

Blueprinting the service company Managing service processes efficiently

Sabine Fließ^{a,*}, Michael Kleinaltenkamp^{b,1}

^aLehrstuhl für Dienstleistungsmanagement, Fern Universität Hagen, Profilstr. 8, D-58084 Hagen, Germany

^bInstitut für Marketing/Weiterbildendes Studium Technischer Vertrieb, Freie Universität Berlin, Otto-von-Simson-Str. 13/15, D-14195 Berlin, Germany

Abstract

Service processes require the participation of the customer: Without the customer, service processes cannot take place. The fact that the service provider is dependent on customer participation causes difficulties in managing service processes efficiently and effectively because customer's contributions can only be influenced by the provider up to a certain extent. The article will stress the management of service process efficiency. Therefore, a production-theoretic view will be used to identify the sources of efficiency problems. Based on this approach, we will differentiate between customer-induced and customer-independent activities for a better efficiency management. The well-known blueprinting technique will be used in a revised version based on the production-theoretic approach to identify starting points for improving process efficiency. Differentiating between three areas of process management, we will suggest measures of factor combination management, information management and property rights management.

© 2002 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Customer integration; Integrative value chain; Service management; Service efficiency; Production theory; Blueprinting

1. Customer participation and its impact on service process efficiency

The most remarkable thing about service processes is that they do not take place without the customer (Chase, 1978; Corsten, 1988; Cowell, 1984; Grönroos, 1990; Hilke, 1989; Hoffman and Bateson, 1997; Kurtz and Clow, 1998; Larsson and Bowen, 1989; Lovelock and Young, 1979; Meffert, 1995; Meyer, 1993; Mills, 1985; Schneider and Bowen, 1983; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000, p. 319). Before the supplier can really start with the production and delivery of a service, the customer's requirements, above all, need to be specified. For this aim, the service provider is dependent on the customer's information about the requirements the service has to fulfill, where and how the service should take place or should be used, etc. (Mengen, 1993; Krimm, 1995). Moreover, some service processes require the participation of the customer during all or some service operations. As a coproducer (Cowell, 1984; Edvardsson et al., 1994; Meyer and

Blümelhuber, 1994; Schade, 1995) or “partial” employee (Bateson, 1985; Schneider and Bowen, 1983; Kelley et al., 1992), the customer may take an active part in the service operation, such as in self-service restaurants. Participation can also be limited to a more passive form of involvement (Eiglier and Langeard, 1999; Maleri, 1997), a requirement of physical presence such as in surgery, a need for the customer to be merely mentally present such as in education or the need to start and stop a process such as in car repairs (Langeard, 1981; Hoffman and Bateson, 1997; Meyer, 1994).

From the service provider's point of view, increasing customer participation may lead to more efficiency, as the customer carries out tasks that otherwise have to be carried out by the supplier's employees (Hoffman and Bateson, 1997). However, increasing customer participation also causes high demands on the provider's service process management: Missing, delayed or unqualified customer contributions influence costs, time and tasks carried out by the supplier's employees (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). Important influences of customer contributions can be identified in the following areas:

- Meeting customer's requirements is dependent on customer's contributions, particularly on information given

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49-2331-987-2534; fax: +49-2331-987-4494.

E-mail addresses: sabine.fliess@fernuni-hagen.de (S. Fließ), michael.kleinaltenkamp@wiwiss.fu-berlin.de (M. Kleinaltenkamp).

¹ Tel.: +49-30-8385-2493/2494; fax: +49-30-832-57-46.

by the customer but also on the quality of customer participation (Brentani and Ragot, 1996; Kelley et al., 1992; Kurtz and Clow, 1998; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000).

- Delayed customer contributions can cause bottlenecks and capacity problems and lead to an overall delay of service delivering (Corsten and Stuhlmann, 1997; Hoffman and Bateson, 1997; Kleinaltenkamp and Marra, 1997; Kurtz and Clow, 1998; Mudie and Cottam, 1999).
- Delayed and unqualified customer contributions, furthermore, can cause additional costs, e.g. when new or changed contributions are required (Maleri, 1997; Mudie and Cottam, 1999).
- Changing or uncertain customer requirements can affect service effectiveness as well as service efficiency (Mills and Moberg, 1990, p. 105; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000, p. 323).

To solve these problems, we can find a bunch of different suggestions. From an operations management perspective, naturally prevailing in efficiency management, it is suggested to standardize, automate or mechanize service processes (Northcraft and Chase, 1985), keep customer involvement within limits (Chase, 1978), delegate activities to the customer (Maister, 1982), or switch from a professional service production approach to a job shop, a batch process or an assembly approach (Bateson, 1990; Levitt, 1972).

The operations management perspective can conflict with the marketing perspective: Sometimes the customer wants to participate to a larger extent in order to receive customized or individualized services according to his specific needs (Engelhardt et al., 1993; Lovelock, 1990) and sometimes he/she likes to play an active part in service processing (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). On the other hand, the customer might not want to participate at all because s/he has delegated the tasks to the provider or because s/he does not have the time, necessary skills or knowledge to take over these functions (Collier, 1987; Corsten and Stuhlmann, 1997).

Therefore, one of the most important goals in service process management is to make sure that customer participation takes place when, where and in the way it is needed to operate efficiently without neglecting customer satisfaction (Palmer and Cole, 1995). In order to achieve this aim, we will introduce a production-theoretic approach of service processes. This approach will be used to identify three areas of potential inefficiencies in service processes: (1) information management insufficiencies, (2) failures in factor combination, e.g. the operation process itself, and (3) incompletely defined property rights. The approach will further be used to distinguish between two different kinds of activities within a service process: customer-induced activities and customer-independent activities. It will be shown that these different activities are connected to different management tasks and, therefore, give new insights in efficiency management.

In the second part of the article, we will combine the production-theoretic approach with the well-known technique of blueprinting. Blueprinting is normally seen as a heuristic method for analyzing and designing service processes. Basing the blueprinting on a production-theoretic approach, we will show that the introduction of a new “line” will clarify points of departure for efficiency management.

In Section 3, we will suggest different actions in information management, factor combination management and property rights management for improving service process efficiency by using the production-theoretic approach and the blueprinting technique as well.

2. A production-theoretic approach of service processes

As the customer is often viewed as a coproducer (Cowell, 1984; Edvardsson et al., 1994; Meyer and Blümelhuber, 1994; Schade, 1995; Mills and Moberg, 1982) or as a “partial” employee (Bateson, 1985; Schneider and Bowen, 1983; Kelley et al., 1992), the vision of the customer as a productive resource (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000) is not totally new. Some authors actually suggest that if customers contribute effort, time or other resources to the service production process, they should be considered as part of the organization (Mills et al., 1983; Mills and Morris, 1986). From a production-theoretic approach, these suggestions go too far. Based on this view and with reference to the three dimensions of services (potential, process and outcome) (Donabedian, 1980; Corsten and Hilke, 1994; Hilke, 1989), we can distinguish between two main stages of service production (Corsten, 1985; Altenburger, 1980; Gerhardt, 1987).

The first stage refers to the service provider’s potential. A provider’s potential comprises capacity factors (assets) as well as commodity factors and provides the foundation on which all value creation is based (Gutenberg, 1983). For a bank, capacity factors consist of the buildings, computers, software and employees, whereas commodity factors are paper, pencils or energy. It may be that from time to time finished and/or semifinished goods are produced in terms of a *speculative precombination* (Schneider, 1993) of internal production factors, i.e. production processes taking place without specific customer orders having triggered them. The goods resulting from such anticipative production runs, and, as mentioned, varying in their degree of completion, together with capacity and commodity factors will then become part of a supplier firm’s *internal factors*. Examples for such precombinations in a bank may be the preparation of information folders containing different kinds of leaflets or the preparation of service product bundles for different customer groups. So, the service provider’s potential typically consists of the service provider’s resources and capacity ready to serve the customer.

The second stage of the service production activities involves the customer in the service operation. From a

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات