

Interfaces between servant processes and service classification

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Abstract

In this paper a theoretical approach was developed to analyze servant processes' characteristics in different type of services, as professional, shop and mass services. facilitator, responsiveness, flexibility, costumer focus and tend to be higher in professional services. Responsiveness and simplicity tend to be higher in mass services while only responsiveness is highlighted on service shop.

Keywords: servant processes, servant company, service classification

Introduction

Service is an activity or process performed in most cases, through the interaction between the customer and the service provider, using infrastructure or systems available, in order to solve problems or meet customer needs without necessarily offering something physical or material as a result, which characterizes its intangibility (GRÖNROOS, 2009). Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2005), in turn, highlight the difficulty in separating products and services, as they usually are associated: both a product is necessary for the provision of services such as the provision of service is present when purchasing a product. The authors also emphasize the simultaneity of production and consumption; the customer is considered a co-producer of what is being offered. Thus, services are designated as activities that require interaction between suppliers and their customers, in a physical environment or not, which has the aim to meet the needs of the applicant who participates in the production process with more or less intensity, at the same time that he receives the activity for having no ability or not willing to perform them.

The degree of interaction between customers and suppliers motivated Silvestro (1999) to propose a classification of services into three categories: at one extreme are professional services, characterized by low demand and high customization, whereas in the other, are the mass services, with high frequency, but executed in a more standardized than the first one; between them there is the service shop, with average repetition and customization.

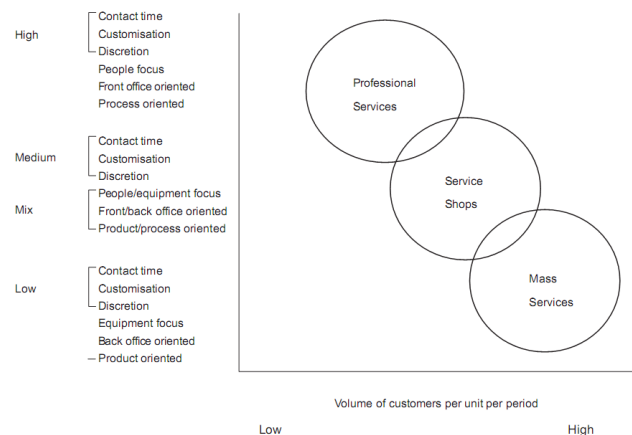


Figure 1- Service Classification by Silvestro (1999)

The quality of services provided can be defined as the ratio of the expectations generated by consumers and perceived benefit for them (FITZSIMMONS AND FITZSIMMONS, 2005; GRÖNROOS, 2009). It can be evaluated in an objective manner, considering technical or compliance with specifications aspects, or may be seen in a more subjective way, where the characteristics of the interaction are prevalent (FITZSIMMONS AND FITZSIMMONS, 2005; PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML AND BERRY, 2006; GRÖNROOS, 2009).

Thus, it is interesting to see “how” organizations meet the needs of their customers rather than just settle for “what” they are doing. So Gonçalves (2000) defines processes as responsible for turning inputs (materials or information) into outputs (goods or services). It is observed that for the same type of activity, depending on customer needs, he can fit in professional services, service shop or mass services.

In order to do beyond what the customer expects, NOBREGA (2009) explains the concept of serving as the execution of activities in an organized way to provide benefits to the user. The author notes that a completely servant entity should base their principles on dimensions of culture and service strategy, in such a way that the servant behavior of employees linked to a servant leadership runs processes resulting in a good or service that also presents these servant characteristics.

Derivated from elements listed by Nobrega (2009) for servant behavior, servant processes elements are: environmental respect, facilitator, responsiveness, simplicity, flexibility, customer focus and informative. It is understood by environmental respect that processes designed to promote environmental preservation; facilitator is related to that processes that facilitate access, contact and use of services, not putting obstacles, shortcuts or other type of difficulty that may cause interruption to customers’ routine; responsiveness deals with process capacity of answer to requests or inquiries by customer or user, and initiative to anticipate these; simplicity shows not bureaucratic processes that can be executed in a fast and simple way, not wasting customers’ time or energy; flexibility indicates processes that can suit different needs by customer and user; customer focus reveals processes designed to serve the customer, consistently emphasizing not only the necessary activities, but the benefits to the customer; and informative is that process that keep the customer informed before and during the execution of the process or service. These variables can be studied to enable a greater understanding of how processes are being carried out within the organization.

Finally, this paper aims to analyze the interfaces between the classification of services proposed by Silvestro (1999) and the elements of servant processes nominated by Nobrega (2009), in order to answer the following questions: what are the interfaces between the classification of services proposed by Silvestro and Nobrega's (2009) servant process elements? What are the elements most present in each category presented?

Fundamentals

Services

In its nature of activity or process, service is something that cannot be stored because of its intangibility, and in most cases there is no possibility for one to experience it before buying it. This restriction by the companies causes the consumers to rely on the reputation of the provider, i.e. "customers try to reduce the uncertainty looking for quality of service signals, and drawing conclusions from concrete evidence, from used equipment, from involved people as well as from communications they receive"(KOTLER, HAYES and BLOOM, 2002).

The simultaneity between production and consumption in service operations make the experience of consuming be unique and evaluated subjectively by those who consume, i.e., even that for their performance, the same criteria are followed and the same resources are applied, some customers may be satisfied, while others not, characterizing the heterogeneity or variability (KOTLER, BLOOM and HAYES, 2002; FITZSIMMONS AND FITZSIMMONS, 2005). It is also characterized by being perishable, that is, if it is not used when it is available it may not be reloaded.

Lovelock and Wright (2001) also characterize services as stage or backstage activities. In the first situation there is greater interaction between customers and service providers through the front-line staff (attendants, salespersons), while in the second, tasks are developed more internally the organization, where the customer is not present.

The characteristics cited above differentiate services providers those manufacturing companies. The next section shows the possibility of grouping them from similar peculiarities.

Services Classification

The classification of services is important because of the particularities demanded in relation to how organizations are managed, primarily being separated by business segments such as healthcare, hospitality, education among others (COELHO, 2004); nevertheless to the author that is not enough because of the various ways how companies may offer a service within the same business.

Silvestro (1999), in turn, compares the number of customers served to the degree of involvement by both: provider as the user's own, resulting in an extreme that are mass services, which there is high demand and low interaction, while on the other hand come professional services, with lower frequency of request, but with high degree of customization. Between them is situated the service shop. A diagram called volume-variety diagonal represents this, as shown in Figure 1.

In Silvestro's model (1999), professional services are characterized by the active participation of the customer during the process of service specification. The relationship with the provider usually becomes a long term one, allowing greater customer retention even that it involves higher prices, because of the skills of the frontline in understanding the peculiarities of each customer, although the activity to be developed may be the same.

For mass services, processes are previously designed, without the direct participation of the customer at the time of providing (SILVESTRO, 1999). They generally do not differ, although there are several options that can be followed during customer interaction. Thus, they must know the customer needs, in order to allow greater speed in attendance.

Interactions between providers and customers is low and presented as short-term, unlike what occurs in professional services, and in general does not allow the creation of links. They try to be consistent, reliable, fast and give equal treatment to interested parties (SILVESTRO, 1999).

Because of the technical characteristics are most observed, service recovery tend to be more focused in this category, and may be used to try to reward the customer who does not feel satisfied with what was offered. Therefore the explicit guarantees, those given to customers before hiring the service, can be used to encourage complaints, which may promote internal improvements in the process (SILVESTRO, 1999).

Finally, the service shop blends properties of an extreme and the other. "The customer is interested in both the outcome of the service, as in the process" (COELHO, 2004). These are services where the customer participates to some extent, there being a variety in supply and demand reasonable. The organizations are not as strict as in mass services, nor as flexible as in professional services.

Services Quality

Service quality is related to what the consumer perceives, according, or not, to his expectations previously created by the characteristics delivered by the supplier. The company that stands for quality services should observe the quality as the customer perceive it, i.e., seek to meet their expectations so preferably overcome their perspectives as opposed to unacceptable quality, when prospects are not met (FITZSIMMONS AND FITZSIMMONS, 2005; GRÖNROOS, 2009)

The quality perceived by the customer is usually related to services processes, and can be classified in two dimensions: technical and functional (GRÖNROOS, 2009). At first, it can be more objectively evaluated, because it depends only on the technical solution of the problem. Comparing the quality of products, it would be like to verify if specifications are fulfilled. From this perspective, GARVIN (1984) defines this approach as based on manufacturing, highlighting "WHAT" or object. But the interactions between customer-supplier lead customer to expect much more than compliance, also considering features such as accessibility, appearance, behavior of service provider, reliability (GRÖNROOS, 2009). To this author, the more related to self-service, more quality would be perceived by the customer as a result of increased participation in its production. Anyway, this dimension runs through "WHAT" and cares more about the "HOW" and is referred to as functional quality of the process or simply process quality.

So, services quality shall be evaluated according to the following dimensions: i) reliability - ability to provide the promised service with confidence and accuracy, ii) responsiveness - willingness to help customers and provide the service promptly, iii) safety - knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence; iv) empathy - show interest, personal attention to customer v) tangible aspects - appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials (LOVELOCK AND WRIGHT, 2001; FITZSIMMONS AND FITZSIMMONS, 2005).

Therefore, the perceived quality of service comes through the relationship between the expected quality and experienced quality (PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML AND BERRY, 2006; GRÖNROOS, 2009) and it may be evaluated in an objective manner, when taking into

consideration technical or specifications compliance, or a more subjective context, when the characteristics of the interaction behaviors are prevalent, allowing processes assume a prominent role in the perception of quality by the customer, as described ahead.

Servant Processes

With the intention of understanding the concept of servant organization, it is necessary to clarify the concept of serving. Nobrega (2009) states that is to “provide benefits to those who one serves”. In a qualitative study conducted with 1282 participants of courses, lectures or seminars on the adoption of serving practice, that author found several meanings for the term, and 88% of the results showed the following characteristics: welfare practices, to be helpful, to get performance, to help, to attend (to serve meals), to give contributions (to provide results), to take responsibility (willingness to serve), to be less (subservient), generate benefits (meet customer needs) and add value (increase the utility).

From data obtained, the author sought to relate this concept to different dimensions present in an organization according Table 1.

Table 1 - Dimensions and Elements for a Servant Organization (Adapted from Nobrega, 2009)

<i>DIMENSIONS FOR SERVANT ORGANIZATION</i>						
<i>ELEMENTS FOR EACH DIMENSION</i>	<i>BEHAVIOR</i>	<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>PRODUCTS</i>	<i>PROCESSES</i>	<i>CULTURE</i>	<i>LEADERSHIP</i>
	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Internal Marketing</i>	<i>Intrinsic quality</i>	<i>Environmental respect</i>	<i>Focus on results</i>	<i>Results and Persuasion</i>
	<i>Simplicity</i>	<i>Good relations</i>	<i>Facilitates use</i>	<i>Facilitator</i>	<i>Respect</i>	<i>Educated and Patient</i>
	<i>Resignation</i>	<i>Access</i>	<i>Informative</i>	<i>Responsiveness</i>	<i>Serving</i>	<i>Listening and Stewardship</i>
	<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Supplementary Services</i>	<i>Intelligent</i>	<i>Simplicity</i>	<i>Responsive ness</i>	<i>Influent and Awareness</i>
	<i>Willingness to Help</i>	<i>People Development</i>	<i>Customer Focused</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Committed to Others</i>	<i>Empathy and Committed to People growth</i>
	<i>Welfare Practices</i>	<i>Social Responsibility</i>	<i>Environmental Non affective</i>	<i>Customer focus</i>	<i>Common good</i>	<i>Common good, Building Community</i>
	<i>Usefulness</i>	<i>Service focus</i>	<i>Supplementary Attributes</i>	<i>Informative</i>	<i>Usefulness and Efficiency</i>	<i>Educator</i>

Therefore, the purpose of a servant organization is to promote servant benefits to customers, but not only meet the demands made by them through execution of tasks. In this case, assuming that the technical quality of a service is met, i.e., that the customer receives from the supplier what he needs, the differentiation between organizations of same segment of activity may exist due to the way processes are used, defined as the logical sequence of interrelated tasks that support the accomplishment of the institution objectives (OLIVEIRA et al, 2010).

For evaluating how servant may be a process Table 2 shows some attributes to be analyzed in each element.

Table 2 - Elements and attributes for Servant Processes (elaborated by authors, 2012)

ELEMENTS FOR SERVANT PROCESSES						
ENVIRONMENTAL RESPECT	FACILITATOR	RESPONSIVENESS	SIMPLICITY	FLEXIBILITY	CUSTOMER FOCUS	INFORMATIVE
Reduce	Participation	Precaution	Agility	Adaptation	Systematization	Information
Reuse	Conservation	Service Recovery	Spontaneity	Customization	Evaluation	Interaction
Recycle	Access	Answers/Feedback	Simplification	Decentralization	Serving	Divergence

For the environmental respect element following attributes were chosen: reduce, when the organization reduces the amount of material used in the execution process, in order guarantee results. The attribute reuse complements reduce, once it allows optimization of resources; and finally, recycle, that transforms resources would not have usefulness and makes it fit for use again, or give it another purposes (ROSA, 2006; ISO 14000 on CASTRO, 2009).

Regarding being a facilitator, participation puts consumer as coauthor of the process (BITNER et al, 1997; CHENG AND TAM, 1997;), conservation is related to the conditions of operation, if there are environments and equipment in good working condition (PARASURAMAN et al, 1988; HILL, 1995; ALLRED, 2001), whereas the access is related to contact possibility from consumer to organization people, environments and / or equipment needed to run the process (JOHNSTON, 1995; HILL, 1995; BITNER et al, 1997; ALLRED, 2001; DAL BELLO, 2004);

Related to responsiveness there may be listed attributes as precaution, through actions, mechanisms or devices capable of identifying, previously, possible failures (CHENG AND TAM, 1997); service recovery when extra benefits can be provided in a systematic and effective way for any possible errors (BOSHOF, 1997; THWAITES and WILLIAMS, 2006), and the answers / feedback relayed to the customers or users for their requests (PARASURAMAN et al, 1988); JOHNSTON, 1995; HILL, 1995; ALLRED, 2001; DENTON in EBERLE, 2010).

The next element, simplicity, brings as parameters agility, in order to enable delivery of results in a fast way (CHENG AND TAM, 1997; DAL BELLO, 2004); spontaneity, by using people, environments and compatible equipment the purpose for which they were specified (ALBRECHT in EBERLE, 2010), and the simplification of tasks through the use of information technology (HILL, 1995).

Then, flexibility is studied from adaptations, i.e., allows process to run within a defined margin of confidence (JOHNSTON, 1995; CHENG and TAM, 1997); customization is related to the wishes and desires of the user which can be met satisfactorily (ALLRED, 2001; MARCHETTI et al in ANDRADE et al, 2011), and decentralization, when executors are empowered to make decisions (FITZGERALD et. al. apud SILVESTRO, 1999).

In the sequence, customer focus presents the systematization, when systematic steps are defined to allow fluidity and continuity of processes, in order to ensure the continuous improvement process (CHENG AND TAM, 1997; DAL BELLO, 2004; ROSA, 2006 ; Biazzi et al, 2009).

For evaluation performance indicators are highlighted, by facilitating the evaluation and perception of fulfillment of what was planned (HILL, 1995; SOHAIL and SHAIKH, 2004; DAL BELLO, 2004; ROSA, 2006; BIAZZI et al, 2009; MARCHETTI et al in ANDRADE et al, 2011).

Process systematization can also affect this attribute, either positive or negative, when observing the term compliances. Finally, serving provides unique experience to customers or users through commitment, trust, confidence, empathy, care in providing the service (PARASURAMAN et al, 1988, JOHNSTON, 1995; ALLRED, 2001; DAL BELLO, 2004; MARCHETI et al in ANDRADE et al, 2011).

Servant processes also are informative from making available information on the various channels of communication, giving to the interested the possibility of searches, making the process traceable and proactively, not waiting customer request for information (JOHNSTON, 1995; HILL, 1995; CHENG AND TAM, 1997; DAL BELLO, 2004; ALLRED, 2001); they also allow interaction, exchange of information between provider and user (HILL, 1995; SILVESTRO, 1999), so making the reports do not differ in the functions responsible for transmitting them (DAL BELLO, 2004) becomes interesting. The information permeates all other documents submitted and is characterized by detailing specifically what is intended to offer. As the first link of contact between provider and customer, it is desirable that information are provided in a clear, objective and complete way, on a self-service as the search in websites or by front-line staff, who need to know the service to pass customer confidence that demand.

Given the above, servant processes are those that show respect to the environment, making life easier for the customer, which answers in simple and flexible ways, for being the focus of the organization, and make information available at all stages of service provision.

Methodology

This theoretical paper is based on the literature of services for dealing with following themes: characteristics, classification and quality of services, especially the classification proposed by Silvestro (1999) and quality defined by Grönroos (2009). Moreover, from studies Nobrega (2009), it presents the concepts of servant organization with a focus on servant processes dimension. Some attributes of high quality service were researched, so they were linked to one of seven elements of servant processes, according to author's perception.

Then, a relationship between the classification of services studied and elements of servant processes was classified as low, medium or high, based on the attributes derived from each element. Finally, assigning values from 0 to 10 to set scale, where 0 means no relationship and 10 full relationship, it was decided to establish that the low level is represented by the number 3, the medium one for by 6, and the high level by 9. In this case, the maximum score would be 63 points and the minimum 21 points.

Results and discussion

After presenting concepts in the previous sections, the interfaces between the classification of services proposed by Silvestro (1999) and attributes of servant processes described by Nobrega (2009) are analyzed. The deep analysis of the literature about the matter was useful to identify some misunderstanding with the original terminology, allowing the researchers to propose a different designation from professional services to customized services, in order to avoid the understanding that the services provided in other categories are taken as amateurs – non professionally.

The service shop and mass service were classified as low-interaction in relation to environmental respect, considering that frequency and demand characteristics are not prevalent for this element. Regarding personalized services, with the evolution and acceptance of green marketing, requests from customers concerned about this characteristic may be more frequent.

On the basis of attributes presented customized services may be more facilitators than other divisions, especially when focusing the participation of the customer to deliver him exactly what he is looking for. In mass services usually for costumers some pre-established options for him make the choice are showed. The shop service tends to give some options, while allowing some changes by the contractor.

For responsiveness, it is understood that the three categories are classified as high relation because generally are concerned with solve the problems presented by customers. In a specific way, differ each other in the form of record, analyze and answer the complaints.

In relation to simplicity, mass service processes are more flexible and simpler, unlike what happens in the customized service, because there may be some activities that require time to be personalized with quality.

Flexibility is a characteristic highly present in customized services because a greater relationship with the customer, making it easier for adaptations. In mass services, processes tend to be more rigid. The service shop is configured by a structure that is not as flexible as the first or so rigid as the second.

About the costumer focus, systematization and evaluation of indicators can become more present in the mass service, but the serving is more related to customized services, and it seems to be essential in servant processes. In the mass services focus already are in the tasks or goals, while it should be on customers.

Finally, customized services tend to be more informative than the others. Consumers from this category often look for information before, during and after acquiring the service, because there is more interaction between them and suppliers. On the other hand, it is also important for mass service dispose most information possible, and to provide almost an auto-service service, what does not always happen to customers. Service shops make available some information, however for more details customers have to contact the company. Table 3 presents, in a systematic way, these relationships.

Table 3 - Relation between servant processes element (NOBREGA, 2009) and service classification (SILVESTRO, 1999) (elaborated by authors, 2012)

	<i>Customized Service</i>	<i>Shop Service</i>	<i>Mass Service</i>
<i>Environmental Respect</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>	<i>Low (3)</i>	<i>Low (3)</i>
<i>Facilitator</i>	<i>High (9)</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>	<i>Low (3)</i>
<i>Responsiveness</i>	<i>High (9)</i>	<i>High (9)</i>	<i>High (9)</i>
<i>Simplicity</i>	<i>Low (3)</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>	<i>High (9)</i>
<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>High (9)</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>	<i>Low (3)</i>
<i>Costumer Focus</i>	<i>High (9)</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>
<i>Informative</i>	<i>High (9)</i>	<i>Medium (6)</i>	<i>Low (3)</i>
<i>Total points</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>36</i>

It can be seen that the customized services reach 54 points, the service shop services 42 and mass service 36, which represents 86%, 67% and 57% respectively of the total. Similarly, the categories were analyzed on how much they surpass the minimum (21 points). The first category exceeds by 157%, 100% in the second and third at 71%. This analysis allows a subjective view that the more elements of servant process are present in a service, the greater the tendency to approach the customized services. This does not mean, however, that they cannot be used in services that constitute a shop service or mass service.

Final Considerations

From the classification of services proposed by Silvestro (1999) in professional services, service shops and mass services, and the elements of the servant processes by Nobrega (2009): environmental respect, facilitator, responsiveness, simplicity, flexibility, costumer focus and informative, this research found that the more elements of servant processes are present in a service, it can be configured more customized services.

On comparing interfaces the types of service and the servant process elements, the study found that for professional services the strongest elements are: facilitator, responsiveness, flexibility, costumer focus and informative; for mass services the strongest elements are: responsiveness and simplicity; in the shop service the strongest elements is: responsiveness.

Due to being a theoretical work, the results shown in this paper were based on the “researcher” evaluations, and this was useful to develop the instrument for identifying the “correlation”, but it represents a lack of confidence, as well as it can be said as not representative. So, for further studies, it is strongly recommended to conduct survey with experts, or service managers, or even a group of some specified service’s customers. This shall contribute, in a more representative manner, to more confident results. A study can be conducted comparing answers from different segment respondents.

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