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Jörg Finsterwalder

Senior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Tony Garry

Senior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Doing More with Less in the 21st Century

The articles comprising this Special Issue of Managing Service Quality represent a selection of revised papers originally submitted to the Services Marketing Track and presented at the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) annual conference held in Christchurch, New Zealand in December 2010. This internationally recognised conference was hosted by the College of Business and Economics at The University of Canterbury and was attended by over 400 delegates from 28 countries. The theme of the conference was “Doing More with Less”. This theme proved to be both relevant and timely at a number of levels.

At one level, Christchurch and the University of Canterbury itself have faced their own unique challenges of “doing more with less”. On Saturday the 4th September 2010 at 4.35am, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake hit the Canterbury region of the South Island of New Zealand. Its epicentre was less than 40km west of Christchurch (Quigley et al., 2010a; Van Dissen et al., 2011). The City and the University recovered in time to host the ANZMAC conference without any serious disruption but whilst aftershocks were anticipated, few had predicted their frequency and severity. On the 22nd February 2011 a more devastating earthquake of magnitude 6.3 but with its epicentre shallower and closer to the City hit the region once again (Hancox and Perrin, 2011). Such was the force of this event, it resulted in the world’s strongest recorded up-and-down shaking movement (peak ground velocity) with some parts of the City’s ground level slipping downwards and upwards at over twice the velocity of gravity (Gorman, 2011). As the ground accelerated downwards, buildings were left behind and subsequently collapsed under their own weight. This resulted in the loss of lives of nearly 200 people and significant property damage to the City and its surrounding area culminating in a rebuild cost estimated at around NZ\$15-30 billion (Conway, 2011; Swiggs, 2011). During the subsequent recovery period many people were indeed faced with the challenge of “doing more with less” at both a personal and professional level. In the immediate aftermath, power, telecommunication, water and sewer supplies were disrupted (Holden, 2010; Quigley et al., 2010b). Many businesses, heritage buildings, private homes and service provider premises were damaged (Bathgate, 2010). This included the University of Canterbury itself where inaccessible offices and lecture and tutorial spaces necessitated the need for both staff and students to improvise with work and study space and lecture delivery facilities until there was a return to a “different kind of

normal”. The resilience and ingenuity of staff and students during this recovery period became very apparent with numerous examples of “doing more with less”. This special issue is dedicated to those colleagues, friends and families who were affected by the recent events in Christchurch.

At another level, the global financial crash of 2009 and its economic consequences have meant many service providers also face the challenge of “doing more with less”. This has been coupled with an increasing global recognition of the importance and contribution of service organisations within both national and global economies accompanied by an imperative to better understand service as a discipline in itself.

“Doing more with less” frequently manifests itself at the interface of company and customer interactions and may influence how customers and service provider co-create the service experience. Much recent service research in this area has been stimulated by Vargo and Lusch’s (2004; 2006; 2008) seminal work on the service-dominant logic (SDL). These authors suggest actors involved in service co-creation, producers and consumers, collaborate in creating value. Drawing on the theme of the conference, how can “more” be achieved with “less” in such service co-creation processes? How can a customer co-create “more” value with “less” input and how can a service provider offer “more”, i.e. better value propositions with “less” resources?

To explore the answers to these questions, a view of arenas and actors relevant for value co-creation is necessary. Figure 1 depicts such arenas and actors in the context of “doing more with less”.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Drawing on the research of Langeard and Eiglier (1987) and Martin et al. (2001), three arenas may be identified relating to onstage and backstage value creation. The service provider backstage comprises an invisible organisational infrastructure and system which implicitly or explicitly influence onstage interaction (Figure 1, right side). An example of such backstage activity is back office work by employees not directly involved in the service encounter, for example, entering customer data into a system. From the customer's perspective backstage may happen disjunct of the service provider and includes pre-existing factors which may subsequently influence the customer's behaviour during the service co-creation process. Examples of this are the availability and disposition of intangible and tangible factors to be integrated into the service co-creation process or other individuals with an a priori influence on the customer and their behaviour during a service encounter. Such influence by other individuals could be word-of-mouth communication before or after a service experience. Whilst word-of-mouth (WOM) communication and service satisfaction have long been recognised as being inextricably linked, we know relatively little as to how this may vary across differing service contexts. In "How Word of Mouth Communication Varies Across Service Encounters", Lang (2011, this issue) attempts to reconcile some of the contradictions that currently exist within the services literature with regards to this. Using an experimental methodology, the author is able to demonstrate that for service encounters which are enduring, affectively charged and intimate, the WOM-satisfaction relationship is positive – the higher the level of

satisfaction, the greater the extent of WOM activity. Where the service encounter is brief, rational and distant, the WOM-satisfaction relationship demonstrates a negativity bias – lower levels of satisfaction lead to greater WOM activity. Lang (2011, this issue) suggests service firms should consider more targeted and appropriate recruitment of personnel depending on the nature of the service encounter to achieve higher levels of satisfaction and positive WOM activity and ultimately “more with less”. This and similar scenarios are depicted in Figure 1 on the left side with Customer A interacting “off- or backstage” with Customers N and M before or after a service experience.

Onstage, during the service encounter, customers may interact with personal and non-personal elements of the service within such consumption environments. With “Restorative Cancer Resource Center Servicescapes”, Rosenbaum, Sweeney and Smallwood (2011, this issue) draw on a number of interdisciplinary literature strands to develop a framework by which practitioners and academics alike are better able to identify and understand the physical and restorative dimensions of such consumption environments. Linking health sciences with the services domain, their paper highlights how health orientated service establishments may cultivate a restorative environment through the design of appropriate servicescapes which facilitate the attainment of psychosocial benefits for cancer patients. Combining medical treatment with cancer resource centre patronage therefore may result in “doing more with less”.

During the service encounter process, customers may intentionally or unintentionally interact with each other as well as service provider staff as part of the service encounter experience. Figure 1, middle, represents this conceptually with Customer A interacting with Customers N and M during the service co-creation process onstage. In their paper “Psychological Safety, Contributions and Service

Satisfaction of Customers in Group Service Experience”, Kuppelwieser and Finsterwalder (2011, this issue) demonstrate how psychological safety influences a customer’s perception of their own and other customers’ co-operation in and contribution to the co-creation of a service experience and ultimately, customer satisfaction. Their research highlights the necessity for service providers to be proactive in their management of customer-to-customer interactions suggesting intervention strategies may be appropriate within some contexts to evoke constructive atmospheres and feelings of positive psychological safety. This in turn has implications for the recruitment and training of service employees within such contexts. The authors suggest that “doing more with less” in provider–multi-customer constellations can be best achieved when all actors contribute their share to the service co-creation process resulting in more value for the individual due to the group’s collaborative effort.

Within the arena of onstage interaction, service staff interaction may also be used to improve the service experience and satisfaction levels of customers by focusing on peripheral service encounter attributes such as the conversation skills of service providers or more central issues such as their understanding of customer service priorities as indicated in the model (Figure 1, middle).

At one level, Mathies and Burford (2011, this issue) provide interesting insights into gender similarities and differences of how frontline service employees perceive what constitutes good customer service. In their paper entitled “Customer Service Understanding: Gender Differences of Frontline Employees”, the authors findings highlight how both genders share the perception that good customer service comprises of listening skills, making the customer happy and offering service but differ insofar as males have a more functional, outcome orientated interpretation of

customer service whilst females will focus on interaction and emotional outcomes. They propose that by acknowledging gender differences, contextual considerations of service encounters may inform recruitment and training processes and allow for a more optimal allocation of resources achieving “more with less”.

In a thought provoking study designed to uncover attitudes and perceptions of consumers towards service providers with foreign accents, Rao Hill and Tombs (2011, this issue) in their article entitled “The Effect of Accent of Service Employer on Customer Service Evaluation” identify how foreign accents may be negatively interpreted and perceived by consumers in non face-to-face service contexts. Their findings reveal how foreign accents may often induce negative stereotyping by consumers resulting in a reduced level of tolerance and an increased perception of a service provider’s lack of understanding. Training in cross-cultural interpersonal and language skills of front-line employees may contribute to alleviating these consumer interpretations. The authors therefore caution service providers who try to achieve “more with less” by focusing on off-shoring services such as call centres and using cheaper immigrant labour not to do this without the correct level of training.

On a similar theme, Garzaniti, Stanton and Pearce (2011, this issue) in “Building Friendships and Relationships: The Role of Conversation in Hairdressing Service Encounters” investigate the contribution that conversation can make to developing ‘commercial friendships’ and improving the service experience. Using a qualitative methodology within a hairdressing context, the authors identify an evolutionary dimension to both task and non-task related conversational exchange in terms of both nature and content. Their findings suggest that conversation exchange may play a pivotal role in developing client-provider friendships and the subsequent development of long-term relationships. The authors point out that “more may be

achieved with less” by placing less emphasis on the need for physical resources or promotion, instead focusing more on the intangible of improving the conversation skills of their providers.

Selection and Review Process

The original call for papers of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) 2010 Annual Conference resulted in the submission of 479 competitive papers, of which 341 were accepted for presentation. A large number of high quality submissions were received and with a rejection rate of 29%, the calibre of papers presented at the Conference was of a high standard. All of the papers submitted for the conference were subjected to a double-blind refereeing process including at least two anonymous reviewers. We gratefully acknowledge the work of 36 track chairs across 18 tracks and the 402 reviewers who contributed their time and experience to this process.

For this special issue of Managing Service Quality (MSQ), the Guest Editors invited a selection of papers for further development, resubmission and review. These papers reflect the diverse range of conceptual and contextual issues encompassed within the services marketing arena but connected by the underlying theme of “doing more with less”. Each of these invited papers was required to undergo a further double-blind review process before final acceptance for the Special Issue.

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FIGURE 1

Arenas and actors relevant to “Doing more with less”

Order of papers

1. Finsterwalder and Garry: “Doing More with Less”: Service Imperatives of the 21st Century
2. Lang: How Word of Mouth Communication Varies Across Service Encounters
3. Rosenbaum et al.: Restorative Cancer Resource Center Servicescapes
4. Kuppelwieser and Finsterwalder: Psychological Safety, Contributions and Service Satisfaction of Customers in Group Service Experience
5. Mathies and Burford: Customer Service Understanding: Gender Differences of Frontline Employees
6. Rao Hill and Tombs: The Effect of Accent of Service Employer on Customer Service Evaluation
7. Garzaniti et al.: Building Friendships and Relationships: The Role of Conversation in Hairdressing Service Encounters