

Laws, E. (2002). *The design analysis and improvement of tourist services*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing.

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*The Design Analysis and Improvement of Tourists Services* is Volume 7 in the *Advances in Tourism Applications Series*. The focus of the volume is the improvement of the quality of tourism service. Laws draws on his background in the study of airline service to illustrate service deficits, methods of gathering data on those deficits, and ways to improve the quality of tourist services. The author is to be applauded for tackling this elusive and subjective area of study. His ability to ground the subject to methodical study is noteworthy.

The text begins by providing the reader with authentic and palpable rationale for the study of service quality in tourism in the first chapter, *Service Quality in Tourism*. Eye-catching statistics from the World Tourism Organization confront the reader with the breadth and depth of the impact of tourism and its projected growth in years to come. Laws segues into his development of the value of service in tourism citing ancient as well as modern references as illustrations. When focus is shifted to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the lack of a mention of the September 11, 2001 events at the World Trade Center in New York City, New York, especially considering its relevance to the airline industry, unfortunately dates the text. The events of September 11, 2001 would now seem central to any discussion of the elasticity in the demand for tourist services and of the central role played by the airlines in the tourism industry.

Chapter 2, *Tourism Service Quality Research*, introduces the application of research of the quality of tourism service. Laws sets out the fundamentals of both quantitative and qualitative research as it applies to related topics such as the factors contributing to tourists' satisfaction, qualities unique to services as opposed to manufacturing for the purposes of research, and the challenges facing service management. Laws keenly parses the factors he analyses with depth and clarity.

The author also highlights the fundamental role of a systems approach in studying and managing tourism service. The discussion defines a system and applies that definition to tourism. Unfortunately, while the external environment is addressed in the system treatment, the internal environment or service to the employee is not covered in this chapter. Even though internal service issues are partially addressed later in chapters 7 and 8, it would be useful early in this chapter on systems as well.

One section of Chapter 2 is devoted to identifying a theoretical framework within which to study services in tourism. This section does a good job of defining a subject it describes as “soft” and “messy”; problems recognized as people-related that are unstructured and unpredictable. The common feature to previous studies was identified as “human beings in social roles, trying to take purposeful action.” That feature’s fungible nature sets the stage for a two-paragraph description of qualitative research in case studies. This discussion could be expanded, however, especially for use by undergraduate students who might be less familiar with the fundamentals of qualitative research.

Laws’ third chapter tackles the analysis of tourism service experiences and breaks down tourism into a number of different events within categories such as pre-flight, flight, and arrival at destination. The Consumerist Gap Model is illustrated both in text and by diagrams that impart to the reader the significance of customer dissatisfaction to the survival of a company. However, the presentation of the model theory is somewhat disjointed in that its presentation is interrupted by a series of discussions on research methodologies. These are valuable but their placement within the chapter is awkward. Future editions could benefit from placing figure 3.3 proximal to figure 3.2 as well as the case study to allow the assimilation of the use of a model with the actual experience.

Chapter 4, *Tourism Service Delivery Systems*, addresses techniques of service operations and techniques of blueprinting and service mapping for analysis purposes. Blueprint and service mapping splay service into a series of relationships and interactions among tourists, service personnel, and technology to facilitate the design and improvement of service. The author describes the influence of systems as they relate to service delivery. He also illustrates relationships between ineffective systems and ineffective service. The case studies involving the airline industry readily exemplify the value of mapping.

I particularly liked the discussion of service. Lacking, however, are examples of performance standards which, I feel, would have enhanced this chapter. Laws provides a good discussion of service mapping, a concept for analyzing the geography of a service, and addresses such problems as bottlenecks in service. It would be helpful, however, to include an illustration of the influences that blueprinting and mapping have on revenues in service added to this chapter.

The fifth and sixth chapters address quality and marketing of service. Chapter 5 provides an effective treatment of defining quality and identifying the gaps between service expectations and experiences. The chapter also provides an excellent application of the theory to a case study involving a trip to Leeds Castle. The case study shows how a tightly run organization can experience service gaps owing to the highly subjective nature of the subject matter.

In chapter 6, the section on care and enhanced services gives a good explanation of how services are delivered. This chapter explores the effect of exaggerated advertising on satisfaction levels. Unfortunately, Case Study 6.1 appears to be text discussion about a case study, but the actual case study is not presented.

Improving service systems is the focus of the next chapter. Laws acknowledges the crucial role of staff training owing to the weight consumers give to their experiences when interacting with personnel. Figure 7.1 provides a useful illustration of the number of customer contacts at a variety of destinations. The discussions on the rationale managers apply when they minimize employee discretion and judgment is particularly interesting. As always, internal interactions and relationships could be discussed and treated with greater detail. The associations and interactions between supervisory and subordinate staff can be a critical consideration when delivering quality service.

The last chapter addresses the importance of inclusion of all employees in the service continuous improvement process. Laws succinctly clarifies the functions of effective service managers and the value sets necessary for organizations to be successful. He concludes with Table 8.5 that illustrates manager control factors. The summary of the chapter is a set of slides of the key points brought forth in each of the eight chapters.

In summary, Laws provides excellent rationale for the study of service quality and the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data is particularly helpful. Also this text provides a sort of cultural experience for American students through the use of the British spelling. The only recommendations not noted would be the addition of questions at the end of chapters to help facilitate discussion. Overall, with some adjustments and corrections of text placement and function of illustration, this excellent text would be useful as an option in any tourism class.