Case Notes

# Module C: Waiting Line Models

# The Psychology of Waiting in Lines

## Case Summary

*This case applies Maister’s psychological theory to understand the psychological attributes of waiting. It suggests six ways for businesses to consider in reducing customers’ perceptions of waiting time in order to improve their satisfaction.*

Case Analysis *This case illustrates how Maister’s psychological theory can be applied to help businesses minimize the negative consequences of forcing customers to wait.. Maister proposed that satisfaction = perception – expectation. As a result, businesses can improve customer satisfaction by reducing customers’ perception of waiting times.*

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

1. What does this case suggest about the way in which operations and queuing models must also address the psychology of waiting lines in formulating methods for minimizing wait?

Maister proposed that satisfaction = perception – expectation. Seven ways are suggested to improve customers’ satisfaction by reducing their perception of waiting time: (1) keep customers occupied while waiting, (2) let customers start queuing early, (3) reduce uncertainty about service offering, (4) reduce uncertainty about waiting time, (5) explain reasons for a delay, (6) use first-come-first served single-queue (as opposed to multi-queue) ordering system, (7) use a group-based (as opposed to solo) queuing system.

2. Think of a long wait that you experienced in the past week. How would one or more of these attributes of waiting have improved your perception of the wait and increased your satisfaction with the service encounter?

I was waiting behind what I thought would be a shorter check-out line in a supermarket only to be disappointed to see the line next me was moving faster. If the supermarket adopts a single-queue multiple-server system, then my satisfaction with the check-out service would be improved.

3. Suppose you were hired to manage the operations flow at a local restaurant as the front-end manager. The most common complaint that the restaurant receives is the long wait times in order to get a table, and overall profitability is starting to suffer as a result of lower patronage rates. Employ at least four of the above attributes in redesigning the front end to increase customer satisfaction.

To increase customer satisfaction with waiting for a table at the restaurant, the restaurant could (1) provide customers an opportunity to order drinks from the bar, (2) allow customers to wait in an area with entertaining displays, (3) let customers know how long the wait will be, (4) let customers know how many other patrons are ahead of them.