 Chapter Summary

The key findings of this chapter are summarised below.

1. Management and employees understood that participants had fuzzy or even unformed hopes and expectations.

2. Management and employees understood that a lack of past experience was a logical determinant of unclear expectations and, hence, entry mood.

3. Management and employees mainly considered participants' entry mood of concern over their instructors and the socialscape, with little acknowledgement of a positive, hopeful entry mood.

4. Management and employees understood the role of participants' mothers as purchase decision makers, but were not aware that this could be an information filter influencing participants' unclear expectations. They were not aware that none of the participants had seen any of the information that was sent to customers after booking.

5. Instructors tried to understand participants' expectations by asking at the beginning of a course, but this related only to activity-based expectations and did not explore hopes and concerns over instructors or the peer socialscape.

6. Management and employees understood that fun and excitement were important participant hopes, but did not consider that hopes of self-expression also existed.

7. Employees did not perceive that participants had hopes and concerns over their own actions/performance.

8. Management and employees understood that participants' hopes in the four key aspects of employees, their own performance, the socialscape and the weather were fulfilled.

9. Despite instructors correctly perceiving the importance of the socialscape to participants, no instructor actively tried to reduce the initial awkwardness of this situation. Instead they relied on participants' time spent in their socialscape in the activity for social relations to develop.

10. Management and employees were sceptical of positive written feedback received unsolicited from young people after their courses, saying that the lack of critical detail was not helpful.

11. Management seemed to be seeking a single, formal mechanism for gaining in-depth feedback from participants, but instructors and administrators believed that the informal, multiple conversational and observational methods they used were the most effective means of seeking this feedback.

12. Management lacked understanding of the value and use of informal, qualitative feedback methods already being used.

13. Management did not understand that participants would not be prepared to write qualitative, in-depth feedback comments, yet staff were aware of this.

14. Management demonstrated overall a less detailed understanding of participants' hopes and perceptions than employees.

Chapter Fourteen
Service Design

14.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the extent to which employee and management accurately perceived participants' expectations and perceptions of their experience at WW was reviewed. This chapter presents an analysis of management and staff perspectives of service design and service delivery at WW, and how these were informed by their perceptions from the previous chapter. Mayer *et al.*'s (2003) Service Process concept considers service design and service delivery separately, but Williams & Buswell (2003) argue that the term 'service design' should combine all of a service provider's activities, from service conceptualisation through to providing customer value. Lytle *et al.*'s (1998) SERV*OR dimensions were adapted in Chapter Five to propose a more generalisable framework for analysing service design, incorporating delivery, in different service contexts:

1. Service vision.
2. Servant leadership, incorporating standards setting and communications.
3. Employee empowerment in customer treatment.
4. Service failure prevention
5. Service recovery.
6. Service technology.
7. Service training.
8. Service rewards.

However, emerging primary data themes informed a re-conceptualisation of these criteria. Therefore, this array can now be condensed into the two main headings below for the WW service context, since many of the criteria were either dependent upon, or were an integral part of, another criterion. The purpose of this chapter is thus to analyse the key factors of service design which influenced participants' experience at WW, using these two overarching criteria developed further from Lytle *et al.*'s framework:

1. 'Servant leadership', which required that a service vision, service standards and service technology policies were communicated to all staff.
2. 'Service failure prevention and recovery', which was managed through employee recruitment, induction and training, and employee empowerment.

14.2 Servant Leadership

This section identifies how management communicated WW's values and standards through exemplar behaviour and includes employees' perceptions of the inappropriateness of some of these communications. The watersports equipment policy is also considered, representing the 'service technology' criterion proposed by Lytle *et al.*

14.2.1 Service Mission and Values

The mission which underpinned the service at WW was shared by all management and staff, as JB observed: *"In our mission statement it says we're trying to provide quality outdoor experiences for young people and I think we meet that."*

LM agreed but was more specific than JB: *"It seems to be to get children involved in watersports and to have fun"*. CR even ignored the outdoor context saying, *"Basically, we are about providing children with an enjoyable experience, and I think that's right."*

The employees at WW, therefore, had a very clear customer-centred ethos, which should have ensured high quality service experiences (Normann, 2000). Further, in this outdoor adventure leisure context, management's attitude should be fundamental to improving service delivery (Donne, 1997) and JP confirmed this attitude towards quality:

> **"One of our main objectives is to maintain quality...I don't want to be forced to identify one thing which makes us different from someone else, it's our attitude, philosophy towards it".**

SJ echoed JP's comments from a staff perspective, saying, *"Quality's in the way we do our job...We have expectations on quality of the way we work"*, and confirming Gummesson's (1990) view that good service quality depends on an appropriate organisational culture, as demonstrated at WW. Gummesson observes that management must engender quality attitudes and JP explained that he and GLo believed that an empathetic attitude (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 1998) was an important underpinning attitude at WW:

> **"We like to think we have a style and we [management] like to encourage people to work in that way; quite what that is difficult to define, but, it's about being friendly and approachable...You know, we want instructors to work *with* young people...and understand what they are experiencing".**

GLo took this further by stating that young people's experiences were central to the WW ethos: **"...our values have to be very much along the process side of the children's experience while they're here"**, supporting Lovelock's (1992c) argument that customers should be at the centre of the 'trinity' of a service organisation's functions.

GLo emphasised '...working *with* young people...' and this was evident in staff's attitude and behaviour. A particular feature was an on-going discussion theme of how to teach skills in different ways to respond to different participant's needs, and instructors typically discussed this in small groups they had informally created as support fora. There was no formal dissemination of these ideas centre-wide, rather, they were implicitly spread as interesting points of conversation or observed behaviour. For example, on one occasion whilst observing a kayak session, I was joined by RW who was taking a break from site maintenance work. As we watched the activity, he said, 'Nice one, G, I never thought of that,' as GL helped a struggling course participant by suggesting a different way of initiating a turn. At the end of GL's session RW questioned him on what he had seen and by the end of the week, all kayak instructors were trying this approach.

The management and staff statements above and the kayak session example support Robinson's (1998) argument that in the leisure industry, a quality culture is more important than standardised practices and procedures, reflected by JP's observation that, **"It's a service industry and you can only run it by having a culture that runs itself"**.

14.2.2 Communicating Service Standards Through a Policy Manual

The WW management believed that its standards were significantly above the minimum required by national governing bodies and legislation. These standards were formally communicated at the pre-season annual instructors' conference, through regular updating training activities, word of mouth between instructors from managements' 'role modelling' activities, and through the centre's staff (policy) manual, which served a mainly technical purpose, but included a statement of WW's aims and values.

All employees were aware of the policy manual and its contents, but DB suggested that it was a superficial document since, as JJ and SJ both agreed, the standards specified for activity sessions were vague. JJ gave an example of sailing, saying: *"It just says 'For sailing you can take up to six people' and so on; it's basic and fairly obvious"* and SJ stated that practice only reflected policy because of this lack of detailed specificity:

14.2.3 Communicating Service Standards Through Symbolic Behaviour

Communicating service standards operationalises the service vision, where management must engender a quality culture with exemplar behaviour (Horovitz & Panak, 1992). The staff felt that this was communicated most effectively by the managements' attitude and behaviour, (Donne, 1997, Gummesson, 1990). For example, CR stated: *"It's G and J, they set the standard, whatever they do, they just expect, encourage, everybody to work to the same standard"*. SJ agreed, stating: *"G especially has got high standards and over time you get to know those standards and work to those standards and everyone just picks it*

all up", supporting Horovitz & Panak's (1992) argument that symbols of management behaviour reinforce shared values. I noted an example of GLo's symbolic behaviour one lunchtime. Most instructors were eating their lunch outside at picnic tables when he began to walk around the site, picking up litter, without comment and not looking at anyone in particular. Gradually, as staff finished their lunch, they joined in, encouraging course participants to do the same, and for the final ten minute period before activities recommenced, everyone on site was picking up litter – even me!

Both managers acted as occasional instructors, either because of resourcing constraints, or, when they felt that their presence on the lake was required for what they called 'role modelling' of standards and practices (Schein, 1992). All of the staff agreed that the managers' occasional presence was important, firstly for the managers' own benefit:

> *"Because he's the head of the team, and if the other instructors don't see him he's just a desk person. But he's not like that, he needs to get out and do the job, I think it does them all good"* (CR)

and secondly as role models to emulate:

> *"...because he has a taste of what we're doing. I mean, he is a very competent instructor, you know, you see him with his little group going in and out, round a buoy, all close together, he usually has it sorted very well. Sometimes our own group control you could call hazy and you can learn from this"* (DB).

However, none of the staff seemed aware of the deliberate 'role modelling' activities that the two managers often assumed when instructing, yet this high profile (Normann, 2000) enabled the managers to reinforce service standards. JB even commented on this, saying, *"No, there's nothing formal to make sure the standards are maintained, but everyone says things like 'Watch how J does it', or 'See what G does'"*. This was a good illustration of how WW management nurtured organisational goals by being visible and thus able to communicate these to instructors (Kandampully & Duddy, 1997).

Manager JP was the best technical windsurfing instructor at WW and this became apparent to me the first time I saw him take a group of participants on a full tour of the lake in a role modelling exercise. He deliberately took this group around every other group on the lake, in close formation, to demonstrate how this could be done without experiencing what the instructors called a 'starburst' situation, where everyone sails off in different directions. JP had warned me in advance of his intention and, whilst being impressed with his performance, I also watched the other instructors on the lake as he had suggested. They were all aware of his presence and even the sailing and kayaking instructors paused to watch as he approached them. At the end of the day instructors were all talking about what he had done and, more importantly, how they thought he had managed it. The value of the role modelling exercise was thus demonstrated.

GLo was candid about both the importance and risks of role modelling activities such as this, stating:

"In truth we often will almost stage-manage it to try and ensure that areas we want to emphasise are quite blatant. But the down side is if we don't do it spot on, that's up for grabs as well and that's fine".

JP explained GLo's 'up for grabs' comment by stating that their own performance would be judged critically by the instructors and they felt they had to prove that they were technically better than those instructors every time they took on the role.

The managers, therefore, made a significant effort to lead by example and their competence and advice was highly respected by the WW staff, as DB confirmed:

[JP]...is particularly good...When I first started my group control was, to put it politely, abysmal, and I was always getting starbursts and losing people, but J said 'You've got to keep them together and this is how you can do it' ".

DB's comment demonstrates that management accorded with Berry *et al.*'s (1994) assertion that the right culture challenges staff to perform to their utmost and WW staff, therefore, responded directly to the behaviour of these managers, whose technical abilities they respected.

14.2.4 Occasional Inappropriate Management Communications

Day to day communications between management and staff were conducted through two key media, the 'day sheet' and the morning instructor meeting, as SC and LM explained:

"Things you needed to know about would be written on the day sheet, anyway, the list of times, groups that are coming, instructors, the schedule of the day" (SC)

"At the meeting in the morning when they tell you what the weather's going to be like, it depends who's giving that if they say 'Perhaps you should consider' and 'What about doing this' and some people feel it's not necessary because it's degrading the instructors' own ability, but you can take it or leave it, really" (LM).

LM's comments here suggest that occasionally the style in which management gave advice at the morning meeting was not always appropriate to the culture of professional judgement empowerment that they encouraged.

Two other staff also commented negatively on WW management's communication style, with GL saying *"...if G* [senior manager] *says 'Go and do that', I'll go and do it straight away...He just blatantly shouts, but he's got a lot of work to do, pressures at home, I don't know".* SC concurred that the management sometimes communicated in an aggressive manner, saying that she did not like JP and GLo raising their voices at her: *"Being*

shouted at: 'Don't do that!' Well, raised voices sometimes, just snapping. Probably just the stress of their job...Er, G did apologise".

Neither GLo nor JP behaved in this way knowingly in my presence, but in the time I spent at WW, I observed a number of occasions when they were unnecessarily aggressive or dictatorial towards their staff, especially in JP's case. This is accepted in emergency situations, but on one particular occasion JP told JJ quite aggressively to spend the afternoon relocating a rack of canoes – not an emergency situation – and she was visibly upset by the way he spoke to her.

Management behaviour such as this could create a situation where employees have more loyalty to customers than to management and, in the longer term, become disaffected with their employer (Senior, 1992). However, despite both GL and SC remarking unfavourably on their managers' communications with them, they each sought reasons to explain this behaviour in terms of their managers' workload, suggesting that the mutual respect generated in the culture at WW was more important to them than their managers' occasional behavioural lapses. This sensitive issue was not explored further with the managers during their interviews, in case the anonymity of these participants was compromised.

When considering communications between management and staff at peak demand times, CR stated, *"Sometimes when we're busy it's non-existent"*, but JB commented overall: *"I think we're looked after quite well by the management. We do confer with them on an informal basis...."*, implying that GL and SC (above) had only characterised their managers' occasional, rather than normal, behaviour, and perhaps explaining further why they tolerated this behaviour.

14.2.5 Employees Seeking Praise from Management

Manager JP believed that it was important to encourage the staff team, saying: **"It's important to maintain that quality and reassure ourselves of that quality and reassure our staff, because we need to pat them on the back"**. The WW staff all stated that they wanted positive feedback from management, highlighted by PS saying, *"I get a lift if someone says to me I've done something well, but it rarely happens"*. The rest of the staff agreed with PS and felt that despite JP's assertion, management feedback was typically over poor performance concerns, rather than giving praise for good performance, as JB explained:

> *"If we're doing well, there's not a great deal said, because the expectations of the management are very high to meet the standards of the centre. If we're doing something wrong then we'll be told about it very quickly".*

LM took this further and commented on her perceptions of poor management feedback when actively sought from one manager: *"Then sometimes you get poor feedback when you ask questions...that's quite hard to find out, to get a straightforward answer, particularly out of J"*.

Contrary to JP's comment above that reassuring staff was important, I did not hear either manager praise anyone for good performance in my time at the centre. Instead, to support JB's observation, it seemed to me that this was expected as a threshold performance level and comments would only be made if this was not achieved.

It would thus appear that WW management understood that their employees wanted encouragement through clear and positive feedback, but were either unable, or unwilling, to provide this.

14.2.6 Watersports Equipment Policy

Service technology at WW related to the specialist equipment - watercraft and personal protective equipment (PPE) - used by all customers and some staff, since many staff used their own PPE. The equipment policy at WW was explained by JP: **"...each child basically gets its own piece of equipment, they don't have to share, which is another policy. We could be more economic if we didn't do that..."**, demonstrating management's decision to accept the higher cost of providing individual, rather than shared, equipment, to increase participants' time spent 'doing' the activity (Kellogg et al., 1997). It was a policy supported by instructor JJ: *"Having good equipment, the right clothing to issue to children, satisfied children at the end of the day who come back. I think we have all of these"*.

JP also illustrated how the equipment provided was designed to meet the heterogeneous requirements of participants. He explained that some PPE, such as buoyancy aids, were legal Health & Safety requirements, but providing a wide range of, for example, wetsuit sizes, ensured that no participant took to the water with inappropriately sized protection. My own observations confirm that no-one took to the water with ill-fitting or incorrect PPE and PS reinforced this by saying:

> *"There's a lot of things that could reflect quality, it could be our equipment, we've got to have quality equipment and if you look round our stores we've got hundreds of wetsuits, so they get the right size, not twenty between ten kids, like some centres, so we always strive for quality"*.

In addition, the equipment policy at WW had clearly been developed in line with participants' needs. GLo emphasised this saying that if an item could be designed better

to suit these needs, and therefore enhance participants' experience, he liaised with the manufacturer to customise their design for WW use, quoting wetsuits as an example:

> **"In fact there are times where we can't get what we need and manufacturers will make something specifically for us. Wetsuits, for example, have thicker neoprene kneepads, that will take repeated kneeling on and not wear away from the inside out. So that wetsuit is then at the standard we want and all parts will last the same length of time. We want to have the right kit for the right job".**

This policy towards equipment is a further indication of how the complex needs of customers (Williams & Buswell, 2003), during their activity experience were central to service design at WW (Ghobadian & Terry, 1995; O'Neill & Palmer, 2003).

This 'servant leadership' section has identified that management communicated standards through their own attitude and behaviour, which employees respected and tried to emulate. However, the way in which management communicated with staff was not always appropriate, yet this seemed to have been tolerated because of their other standards-setting behaviour. Finally, it is clear that service technology (watersports equipment) policy and development was focused on enhancing participants' experience at WW.

14.3 Service Failure Prevention and Recovery

This section considers the basis on which employees were recruited at WW, and the personal attributes which influenced their ability to work in an empowered environment to satisfy watersports participants. The importance of instructor's own personal scripts is also discussed, together with the importance of their peer socialscape.

14.3.1 Recruiting, Inducting and Training Appropriate Staff

The importance of personal virtue-based qualities (McNamee, 1995) of WW employees was discussed in Chapter Five; therefore it was critical for WW management to recruit and induct appropriate staff who could work in an empowered culture (Belbin, 1998).

According to JP, the annual employee turnover at WW was approximately 10%, most of them being students working on short-term seasonal contracts, and PS implied that this turnover was wasted recruitment and induction effort, saying, *"...it's a shame when they go because we've all put a lot into it and we have to start again with new people next time"*. However, this effort would have ensured that participants were satisfied with their experiences at WW, therefore, it was not wasted.

GLo explained that in the recruitment process, the initial criterion for a candidate to gain an interview would be an appropriate technical qualification from a National Governing

Body, such as the Royal Yachting Association, or the British Canoe Union. He added that this "...would be the trigger that gets someone an interview to say do they fit our culture?", suggesting that a candidate's non-technical personal attributes, enabling them to work in the empowered culture (Witt & Muhlemann, 1994), were as important as their technical competence.

Following a successful interview, candidates were invited to WW for a 'try-out' exercise where they followed an instructor as a 'buddy' (Robinson, 2004). This acted as a second screening process for compatibility with the centre's culture, as GLo explained:

> "...then there's the try-out bit, where they shadow an instructor. Many at that stage don't come back again, who decide they can't work in the way we're asking them...see whether their style is compatible with our style of working, our values. Sometimes at that stage you realise that some people are a long way away from our style".

Once a candidate had been employed following 'try-out', a formal induction process ensued, using policy documentation and further shadowing of an instructor, who would then decide when the new employee was ready to lead an activity session. This supports Green & Steven's (1999) assertion that induction is an important underpinning for leisure employees to carry out their work effectively.

The only employee who expressed disappointment with her induction and consequent ability to carry out her role effectively was the administrator, SC, linking directly to her views on being empowered, saying: *"I think at the beginning I needed more guidance. I had about three days in the office with C and then that was it."*

Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (1998) state that empowered employees must be informed and well trained and although SC followed the same shadowing process followed by the instructors, she did not take part in any further training. Therefore irrespective of management's very positive attitude towards instructor training, SC's training needs may have been deprioritised because her role was not instructional, despite being the first point of contact for all telephone enquiries. I found SC to be very effective in her work at WW and the senior management may have considered that she needed no further training in the role.

It emerged that management's attitude towards staff training was driven by resource efficiency, where staff became multi-skilled to reduce constraints on activity programming, rather than to enhance participants' experiences. This was highlighted by GLo saying, "The more skills we give them the more that's going to improve our processes" and instructor JB confirming that instructors had been engaged in training to broaden the scope of activities they could instruct.

190

14.3.2 Instructors Empowered to Satisfy WW Participants

Johnston & Clark (2001) state that service design enables management to remove some uncertainty at the point of service delivery, where interactions in the service encounter must, ultimately, be left to the service employee. This service encounter at WW was influenced by complex and variable situational factors (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996; Mayer *et al.*, 2003) in both the servicescape and socialscape. The WW management believed that their instructors needed the flexibility to decide how to perform their role, recognising that services can break down unexpectedly and that instructors had to be empowered to deal with this appropriately (Walker, 1995). Instructors were empowered to use their professional judgement to make local decisions based on resource constraints, weather conditions and participants' responses, therefore flexibility in decision-making during the service encounter was an important facet of service delivery. Being empowered meant that they took responsibility for their work to meet management's performance expectations (Kanter, 1994) and customers' needs (Bendell *et al.*, 1993), with initiative and imagination (Boshoff & Leong, 1998).

GLo explained that this empowerment required him to place a great deal of trust in the instructors to satisfy customers in the most appropriate way (Chernish, 2001), thus taking the initiative for levels of quality (Hjalager, 2001). He hinted that the influence of the dynamic servicescape on their work was a key factor in this:

> **"At the end of the day we do rely on all the instructors at all levels to make informed, on the job decisions. In fact, once they are on the water with a group, the flexibility we give an instructor has is incredibly high, and that involves the other decisions on how is the programme revised, how is the equipment maintained or replaced, all those decisions which affect their work".**

JP added that the instructors had to manage the variable needs of participants and the nature of instructing necessarily required discretion in decision-making (Lashley & Lee-Ross, 2003) by the instructor. Both managers' observations support Eccles' (1993) assertion that there must be a reciprocal management disempowerment of decision-making when employees are empowered, otherwise management retains responsibility for those decisions.

The instructors confirmed management's empowerment policy, with PS summarising that they had *"...an overall framework. You've got to cover certain things, but how you decide to cover it is entirely up to us"*. SJ explained how being trusted in this way challenged him to take responsibility for his own performance (Berry *et al.*, 1994):

> *"I do feel that the management do put a lot of trust in us to do our job and most of the staff try to rise to it to reach as high standards as we can. You're experienced, you use your common sense and experience",*

reflecting the argument that leisure employees should 'own' the service encounter (Williams & Buswell, 2003), and take pride in its success (Mullins, 2003).

A feature of flexibility given to WW employees' was that with finite equipment resources available, instructors would negotiate with each other, co-operating together (Low, 1998) to ensure optimum resource allocation, illustrated by JJ stating:

> "We have almost free rein, but there are limits. If we're busy, you can't just take out whatever boats you want, you agree with the other instructors what each of you will take out, but then, you can teach as you see fit".

Every morning I observed these 'negotiations' between instructors and in nearly all cases the decision was based on which craft were most appropriate for a particular group, rather than, for example, their condition or colour. Occasionally compromises were necessary, but these were rare.

14.3.3 Empowerment in Variable Weather Conditions

A critical aspect of instructors using their professional judgement at WW was that they trusted management to support their decisions because they were trusted themselves to take responsibility for satisfying customers (Schneider & Bowen, 1995). JJ gave an example I had seen where she had brought young people off the lake early because they were extremely cold, but had left the sailing boats drifting, rather than putting them away first. Management had questioned her actions but agreed with her participant-centred reasons for overriding a standard operating procedure, demonstrating that through employee empowerment, management fully supported front-line staff to carry out their roles effectively (O'Neill, 2000). The senior manager, GLo illustrated his understanding of situations such as this:

> "It can also be quite salutary; the realism of what different weather conditions or environment can do to your best laid plans and how the flexibility has to be there".

Instructor DB gave an example of type of decisions he would have to make to accommodate different conditions:

> "Yes, it's often when it's quite windy and you have a decision to make on what boat, what size of sail, one person or two people, and how much to tell them, because if it's windy the chances are they may capsize and you sometimes have to make that choice. You have to assess the situation and the people you've got. If the weather's bad you think 'What is the best I can do for them?' ".

DB stated clearly here that he still aimed to manage at his 'best' in uncontrollable weather conditions, with no suggestion of compromising this effort simply because variable weather made managing the service encounter more difficult. Haksever et al. (2000)

emphasise that in a complex service with an uncertain operating environment (such as at WW) employee empowerment becomes more important; therefore instructors exercising their professional judgement in this way was a key component underpinning service performance at WW.

14.3.4 Instructors' Personal Scripts and Routines

Having explained the need for flexible service delivery, the WW instructors qualified this by alluding to having implicitly structured routines or behaviours (Goiai & Poole, 1984), within which they exercised their judgement. Williams & Buswell's (2003) notion of a service script continuum helps to interpret this, such that rather than using a prescribed script, each instructors had established their own script which acted as a framework for flexible, adaptable decision-making (Solomon et al., 1985). This extended beyond service scripts being imposed by management, to personal scripts being developed by empowered instructors, integrating potential decision points and likely alternatives available, which Lord & Kernan (1987) call the multiple paths and sequences of a script. These personal scripts were informed by the instructors' technical training and experience of the particular servicescape in which they worked.

The following are examples of different instructors' personal script routines and behaviours. The first is aimed at reducing the time spent preparing to get on the water (GL). The second identifies how quality/safety checks were made (GJ). The third indicates of how a typical session might develop (DB) and the fourth shows a broad verbal script on negotiating some aspects of the activity session (JB):

> "So I get out of the staffroom, kit already on, boats ready and grab them when they come through the gate. I can get them on the water in twenty minutes". (GL)

> "When we get the kids, you just try to keep them as tight as you possibly can, so you don't lose them as a group. So you're setting the standards of the session straight away, you're checking helmets, buoyancy aid on, all fitting properly, so right from the beginning your standards are high". (GJ)

> "My aim is to get them kitted out as soon as possible and I get their buoyancy aids and helmets to speed things up. So the first thing I do is to explain what the board's all about, using simple language, not too technical, then explain about the sail and board while they're still dry. Then I do balancing sessions with the rigs and explain what they're trying to do. No, on the grass, so they're dry and hopefully still warm. Then we go and try the boards out, doing exercises on the water. I find you can't keep them all together, because they're going on at different rates, so I try to focus my attention on the less able ones, but give the others tasks to do while I do that". (DB)

> "Normally as part of the structure of planning the session we discuss with them what they want to do. I normally ask them 'Do you want to get wet, do capsize, or what?' Then they tell us and we agree then with them what they want to do, so we can plan the session and know we are doing what they want to do". (JB)

193

The WW instructors used a repertoire of scripts to deal with different situations (Lord & Kernan, 1987), which may have been uncontrollable or unpredictable (Price *et al.*, 1995). In addition, going beyond Tansik & Smiths' (1991:44) suggestion that employees with many and complex scripts need a *"...near constant level of alertness...",* I observed that the WW instructors were **always** alert to participant's needs.

GL also explained that his personal script approach deliberately included an element of ad-libbing, to fill spare moments and enhance participants' service experience by providing something unexpected (Price *et al.,* 1995; Voss, 2003): *"Whenever there's a spare five minutes here or there, get them to do something, make it up!".* GL's comment here demonstrates that he took personal pride in the service encounter (Mullins, 2003), that he responded well to having the flexibility to manage participants' experiences appropriately, and that his personal script in doing so was based on professional and personal values.

14.3.5 Personal Quality, Virtuous Conduct and the Love Factor: Intrinsic Service Values

In Chapter Twelve participants' perceptions of WW staff behaviour were analysed, in terms of employees' personal quality determining service quality (Møller, 1987), the virtuous conduct of outdoor adventure instructors (Yaffey, 1993) and the love factor (Gummesson, 1991). The WW staff displayed these three theoretical attitudes through their behaviour, which was fundamental in assuring participants' satisfaction.

Møller (1987) argues that front-line service employees' standards of personal quality strongly influence the customers' perceptions of their service experience. Chapter Twelve concluded that WW participants were satisfied with their experience and all staff were able to evidence their own standards of personal quality which contributed to this, summarised well by GL professing his own personal quality values:

> *"To me your appearance has got to be good, you've got be polite, you've got to be giving...if you take a group in the morning, when you take a group in the evening, you have to give that same instruction, same enthusiasm, same experience. Everything you give over has got to be the same, attitude, everything. But if you're doing five sessions a day, that last group can get the slack end, you struggle to give them the same. I just think you've got to show a professional attitude".*

In addition to personal quality, the staff provided evidence of their virtuous conduct (Yaffey, 1993), in which outdoor adventure employees seek to enhance the quality of their own life and that of their customers, through their work. In this respect, they saw their own work emotionally as part of their lifestyle (Normann, 2000) and would not be able to detach their own subjective feelings from their service delivery role (Chandon *et al.,* 1997).

RW illustrated this by saying: *"I enjoy sailing and I would like other people to experience the same kind of fun... It's the smiling faces, I think, nearly all the time, that does it for me"*.

The third employee attribute evidenced was Gummesson's (1991) love factor, the desire to provide a service for the recipients of that service, in a caring and compassionate manner. PS summarised the two key components of his role at WW, saying:

> *"I enjoy my job, I enjoy working with children, I enjoy teaching watersports, but what I enjoy most is combining the watersports with working with children. I genuinely feel that"*.

Also, GJ reflected how the instructors exercised caring and compassionate behaviour by managing the service encounter as a relationship (Arnould & Price, 1993; Fletcher, 1971; Kalisch, 1979) and doing so with friendliness and respect (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995):

> *"Well I do it by getting to know the kids a bit better, treating them more like a friend than an instructor, so that at dinner time you'll sit with them, and then after a while they'll be coming to you and asking you the questions, so they don't see you as the instructor and they're not frightened to ask you questions. Not too formal, really"*.

These staff comments reflect my own observations, that in this service encounter relationship at WW, instructors tried to present themselves to participants in a personal, accommodating way (Williams & Buswell, 2003), rather than as the driver of a didactic technical information-giving encounter.

14.3.6 Peak Season Workload and its Pressures on Employees

The attitude of WW employees towards their customers was fostered by the values and beliefs demonstrated by the WW management and JP felt strongly how he thought this was manifested:

> **"I'd like to think it was, that there are the whole work patterns, the way we go about doing everything from when you ring up...whatever contact you have with us is a good experience...".**

However, all staff and management acknowledged that although there were seasonal peaks and troughs in customer demand, for much of the year, WW was working at, or close to, maximum capacity. JP perceived this as problematic in his management role, stating: **"I'm never quite sure why this is, but we suffer hugely from not getting round to things because we've got so much to do day to day."**

All staff also commented on their experiences of working at times of peak demand, agreeing that they worked for a longer time with few breaks and most suggesting that this was very tiring. The role of an instructor at WW was physically and mentally demanding,

causing them to expend much emotional labour (Townsend, 2004). Therefore the WW service delivery context placed greater pressures on employees than a non-physical service role, as three staff illustrated:

"Sometimes in the Summer...you can get some sessions back to back and our biggest complaint is trying to cram in four sessions in a day, a busy Summer day, and you don't get more than fifteen minutes between them" (SJ).

"In the Summer we work evenings and although we might not come in until after lunch, I might have worked the weekend and evenings. I have had two days off during the week, but you do start to feel it" (PS).

"During the height of the season it was full on, especially for me, all the time, as well as the weather being terrible, I've been on the water practically every day through the season. It's been tough" (GJ).

However, the effects of this were not always simply the fatigue that SJ, PS and GJ identified. CR believed that it had caused some staff to leave WW's employment and that illness amongst those remaining had been more prevalent than in previous years, saying:

"Well, we go through to 7 o'clock and even 9 o'clock at night in the busy times and that is quite stressful. We've had a lot of illnesses this year...and then others have left: N's gone travelling...J, she's away soon. S was very capable, but she couldn't really cope with the responsibility, she had anxiety attacks".

CR highlighted here one instructor, S, who could not cope with the demands of the role and had to leave WW, reflecting Johnston & Clark's (2001) assertion that it is stressful for service employees who have to exhibit a continuously positive attitude. However, this argument was extended at WW, since employees were responsible for both the satisfaction **and** safety of participants, thus intensifying their stress.

On the day that S left WW, she had been deputising for the Duty Manager, the centre was working at capacity and she had to make a number of weather- and safety-related operational decisions. That morning, shortly after running the staff meeting, I noticed S becoming increasingly agitated as different instructors sought her advice. Then, as the morning session progressed, the wind speed increased and she was having to make an increasing number of safety-related decisions. I saw S driving a rescue boat from group to group, helping with an increasing number of capsizes and having animated discussions with instructors, until she finally 'dropped the anchor', switched the engine off and sat completely still in the boat. S was taken ashore by another rescue boat and driven home in her own car by GLo: she never returned to WW. This sad incident highlights the stressful nature of working in an outdoor adventure environment, and thus how it is atypical of most other services.

This section has demonstrated that the complex adventure leisure service environment at WW was a unique aspect of that sector, where specific physical and mental demands

196

were made on front-line delivery staff. A fundamental aspect of their role was being responsible for the physical and emotional safety of young people in a potentially dangerous environment, and effective service delivery. This, according to Barrett & Greenaway (1995), required staff with a caring respect and empathy with participants, in addition to technical service delivery competence.

14.3.7 The Employee Socialscape Supporting Self-Development

In addition to formal training opportunities, there was a strong ethos of instructors reflecting on their own performance and seeking to improve this less formally, illustrated by JB saying, *"I'm not multi-talented, but I'm working on it. I've got a lot to learn"*. Also, as a manager, JP felt that reflexivity was an important skill for instructors to develop and exercise, stating:

> **"...people need to develop that skill themselves; to start to review themselves at the end of sessions and look at things like their relationship with a group, what they can do better and how they can move on next time".**

In order to be able to make informed professional judgements on flexible service delivery, WW instructors relied heavily upon their own peer socialscape for testing ideas or seeking advice if unsure of their options. This was an aspect of the integrative culture (Kanter, 1994) of taking responsibility for their own performance, where all staff believed it was important to be able to do this and agreed that colleagues were always supportive of each other, but to differing degrees. For example, GJ appreciated that, as a new employee, he would get a response to any question, saying:

> *"I was new here this season, so I did go and ask a couple of people's advice. That's one thing that I think is good, if you think it's a dumb question, they'll still answer it".*

LM explained that the help she received typically encouraged her to think more about her question so that she would find the answer for herself:

> *"I have done that, where sometimes if the weather's been a bit iffy, asked a few people 'What do you think about using the Lugger?' and they can ask you leading questions, like 'What age are they? Have they been before?' to make you think a bit more about it".*

DB had significant experience of teaching windsurfing, but he gave an excellent example of how he sought help to resolve a recurring problem he encountered with his activity group management:

> *"I spoke to P about this and he said the best thing is just to stop talking, just don't say a thing, and eventually someone will say 'Shut up you lot, I want to learn something here'. That was the best advice I ever had. I've no problems with doing that. I'm not too proud to ask people".*

However, of all the instructors, DB demonstrated to me through his daily behaviour that he was the least inclined to seek this help from another instructor. His reference to 'P' here was PS, the Duty Manager, who had a rank within the WW hierarchy and DB seemed only to respect the views of the formally appointed management, possibly because he was an ex-RAF officer more comfortable with that reporting line.

On a more practical level, GL gave an example of his positive attitude towards working at WW, explaining how he and PS had spent time outside of their normal working hours coaching each other in something new they had to learn:

> *"So me and P spent an hour just practising these new strokes, coaching each other, watching the blade, the boat angle, so we could chat back to each other, because you can't always see what you're doing".*

The success of WW's integrative culture of flexibility and co-operation in the instructors' socialscape was characterised by RW saying: *"Things will be discussed as you go along on the water and you all just fit in around each other pretty well"*, which reinforces Cooper & Lockwood's (1992) argument that effective communications are essential in a culture which encourages high service quality.

This section has identified that WW managed 'service failure prevention and recovery' by recruiting employees with congruent values and attitudes, who responded to being empowered to take responsibility for satisfying watersports participants through discretionary decision-making. Three critical values of personal quality, virtuous conduct and the love factor underpinned employee behaviour, which resulted in participant satisfaction.

14.4 Chapter Summary

1. Performance standards were established by management, through a policy document and their own exemplary behaviour as leaders. These were reinforced by deliberate 'role-modelling' activities by management to communicate standards by example, but staff did not seem aware that these activities were planned to do this.

2. Management was highly respected by staff due to their superior technical competence.

3. A quality culture existed at WW, which placed the experience of participants at the centre of the service process and implicitly challenged staff to perform at their best.

4. Recruitment, 'try-out' and induction were all part of a process to ensure that new employees' personal qualities and behaviour during the service encounter were appropriate for WW's culture.

5.   The unique, complex, dynamic servicescape and the heterogeneous needs of participants required management to empower instructors with discretion to be flexible to respond to customers' needs in the most appropriate way.

5.   Instructors felt that they were fully supported in their decisions by management, if these decisions were to improve the experience of participants.

6.   Instructors had developed their own behavioural scripts as a multi-pathed framework for flexible decision-making.

7.   The staff socialscape provided an important support mechanism for instructors to test ideas and receive feedback for improving their performance.

8.   The instructor role at WW was physically, mentally and emotionally demanding, but WW staff managed through their own personal quality, virtuous conduct and the love factor.

Chapter Fifteen

Conclusions and Recommendations

15.1 Introduction: Thesis Aims and Research Questions Revisited

In the previous section the findings of this thesis have been presented and discussed. This chapter draws out the key aspects of these findings, which demonstrate how the research questions have been answered and the research aims achieved, taking each research aim in order. The implications for policy and practice at WW and the adventure leisure and service quality management fields are discussed, and the contribution of this thesis to knowledge is then clearly summarised. Finally, personal reflections on the study and research process are presented.

15.2 The Appropriateness of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model

The first aim of this thesis was to review critically the appropriateness of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model for investigating service quality and satisfaction in outdoor adventure leisure. This has been achieved by answering three questions in the review of literature:

i. Are determinants of expectations appropriate and comprehensive?
ii. Are all potential perceptual gaps explicitly represented?
iii. What is the relationship between service quality and satisfaction?

To address the first research question in part, two additional determinants of pre-service expectations have been identified: the 'concept of equity' (Mackay & Crompton, 1988), and 'mood on entry' to the service (Hanna & Wozniak, 2001). In addition, participants' perceptions of 'critical moments of truth' have also been added, based on the nine-point classification synthesised in Chapter Three, which then influence participants 'emotions' (Yu & Dean, 2001), resulting from disconfirmation (Wirtz & Bateson, 1999). These emotions, in turn, inform participants' expectations of subsequent service transactions. These factors are suggested to be cyclically dynamic, deriving from perceptions of one transaction and informing expectations of the next, until the last service transaction has been experienced.

The second question is answered by suggesting that two further perceptual gaps should be included in the model. Gap 1 is management's awareness of service participants' prior expectations, but not of their perceptions. Zeithaml *et al.* (1990), Parasuraman *et al.* (1991), Saleh & Ryan (1991), Lewis (1993) and Staughton *et al.* (1997) acknowledge the importance of management understanding of these perceptions, but they do not include

this as a further perceptual gap. Luk & Layton (2002) then suggest that service employees often understand customer expectations better than managers and they also find that this employee understanding may not always be accurate. The authors thus propose two further gaps between employee and management perceptions. However, in adding these two conceptual gaps, Luk & Layton still do not acknowledge employee and management understanding of customer *perceptions* of the service. This is incorporated in the refined SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model proposed in Chapter Six, where, for clarity, 'management perceptions' and 'employee perceptions' only are stated, but include *both* customer expectations and perceptions.

Following analysis of the primary data, it became apparent that the Conceptual Gap Model could be refined further, with respect to the determinants of expectations. This is discussed in sections 15.4 and 15.5, with a final model proposed in section 15.6.

To answer the third question, the concepts of service quality and satisfaction were critically examined and a relationship was proposed in Chapter Five. The intention was to theorise a relationship from conflicting academic arguments over the definitions of these concepts, and to understand more clearly their position in this thesis; there was no intention to prove this relationship empirically. However, the study's findings show that this relationship can be evidenced using, for example, the tangible appearance of WW as a quality attribute. Participants' initial 'transactional quality' perceptions of the layout of the centre created 'transactional satisfaction' feelings. The aggregated transactional quality perceptions then informed an 'overall quality' evaluation. This evaluation combined with aggregated transactional satisfaction to provide participants with an overall feeling of satisfaction. The relationship is represented below:
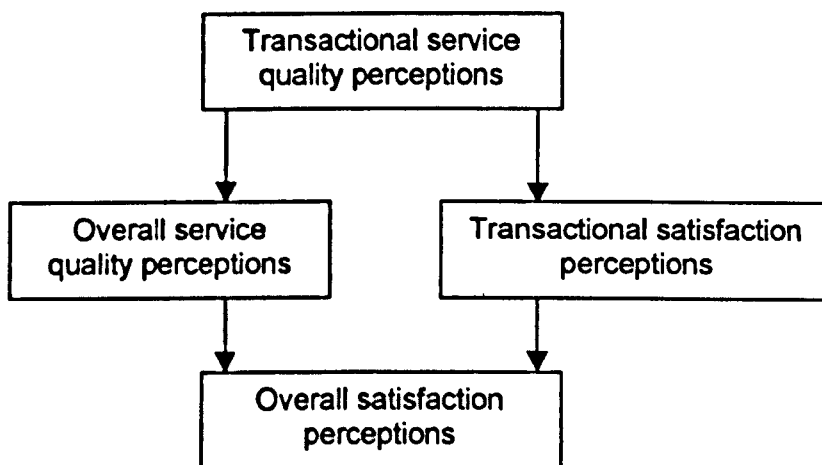
Figure 15.1 A proposed relationship between satisfaction and service quality

The second aim of this thesis was to examine novice participants' expectations and perceptions of managed outdoor adventure leisure, using the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model and any incorporated refinements. This has been achieved by answering three research questions:

i.   What are participants' expectations of their experience?
ii.   How are these expectations derived?
iii.   How do participants' perceptions of their experience compare to their prior expectations?

The answers to these questions will now be addressed.

15.3 Participants' Fuzzy Expectations of Wodin Watersports

Nearly all of the participants had vague or undefined 'fuzzy' expectations (Ojasalo, 2001) of their experience at WW, displaying only a broad 'cognitive schema' (Schneider & Bowen, 1995) of what might happen. This supports the argument that people are not always conscious of what they expect from an outdoor recreation experience (Brown, 1989; Fick & Ritchie, 1991) and Arnould & Price's (1993) confirmation of that in outdoor adventure watersports. However, all participants stated hopes or aspirations, and concerns; therefore conclusions are now drawn on their determinants.

15.4 Determinants of Participants' Hopes and Concerns

In Chapter Six the determinants of expectations in the original SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model were refined, adding the concept of equity (Mackay & Crompton, 1988) to needs/wants, past experience, word of mouth and WW's external communications. Also, participants' service entry mood was suggested as an influence on their expectations (Hanna & Wozniak, 2001).

Within the needs/wants determinant, participants identified four key sources of potential hopes and concerns:

1.   Service employees' behaviour
2.   The peer socialscape
3.   Participants' own performance in skilled leisure consumption
4.   Weather conditions.

Hopes and concerns were inversely related on the same source and the first three sources were more critical to participants than weather conditions, as discussed below.

Service Employees

Employee behaviour in this context has been identified as crucial in producing a positive experience for participants (Holyfield, 1999; Kalisch, 1979). Schneider & Bowen (1995) and Wirtz & Bateson (1999) suggest that employees' technical gatekeeping skills and social impression management skills are the two key elements of this behaviour, but the latter was more important to participants at WW. This is because such interactions contain some degree of emotional charge (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Wurdinger, 1997) which influences participants' feelings. The key hope for participants was that instructors would make their experience fun and treat them with empathy and caring respect (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995).

The Socialscape

The peer 'socialscape' is a new term suggested in this thesis for what Aubert-Gamet & Cova (1999) term the sociospatial element of the servicescape. Unger (1984) argues that this is important in a leisure experience and Priest & Gass (1997) further exemplify this in adventure leisure kayaking. All participants except one stated that either being with a friend or making new friends at WW was an important hope for them. This notion of social dependence in a service (Canziani, 1997) can be developed further at WW to support Bettencourt's (1997) assertion that customers also have a physical dependence for mutual assistance during the service.

Participants' Own Performance

Participants' performance in developing their own skilled leisure consumption was also important to them, such that they hoped for hedonic feelings (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) of excitement and control (Anderson, 1996) as their skills improved. A further aspect of this skilled consumption was that nearly half the participants hoped to realise personal values (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999) or express themselves in some way (Priest & Gass, 1997), supporting Dimanche & Samdhal's (1994) argument that leisure consumption feelings and self-expression are not mutually exclusive.

The three participants with clear expectations of their experience at WW were influenced by their past experience at the centre in another watersports activity. Therefore, O'Neill & Palmer's (2003) observation that customers with no past experience will have unclear expectations of a service has validity. However, most of these latter participants had positive perceptions of WW through word of mouth sources and thus had broad, implicit expectations (Ojasalo, 2001), or a cognitive schema (Schneider & Bowen, 1995), that they would enjoy their experience, without considering how in more detail.

The influence of WW's external communications on expectations can be demonstrated by nearly all participants stating that they had not seen any publicity material or pre-course information, despite the latter documents being sent out to all customers. This, combined with a lack of past experience, explains why participants' expectations were unclear, and is influenced by another determinant not previously considered in the refined SERVQUAL gap model: participants' parents, or, more specifically, their mothers who organised their WW course. Only one participant organised his course himself and ten participants were not even consulted by their mothers at all prior to a course booking being made. The pre-course documentation was therefore sent to nearly all participants' mothers, who then acted, wittingly or not, as information filters. Thus, participants' unclear expectations were also determined by not being aware of WW's external communications.

Finally, on determinants of expectations, the results in this thesis demonstrate that participants' expectations – expressed as hopes and concerns – influenced their entry mood, contradicting Hanna & Wozniak's (2001) assertion that entry mood is a determinant of expectations.

From these conclusions, a further refinement of the determinants of expectations can be made in this thesis to the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model, incorporating parents (the purchase decision-maker) as a determinant of expectations, and expectations as a determinant of entry mood:
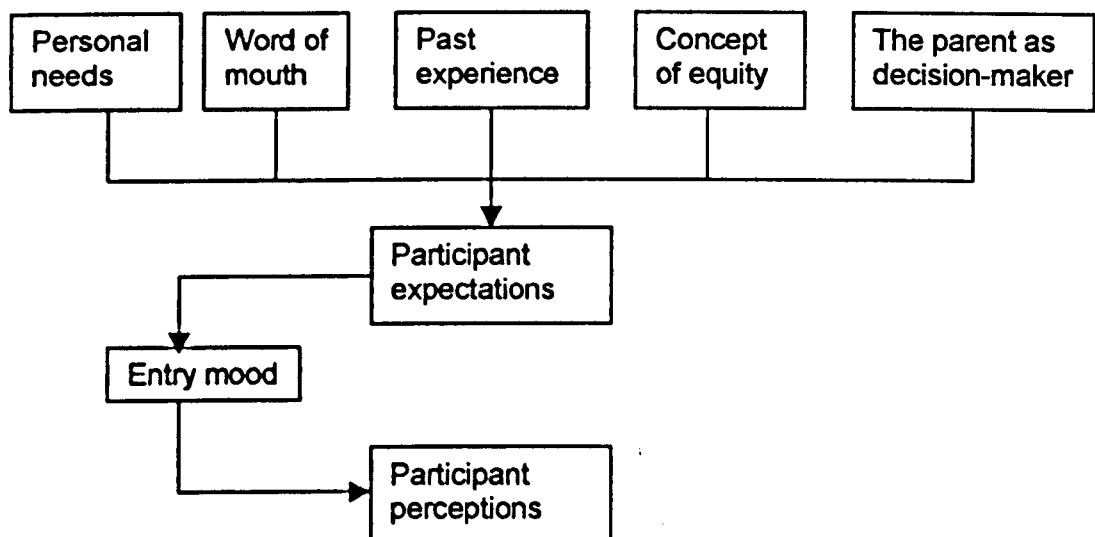

Figure 15.2 Determinants of expectations and entry mood

15.5 How Participants' Perceptions of their Service Experience Compared to Their Prior Hopes and Concerns

All participants except one said that their experience at WW was better than they had hoped for. This was due to their emotional disposition being changed positively by three sources of critical moments of truth: their instructor, their socialscape and their own performance in co-producing the experience, aligning with their three key sources of hopes and concerns. The appearance of tangibles and perceptions of safety management at WW also played a minor role in initially adjusting this disposition.

Firstly, instructors were perceived as being friendly (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996) and they treated the participants with courtesy (Akan, 1995), respect (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995) and appropriate humour (Swan & Bowers, 1998). Participants' hopes of their relationship with their instructor were important to them and these behaviours (Ferguson et al., 1999) exceeded these hopes in nearly every case.

Secondly, hopes of the new socialscape were important to participants (Canziani, 1997) and despite feeling uncomfortable at the introduction stage, friendships developed over time and these hopes were realised by most participants. The behaviour of some people was not appreciated by all participants, but this temporary 'anti-socialscape' was a transactional element in the overall service encounter, and the positive feelings experienced through peer interaction had a more significant effect on their perceptions.

Thirdly, participants' own performance made a significant contribution to changing their emotional disposition positively. Developing skilled (production and) consumption of their activity increased participants' enjoyment (Lentell & Morris, 1995; Gratton & Taylor, 2000), despite transactional moments of frustration (Ryan, 1995). Some participants were able to illustrate how they experienced 'peak adventure' (Priest & Gass, 1997) and 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 2000), producing feelings of excitement (Anderson, 1996). These three sources of critical moments of truth all evoked changes to participants' emotional disposition on a transactional basis during their service encounter, and influenced their overall perceptions of a changed disposition as a result of that experience. This demonstrates a relationship between transactional and overall satisfaction, but to link the concepts of satisfaction and service quality as Chapter Five proposes, particular quality attributes perceived by participants are now considered.

The appearances of tangible items (Zeithaml et al., 1990) at WW had not been significant pre-course hopes for participants. However, the initial visual impact of the well-organised site layout had a positive effect on their emotional disposition, producing a transactional feeling of satisfaction. Overall perceptions of the quality of tangible appearances were

positive and this, combined with aggregated transactional satisfaction, resulted in participants' overall satisfaction.

Also, perceptions of safety management as the 'security' quality attribute were influenced by the way that safety was managed in each transactional rescue episode, and the resulting emotional disposition it created in participants. The overall perception of the quality of this attribute was informed by the transactional episodes experienced and observed. The overall satisfaction emotion was informed by these quality perceptions, together with the aggregated feelings of satisfaction evoked during the service encounter.

The notion of transactional experiences in the service encounter changing emotional disposition was developed further in Chapter Thirteen and a dynamic relationship between participants' expectations, entry mood, perceptions and changing disposition was suggested. Participants' expectations influence their service entry mood and then, the first transactional service experience changes that emotional disposition and new expectations are established for the next service transaction. These expectations influence an entry mood for the next transaction, which may then change participants' emotional disposition once again, until the end of the service. This is particularly true in the extended encounter at WW and can be illustrated as follows:
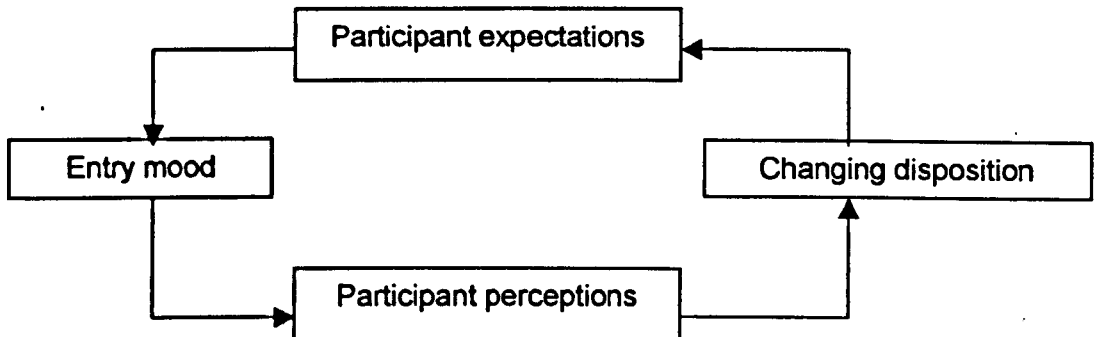
Figure 15.3 A cyclical relationship between expectations, entry mood, perceptions and changing disposition.

The third aim of this thesis was to evaluate critically management and staff perceptions of novice participants' service experiences at Wodin Watersports. This has been achieved by answering two research questions:

i.   To what extent do management and staff understand participants' expectations and perceptions of their experience?

ii.   How is the service designed and delivered to create participant satisfaction?

The answers to these questions will be reviewed in the next section.

15.6 Management and Staff Perceptions of Participants' Expectations and Perceptions of their Service Experience

Management and staff at WW obtained qualitative feedback on customers' experiences from a number of different sources. Participants made *ad-hoc* comments to the administrators and sent letters of thanks to specific instructors, but the WW management felt that these were too superficial to develop any critical understanding of their content. Instructors tried to use on-going, informal observation and conversation with participants to gain feedback, which the WW manager encouraged, but he still sought a formal, single mechanism for understanding participants' experiences, ideally using written feedback.

Management did not appreciate that participants would not be prepared to write in-depth, qualitative comments about their experiences, because it would be boring. However, this was fully understood by WW staff, who felt that the informal observation and conversational approaches already in place were the most effective means of understanding young people's experiences at WW. This was supported by the participants themselves who enjoyed discussing their experiences for this thesis; therefore WW management should have placed greater value on these conversational and observational approaches already in place.

Management and staff understood that participants' expectations were fuzzy or undefined (Ojasalo, 2001), and they were aware of potential hopes and concerns, but they emphasised the latter and there was little acknowledgement that participants' entry mood was often both anticipatory and apprehensive. The importance of three sources of critical moments of truth: instructors, the socialscape and participants' own performance, were understood to varying degrees. Some instructors were unsure of what participants expected of them and management and instructors agreed that having fun was all participants wanted, when many actually hoped to express themselves in some way through developing their competence (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999; Godbey, 1994; Priest & Gass, 1997).

Parents were understood to be significant in the purchase decision to send their children on a watersports course, typically for family convenience (Howard & Madrigal, 1990). However, they were not understood to be filtering information and, hence, influencing their children's unclear expectations, as suggested in this thesis.

Management and staff perceptions of participants' perceptions were broadly accurate in the three aspects of instructors, the socialscape and participants' own performance. They commented on perceptions of the technical ability of instructors, but only management observed that the instructor's impresario role (Kandampully & Duddy, 1997) was important

to participants' experiences at WW. Staff and management's understanding of participants' own performance perceptions was correct, but the importance of the jetty jumping activity was misperceived, in that participants only viewed it as an element of the overall experience, not a defining moment in their time at WW. Finally, although the socialscape was understood to be an important element of participants' experiences, few of the instructors acknowledged the awkwardness experienced at the beginning of a course. Also, none made any attempt to help minimise this, instead relying on the participants spending time together to negotiate their relationships.

Overall, management and staff perceived participants' expectations and perceptions correctly, with some variation at a transactional, operation level, where either management or staff showed a greater understanding. This suggests that localised perceptual gaps may have existed between management and staff, as the refined SERVQUAL gap model in Chapter Six illustrates, and that these gaps should be included in the model.

At this stage, it is helpful to revisit Research Aim #1 of the study. The findings in Section 15.6 (above) confirm the potential existence of four further perceptual gaps between management and staff, and two subsequent gaps leading from there to service design. Combining these gaps with the additional refinements suggested in Section 15.5, leads to the conclusion that the eleven gap ADVENTUREQUAL conceptual model can be used as a framework for analysing service quality in young people's outdoor adventure activities management. This final iteration of the ADVENTUREQUAL Model is shown in figure 15.4, alongside the refined model proposed in Chapter Six. The shaded areas demonstrate the development from the original SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model.
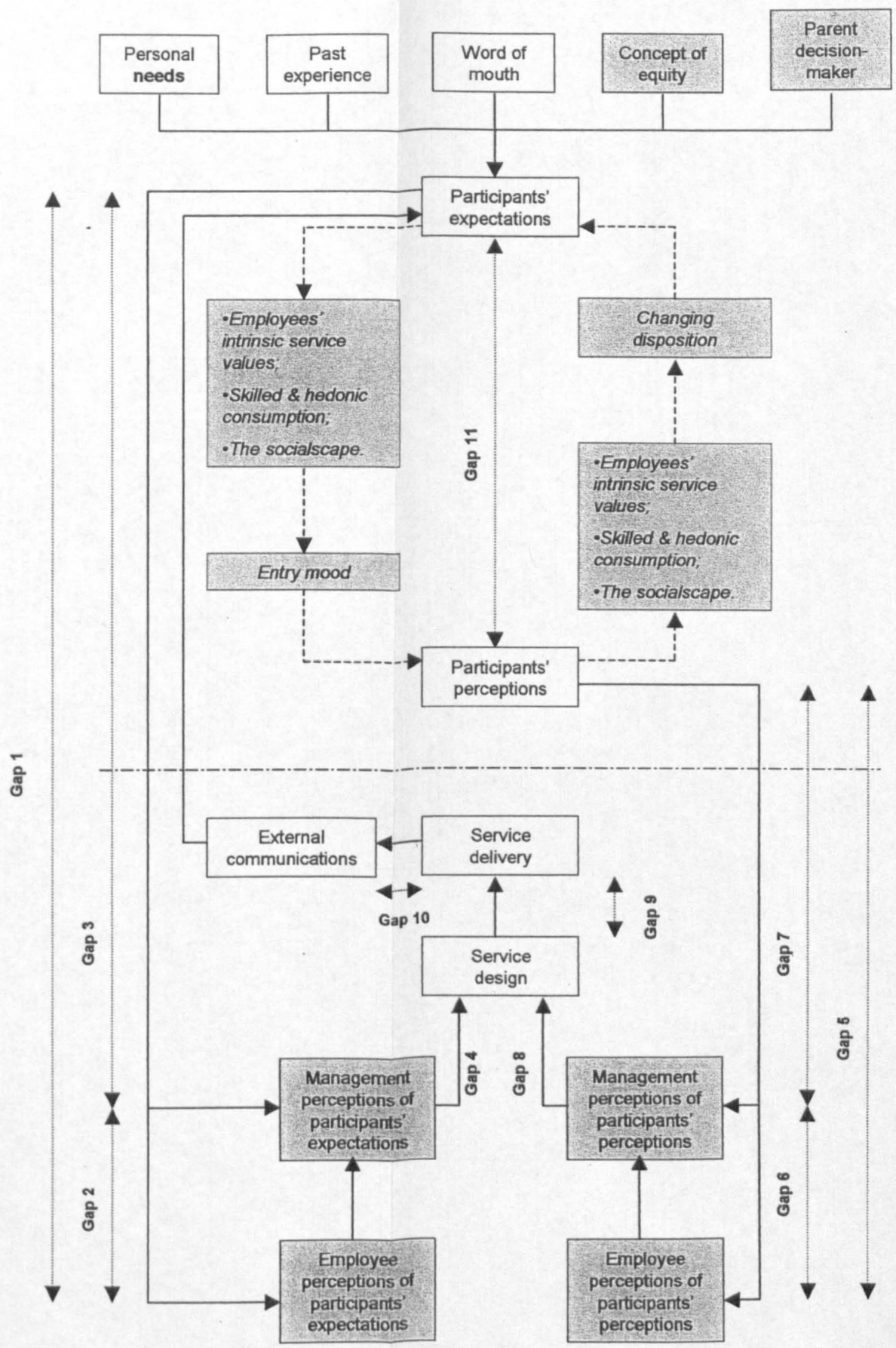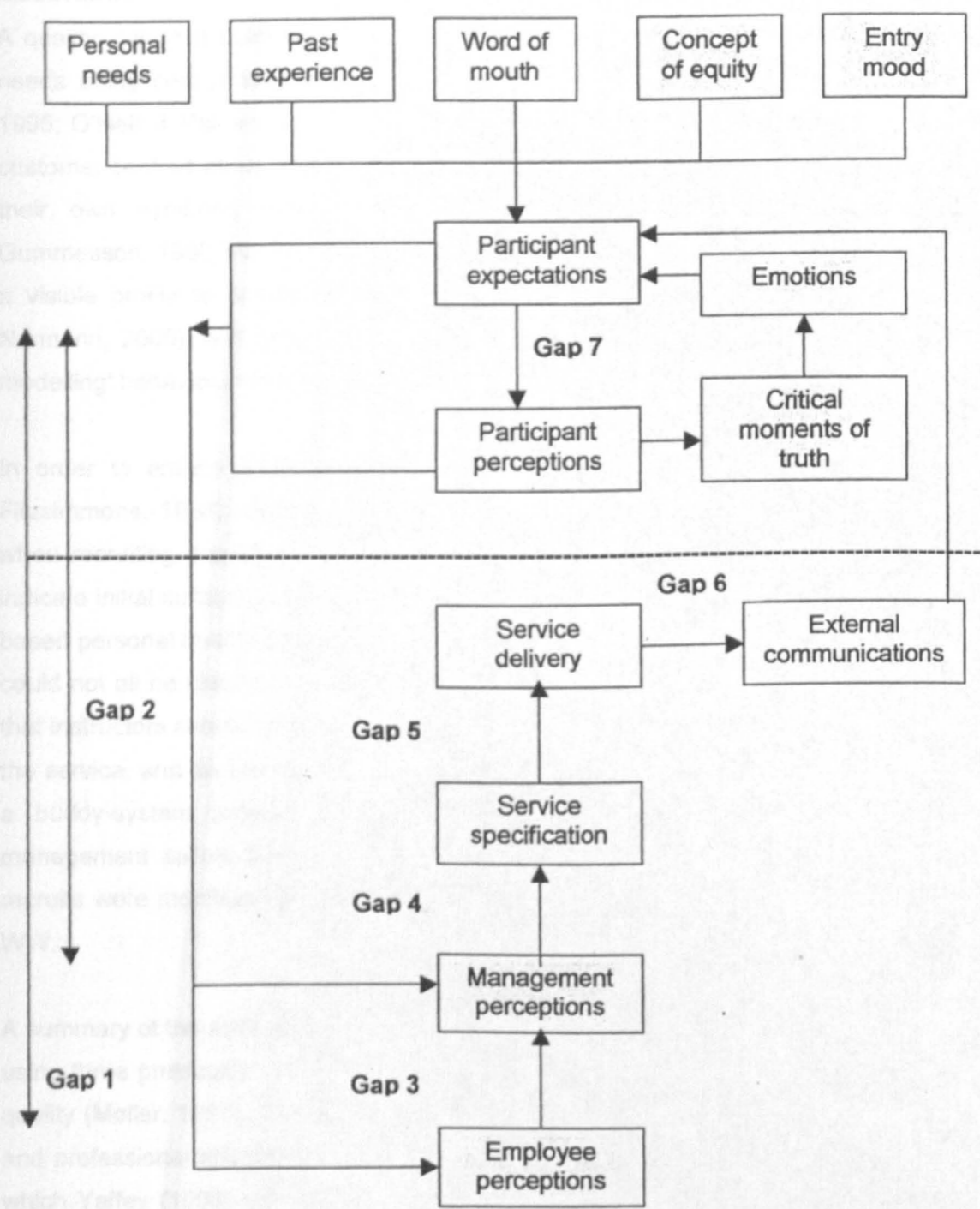
Figure 15.4 The ADVENTUREQUAL Conceptual Gap Model (right hand side), showing the developments from the previous refinement of the SERVQUAL Conceptual Gap Model (left hand side).

15. 7 Key Aspects of Service Design and Delivery Which Created Participant Satisfaction

A quality culture (Robinson, 1998) existed at WW, with young people's complex service needs being central to service design and delivery at the centre (Ghobadian & Terry, 1995; O'Neill & Palmer, 2003; Williams & Buswell, 2003). Management engendered this customer-centred ethos to provide high quality service experiences (Normann, 2000) by their own symbolic behaviour to reinforce these shared values (Donne, 1997; Gummesson, 1990; Horovitz & Panak, 1992). In particular, management tried to maintain a visible profile to communicate values and standards (Kandampully & Duddy 1997; Normann, 2000), and often acted as instructors to engage in deliberately staged 'role-modelling' behaviour (Schein, 1992) for staff to emulate.

In order to ensure that WW staff displayed an empathetic attitude (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 1998) towards participants, management used two key screening criteria when recruiting employees. The first was a minimum level of technical competence to indicate initial suitability and the second, more important criterion, the existence of virtue-based personal qualities (McNamee, 1995) shared by existing staff. These latter qualities could not all be clearly articulated for this thesis by WW management, but they believed that instructors should understand what young people were experiencing in the process of the service, and be friendly and approachable in their behaviour. New recruits underwent a buddy-system process in their induction period (Robinson, 2004), which WW management called 'try-out'. This served as a probationary period during which the recruits were monitored for those personal attributes appropriate to the quality culture at WW.

A summary of the staff attributes sought by WW management is synthesised in this thesis using three previously unconnected concepts. The first is that personal quality begets all quality (Møller, 1987), meaning that WW staff had already established their own personal and professional attitudes and behaviour. The second is the notion of 'virtuous conduct', which Yaffey (1993) argues is a fundamental attribute of outdoor adventure instructors, and means that they are trying to improve the quality life for both participants and themselves, through their work. The third concept is Gummesson's (1991) 'love factor', where WW employees actively wanted to provide the service for the recipients of that service, in a caring and compassionate manner. This thesis proposes that these three attributes are employees' 'intrinsic service values', which should transcend all services management. These values enabled WW instructors to cope with a physically demanding service role, whilst expending much emotional labour (Townsend, 2004) being responsible for young people's physical and emotional safety, in a risk-laden service environment.

A further necessary instructor attribute was that they were capable of working in an empowered work culture (Belbin, 1998), where they had the discretion to satisfy participants in the most appropriate way (Chernish, 2001), which was critical in a complex service with an uncertain operating environment (Haksever et al., 2000). Berry et al. (1994) suggest that an empowered culture challenges service employees to perform to their utmost and this was apparent in the behaviour of WW instructors. These instructors used their own broad, personal scripts (Williams & Buswell, 2003) and behavioural routines (Solomon et al., 1985) with multiple paths and sequences (Lord & Kernan, 1987) built into each decision point, to create an empathetic relationship with the outdoor adventure participants (Arnould & Price, 1993; Fletcher, 1971; Kalisch, 1979). This relationship critically contributed to participants' feelings of satisfaction with their experience.

Having concluded on service design and delivery at WW in this section, the following three sections consider the implications of the findings of this study for policy and practice at WW, the outdoor adventure leisure field and for the service quality management field.

15.8 The Implications of this Study for Policy and Practice at Wodin Watersports

There are four overall themes to emerge as recommendations for Wodin Watersports as a result of this study, relating to: using existing sources of information about participants' experiences; the key aspects of managing service quality through service design and delivery; managing participants' socialscape more actively; and reducing the 'fuzziness' of participants' hopes and expectations.

The first theme for WW management to consider is that valuable sources of information already exist at the centre, to enable them to develop a better understanding of participants' experiences there. The WW management team was planning to implement a single feedback mechanism to provide such understanding in a simple, efficient way, through in-depth written comments from participants, whilst ignoring the rich evidence they already had access to, because it was fragmented in different forms from different sources. Unsolicited letters were received from participants and staff already employed 'informal' qualitative feedback mechanisms of unstructured conversation and observation, which, when combined, give a useful insight into participants' experiences.

WW management should collate data from these sources, now that they have been identified in this thesis, and give the data credence, rather than be dismissive of the informal nature of the data-gathering methods. An effective way to do this would be to instigate regular staff team meetings, for everyone to report on their own experiences of

understanding participants' experiences, and to try to identify key themes from the unsolicited letters. Further, to support staff in developing their skills of using informal feedback methods more cognitively and explicitly, management should encourage staff to undertake 'research methods' education.

Also, most participants in this study stated that they would not be prepared to provide in-depth feedback in written form, because they would see it as boring. WW management should not, therefore, pursue this single mechanism initiative, despite its potential attraction as 'formal' evidence of satisfaction, gathered through one medium.

The second theme to emerge for WW management relates to key aspects of service design and delivery. The existing approach to recruitment, induction and empowering staff with the discretion to satisfy participants appropriately, is a critical underpinning of WW's management of service quality and participant satisfaction and should be developed. Candidates – both instructors and administrators – were recruited who possessed the 'intrinsic service values' identified in Section 15.7. These values were then verified through the induction system of 'try out' and general immersion in centre life over a period of time. The candidates required a threshold technical qualification, but more importantly, had to demonstrate their ability to work in the WW culture. There was also a self-deselecting aspect to this exercise, where occasional candidates would realise that the culture did not suit them and they would not ultimately take up employment at WW.

A further aspect of this second theme is that at peak times of demand, employees became physically and emotionally exhausted, often leading to illness and sometimes departure from WW. They were driven to this state by exercising their intrinsic service values in a physically and mentally demanding work environment and WW's management had no policy to protect staff from such circumstances. The implication from this study is that WW's management should consider how to reduce the impact of peak demand on staff, through, for example, reviewing its policies on scheduling and the recruitment of additional part-time or seasonal instructors for these periods. A cost-benefit analysis would identify the recruitment induction, training and salary cost implications, compared to the financial benefits of reducing illness and departure, and the associated costs of quality. A review of the quality and size of the local labour pool for covering illness and departure at short notice would also be sensible, as this may be a significant factor. In addition, management should consider whether demand could be managed more effectively though its pricing policies, to reduce peak demand but maintain revenue.

The third theme that arises from this study is that there are three important sources of 'critical moments of truth' (CMOT) for participants, which management should understand

more clearly: employees' intrinsic service values displayed through their attitude and behaviour; participants' skilled and hedonic consumption of the adventure leisure activity; and participants' socialscape. Any or all of these can have a significant influence on changing participants' emotions, which are an important factor in their evaluation of WW's service, and should thus be managed appropriately. In particular, participants expressed concern that the potentially awkward introductory stage of a course, and thus, a new socialscape, required more active management by WW staff. WW management should therefore review its policy on how participants are welcomed and introduced at the beginning of a course, to manage that socialisation process more actively and make the experience more comfortable.

Finally, the fourth theme highlights that participants expressed 'fuzzy hopes', rather than clear expectations, about their experiences, because they were not sufficiently informed by a number of determinants of expectations. Of these, only external communications was within WW management's control and it became clear that although mothers received course information from WW, they filtered this from their children, unwittingly or not. As a result, most participants had not seen this information and could not form any clear hopes or expectations. The policy should therefore be to send additional information about the centre and its courses directly addressed to the participants, so that they can establish clearer expectations.

15.9 The Implications of this Study for the Adventure Leisure Field

This study uniquely seeks young people's direct views on their experiences at an outdoor adventure leisure centre, responding to Barrett & Greenaway's (1995) concern that existing research into young people's experiences of outdoor adventure is methodologically weak and ignores young people's own accounts of those experiences. That argument is supported nine years later by Rickinson *et al.* (2004), who recommend that there is still a need for properly conceptualised and designed research into young people's experiences of outdoor adventure activities. This study, therefore, informs adventure leisure managers of young people's direct perceptions of their experiences, through properly conceptualised and designed research. These perceptions are respected as credible reflections that provide an insight into the important attributes of the adventure leisure service, to invoke feelings of satisfaction in young people.

The findings of this study demonstrate that young people attending WW have fuzzy hopes, rather than clear expectations, but these hopes relate to three specific aspects of the service: the behaviour and attitude of the instructors; their own hedonic and skilled adventure leisure consumption; and the new socialscape they will experience. Further, these three aspects are also sources of CMOTs in young people's perceptions of their

experiences, and are situated within the broader ADVENTUREQUAL conceptual framework proposed in this study.

It is reasonable to assume that these findings have some generalisability, or 'ecological validity' (Gill & Johnson, 1991; Weiss, 1994) in similar adventure leisure contexts and can inform those managers in their service design. ADVENTUREQUAL can help managers to conceptualise their adventure leisure service, and demonstrates how a clear understanding of young people's expectations and perceptions of their experience is a critical aspect of service design.

Importantly, the model highlights that gaps can exist between employee and management perceptions of participants' expectations and perceptions. This study at WW has identified that front-line instructors have a clearer perception of these than the WW management, with their understanding being developed from qualitative, unstructured conversations and observation. The implication of this for other adventure centre managers is that instructors' perceptions should be acknowledged as often being more accurate than those of management, and this potential gap should be closed to inform service design.

Understanding the determinants of participants' expectations can help managers in the adventure leisure field. In particular, identifying a parent as the purchase decision-maker who might not pass on all information to their children is useful. Promotional material can be targeted specifically at the parent to close the sale, but this can then be followed up with information targeted at, and sent directly to, participants, to clarify their expectations.

The three sources of critical moments of truth that are the focus of participants' key hopes and perceptions highlight to managers what young people seek in their adventure leisure experience. Firstly, instructors' attitude and behaviour is influenced by their intrinsic service values, not simply technical qualifications, and this information should be used by managers in the recruitment process, to ensure that only instructors with intrinsic service values are employed. Induction and on-going training activities would then focus more on improving their technical abilities. Also, these employees must be able, and enabled, to work in an empowered way, with the discretion to use their professional judgement appropriately.

Secondly, young people want both to develop their skilled consumption and enjoy hedonic consumption of adventure leisure: they want to develop their competence and have fun doing so. A service designed to focus either on skills development, or having fun, to the exclusion of the other, would therefore be inappropriate, and managers must ensure that a balance of these is provided.

Thirdly, participants at WW emphasised the importance of their socialscape, and the early awkwardness of developing relationships with fellow participants. Adventure leisure managers should, therefore, set criteria for the composition of any activity group that is formed, to ensure that a comfortable socialscape is created. This may be difficult, as it is dependent upon demand, but the simplest criterion used by many managers is grouping by age and this can be enhanced by specifying days and times for particular age groups. Some adventure leisure centres specify a skill threshold (for example, beginner or intermediate) with a broad age range, but the difference in social maturity between a twelve year old and a sixteen year old is significant, regardless of skill parity, and in this example would lead to an inappropriate socialscape.

Having discussed the implications of this study for the adventure leisure field, the implications for the service quality management field are now explored.

15.10 The Implications of this Study for the Service Quality Management Field

Three key themes emerge from this study to have implications for the service quality management field. Firstly, young people's accounts of their service experiences have been sought directly, where a dearth of research exists; secondly, a new relationship is proposed between service quality and satisfaction, on both a transactional and overall level; and thirdly, the ADVENTUREQUAL eleven gap conceptual model is developed from the five gap SERVQUAL conceptual model. The implications of each of these for the service quality management field are now discussed in turn.

The first key theme with implications for the service quality management field is to seek more young people's accounts of their experiences. In any service context where young people are service consumers, their views on that service should be sought directly, to inform service design. Managers need to acknowledge Matthews & Limb's (1999) argument that children have different needs to adults, and that adults wrongly make decisions for them without consultation, allowing children no influence over their own life environment. For example, Robinson (1997) observes that service quality in young people's leisure is typically defined by adults. These adults must therefore assume that they see what children want because they were once children themselves, yet this is viewed through their own adult lens that has been developed during and after childhood; therefore, it is an adult interpretation of the memory of being a child. Clearly an adult cannot view their world through any other lens and understanding children's needs will inevitably involve a degree of interpretation. However, in seeking direct, in-depth perceptions of young people, services managers can reduce significantly the need for such interpretation.

Services managers can be confident that perceptions of young people in the age group studied here are thoughtful and considered, providing clear insights into their hopes and concerns for, and perceptions of, their service experiences. As MacDonald (1995) has also found earlier, young people are prepared (and often keen) to discuss their hopes and experiences in depth with an adult who is interested to listen.

This study finds that young people at WW consider particular sources of CMOT to be important to their satisfaction with the adventure leisure experience. Despite the uniqueness of the adventure leisure servicescape in the service industry, two of these CMOT sources can be tentatively proposed to have relevance to other service contexts, especially in temporally extended encounters. The attitude and behaviour of adults who are responsible for providing a service directly for young people will be an important CMOT source; therefore services managers should recruit adults who possess 'intrinsic service values'. Also, if the service is consumed by groups of young people, rather than individuals, services managers should consider how they manage that socialscape as an important CMOT source.

The second key theme with implications for the service quality management field is the new relationship proposed here between service quality and satisfaction (see Figure 15.1). It has been synthesised from the review of literature and is supported by primary data, to demonstrate that in the WW extended service encounter, transactional service quality attribute perceptions influence transactional satisfaction perceptions and overall aggregated service quality perceptions, which together then influence overall aggregated satisfaction perceptions.

This suggests that the longer a consumer stays in the service context, the more transactions they will encounter and the greater the scope for service quality attribute success or failure, with consequent transactional satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Aggregated service quality success or failure is then perceived overall and combines with the aggregated transactional satisfactions or dissatisfactions, to determine overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

However, the challenge for services managers is not simply to define a minimum temporal threshold for an extended encounter and respond accordingly. Rather, it is to appreciate that consumers' transactional perceptions accumulate and the issue is thus to understand the extent and criticality of these transactions, rather than the absolute time spent consuming the service. To identify the criticality of service transactions, the CMOT notion developed in this thesis is helpful. In Section 3.3.3 a nine-point classification of possible sources of CMOT at WW is identified and has potential application to other service

contexts. Consumers could be consulted on CMOT sources using the nine-point framework, to establish which are more or less critical, and whether any more sources can be added that are context-specific. This would then provide a managerial insight into those key CMOT sources that must be managed to influence transactional quality perceptions and hence, transactional satisfaction, overall quality and overall satisfaction perceptions.

The development of the ADVENTUREQUAL conceptual gap model is the third key theme with implications for the service quality management field and is now discussed. The ADVENTUREQUAL conceptual gap model has been uniquely developed in this thesis from the original SERVQUAL gap model and its subsequent variations. ADVENTUREQUAL specifically conceptualises the WW study context, but it has potential application to other services.

There are three important aspects of ADVENTUREQUAL that can relate to more general service quality management. The first is that six more perceptual gaps exist than were previously identified in the SERVQUAL gap model; the second is that more determinants of expectations exist; and the third is the incorporation of the service quality/satisfaction relationship already proposed in this thesis. The implications of each of these developments for the service quality management field are now explained.

The first development is that the previous SERVQUAL gap model omits a number of gaps that are now identified in ADVENTUREQUAL. A possible gap in management's understanding of consumers' perceptions of their service experience is explicitly identified and it is reasonable to assume that this basic feedback loop would be considered important in principle by most managers. However, a further issue for services managers to recognise is that their perceptions of consumers' expectations and perceptions may be different from, and less accurate than, their front-line employees' perceptions. The implication of this is that managers need to ensure that such a perceptual gap does not exist, by seeking employees' perceptions and acknowledging that these may be more accurate than those of the managers. Any perceptual gap between managers and employees regarding consumers' expectations and perceptions would create a subsequent gap to mis-inform service design, which is a critical stage underpinning effective service quality management.

The second development adds two determinants of consumers' expectations: the 'concept of equity' and the 'parent as the purchase decision-maker'. It is helpful for service managers to understand the concept of equity, where service consumers believe that they should receive the same service as every other consumer, in all respects. Service quality

and associated standards must, therefore, be managed to ensure that consumers do receive equitable treatment consistently. Management's approach to this will vary across different service situations; for example, the WW management relies on empowering staff to use their professional discretion, but a fast food chain may use fully scripted behaviour and language. The service quality management challenge is thus to specify quality and standards in service design and establish appropriate monitoring and maintenance mechanisms.

The parent as a purchase decision-maker is a determinant of expectations that can apply to services where a customer purchases the service for someone else to consume. The customer can be targeted for making the purchase, but if the customer does not provide the consumer with relevant information about their impending service experience (as at WW), the consumer may only be able to form fuzzy expectations. In such service cases, managers should consider how to ensure the consumer receives appropriate information for setting their expectations.

The third ADVENTUREQUAL development of relevance to service quality management serves to reinforce the proposed service quality/satisfaction relationship. In each service transaction there is a cycle of participants' expectations of potential CMOT sources leading to their pre-transaction entry mood. This is followed by their perceptions of CMOT sources in the transaction, leading to a changed emotional disposition and expectations of the next service transaction. In this cycle, CMOT sources are the attributes of service quality that can be managed and, when perceived in the service, change a participant's emotional disposition to being satisfied, or dissatisfied with that transaction, although other emotional descriptors can be used within these categories (see Section 3.6). The aggregate of CMOT (quality attribute) perceptions informs an overall quality attribute perception and this combines with the aggregate of transactional satisfactions or dissatisfactions, to create an overall feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

The complete ADVENTUREQUAL model can therefore be used to conceptualise the service design elements of different service contexts, with minor adjustments. For example, the 'parent decision maker' determinant can either be replaced with 'customer' or omitted if the consumer is the purchase decision maker. Also, different CMOT sources can be clearly identified and managed transactionally to create consumer satisfaction. However, ADVENTUREQUAL in its unchanged form could be applied to general education management, given that WW provided a form of education in the outdoors.

The implications of this study for policy and practice at WW, for adventure leisure managers and for service quality management have been discussed in the previous

section. The contribution of this thesis to knowledge is now summarised, reflecting once again on the key arguments already presented, to emphasise their importance.

15.11 The Contribution of this Thesis to Knowledge

The contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is summarised in this section, rehearsing once again important arguments that were developed earlier in the study. There is a clear justification of why this thesis informs firstly, future research into young people's experiences of adventure leisure and general leisure participation; secondly, the management of young people's adventure leisure and general leisure experiences conceptualised through ADVENTUREQUAL; and thirdly, the wider field of service quality management.

15.11.1 Researching Young People's Experience of Adventure Leisure

This study uniquely addresses the call from over a decade ago for in-depth, qualitative research into young people's own perceptions of the quality of their experiences in the outdoor adventure leisure service encounter (Anderson, 1995, 1996; Barrett & Greenaway, 1995; Collins, 1996; Donne, 1995; Rawlinson-Plant, 1992). This is also an issue for wider research into leisure service quality management, since Robinson (1997) observes that children's feedback on leisure provision is significantly under-represented, and her comments are still valid eight years later.

A further issue identified by Rickinson *et al.* (2004) is that research into young people's views of their adventure leisure experiences must be methodologically rigorous, with proper conceptualisation and design. This study has developed through the stages of problem definition, literature investigation and methodological justification, to establish a theoretical framework. A configuration of data gathering techniques was designed and implemented and all data units were analysed, before the most relevant data to the study aims were identified for discussion. Rickinson *et al.*'s criteria are thus addressed.

For the first time in adventure leisure research with young people, participants were interviewed prior to adventure leisure courses to seek their direct expectations of those activities. Participants were then observed during the courses in a range of participant observation modes: observer-participant (Gold, 1969), observer-interactant (Adler & Adler, 1987) and semi-participant (Bryman, 1989), using expectations data to identify potential 'critical moments of truth' and their sources, which influenced satisfaction with the experience. The nine-point critical moments of truth classification (Section 3.3.3) was synthesised from the concepts of 'moments of truth' (Carlzon, 1987) and 'critical incidents' influencing satisfaction (Arnould & Price, 1993; Bitner, 1985, 1990; Bitner *et al.*, 1997; Edvarsson, 1992; Edvarsson & Strandvik, 2000; Howat & Murray, 2002; Kandampully &

Duddy, 1997; Stauss & Weinlich, 1997; Wels-Lips *et al.*, 1998). Finally, the young people were interviewed shortly after their courses, to reflect on whether and how their experiences met prior expectations, and which sources of critical moments of truth were most significant to them.

The accounts of these young people are made explicit in this study and used in their raw state, without adult judgement or interpretation of 'what they really thought'. This responds to Matthew's & Limb's (1999) concern that adults typically interpret young people's needs without consulting them directly. Any unclear comments were clarified directly with participants during the interviews to ensure that their meaning was not ambiguous.

Despite some participants being hesitant to comment during their pre-course interview, all were prepared to recount their experiences in more depth during the post-course interview, with some saying that they enjoyed doing so because, unusually, an adult was listening to their views with respect. Participants' reflections were both thoughtful and meaningful, supporting the literature recommendations that young people's direct accounts of the quality of their experiences should be investigated and used by adventure leisure managers to inform service provision.

The uniqueness of this study of young people's adventure leisure is therefore clear. It investigates, and gives respect to, young people's direct, in-depth accounts of their experiences using a novel, qualitative approach for the adventure leisure sector. It confirms that these accounts are both thoughtful and meaningful, and can inform adventure leisure service design and delivery.

15.11.2 The ADVENTUREQUAL Conceptual Gap Model

The ADVENTUREQUAL conceptual gap model has been developed from the SERVQUAL five-gap model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) and its variations (see, for example, Akan, 1995; Augustyn & Ho, 1998; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Ekinci & Riley, 1997; Hanna & Wozniak, 2001; Lewis, 1993; Mackay & Crompton, 1988; O'Neill *et al.*, 2000; Robledo, 2001; Saleh & Ryan, 1991; Staughton *et al.*, 1997; Tribe & Snaith, 1998; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999; Williams, 1998; Wong Ooi Mei, 1999).

ADVENTUREQUAL was developed in two stages and the first development shown in Figure 6.1 (p84) was synthesised as a result of the Literature Review. Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) acknowledge in their supporting explanation of the original five-gap SERVQUAL model that management should understand both customer expectations and perceptions, yet, inexplicably, do not include the latter gap explicitly in the model. Senior (1992) highlights the importance of this omission; therefore, the gap between management

220

perceptions of consumers' perceptions was included. Also, Luk & Layton (2002) find that perceptual gaps can exist between managers and employees' understanding of consumers' expectations and perceptions; therefore an additional gap between managers and employees' perceptions was added, to create a more comprehensive seven-gap model. At this stage, the model deliberately combined consumers' expectations and perceptions into a single perception for both employees and management, relying on the accompanying narrative to elaborate on these gaps.

The determinants of consumers' expectations were then extended by Mackay & Crompton's (1988) addition of 'the concept of equity' and Hanna & Wozniak's (2001) 'mood on entry'. The former determinant suggests that a consumer expects to experience the same service as every other consumer and the latter that expectations are influenced by entry mood. Also, during the adventure experience, a consumer's perceptions of 'critical moments of truth' in each service transaction influence their emotions (Yu & Dean, 2001) and, in turn, inform their expectations of the next service transaction (Pitt & Jeantrout, 1994), repeated to the end of the service. This cyclical relationship was therefore added to the model.

The first iteration of a refined SERVQUAL gap model (p84) was used as a theoretical framework for data gathering at WW, to encompass management, staff and participants' perspectives of service design and delivery at the centre. Following analysis of the data, it became clear that this conceptual model was both incorrect and incomplete and it has thus been amended. The 'parent decision-maker' (who could also be called the customer) is added as a further determinant of expectations and participants' 'entry mood' is influenced by, rather than a determinant of, expectations, contradicting Hanna & Wozniak's (2001) previously argument. This latter point is important because it balances the emotional aspect of the expectations/perceptions cycle of service transactions within the extended service encounter at WW. Expectations of the first transactional service experience set a participant's entry mood and their perceptions of that experience may change this emotional disposition. Expectations may then be readjusted for the next transaction to establish a new entry mood, which may, in turn, be changed by the next transaction. The cycle continues until the end of the service.

A vital element of the service transaction cycle is that entry mood and changing disposition are influenced, respectively, by fuzzy expectations (Ojasalo, 2001) and perceptions of three critical moment of truth sources: staff attitude and behaviour, participants' own performance and the other course participants. These three attributes of young people's adventure leisure experience have been uniquely refined in this thesis, drawing on theoretical underpinnings to synthesise a new understanding. Firstly, staff

221

attitude and behaviour are influenced by three previously unconnected concepts: Møller (1987) argues that employees' personal quality begets all quality and must underpin their behaviour; Yaffey (1993) identifies the 'virtuous conduct' of outdoor adventure instructors who wish to improve the quality life for both participants and themselves, through their work; and Gummesson (1991) propounds the 'love factor' in services, where employees actively want to provide the service for the recipients of that service, in a caring and compassionate manner. It is proposed in this thesis that these three attributes are employees' 'intrinsic service values', which should be fundamental to all adventure leisure employees and which also have direct application to other service contexts where high consumer/staff interaction exists.

Secondly, participants' expectations and perceptions of their own performance combine two different aspects of leisure behaviour not previously connected in the same experience: hedonic leisure consumption (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and skilled leisure consumption (Gratton & Taylor, 2000; Lentell & Morris, 1995). In the former state participants seek feelings of pleasure (Kleiber *et al.*, 1986), for example, exhilaration/excitement and fun/enjoyment (Anderson, 1995, 1996). In the latter state many participants hope to express themselves in some way through developing their competence (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999; Godbey, 1994; Priest & Gass, 1997) and enjoy feelings of peak adventure (Priest & Gass, 1997) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 2000) which although experienced, are not necessarily understood by participants.

Thirdly, Holyfield suggests that the social aspect of an adult outdoor adventure experience enhances the quality of that experience, which Aubert-Gamet & Cova (1999) call the sociospatial element of the servicescape. In this thesis, the term 'socialscape' (Donne, 2004) is used to identify that important aspect of the adventure leisure experience identified by young participants at WW.

All eleven perceptual gaps are now included in ADVENTUREQUAL, despite previously combining customers' expectations and perceptions into a single perception for both employees and management, with an explanation elaborating on these gaps. This acknowledges the *viva voce* discussion to make all gaps explicit, rather than present a simplified model, and adds weight to the contribution to broader service quality management knowledge made by ADVENTUREQUAL: all eleven gaps apply to any services management context.
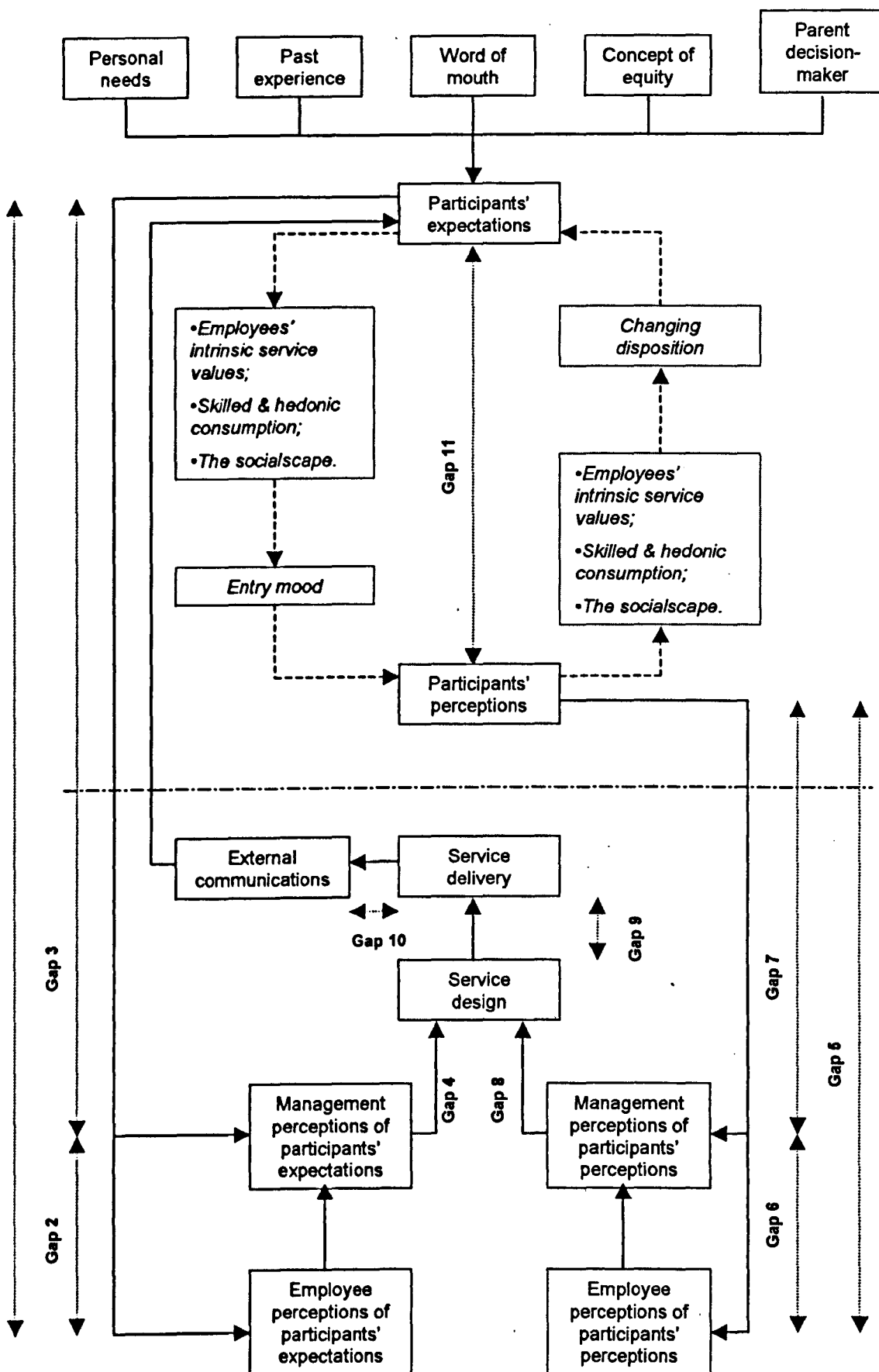
Figure 15.5 The ADVENTUREQUAL Conceptual Gap Model

To summarise this section, the contribution of this thesis to knowledge in the adventure leisure field is the derivation of the ADVENTUREQUAL conceptual gap model. The model identifies two more determinants of expectations and six further perceptual quality gaps. It enables adventure leisure managers to recognise that three critical moments of truth sources have a key influence on participants' service entry mood and changing emotional disposition as a result of their experience, influencing the expectations/perceptions gap. Also, changing an emotional disposition from an initial entry mood can result from any transaction in the service; therefore, close attention must be given to managing participants' emotions throughout the adventure leisure experience. Overall, the model is a powerful tool to help adventure leisure managers to conceptualise and, thus design, their service appropriately.

There is an obvious link between attributes of the service changing WW participants' emotions during service transactions and the service quality/satisfaction relationship, theorised in Section 5.4 and demonstrated empirically in Section 12.10. This important contribution to knowledge is now explained.

15.11.3 Demonstrating a New Relationship Between Service Quality and Satisfaction

Academic disagreement exists on the definitions of, and relationship between, service quality and satisfaction (see, for example, Chong et al., 1997; Crompton, 1999; Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994; Dedeke, 2003; Galloway, 1999; Kasper et al., 1999; Lee et al., 2000; Liljander & Strandvik, 1993; Pitt & Jeantrout, 1994; 2001; Tan & Pawitra, 2001; Wisniewski, 2001; Zeithaml, et al., 1993). In Section 5.4 of the Review of Literature these different arguments are discussed critically and three consistent themes are identified to theorise a new relationship between these two concepts (see p65).

Firstly, Lee et al. (2000) confirm Assael's (1995) summary definition of perceptions of service quality as the '...selection, organization, and interpretation of marketing and environment stimuli into a coherent picture'. At WW, the three sources of critical moments of truth identified in ADVENTUREQUAL represent those stimuli most important to participants. Secondly, satisfaction is defined as an emotional response to a service experience (see, for example, Cronin, 2000; Kasper et al., 1999; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1989, 1996; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). At WW, participants' changing emotional disposition in ADVENTUREQUAL is the satisfaction response to the critical moments of truth stimuli. Thirdly, quality perceptions and satisfaction emotions exist in consumers' minds at both a transactional and an overall level (Sureschander, et al., 2002), and these cannot always be optimised in the transactions of an extended service encounter (de Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999).

These three themes can be combined to synthesise a theoretical relationship between service quality and satisfaction that has not been previously considered (see Figure 15.6 below).

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        ┌──────────────────────┐
        │  Transactional service│
        │  quality perceptions  │
        └──────────────────────┘
           │                │
           ▼                ▼
┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐
│  Overall service │  │ Transactional satisfaction│
│ quality perceptions│  │      perceptions     │
└──────────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
           │                │
           ▼                ▼
        ┌──────────────────────┐
        │  Overall satisfaction │
        │      perceptions      │
        └──────────────────────┘
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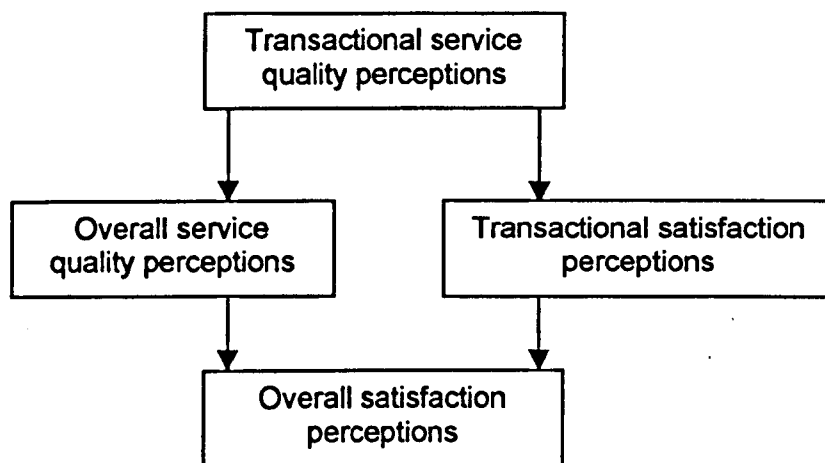
Figure 15.6 A new relationship between satisfaction and service quality

The relationship is demonstrated empirically at WW. For example, an instructor's attitude and behaviour as a result of their intrinsic service values is a positive quality perception by a participant in one transaction of the extended service encounter. The participant's perception of this behaviour then creates an emotional feeling of satisfaction about that transaction. Using ADVENTUREQUAL, the satisfaction feeling is a changed emotional disposition, which informs the participant's expectations of the next transaction and sets their entry mood for that transaction. In the next service transaction, the instructor's behaviour is perceived to be positive once again, and another emotional feeling of satisfaction is created. The cycle continues to the end of the service experience, where the participant has an overall quality perception of the instructor's behaviour, informed by the aggregate of their transactional quality perceptions. This overall quality perception combines with the aggregate of satisfaction perceptions, to create an overall perception of satisfaction in the participant.

The contribution of this thesis to the service quality management field is to propose a new relationship between service quality and satisfaction that has not previously been considered. It draws upon existing definitions of the concepts and adds the 'transactional' and 'overall' dimensions, to demonstrate that transactional service quality perceptions are antecedents of transactional satisfaction perceptions and overall service quality perceptions, which are both antecedents of overall satisfaction perceptions.

15.12 Recommendations for Future Research

Two recommendations for future research arise from this study and the first arises from Research Aim #1. The eleven gap 'ADVENTUREQUAL' Conceptual Gap Model is developed from the original five gap SERVQUAL model, to reconceptualise determinants of expectations and perceptual gaps in the context of young people's outdoor adventure leisure management. ADVENTUREQUAL should be tested as a device for analysing service quality and satisfaction in young people's outdoor adventure leisure, and in the wider context of services management. In particular, the eleven quality gaps should be considered, and the sources of critical moments of truth should be verified for adventure leisure, and tested for their application to other service contexts.

The second recommendation emerges from Research Aim #2. Although this thesis addresses the call for over a decade to investigate young people's direct accounts of their adventure leisure experiences, it is only a starting point. Young people's perspectives of their experiences in adventure leisure and other service contexts should be researched further, since they are still under-represented, despite this thesis.

15.13 Personal Reflections on the Study

In this section I shall firstly explain the personal significance of conducting this study and then reflect upon my learning in the research process, to demonstrate how my understanding of key aspects of that research process have developed. I maintained a research diary throughout this study and have used this to inform these reflections. My diary was a mainstay of my research, since it mapped three aspects of the process: firstly, I have a record of every day's activities spent working on the study, together with the gaps when I did nothing; secondly, the left hand page of each pair of open pages contains the technical content of my work, tracking the development of all aspects of my thinking about the thesis and my work-in-progress activities; and thirdly, the right hand page candidly (and sometimes profanely) notes my private feelings during each day that I worked on this study.

I kept this diary as a motivational symbol of my progress – or lack of progress – and to record every research decision I made, just in case I became lost in the PhD wilderness and needed to recover my direction. In fact, this happened when I had to suspend my research formally due to the increased demands of my employer. I also wanted to be able to reflect on the evolution of the study and my developing experience as a researcher, to understand the journey I followed. I started this thesis with incredible naïveté about the research process, and arrogance in my own ability to conduct research. Appendix 3 shows two sample extracts of my diary, demonstrating a change in these attitudes: in 1997 I believed that I could easily complete a 'fast and dirty' study; in 2004 the intellectual

demands of the process were apparent; and I reach this final stage now with more understanding and humility.

The final reason for maintaining my diary was catharsis. Recording privately in plain language my frustration, doubt, anger, fear, a sense of isolation, and also success, confidence, pleasure, anticipation and a sense of collegiality, was an important exercise in maintaining my overall perspective.

I have sought in this thesis to reduce the void in research into young people's perceptions of the quality of their outdoor adventure experiences, to inform those who manage that service. Since Fletcher (1971) acknowledged that his original study of young people in Outward Bound activities required an additional humanistic narrative of their experiences, Rawlinson-Plant (1992), Barrett & Greenaway (1995), Donne (1995) and Anderson (1996) have all stated that further research into young people's perspectives of their experiences of outdoor adventure provision is required. My own assertion of the argument in 1995 was an early precursor to embarking upon this thesis, and I anticipated being one of a number of researchers engaged in such research. However, Rickinson et al. (2004) confirm that even to that date, no significant work had been conducted.

By definition, this PhD thesis makes an original contribution to the body of services management knowledge, in the outdoor adventure leisure context. However, I remain concerned that young people's perspectives of their outdoor adventure experiences are still under-represented. My own children have been born since I started this thesis and I have thus become even more sensitised to understanding young people's perceptions, not simply about their outdoor adventure activities, but about other experiences which are provided for them as managed services. Therefore, I have clarified my personal agenda for future services management research as a result of this thesis.

The approach I have taken in this thesis has been to conduct an interpretivist study with some initial structure, to allow further themes to emerge. This approach was identified by Miles & Huberman (1994) and further informed by Easterby-Smith et al. (1996), who argue that adhering to one of the two polarised research paradigms is not necessarily applicable, nor helpful, in management research. Pragmatically, as a part-time researcher, I had to manage this study within particular constraints, and their work enabled me to establish an appropriate 'worldview'.

Continuing my reflections on the research process, I found that the time I spent 'resocialising' myself (Burgess, 1984) into the WW organisation had two important outcomes. Firstly, I was able to discuss in detail with different staff the logistics of my

data-gathering activities. I sought their advice on the specific content of courses, which areas of the lake they favoured using at different times, the behavioural scripts they followed at the beginning of a course to prepare participants with necessary equipment, the most appropriate approach to participant observation in different circumstances and any interpersonal staff issues that I should be aware of.

Secondly, both my persona and research were accepted by the WW staff, whose voluntary assistance I relied upon. As I have already explained in Chapter Nine, one individual seemed to resent this study, but he had a critical role in enabling, or potentially hindering, my daily access at the centre, despite the Centre Manager's agreement. Therefore it was imperative that I managed carefully his antipathy towards this research and my presence at WW. In fact, this individual ultimately invoked a rite of passage where it was clear that my participation would dictate his co-operation to be interviewed and, in his role at the centre, I felt that he was an important person to interview. I was thus compelled to participate and this finally improved his acceptance of my research, with him ultimately being a very willing interviewee. As a result of the resocialisation process, I was able to work as a quasi-insider at WW and could concentrate wholly on my primary data gathering activities, but was reassured that I could seek advice from any WW staff where necessary.

Throughout the primary data-gathering phase, I was sensitive to being a male conducting research with young people, cognisant of Warren's (1988) observation that my gender could be a barrier. In fact, I was pleased that by providing evidence of a police (Criminal Records Bureau) check and following specific communications protocols, I was readily accepted as a researcher by both parents and young people. However, during the pre-course interviews, it appeared difficult for many of the young people to accept that I was listening to their views without judgement, or seeking a 'correct' answer. As a result, these interviews were shorter than I had anticipated. I had established interview behaviour protocols for myself, based on treating everything participants said with respect, but had to work very hard to convey that premise in these interviews. Then, during the post-course interviews, it was clear that most of the participants had actually understood this, as they reflected more thoughtfully, and were able to recount their experiences in rich detail. In fact, some participants said that they had been looking forward to talking to me after their course finished, because our 'discussion' (my adopted term for the interviews) was a new and enjoyable experience for them.

I found that I was able to use the participant observation data to prompt some participants' post-course responses. However, many did not need such prompting because they were keen to recount their experiences and had already reflected on what they would say to

me. This suggests that the participant observation data made less of a contribution than I had planned, but the usefulness of that data gathering activity itself extended beyond generating interview prompts. It was helpful that I had seen the situations recounted by participants, so that I could question them with more understanding, as May (1993) suggests. Also, the increased contact I had with these participants helped to develop our relationship for the post-course interview. An additional benefit I had not anticipated was that it gave the WW staff visual clues of my research activities and they were further reassured by my intentions for the study.

The process of interview-transcribe-observe-interview-transcribe with each respondent was intensive and exhausting for me, not least because it involved a number of participants in parallel each week. Also, due to the abnormally low number of participants booked onto courses that year, I was obliged to include every available respondent who fitted the sampling model. Consequently, the number of participants was determined by default, not through being purposive. However, the intensity of the process meant that I was fully engaged with the activity and I felt close to the data it produced.

In a repeat of this study, if time constraints allowed, I would extend the data-gathering time into a second year, to reduce the weekly number, but extend the total number, of participants. Although Lofland & Lofland (1995) suggest that 20-50 interviews is a typical number (there were 20 watersports participants and 13 WW staff in this study), I could have gathered more participant data to add further insights to the discussion of results.

Finally, towards the end of this study, it became apparent to me that, rather than inductively seeking the 'what' and 'how' of service quality at WW as we had originally agreed, the management team had a hidden agenda to prove the existence of significantly negative aspects in their service provision. Both GLo and JP seemed unprepared to accept participants' positive feedback and they were cynical as to whether this was a real reflection of their service delivery. I was disappointed that they could not celebrate the positive findings of this study, but this re-confirmed GLo's original 'stated' concern that he did not fully understand participants' experiences, nor how they were being managed. In fact, it seemed to me then that he did not wish to understand that participants were satisfied with the quality of service provision at WW, and was seeking an issue, which did not exist. However, I am grateful that the WW management team co-operated so that I could achieve the agreed aims of this study, without trying to introduce their additional agenda.

15.14 Learning to Become an Independent Researcher

At the conclusion of this study I can now reflect on how I have developed my understanding of the research process to become an independent researcher. I have defined a problem with original theoretical and practical implications and read widely and critically, to establish a theoretical framework and appropriate methodological approach that investigates gaps in a body of knowledge. Within that methodology I have designed and implemented a configuration of data gathering methods, I have analysed every data unit and selected those data most relevant to the study aims for further critical discussion and interpretation. I have drawn conclusions from that interpretation and, in addition to emphasising the contributions to knowledge I had anticipated, I have allowed issues to emerge that did not correspond directly with my earlier thinking. Due to the nature of a qualitative study such as this, which is often messy and non-linear, I have regularly reviewed and adjusted the research aims and questions as my thinking and understanding developed, and new literature was published. Finally, I have defended my thesis and its philosophical standpoint in the oral examination.

The oral examination was the first opportunity for me to be tested as an independent researcher and I decided that I should undertake this event alone, without either supervisor in attendance. The onus was on me to clarify fully any weaknesses of the study and leave the examination understanding how to ensure that the final thesis would be of PhD standard. Then, following the examination, I would have no further reliance on my supervisors, other than as additional colleagues to help me proof read my work, and I could refer back to my examiners for advice. However, shortly after the examination, I reflected on one examiner's observation that I had taken copious notes on the required thesis amendments and should now know what work needed to be done. From this clear hint that I should be an independent researcher, I spent time reflecting on how the thesis content should be more complete and coherent, before finally making the amendments. With this understanding, I chose not to seek further advice from my examiners.

15.15 The PhD Oral Examination: a Formative Experience

The oral examination was an important learning experience in two ways. It initially served to identify the shortcomings of my written thesis and, after time for reflection, clarified its critical role in reaching the end of the PhD researcher's journey. I shall now reflect on my understanding of the thesis content, followed by the role of the oral examination in the PhD research process.

The shortcomings of my thesis were very clear when identified by the examiners. I explained my reasons for the thesis decisions I had made: not including all of the conceptual gaps in the full ADVENTUREQUAL model; only briefly summarising the

contribution to knowledge, but including expansive personal reflections; and writing a only short section on the policy implications at WW, without considering the broader adventure leisure and service quality fields. During our discussion I understood that these decisions were flawed and important gaps in my thesis should be addressed.

However, one decision I could not immediately rationalise was why I had not included my participant observation data in the Presentation and Discussion of Results Section. When the question was asked I could see that the omission was obvious, because I had only used the data to inform my post-course interviewing, yet this was inconsistent with a single case ethnographic study. I understood that the discussion of results needed thicker description from my perspective to verify the interview data and paint a more vivid picture of the WW context, but could not explain why I had omitted to include these data.

I took some time to reflect on this after the examination and realised that I was still completing my methodological training as a researcher. I had conducted a single case ethnographic study, but in my 'methodological pragmatism' (p89) I had not fully embraced this interpretive approach. My previous research experience had used positivist approaches and although I had been sailing close to the jetty of ethnography in this study, I never quite landed there, despite having cleared the channel to do so. My examiners hauled me in to this methodological jetty and I now stand on the dry land of understanding (apologies to the reader for this pun-filled metaphor, but it tells the story very well!).

The oral examination verifies the standard of the PhD but I had not understood its importance In elaborating upon the written thesis arguments and assumptions. Having read a number of articles on the principles of PhD examinations I was prepared to 'defend' my thesis and also acknowledge its weaknesses. However, I had not anticipated that this would be such a formative learning experience, stimulating further learning to complete my thesis amendments. Rather than simply being a 'defence' of my work, I found that the examination became a discussion to identify aspects of the study that I had not made explicit nor justified fully. I now understand that without this learning opportunity, my written thesis would not be of PhD standard.

The scrutiny by two external examiners provided additional, separate perspectives for this study. My supervisors and I may have become too close to our own experience of the study process to see its weaknesses with clarity; therefore, this element of the examination process is crucial for maintaining the standard of the award.

Following the examination I had intended to complete the thesis amendments as soon as possible, but was cautioned against this by one external examiner. I now realise the sense

of this advice and the importance of taking time to reflect on the examination for the final thesis draft.

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APPENDIX ONE:

An Example of a Coded Interview

Interview Code: 2CB

UNIT	TEXT	NOTES
001	*C, tell me anything you remember about your sailing course.*	
002	I had an absolutely fabulous time!	
003	I think I've learned everything I wanted to learn, achieved everything I wanted to achieve,	
004	I made friends with everyone in the group, really, it was a lovely group, everybody was really friendly.	Importance of socialscape
005	The instructor was really nice, she, like, taught us everything really well.	
006	I just had a fabulous two days, really.	
007	*Let's go back to your first impressions. What did you think about the centre when you arrived there?*	
008	Well, the lake looked well organised, you know, everybody who was on it at the time looked well supervised. Er, the cabins, like, even though I wasn't staying there, I thought they all had cobwebs on them, so, presentation-wise...but I'm sure they are all nice on the inside.	
009	The staff are friendly there. We sort of walked in and they showed you where to go and you got upstairs and, like, your instructor introduced herself and made everyone else introduce themselves and that made you feel quite easy and relaxed.	Transactional staff behaviour changing participants' disposition
010	*What about you first impressions of the boats and any other equipment you used?*	
011	They looked smart, not old things, the equipment looked safe and new, I felt, like, quite confident in everything.	Transactional quality => changed disposition of transactional satisfaction
012	*So with all those impressions, what were your feelings about the course you were about to go on?*	
013	Er, that it was going to be very well run, that the emphasis was on safety, but learning and having fun, so, I mean, emphasising the right things. I just knew I was going to have a good time, but I knew it would be safe.	Changed disposition determined entry mood for next transaction.
014	*Tell me a bit more about what you thought of L: she is quite keen for some feedback about the course.*	
015	Yeah, she was really friendly, she was lovely, she reassured you about everything and went	Impression manager and information gatekeeper

	over everything at least a few times, because sometimes they just want to get you in the water straight away, but she made sure that, like, everybody knew what they were doing. She came out and shouted advice if you were, like, stuck and she always made sure that she knew what you were going to do, so if you were tacking, she'd say, like, "aim for this", or something. She was always there just checking you were not frustrated, so she was just, like, really, kind of cool and relaxed.	
016	*Do you think she understood the level you were at with your sailing and was able to give you the right level of instruction?*	
017	Yeah, I do, I think that you know, different people, because there was one girl who wasn't really into water, she wanted to be a ballet dancer, it wasn't quite her scene! She hated boats and getting wet. With her she was very supportive and let someone go in the boat with her and then let her go around in the speedboat when she didn't like it and then I let her, she came in the boat with me. But, you know, I thought that was good how she wasn't forced because she was really upset, but sometimes you can say 'just carry on with it', but that's not always helpful.	Empowerment, flexibility to meet participant's needs, empathy with participant's emotions
018	*Tell me more about this girl K, because potentially she could have spoiled people's enjoyment.*	
019	Well, K just seemed to, like, panic all the time and I don't think she was being silly or wanting attention, it was genuine. But I think L did that really well, because sometimes you've just got to make them do it to see if their fear is real, so, I don't think she could have handled K any better, really. She definitely didn't ruin our fun, because L, kind of, let us go out and then sorted K out, so, it didn't hold anyone else up.	
020	*Also, you just said you let K come into your boat with you. Why did you offer to do that?*	
021	Well, I just saw her on the speedboat and I thought, well, if that was me and I was scared, I would want someone to do that to me and I thought that, you know, there's no point in having one person out of the group who doesn't know what's going on, so I just said she could come with me and we were the only ones who didn't capsize, actually, so we were quite lucky. If that was me I would want someone to be friendly to me. But she was quite, like, when someone else was in charge she wasn't as panic-stricken at all. She goes, well, 'I know I trust you not to capsize' but she said, she actually said 'well if we do	Socialscape, mutual dependence

	capsize it would be fun to fall in', so I think if someone else is there with her she is fine about it, it's just the initial fear of being out there on your own.	
022	*Interesting that she said 'it would be fun if we fell in'?*	
023	Yeah, she goes 'I hope we don't fall in' and I go 'well you'd better not start screaming!' and she goes 'well, it doesn't matter if we do, we'll just get back in again' and that surprised me because I thought she would be like 'oh no, no!'	
024	*I did ask you the other evening if you got into trouble on the lake, how quickly you would expect L to help you. Did you ever get to that stage?*	
025	Only on the first day. I was out there and we hadn't been told to let go of our ropes if there was a gust of wind, so I caught one on the really gusty part of the lake and I capsized, but, like, they were out there as soon as they could have been, to be honest. It wasn't far from the jetty but they came out...	
026	I was pleased because they told me how to, like, get my boat back upwards and afterwards we were meant to be doing the capsize that afternoon and I felt really good that I'd already done it. I felt like it was a learning experience, rather than an accident.	Own performance determines changed disposition
027	*That's good. You said you wanted to be shown how to get yourself out of difficulty if it happened and it seems like you were. OK. What impression did L give about her understanding and experience of the sport?*	
028	I felt she was, er, obviously did that sport, because she knew nearly everything, like, all the wind, even though she wasn't in our boat she could tell us what to do. I was very impressed by that, it was nice to know that she knew what she was doing because it makes you feel more at ease with what you're doing.	Information gatekeeper changing participant's disposition through transactional behaviour
029	*So were you completely confident in her as an instructor?*	
030	Oh yeah, most definitely.	
031	*Were you happy with the way she treated you, spoke to you...?*	
032	Oh yeah, very happy. I think she did it really well. She was friendly with everybody and, er, C, he found things quite hard, like, putting it in different hands and I thought she handled that very well, because my brother's quite the same, so, in that kind of situation she was very patient and made sure she didn't say, 'oh come on, you're keeping the others waiting'. She made sure he knew it	Service values

	and, like, it doesn't take long, it's just best that everyone's safe out there, isn't it?	
033	*Yes, that's true. L said that she spent a long time making sure that everybody understood at the beginning, and wondered if she spent too long.*	
034	Well, I think it was about right but We didn't really need two goes, at least, I didn't, but we're all different, so she made sure we all got the practice on the simulator.	
035	*Did you get bored at all at that stage?*	
036	A little, but then she was always putting in different things that I didn't know, like if the wind was doing certain things, so I kept listening for that sort of thing, really.	Transactional change to negative disposition
037	*Do you feel that L always explained things or demonstrated things well enough, or was there ever any confusion in what she said?*	
038	Oh yeah, most definitely. She went over it really well, so I don't think anybody was confused about what she said. She said it all in a clear way that was easy to follow and easy to understand.	
039	*At the beginning, when you were rigging the Toppers on the slipway, it seemed to take quite a long time. I wondered whether Liz had been clear in what you had to do then?*	
040	I think the instructions were right, but, it was, like, quite confusing. It would have been easier if we'd, like, gone off and watched how to do one bit, but instead we did it all in one go. So it's quite a lot to remember - even though she came round and showed us if we weren't sure. I felt we could have done that a couple of times, like de-rigged it and start again to make sure. I know I remembered it, but I know that today I struggled to remember.	
044	*When we chatted the other evening, we talked about whether anything was being promised to you by the centre about this course. Do you feel that if anything seemed to be promised, that you got what was promised?*	
045	Yeah, it says all about the friendliness of the instructors and I felt like, we weren't kind of separate people, we were all one unit together, we all worked and helped each other, so I feel I got more than I thought I'd get.	Socialscape, importance of instructor's behaviour
046	*Is that better than you expected?*	
047	Oh, definitely!	+ve disconfirmation
048	*Tell me what you thought about the rest of the group.*	
049	The individuals?	
050	*Anything that strikes you: the individuals, the whole group, whatever.*	
	I thought we were kind of a wide range ability-	Socialscape

	wise, you know, we were all pretty much beginners, apart from, er, G. But I think areas like different kinds of confidence, like K was really unconfident, but that didn't really affect the whole group, it kind of brought us together, really, because we all wanted her to feel safe, you know?	
051	Then the boys...they weren't kind of that friendly. Sometimes they could be a bit stupid, but they weren't holding up the group or anything. It was just sometimes they could be a bit, they were trying to push us in and stuff, but that was just in fun.	Antisocialscape
052	*That's interesting, what was stupid about what they were doing?*	
053	Well, they were trying to push people in and sometimes they just wouldn't listen, but, it wasn't like they were being naughty boys and I wanted them to go away, but they just could have been a bit more friendly, really. I know there's the thing with boys and girls not always getting on together, but everyone can get on really. But we all got on, there were not, like, tiffs, or anything.	Antisocialscape
054	*So as they were there together, do you think they kept themselves to themselves a little?*	
055	Er, yes. I mean K and the other girl who she was staying with, they knew each other, and there was me and S and we just got to know each other straight away, so we were four friends, really.	
056	*So, to recap, did the boys' behaviour spoil your enjoyment?*	
057	No, because I got thorough enjoyment out of the course. I couldn't have enjoyed it much more, I thought it was perfect, really.	Antisocialscape did not affect overall satisfaction
058	*On the first morning, L told you all that there was hardly any wind, but there would be on day two. How did you feel about that?*	
059	I don't know. I wondered whether the day was going to be really rubbish , but, I mean, it wasn't at all, because, like, even though we stopped a few times, it was good just to know what you were doing in easy weather, so you knew what you were doing yesterday when it was really windy. That was probably an asset to the course, having a calm first day, because it gave you a chance to learn and you weren't, kind of battling with force four winds or something.	Uncontrollable servicescape
060	*Of the two days, which did you prefer?*	
061	I think I preferred the first day, because we did more sailing. Because yesterday, although it was part of the course, we went in a six man boat and it was too windy, anyway, but if it had been a bit	Time on activity important

	calmer I would have liked to just go out on my own and just sailed around to, like, reinforce what you had learned. But not in that weather yesterday.	
062	*So the weather dictated what you were doing?*	
063	Yeah.	
064	*At the very beginning you were late, for whatever reason, and L asked you to introduce yourself to the rest of the group? Did you mind doing this?*	
065	Er, no, because we all had to that and we were just about to start and I don't get silly about things like that, I'm quite confident, really. It's nice to meet everyone and find out what experience they had, so you had a general idea of what they were all about.	
066	*Did you find it useful that you all had to introduce yourselves?*	
067	Yes, it kind of breaks the ice when you actually have to say something to people.	
068	*You mentioned going on the simulator. Did you expect to do that?*	
069	Yeah, I did because I've done it once before. But I think that is necessary because going out on the water straight away is, like daunting.	
070	*The first activity you did was to lie on the Toppers and paddle them in relays around a buoy. That didn't seem like you were really doing anything useful: what did you think about it?*	
071	Oh, that was a bit of fun. It was really good, just getting in the water and I really enjoyed that because it just gets you used to the water and warmed up for the day, although the water wasn't warm.	Own actions changing disposition
072	*You had helmets with stickers on, which were supposed to have your names written on them. The names on your helmets were wrong, was that a problem at all?*	
073	No, because we'd introduced ourselves at the beginning, because there are only five other people you remember who they are, really. But she did mention that she had some stickers but she couldn't remember where she'd put them, or something. But I suppose that could have been confusing in some situations, but you can't really see each other's helmets when you're in a Topper, so...it didn't really matter.	
074	*Would it have made any impression at the beginning if you were given helmets with your names on?*	
075	I think it might have, kind of, brought you together, thinking, like, this is our group, these are our names and when you didn't know each other you just remembered it. It would have	

	helped, yes.	
076	*As soon as you launched your Topper you seemed to be coping very well with the basic reaching course that had been set out. Did you find this easy?*	
077	Er, yeah, I did. I knew the basics, so that helped a lot.	
078	*Did you find it too basic?*	
079	Yeah, we were out there for a long time, because the wind wasn't very strong and it was quite easy and I thought we could have done less time. But you have to do it for everybody, so...	
080	*When I spoke to you yesterday lunchtime you said you had not capsized and seemed really pleased about that. Were you and why?*	
081	Yeah, I felt really good about that, it was a real achievement, because you only capsize when you get caught out by the wind the wrong way and, with K panicking, it made it feel like an even better achievement because we did it in less gybes than she thought we'd need.	Own performance in transaction changing disposition
082	So I think L was quite pleased that we did that as well.	Instructor's behaviour contributing to positive feeling.
083	*L wasn't actually sure how you were enjoying it, because you were concentrating a lot, didn't ask many questions but just got on and did it.*	
084	Well, I like to listen to understand what I'm supposed to do. I like to concentrate on what I'm doing and get in done, that's the way that I work.	
085	*There were three things that you said you wanted from the course: achievement, freedom and fun. You've mentioned two of those, what about the freedom aspect you mentioned?*	
086	Er, I felt to a certain degree, but I feel that you would have that if you hadn't had the weather like yesterday. So I think she would have let us go sailing around the lake. But, yeah, we were very much free to do our own thing on the water.	Empowered, flexibility
087	*What did you think about going on the Lugger yesterday?*	
088	Oh, it was a really good experience. I really enjoyed it.	
089	*Tell me why.*	
090	It's just like you're all working together. Two people sailing and someone steering, you just had a go at everything. I think that's what it must be like when you see the round the world race. You see it and think that must be easy, but when you're doing it, you see it's so much harder and a lot more involved, like pulling in the sails here, watching where you're going and you had to go and get the duck and steer and everything. I	Mutual dependence in the socialscape

	thought us all together, because, like, we'd known each other for two days and we were all working together, we all helped to keep the boat going.	
091	*Tell me about the duck activity.*	
092	Well, we chucked it out and had to turn around and have to go up and get it, but because we were in this massive boat, you have to have accurate steering, everyone has to work together. The sails people have to pull it in tighter or let it out, depending on the wind. It was really good for teamwork.	
093	*Did you feel a bit silly chasing a rubber duck in the middle of a lake?*	
094	At the end of the day we were all doing it and it was helping us to learn, so, no, it was just good fun.	
095	*Did you need the waterproofs that L provided you with on the Lugger?*	
096	Yes, they kept us dry and warm on the top, but obviously our legs were cold because we were in shorts, it was safety in case we fell in the water.	
097	*Because of the changing conditions, L had to juggle your group's activities to fit the weather, to make sure you covered the two stages. Were you happy with the way she did that?*	
098	Well I didn't feel we were jumping from one thing to another, there was definite progression, step by step, so yeah, I feel she did it really well.	
	K again was screaming on the Lugger: did that affect your enjoyment?	
099	Well, again, you have to make allowances. Like some people would have got all up tight about it, because it could have been a bit scary for her, but sometimes she went a bit over the top. But, some people are scared of different things and you have to make allowances. So I don't think it really affected us.	
100	*Apparently S had a bad capsize which I didn't see.*	
101	Very bad.	
102	*Did you see it?*	
103	We saw her when she had capsized, as we sailed past, but if we had seen it we would have helped her if she had asked for help. But she said nothing and we felt a bit bad about that afterwards, because, maybe we could have helped, but, she's all right now.	
104	*Having found out that she hurt herself, did that give you any concerns about whether you could have hurt yourself?*	
105	Yeah, it did, because, I suppose you go on the course knowing there's a risk in everything, but it	Realistic safety perceptions

	made me feel, like, a bit scared, but then, if she'd been rushed off to hospital I'd have thought 'oh god!', but nothing could have stopped it, it was just one of those things that happens, you know? If Liz hadn't been next to her she would have gone under, so, it's just one of those things. I didn't feel that it was safe, because I felt safe all the time. It was just one of those things. You don't go along thinking you can never get hurt.	
106	*Overall, was the course better, worse or the same as you expected?*	
107	I thought it was better.	+ve disconfirmation
108	*Why do you feel that?*	
109	Er, because I wasn't expecting our group to be as strongly bonded as it was.	Socialscape
110	I didn't expect our instructor to be so nice. I thought L was really nice, she taught things the way I like to pick them up, I don't like to be told something and just get out there and practise it. She was really thorough in everything she did; she made sure that everybody was fine.	Instructor
111	I just felt 100% assured that I was going to be all right and everything was safe and the equipment was in really good condition, so...that's it.	
112	*Can you describe anything that was worse than you expected?*	
113	Er, I think that the cabins looked a bit 'god', all those cobwebs, I mean, it doesn't take much just to give it a quick clean, does it? That kind of put me off, but everything else was immaculate, like the changing rooms...and hot showers!	
114	*What about anything else that was better than you expected?*	
	I think it was the safety. I've been to the X Company thing and that's just run of the mill there, but we had really nice waterproof jackets, like really nice and the buoyancy aids fitted well, they were comfy, they weren't, like, too bulky. The boats were all clean, in perfect condition, the equipment was all there, clean, not rusting over. I just think the whole aspect of the equipment was really good.	Transactional tangible quality determining overall quality evaluation and satisfaction.
115	I think L was a very thorough instructor, you know, the way she told us to aim for this, zigzag up. She went over the gybes and tacks very thoroughly, so I don't think she could have done much better for us than she did, really.	
116	*Apart from us having this chat now, did L or anyone at WW ask you how it was going, were you enjoying yourself, that sort of thing?*	
117	No.	
118	*Did you expect them to?*	
119	Well, I think that, actually, at the end of the first	

	day, she did ask if everyone was enjoying themselves? But I think it would have been good if she'd asked 'are you doing everything you thought you would?'. She could have asked us all at the beginning what we wanted to get out of the course and then at the end check and see whether we did get that, in the same way you're doing now. She would then know what we wanted, like, Ch could have wanted to overcome a fear of water, I don't know.	
120	*What do you think L assumed you were there for?*	
121	I think she knew that we all had similar ideas and at the end of the day we were there to do our sailing course.	
122	*So should more attention be given to what you wanted from the course?*	
123	Yes, like overcoming fear, or any other experience thing.	
124	*Is it possible that L maybe already had a good idea what you all wanted from the course?*	
125	Well, probably. She sees us as individuals and understood the different kinds of people we were, so she must have had a good idea.	Empowered to be flexible
126	*This is a question that has come from talking to other people on these courses. Do you find that as a teenager, or young person, people don't actually ask for your views and opinions.*	
127	Er, well, no much more than when you're a child, really.	Adults not seeking young people's views
128	*So is there really any need to ask you more about what you think?*	
129	Yes, we should be asked more about what we think, kind of more emphasis put on what we want to get out of things. I think that would be quite helpful on a course like this: what we want to get out of it, what we want to achieve, yes.	Adults should find out!
130	*If you were given a tick box questionnaire about the course, would you actually fill it in?*	
131	Er, yeah, I think I would, because if you've got strong views, which I usually do have, then you must go and tell them, so they've got an opportunity to do something about it.	Formal feedback
132	*What if you didn't have any strong views?*	
133	I probably still would, because it's nice to let them know what you thought about it all, how good it was	
	What if the questionnaire asked you to write a few lines about what you thought?	
134	I wouldn't do it in as much depth as we're doing here. I think maybe this way is a much better way of trying to get their views, because people don't want to sit there writing...	Not qualitative written comments

135	*Why not? Tell me more.*	
136	It's just like tiring and so many things come into your head and you can't be bothered to write it all down. But if you're talking, it all just comes out and you can just say everything you want to say about it.	Verbal qualitative feedback
137	*So are you finding this chat a useful way to explain things?*	
138	Yeah, I'm saying far more than I would on paper.	More likely to get in-depth verbal feedback
139	*OK, not everybody completes questionnaires honestly, either they can't be bothered to read it or it's just a time factor. Would you fill it in honestly?*	
140	Yes, I would. If I didn't think the instructor was good I would say so. If they want to improve then you've got to be honest.	.
141	*Would you mark generously or hard?*	
	Er, more generous I think.	
142	*One final question, C. At any stage since our first chat the other evening, have you felt uncomfortable with any aspect of this research or the way I've carried it out?*	
143	Oh no. I think you've made it nice and relaxed, not too formal or scary. I feel quite relaxed with all that.	Feedback on data gathering
144	Yeah, I think it's been good finding out about it all, because I think someone should be finding what people think about this kind of thing.	Supports the study!

APPENDIX TWO:

Example of a Data Theme Document

Data Analysis Theme

Code	Theme
C	Customer Perceptions
C7	The Socialscape

Content	Ref.
Positive impact	
Very easy-going and friendly people.	2GW079
I liked them, yeah. When I got there in the morning, I got there quite early and I started talking to a boy and we just got talking then about where we'd done it and when and how we'd liked it and things like that. I got on really well with all of them...and the others when they arrived.	2JD011
It was nice to meet everyone and find out what experience they had, so you had a general idea of what they were all about.	2CB065
Well, in a way, the beginning was all getting to know each other and I was thinking about having a good time.	2SH012
They were quite nice. When we all met together, I wasn't too sure who they were, but they were nice.	2HM067
Oh they were quite cool, I liked them. A really good atmosphere. Jamie seemed really nice, because he was quite quiet, but one of the others seemed a bit pushy! (Laughs). He just had to first to do everything, I don't know, his general attitude was just....him, really.	2TG010
It was like, really good because our group got on quite well, which was nice	2TG047
I made friends with everyone in the group, really, it was a lovely group, everybody was really friendly.	2CB004
The people on the course, I got on with them, so that was all really good.	2HM187
They were quite friendly, actually. They were all younger than me and basically, nice guys.	2CP122
They were OK. We got on well.	2CS012
They were fine.	2AS059
They seemed fine.	2KH010
I enjoyed watching people mess up and get it wrong! They kept trying to play games with each other and splash each other, but they kept losing control.	2KL038
Everyone else was falling in so you felt like the same as them, it was good.	2TW004
No, we were, like, board to board and I kept saying "I'm going to win" and he said "No you're not!" We were just making jokes.	2CP173
I felt like, we weren't kind of separate people, we were all one unit together, we all worked and helped each other, so I feel I got more than I thought I'd get. I wasn't expecting our group to be as strongly bonded as it was.	2CB040
Arrival on the second day, just knowing everyone and sitting round chatting. On the water saying 'hello' to each other...getting along.	2CS050
Neutral Impact	
Erm......they seemed OK. I didn't really, sort of, say much to them to start with. It was later, lunch, when we started chatting a bit.	2DK010
They seemed OK.	2TH010

Er, they were all right	2CR066
They were OK.	2AB048
Antisocialscape -ve	
I wasn't too keen on one person. He rammed you and tried to and tried to get you in the water. He was trying to be silly and I was trying to get on. It spoilt it just a little bit.	2PM083
[Did this affect your enjoyment?] Well, partly because all the boys put on their wetsuits inside out! And, because we were all going on at the same time there were queues to get into the wetsuit room. He *[the instructor]* did say they're inside out. I think the boys just didn't listen.	2AS043
There was K, I think her name was. We were on the big boat this afternoon and we were told to all sit on one side to see how much it would make the boat turn and she got a bit worried and started screaming and didn't go on any of the Toppers because she got a bit worried. Yeah, it did annoy me a bit, because I would have liked to muck about a bit more, but we weren't allowed to because she got a bit worried.	2CR072
Antisocialscape no issue	
Well, they were OK. One of them I didn't really get on with because he was a bit of a brat (laughs). Oh he just didn't co-operate with anybody or anything and was kind of in his own little land and then, I just didn't like him, I thought he was really, just, weird. *[Did this affect your enjoyment?]* No you always get one!	2HM061
Sometimes they could be a bit stupid, but they weren't holding up the group or anything. It was just sometimes they could be a bit, they were trying to push us in and stuff, but that was just in fun.	2CB051
She definitely didn't ruin our fun...	2CB019
[Two crashes with others] First time, accident, OK. Second time a bit 'grrrr' . Yes, but it happens, so...it was accidental.	2HH124
One of them was a bit strange, but I didn't have much to do with him.	2HH062
Mutual Dependence	
Well, I was stuck and couldn't get onto the jetty and by the time I had my third go everyone else was, kind of, over by the boards. I'd been helping everyone else get up onto the jetty because I was the tallest, so I wanted to make sure I had all my goes.	2CP225
This morning everyone just went and got all the boards and sails and like, everyone helped everyone else. It was as though no one was doing their own thing. Then we just got on the boards and sailed off. I think that's because we weren't kind of as worried because we got know each other better and we were more friendly to each other. More comfortable. I noticed that and it was really nice.	2TG060
That was because I didn't want to see her look like a fool. If she didn't understand it and she got embarrassed then that would be, I just didn't want her to get embarrassed.	2HM091
Well, I just saw her on the speedboat and I thought, well, if that was me and I was scared, I would want someone to do that to me and I thought that, you know, there's no point in having one person out of the group who doesn't know what's going on, so I just said she could come with me	2CB016
They were a really friendly bunch, we got along OK, I helped them	2TW064

269

out, even. If they were struggling and D was with someone else, you'd just help them get their sail on their board, stuff like that.	
I think that when you are in a group of people like that you have to get on with them. You also have to trust them as well and we all trusted each other not to crash!	2JD041
I thought of us all together, because, like, we'd known each other for two days and we were all working together,	2CB090
Initial Introductions by the Instructor – not needed	
Well, there wasn't really any introductions, I just kind of, heard people calling them whatever they were called. I was OK without it. I didn't need that.	2HM030
Initial Introductions by the Instructor –needed	
J did not get everyone in the group to introduce themselves, which would have been good to get to know them.	2SJ014
It would have helped us getting to talk to each other quicker	2DK024
We got on OK, but maybe it would have been good, because it took some time to talk to the others properly, like we knew them.	2KH014
Well, we did have our names on our helmets, so we could speak to each other...but I think it would have been worthwhile us introducing ourselves.	2CS018
I think so, then you could have helped each other early on and not feel about them 'I don't want to be partners with him because I don't know him.'	2TW082
Well, I felt sorry for J, because we three knew each other and he was quite quiet. But it might have been a good idea, because for a long time we all just sort of smiled at each other a lot and said stuff like 'do you want a hand' but didn't really talk. I don't know, maybe there should have been more group things at the start, maybe not introductions, but say, just a little ten-minute game like the other group was doing.	2TG014
Initial Introductions by the Instructor –neutral	
After sitting rafted up you started talking to each other and some of the girls knew each other and I knew another girl, she is L's cousin and A found some friends, so it was all fine.	2AS081

APPENDIX THREE:

Sample Pages From My Research Diary

05/05/07 Meeting SB/Barry Davies.
Usta
2nd Supervisor OK to do.

Discussed nurses focus, contribution to body
of knowledge, how a future researcher could use this
research
↳ What is the experience of young people in
other elective studies? What are the agents/agendas?
How can this research inform management.

More theory: Statisfars(Statisfiers)
           Zones of Tolerance
           CIT - Mary Jo Bitner
           Participant Observation
           Explicitly state Action Research

Autumn conference (paper by 01/05 : Frontiers of Service
in Tennessee, USA.

WWReflecting research Arnold & Price : in Gabbott & Hogg Reader.

⊛ Examples from Nursing research

A very good meeting!
Could be a fast & dirty result! Easy
to fast tracking R&D is a possibility (<4 years).

Reduce the scope of the research to focus
on children's experience and how different agents
input on this.
Objective for research: to inform management.

(2)/05/07
Finished R&Y draft last night
⟹ SB for comment today.

03/09/04

1. Copy Service Design Stuff → DC (pmt?)
2. Cut & paste Service Delivery? (pmt?)
3. Dr. Hoofer → Zip problem.
3½. Start writing Service Design
ex. 003ck's met JB
4b. Relayout Results Structure
4½. Add Management Control to Service Design
    ↳ New Structure

Generally positive discussion, reinforced my thoughts.

Found the missing document for Design!
↳ Cut & pasted and have changed the structure.

06/09/04

1. Copy new Results structure from Zip & print
2. Matthew - printer cartridge (was printer not set up
3. Write Ch X as much as possible
4. Order files to keep only we files pending - all always to WIP (Chapters) pmt
5. Reprint supervised results structure

(+) lots of reworking these two chapters because of the overlaps. It is difficult to separate out some aspects

THIS IS FUCKING
INFURIATE!

This morning I think I have nothing left to give to anything; do some file maintenance! Physical (mental) absolutely no reserves and this is the worst time for it in terms of the day job — being on the new semester? Not working good.

Ch 4 structure is crap. It needs a complete overhaul wrt Ch Solo
⇒ becomes one chapter?
    ↳ certainly two to the integrated
    ↳ to one chapter

③. Design (Delivery. PZB gap model).
①. Design should incorporate everything
    (Buswell & Williams) but this reference needs
    to be aligned with Stuley's theoretical framework

↳ No go back