

Foreword

Services cannot be produced without customer participation. This aspect involves significant consequences for services management. The integration of the customer and the integration of the external resources that customers need to provide require comprehensive means to coordinate the activities of suppliers and customers. Services management literature is based on the idea that the success of service companies mainly depends on an effective and efficient design of supplier and customer interfaces. As a result, academic and practice-oriented service management problems are concerned with managing service processes. However, most approaches are focused on the supplier process side. Here, numerous concepts as well as IT supported tools for service process documentation and service process management have been developed. Customer processes, on the contrary, have mostly been ignored even though it is obvious that they have a high impact on the overall success of the service process.

The present work is a major step forward to close that research gap. The author analyses the customer influence on efficiency and effectiveness of the service process depending on the customer's service process knowledge. The empirical data of the thesis was gained from a practice study: it was made in cooperation with a corporate division of T-Systems International that provides business customers with virus wall and firewall service packages for data network security. The study is based on the assumption that service customers have a script, i.e. a relatively precise image of the structure and process of the service transaction. Such a script essentially affects the coordination of supplier and customer process activities. Presumably, process efficiency and process effectiveness of a service transaction are more successful if there is a strong compliance between the customer script and the actual service process that is planned by the service provider.

This central hypothesis as well as further hypotheses was verified through an empirical study. As a result from the study, customer knowledge affects the specification of the customer script. Also, it is shown that the process design of the service provider has an impact on the specification of the customer script. The script influence on the service process success needs to be considered on two aspects: First, the customer script has an influence on customer satisfaction as a measure for service process effectiveness. Second, script influence on service process time as a measure for efficiency could not be verified.

These results bear significant consequences for theory and practice: The theoretical discussion comes to the conclusion that special types of service transactions can be differentiated

according to the transaction cost reducing effects of the customer script. This differentiation of various service types is based on the necessity to allow for customer scripts on the one hand and the learnability of the script on the other. With reference to the practical implications of the study, it points out that the allowance for customer scripts may result in innovative process design of the service provider as well as modified marketing of services.

The thesis addresses a topical problem of practical as well as academic relevance and presents various suggestions for the implementation in business practice. Therefore, the work will hopefully be met with high response from academia and practice.

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