

Service Blueprint a Tool for Enhancing Service Quality in Restaurant Business

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Abstract

The paper analyses its existing service blueprint along with recommends how the restaurant can enhance its quality service as well as efficiency level. Based on the semi-structured interview on the restaurant, a new service blueprint has been redesigned which limits the present and potential failure points in the existing process. High participation level from the customer along with service providers and employees will add a new value to the efficiency level of the service quality.

Keywords

Blueprint, Service, Service Process, Service Redesign, Improvement, Restaurant

1. Introduction

Quality service is the critical factor facing restaurants today and it becomes vital to achieve the success in restaurant business. To enhance service quality, service blueprint may play a crucial role. The restaurant business all over the world is growing in a significant manner due to the customer behavior on eating out [1]. Why customers visit the restaurant? It may be for many reasons but for sure the best reason is to gain positive dining experience so restaurant service provider needs to ensure high-quality dining experience for customers [2]. Basically, customers evaluate the satisfaction level of a service comparing with their previous expectations [3]. Thus restaurant should identify customers service expectation at the time of service performed [4]. Moreover, service blueprinting could be the vital instrument to realize customer service expectations.

Service industries become the ultimate source of economic leadership for most developed and developing countries in the past recent years [5]. It is evident from the recent trend of the economy that service industries are somehow

providing social/personal services, transportation, finance, advertising, repair, distribution, or communication support for manufacturing industries [6]. Human needs are multi-dimensional as result physical goods are not enough to meet human needs, invisible services indeed. Therefore, new service design becomes a distinctive task for service professionals [7]. Moreover, from the service oriented organization's point of view, like restaurant, designing a service process is a combination of physical and non-physical components.

The ultimate aim of service design should be enhanced service quality, retained existing customers, attracting potential customers and who has loyal and positive attitude towards the company. In reference [8] Edvardsson (1997) suggests that service designer should take account of customers' expectations in designing each element of the service and to define how and what of service design and help linking the customer needs and an organization's strategic intent [9].

However, most of the firms desired to zero-defects service performance, but the nature of service itself encounters such an environment where service failure is almost inevitable [10]. An effective service blueprint can reduce the failures and enhance service quality in a large extend.

Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to discuss the conceptual strategies about service blueprinting and presents a reflection of those theories with a service design of a restaurant. This paper also target to find out failure points to prevent the critical failures from occurring and reduce the risk of service failures. Specific research objectives are:

- Discuss the conceptual framework of service design.
- Present the service design of a real-world service organization.
- Find key failure points and redesign the service process to solve them.

Lastly, the paper also tries to focus on possibilities of further improvement of the service design by enhancing value co-creation. As the service organization, one restaurant from Karlstad named "Wok Kitchen" is selected.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Blueprinting

A service blueprint such a diagram that depicts all the related parties participates in service delivery process [11]. Blueprinting is a key tool used to design new service or to redesign existing ones, and it specifies in some details how the service process should be constructed. To enrich service innovation and service development service blueprint must be customers centric [12]. According to Lovelock & Wirtz (2007) service process such an instrument of service, which depicts the way, and the sequence of an operating system to create the value proposition that been promised to customers [13]. Since the service process are mostly intangible in nature so it is tough to visualize. Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) also stated two important things to develop a Blueprint. First, require to focuses all

the key points involved in creating and delivering the service, second, need to specify the linkages between these points. The best way is to keep these activities relatively aggregated in order to define the “big picture”. Afterwards, it might be possible to refine the given activities by “drilling down” to reach higher levels of detail [13].

The most important characteristics of service Blueprinting (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007) are:

- It differentiates between what customers experience “front stage” and the activities of employees and support processes “backstage”, where the customers can’t see them.
- It clarifies the interactions between customers and employees, and how backstage activities and systems support these interactions.
- It gives managers the opportunity to identify potential fail points in the process, where there is a significant risk that things can go wrong and affect the quality of the service.

2.2. Service Blueprinting for Existing Services

The Service Blueprinting procedure is appropriate for existing services. By illustrating and analyzing the current status of the service process, it is possible to see areas of improvement within the service sequence. Creating visual representations aid process improvement by showing the flow and highlighting potential points for incremental adjustment.

2.3. Components of Service Blueprints

Lovelock and Wirtz presented the key elements of the blueprint by an example of a restaurant experience from a customer’s viewpoint. From the demonstrated blueprint in their book, we can find the following major components for a blueprint design [14]:

Customer Actions: all of the actions that customers participate in the service delivery process.

Onstage/visible Contact Employee Actions: face to face interaction in between the customers and employees.

Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions: All the actions that conducted by employees but invisible to customers.

Support Processes: All the tangibles that customers are exposed to that can influence their quality perceptions.

Physical Evidence: 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.

3. Methodology

The paper is based on classic and contemporary theories and researches on “service management” and “service blueprinting.” A case study approach is followed

which is qualitative in nature. For data collection, a semi-structured interview has been conducted. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions. Semi-structured interviewing is best used when researchers won't get more than one chance to interview someone to collect data.

The semi-structured interview guide provides a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data.

4. Background of the Case

This paper has been prepared by focusing on the service processes of “Wok Kitchen” restaurant’s Karlstad outlet, situated in the food court of “Mitticity”—a very prominent shopping mall in the center of Karlstad City. “Wok Kitchen” is a restaurant chain, which is doing business in Sweden since 1999. They have an established and highly successful restaurant concept with a total of six restaurants in Sweden and an equal number in the United States. The selected organization for this paper is Wok Kitchen’s Karlstad outlet and we try to analyze its service processes and depicting a blueprint from our practical experience.

As we mentioned earlier that the outlet is situated at the food court of Mitticity, it uses the facility for its own customers. Therefore, for this analysis we will use the food court as Wok Kitchen’s service ground. Wok Kitchen Karlstad’s outlet contains about 40 tables between large and small size with about 120 seats, which enables 120 persons to take their meals at a time during the working hours all through the week. Wok Kitchen serves Chinese and Thai foods and the price limit per package is between 59 to 89 SEK. They are serving heavy meal packages with very reasonable pricing. The shopping mall is one of the busiest places in the city, having heavy foot traffic throughout the day. The key target market of the restaurant is the customers of the shopping mall and the people who are working in nearby business concerns who look for regular lunch packages within a reasonable price. The restaurant provides self-service for the customers. Under the supervision of the manager, three employees work full time in the restaurant; including a chef, an assistant chef, and front of house employee who serves in the food delivery counter.

4.1. Case Study: Service Blueprint of Wok Kitchen: Service Process Design

4.1.1. Physical Evidence

The restaurant has a good view and a good location as it is in the center of the mall. They have also decorated the restaurant in a good manner that attracts the customers and makes them feel better when they are eating. As is shown in **Figure 1** customers can choose food items from the written menu board placed beside the cash counter, and can look to the food preparation and the foods available at the counter what we can call visual menus. Customers can view others and

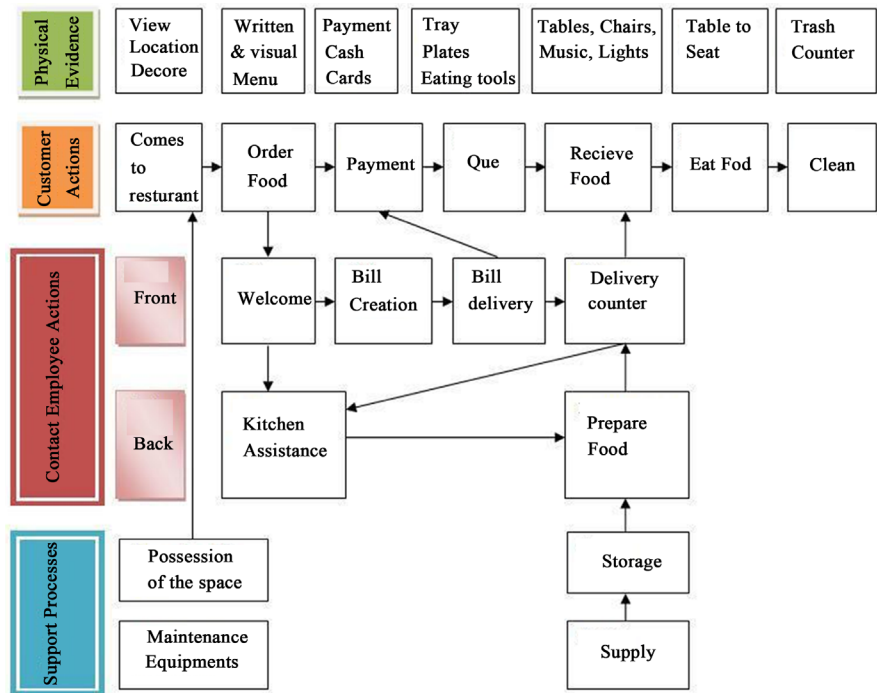


Figure 1. Existing service blueprint of wok kitchen.

select the same food. Cash and cards both are accepted for payment. The restaurant provides its customers with trays, plates and other eating tools like the spoon, folk, and knife. Music and lighting add some extra values to the environment the customer experience while eating. The seating space enough to well enough has tables for their customers to sit and eat. Before going, the customer is required to take the tray and the leftovers to the trash counter.

4.1.2. Customer

Customer part of the blueprint describes the activities of the customer. As is shown in **Figure 1** the first step is the entrance of the customer. The customer comes into the restaurant and places an order. When a customer comes to the counter to place an order, the person on the cash counter greets him/her and receives the order and makes two bills—one for the customer and the other for the delivery counter. The customer then pays the bill, and meanwhile, the delivery person arranges the food to serve. Within this period, the customer stands in a queue at the delivery counter and waits for his/her turn as it is a self-service restaurant. After receiving the food the customer goes to a table and eats the food and after eating he/she cleans the table and takes the trash to the trash counter.

4.1.3. Contact

As is shown in **Figure 1** this part presents the contact points between the customer and the service employees. It can be divided into two stages-The front part and the back part. When a customer places an order at the cash counter, the cashier makes two copies of the bill; one for the customer and the other for the

delivery counter. As they always sell some specific food packages, the food is always ready and stocked at the delivery counter. The cash counter and the delivery counter always stays in contact with the kitchen assistants to ensure proper supply of foods in the “delivery” or “serving” counter. Whenever any food item is about to finish the kitchen assistants are informed and starts preparing the food to deliver on time.

4.1.4. Support Services

As is shown in **Figure 1** support service is the forth and the last part of the blueprint that we designed for WOK Kitchen. The possession of the space is rented from the shopping mall authority. It's the first supporting element of the service process. Next, to it, we presented maintenance of the restaurant and its equipment *i.e.*, machinery, ovens, dishes, other kitchen items, material for the food etc. There are specified suppliers for different raw materials who help to run the supply chain smoothly by delivering on time. The back part of the restaurant contains a storage space to keep the raw materials and other elements for cooking.

4.2. Fail Points in the Process

Lovelock and Wirtz stated that, a good blueprint should draw attention to points in service delivery where things are particularly at risk of going wrong. From a customer viewpoint As is shown in **Figure 1**, we recognized two key failure points:

- All of the Items presented in the “Menu Board” is not always available. The available items differ day to day and usually, there is no sign or marks on the Menu Board which Items are available for the day.
- At pick hours, the queue often gets quite long, making the customers wait for longer time span. As the customers wait to stand queue, it may cause serious dissatisfaction from customers which might affect their perceived value of the overall service.

4.3. Possible Solutions to the Fail Points (As Is Shown in Figure 2)

For fail point 1, a customized menu board might be introduced which can be changed frequently. To serve this purpose, an electronic display showing all the items can be set up which can be easily customized. If that is not possible at least, some marks or signs should put to the menu board identifying the availability or non availability of the items.

For fail point 2, one additional front-line employee can be appointed in the delivery counter who will help to serve the food. This might be applied only in pick hours also by recruiting employees on hourly payment basis. In that case, good assessment of demand will be required.

4.4. Service Process Redesign

See **Figure 2**.

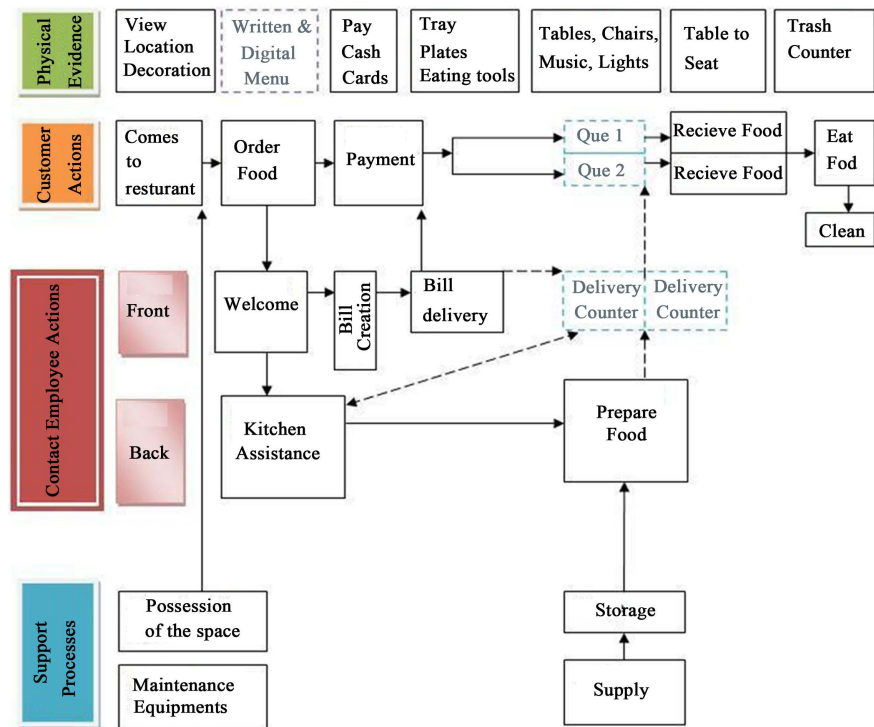


Figure 2. Redesign service blueprint of wok kitchen.

4.5. Value Co-Creation by the Customer

Focusing on the customer-provider relationship, we can say that Blueprinting helps us to specify the customer's role in delivering the services as it clarifies the importance of this role. By conducting service Blueprinting we can analyze the customer as a co-producer for the service and identify the level of customer participation. Customer participation can be divided into three broad levels [13]:

- a) Low participation level where employees and systems do all the work, and products tend to be standardized.
- b) Moderate participation level where customers inputs are required to assist the provider in creating and delivering service and in providing a degree of customization.
- c) High participation levels where customers work actively with the provider to co-producer the service.

5. Conclusions

In our case, we see high participation levels of customers as they directly take part in the service process and thus co-create value along with the employees. This system is good as the customers can get direct access to the service process taking the active role in it.

However, the same customers may dislike the Self-Service Technologies (SST) when the system does not work smoothly [13]. So, considerations should be given to the reliability of the system from the customer's perspective; whether it is working well and to which extent it is user-friendly. If this system does not

save time, then we may need to rearrange the waiting points, get rid of the bottlenecks, and try to invent some ways to cut some processes short. But sometimes, the service providers face ultimate failure of the system. Considering those scenarios, some backup process should always be ready to fight the disastrous situations.

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