

Building a Blue Print for Service Quality for Indian Small & Medium Manufacturing Enterprises

S. K. Gandhi, Anish Sachdeva, Ajay Gupta

Department of Industrial and Production Engineering, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar National Institute of Technology, Jalandhar, Punjab, India

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Abstract

Along with the awakening to the domination of services in the Wolds's economies, there is a growing emphasis in business practice on creating meaningful, memorable customer experiences. There are a number of models trying to capture and define "Service Quality". They each have their strength and weaknesses. However, the core definitions of service Quality is simple and consistent, that is, service quality is customers thinking that they are getting better service than expected associated with actual delivery, where expectation is the level of service the customer hopes to receive. Most of the academic literature have focused on "What" aspects relating to service quality, however, little explicit coverage has been found on "How" aspects relating to service quality because of underlying belief that services (s) have no tangible value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Despite the dominance of services in modern economies, and their rapid growth worldwide, it is surprising how little research and how few methods and techniques exists to address this unique challenge. Notably, the manufacturing industries have a long tradition of design for specification unlike services, which commonly lack concrete specifications for which process documentations and analysis tools have been in use for many years, for example, "flow charts", or "flow process charts", date back to at least 1921, when the legendary Frank Gilbreth gave a presentation titled "Process Charts- First Steps in Finding the One Best Way" at the annual meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (Graham, 2004). However, flowcharting and the various flowcharting tools have been useful in their own right, but limited in depicting distinguishing element of service operations (Sampson and Froehle, 2006). In this paper, we review the most popular flowcharting framework as applied to services as 'service blueprinting'.

1. Service Blueprinting-Introduction

The Service Quality can be improved innovatively using 'service blueprinting' as it is a picture or map that accurately portrays the service system so that the different people involved in providing it can understand and deal with it objectively regardless of their roles or their individual points of view. Blueprints are particularly useful at the design stage of service development allowing firms to simultaneously visualize the service processes, the points of customer contact, and the physical evidence of service from the customer's point of view. While the essentials of service blueprinting were introduced two decades ago, the method has evolved significantly as a useful approach for addressing many of the challenges in services design and innovation and is particularly open to customer experience design and innovation and is particularly open to customer experience design. Blueprints also illuminate and connect the underlying support processes throughout the organization that drive and support customer- focused service execution.

According to Shostack (1984, 1987), service blueprinting was initially introduced as a process control technique for services that offers several advantages: it was more precise than verbal definitions; and it could identify

failure points in a service operation. One early adaptation was the clarification of service blueprinting as a process for plotting the customer process against the organizational structure (Kingman-Brundage, 1989). Service blueprinting was further developed to distinguish between onstage and backstage activities. These key components still form the basis of the technique.

Service Blueprint Components	
Physical Evidence	
Customer Actions	
Line of interaction	
Onstage Contact	
Employee Actions	
Line of visibility	
Backstage Contact	
Employee Actions	
Line of internal Interaction	
Support Processes	

Fig: 1. Service Blueprint Components

The key components of service blueprints are shown in fig 1. They are Customer Actions, Onstage/Visible Contact Employee Actions, Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Action, Support Processes, and Physical Evidence.

The customer actions area includes the steps, choices, activities, and interactions that customers perform in purchasing, consuming and evaluating the service-delivery

process. Customer actions are depicted chronologically across the top of the blueprint. What makes blueprint different from other flowcharting approaches is that the actions of the customer are central to the creation of the blueprint, and as such they are typically laid out first so that all other activities can be seen as supporting the value proposition offered to or co-created with the customer.

The next critical component is the onstage/visible contact employee actions, separated from the customer by the line of interaction. Those actions of frontline contact employees that occur as part of a face-to-face encounter are depicted as onstage contact employee's actions. Every time the line of interaction is crossed via a link from the customer to a contact employee (or company self –service technology, etc.) a moment of truth has occurred.

The next important component of the blueprint is the backstage/visible contact employee actions, separated from the onstage actions by the line of visibility. Everything that appears above the line of visibility is seen by the customer, while everything below it is invisible.

The fourth critical component of the blueprint is support processes separated from contact employees by the internal line of interaction. These are all the activities carried out by individuals and units within the company who are not contact employees but that need to happen in order for the service to be delivered. Vertical lines from the support area connecting with other areas of the blueprint show the inter-functional connections and support that are essential to delivering the service to the final customer.

Finally, for each customer action, and every moment of truth, the physical evidence that customers come in contact with is described at the very top of the blueprint. These are the tangibles that customers are exposed that can influence their service quality.

2. Guidelines for Blueprinting

Applying blueprinting in practice for service quality requires following guidelines:

1. Decide on the company's service or service process to be blueprinted and the objective
2. Determine who should be involved in the blueprinting process
3. Modify the blueprinting technique as appropriate
4. Map the service as it happens most of the time
5. Note disagreements to capture learning
6. Be sure customers remain the focus
7. Track insights that emerge for future action
8. Develop recommendations and future actions based on blueprinting goals.
9. If desired, create final blueprints for use within the organization

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Time has now come to visualize for developing new services with acceptable 'service quality' base on traditional engineering approach to be called as service engineering, which is concerned with the systematic development and design of service products. For this suitable models have to be classified as follows:

- A product model that describes, what a service delivers (description of the service, data models), that is it deals with "what" aspects of service quality.
- A process model that describes, how a service delivers (definition of process steps, definitions of interfaces), that is, it deals with "how" aspects of service quality, say, using service blueprinting. Visualization of the service process is particularly useful for decision makers, contact personnel, experts and customers.
- A resource model that plans the resources needed for service delivery (staff, material, IT infrastructures), which is to be the domain for practicing trainers. Though the discussion of this paper is extended only to service blueprinting, it is well understood that there will be an ongoing set of activities as progress to be continuously monitored for results, and actions through completed work-plan tracking sheets having bases for classifying the respondents

3. Conclusion

Referring to a retrospective commentary by Lovelock (2001) on new tools for achieving service quality, it is always vital to get to the root cause of service failure rather than simply dealing with symptoms. Almost all service quality models describe only "what" aspects of service quality to be referred as symptoms, however, "how" aspects to be referred as root cause have been significantly overlooked. Emphasis on "how" aspects would rather than being considered a one-time fix. As every business has a mix of interactive processes and independent processing, recently Sampson (2010) has defined the "service science" as the science of multi-entity interactive processes and proposed Process-Chain-Network (PCN) Diagrams to help researchers and practitioners in documenting, designing, analyzing and reconfiguring process processes in documentation, designing, analyzing and reconfiguring processes of all types by considering useful features of Service Blueprinting alongside accommodating a network representations of service processes. 'Service Quality' construct is not merely a combinations of the service and quality phenomena, but is much more than that. It is to be noted that the quest for service quality through design of a service process is an ongoing journey rather than a destinations which would still undergo changes.

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