

Designing Service Process

From the customer's perspective a service is an experience, but from the service company's perspective a service is a process which should be designed and managed to create a desired customer's experience. Additionally, it can be an important component of a company's competitive strategy and a way to differentiate it from competitors. Service process is also linked with service quality evaluations and service outcome is linked with customer satisfaction evaluations. For all of these reasons, a service process should be examined in detail as well as the techniques used to display all elements of service delivery. A very simple form of describing a service process is a **flowchart**. It is a tool, which shows a sequence of encounters that customers have with a service company. **Flowcharting** helps to distinguish service elements like the core product and supplementary services and enables to assess the level of customer involvement in the service delivery process. A more sophisticated form than a flowchart and one of the most common techniques used to design new services or redesign existing ones is **blueprinting**, blueprint specifies how a service process should be constructed and includes detailed description of all activities visible and invisible to customers showing the linkages between them. When developing a blueprint, first it's necessary to identify key activities involved in a service process, distinguishing those which are experienced by customers and those which are other actions and support processes essential for service delivery. Between the front-stage and back-stage activities there is a line of visibility. For companies which take into account the customers' perspective, a very important aspect of designing a blueprint is identifying the interactions between customers and employees. Operationally oriented businesses would rather focus on managing the backstage activities. However, two perspectives are important and blueprinting might be a useful tool for operations managers as well as marketing managers.

A blueprint enables managers to identify potential fail points in the service process and modify the procedures to enhance the customers' experience and increase productivity. It is usually presented as a sequence of actions involving several stages and is similar to a theatrical script. When designing a blueprint it is also important to consider the type of a service encounter that a customer has with a service company, since it causes several implications for the service delivery process. The service encounter is a period during which a consumer directly interacts with a service, including its personnel, tangible elements and other aspects of the service environment. From the customer's perspective, the encounter differs depending on two factors: the level of tangibility of the service and the recipient of the service who might be either a customer or his or her possessions. High-contact encounters, such as hairdressing, healthcare, fitness and