

Developing a Film-Based Service Experience Blueprinting Technique

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Abstract

The arts are labelled an important driver of value co-creation. Research suggests that businesses can translate the arts into action using the potency of art forms. Film is one of these art forms available to businesses that are willing to draw value from employing arts-based initiatives and approaches. Film as an art form, as well as its technological evolution, is opening up new perspectives for the service industry, also for designing and managing services. The technique of service blueprinting, developed in the 1980s, has since been applied and improved. Nevertheless, the conventional service blueprinting technique does not properly capture and visualise the customer's service experience. To date, the art form and medium of film has not been conceptualised and integrated into the method of blueprinting of service experiences. This conceptual paper addresses this gap and showcases how digital film can be used for the development of a film-based service experience blueprinting technique to make service issues more comprehensible and redesign more customer focused.

Keywords

Blueprinting; digital film; touchpoints; customer experience mapping; service industry; arts

“Human activity rests on something that cannot be fully put into words” (Schatzki, 2014, p. 18).

1. Introduction

The arts are touted to become an important source of value creation for businesses (Lampel & Germain, 2016; Stokes, 2014; Schiuma, 2011). Research suggests that organisations and their managers are more receptive to practices in the arts (Holbrook, 2015; Meisiek & Barry, 2014). Some applications of the arts are particularly visible in the service area where arts-based concepts and tools have been (re)designed and used to comprehend, innovate and manage service. A prominent example is the adaption of theatre by service scholars (see, for example, Daly *et al.*, 2014; Grove & Fisk, 1992). Yet, certain tools and techniques from other disciplines used by service researchers, such as the blueprinting technique, remain rather static in their development in relation to an arts-based infusion, despite the fact that they have been improved and enhanced over the years (for example, Bitner *et al.*, 2008; Eichentopf *et al.*, 2011; Patrício *et al.*, 2008).

The blueprinting technique, a prominent tool integrated into service research over 20 years ago, depicts the service process and provides guidance as to how to create a service (Shostack, 1984). Bitner *et al.* (2008, p. 90) point out that the “[u]se of photography or videography can greatly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of [blueprinting]. This type of usage is emerging in the business and trade press as well as in the academic literature”. Despite the fact that some scholars instruct on the use of pictorial evidence, and select practitioners and academics utilise videography (for example, Bitner *et al.*, 2008; Echeverri, 2005; Pareigis, Echeverri, & Edvardsson, 2012) to capture the physical evidence of the

servicescape as well as the customer experience, this emergence is rather sparse. A systematic conceptual development of the blueprinting technique to better capture the intricacies of customer—service provider interaction and experience using the audio-visual medium of film remains lacking. This conceptual paper addresses this gap by aiming at developing a film-based blueprinting technique. Similar to how the street view system on Google Maps can enable a more detailed perspective of a road map, this paper proposes to illustrate how a film-based service blueprinting technique aids in addressing the research question how to capture more precisely the reality of the service co-creation process to aid in the design, evaluation and improvement of the service experience.

2. Blueprinting

A little over two decades ago, scholars introduced a new framework for mapping the service phenomenon to the service marketing literature (Bitner *et al.*, 2008; Kingman-Brundage, 1989; Shostack, 1982; 1984). The blueprint, applied to the service sector in order to provide a clearer depiction of service encounters and related processes, showcases the customer experience as well as the service system to enable the different people designing, partaking in and providing the service to comprehend it factually, independent of their roles or their points of view (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013). Blueprinting filled a gap to visualise service exchange by generating a tangible and more concrete way to visualise the mostly intangible aspects of service and to aid in transferring service marketing knowledge (Bitner *et al.*, 2008). It offered academics and practitioners alike, insight, transparency and perspectives into the processes involved in service co-creation.

Shostack (1982; 1984) introduces service blueprinting to the academic literature and suggests that a blueprint is more accurate than verbal descriptions and less subject to misconception. The service blueprint, exemplified by Shostack (1984) using a shoeshine service, maps all activities centring around the customer's pathway, i.e. along all touchpoints of a service experience, and structures the activities according to their proximity to the customer. Shostack's (1984) version suggests a line of visibility which separates visible (for example, application of shoe polish) from non-visible activities (for example, purchasing the polish) for the customer. Furthermore, Shostack (1984) indicates the time per process step (for example, 30 seconds for applying polish) as well as potential failpoints (for example, using the wrong coloured polish). Kingman-Brundage (1989) introduces theatre terminology to depict onstage and backstage activities on either side of the line of visibility. Furthermore, a line of interaction distinguishes between actions performed by customers from those executed by employees. Similarly, the line of internal interaction demarcates back office from support functions and a line of implementation separates support functions from management functions (Kingman-Brundage, 1989). Bitner (1993) continues the evolution of the technique by integrating the concept of the servicescape (Bitner, 1992) into the blueprint to cater for the physical – often in the form of visual – evidence of the tangible environment the service is performed in.

By illustrating customer actions, visible contact employee actions, invisible contact employee actions, support processes, and physical evidence (Bitner *et al.*, 2008, Kingman-Brundage, 1989), this technique also enables the mapping of more intricate exchanges, such as those involved in human interaction. Thus, the service blueprint depicts an otherwise

intangible process in order to improve the customer and service experience (Bitner *et al.*, 2008; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013).

The following section outlines areas of improvement which, when addressed, aim to advance the development of the blueprinting method to improve the customer experience.

3. Areas of improvement

3.1. New technology

In a time when digital technology is undergoing rapid change, the original cyan-blueprinting method, once crafted by practising engineers and architects, has today been replaced by the Android and iPad powered tablets (Abdelhady, 2015). Yet, the service sector as such is touted as “less disciplined and less creative” (Bitner *et al.*, 2008, p. 66) in regard to innovative approaches. A current viewpoint is that, even though there are fundamental shifts within the service environment, service design methods are not addressing or perhaps representing these changes (Patrício *et al.*, 2008). The current service blueprinting technique may be lacking integration of new technology for its advancement in the service arena.

3.2. Mapping and documenting experience

Over the last few years the customers’ role has changed. Today, it is claimed that value is co-created and experienced by customers in a relational exchange rather than through the products or services themselves (Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlström, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

The creation of experiences has become a distinct and important offer (Lampel & Germain, 2016; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). As a result, operational optimisation must make way for customer experience, i.e. human emotion and behaviour, in the design and improvement

of services (Barbieri *et al.*, 2013). The methodology present in the blueprint is “based on the traditional, and arguably increasingly outdated, view that the firm provides services for the customer” (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2015, p. 251).

The service blueprint’s structure has been advantageous for both academic researchers and the service industry to grasp the service process. However, when aiming at highlighting the customer experience, the original blueprinting technique visualises a structure which only functions like a “scaffolding” that frames the customers’ individual service experiences contained in the touchpoints. Nevertheless, this scaffolding does not reveal their content. Therefore, it remains open how the current model can better integrate the inclusion of the human factor to produce an enhanced service blueprint (Barbieri *et al.*, 2013).

Stauss and Weinlich (1997) integrate the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) into Service Blueprinting and develop the Sequential Incident Technique. Service customers are interviewed to capture – via storytelling – all their incidents, i.e. their normal and critical experiences along the service process. These incidents can then be categorised and related to the touchpoints in a blueprint. Such technique provides rich and authentic information which can be documented and used to analyse and illustrate the customer experience. However, authenticity as well as contextual information may get lost in the transcription of audio material. Although the original interview data may be of use for further exploration, the interviews remain statements of individual service experiences disjunct from the service context they occurred in.

Echeverri (2005) captures, through film, real-time user perceptions of passengers who use public transport. The investigation reveals concrete cues in the service environment and processes that influence the service experience from a customer perspective. Video material

documents customers' movements and emotional reactions to situations within the service context. Echeverri (2005) shows that a film-based analysis of customer experience can assist service providers by revealing previously undocumented incidents. Although, through a potentially labour-intensive process, several hours of customer videos underwent analysis, "the majority of the recordings were of limited value" (Echeverri, 2005, p. 204). It remains unclear whether the recordings have been archived for further usage. Although this study lacks the systematic integration of film-based material into a conceptual approach, such as the blueprinting technique, the observational method appears promising in obtaining "more detailed, authentic and dynamic information" (Echeverri, 2005, p. 199) of the service experience by utilising film.

Other approaches to integrate human factors in the blueprint are, for example, by Barbieri *et al.* (2013) who suggest that actors' profiles, their feelings and motivations are to be considered. At the expense of clarity, this approach requires the addition of supplementary information and markers to the blueprint to showcase this for both employees and customers.

Hence, albeit it is the blueprint's "most important feature (...) of illuminating the customer's role in the service process" (Bitner *et al.*, 2008, p. 71), visualising the customer experience still requires work to be integrated into the technique albeit some efforts have been made. For example, Patrício *et al.*'s (2008) service experience blueprinting technique aims to capture customer requirements for the design of multi-interface service experiences by combining the disciplines of service management and software engineering. Yet, the focus on three-dimensional media to grasp the customer perspective remains lacking. Therefore, the issue remains to capture more in depth what the customer experiences.

3.3. Level of detail

The level of detail in a blueprint, as well as the issue of complexity, as outlined above, is a point to be more thoroughly considered. The systems level the blueprint addresses determines the level of information. For Kingman-Brundage (1989, p. 30) a “blueprint is a picture of a service system”, distinguishing macro and micro systems levels. The so-called concept blueprint is a macro-system depiction. It illustrates the service system at an overview level. As such, a concept blueprint visualises how each job or unit within an organisation operates in relation to the service (Kingman-Brundage, 1989). At a micro-systems level, Kingman-Brundage (1989) devises a detailed blueprint which focuses on and conveys the specifics of the service system which have not been fully explicated in the concept blueprint. To address the fundamental needs of different managers within an organisation requires such distinction of level-related blueprints (Kingman-Brundage, 1989). Bitner *et al.* (2008; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013) recommend concept blueprints with few details to communicate the general nature of the service, and for the diagnosis and improvement of service processes, the authors support the use of detailed blueprints. Yet, this might mean that a range of blueprints is necessary. Furthermore, a detailed blueprint may not be able to fully depict the intended information or might be too complex. “We have seen blueprints that (...) stretch around an entire room” (Bitner *et al.*, 2008, p. 74). How helpful might such blueprint be in terms of overview and ability of dissemination? In summary, the issue of complexity in a blueprint has not been adequately resolved.

3.4. Time

Akaka and Vargo (2015, p. 455), based on Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003), point out that “the time/place component of interaction is a critical feature of service experience”. Bitner’s (1993) integration of the servicescape concept adds physical evidence to blueprinting and Shostack (1982; 1984) includes indicators for the time per process step, i.e. per each encounter with the customer. To capture time, Fließ *et al.* (2004) integrate the critical path method (Kelley & Walker, 1989) into blueprinting. Yet, their integration leads to either a second, time-only focused blueprint or the integration of a timeline into the original blueprint comparable with a Gantt chart. Nevertheless, time might not only be important in terms of operational efficiency but also from a customer experience point of view (Sherman *et al.*, 1997). For example, minimising airline passengers’ time at check-in might improve operational efficiency and lead to shortening of the check-in duration altogether and, at the same time, lead to a positive customer experience due to less waiting time, or even the increase of duty-free shopping time. In summary, can experienced time be better integrated into the blueprint other than via numerical time?

3.5. Dimensionality

Phenomenologically, blueprinting, on the most part, uses signs and symbols employing shape, font and, at times, colour and image to illustrate actors, processes and interdependencies depicting a service which, by virtue of its intangibility, already shows a “lack of concreteness” (Crosby *et al.*, 1990, p. 68). Although, such visualisation offers a more simplified expression of the service, allowing for the phenomenon to be easily constructed, the disadvantage is in having to use the formal elements of signs, symbols and pictorial

evidence to depict the service experience. Hence, by nature the current blueprint is somewhat reductionist and this level of chosen abstraction has implications for the level of detail in a blueprint. Furthermore, service blueprints are usually visualised in a “pen-and-paper” fashion which reduces the representation of reality to a “two-dimensional picture” (Fließ & Kleinaltenkamp, 2004, p. 396). Blueprinting, therefore, in its current form, is limited due to its two-dimensional delineation and in its potential to illustrate the holistic service experience.

3.6. Academia-practitioner divide

Daly *et al.* (2014) voice their concern about knowledge transfer from academics to practitioners and urge that the current understanding of the service be made more relevant to a practitioner audience (Daly *et al.*, 2014). Not only does a blueprint have to capture the customer experience as outlined above, but when conveying information entailed in the blueprint to managers and employees alike, the presentation of the blueprint needs to provide stimulus for them – this may mean that it may require an emotional component (Barger & Grandey, 2006) in order for it to be well received. Daly *et al.* (2014, p. 583) claim that “[i]nputs from both the visual arts and performing arts can enrich the aesthetics associated with the design and delivery of various services.” This appears to resonate well in regard to combining the visual arts (film) with techniques used for the design and delivery of services (blueprinting). Hence, for methods such as blueprinting, there needs to be a more comprehensive approach for communication which assists with the (further) adoption of academic techniques and dissemination of knowledge to the practitioner community (Daly *et al.*, 2014). In line with Daly *et al.* (2014) it can be stated that scholars need innovative ideas and practices to captivate practitioners.

4. Film

Film is one of the most influential media for storytelling (Finsterwalder *et al.*, 2012; McKee, 1997) and is used in research to analyse human behaviour (Emmison, 2011; Heath, 2011). Film as a medium and scientific tool, records and reveals phenomena (Kracauer, 1960), not only because it enables the analysis of a large range of time occurrences, it can also document reality (Monaco, 2009). Film has the capacity to serve as an agent of change. Phenomenologically, a) a film image documents what the camera technology captures in an optical pattern, and b) communicates content to inform or to entertain, hence is also a mental experience (Kracauer, 1960; Monaco, 2009) conveying a story or practice.

4.1. *Depicting and documenting experience*

“[A]nyone (...) can—more or less—grasp the basic content of a film (...) without any special training” (Monaco, 2009, p. 17). Bruner (1986, p. 6) points out: “[w]e recognize in everyday life the gap between experience and its symbolic manifestation in expression”. The use of film conveys events by employing the technical capabilities of the medium without actual information being “lost in translation”. For example, when an individual talks about an airplane, they have to describe the aircraft and may miss out on relaying some information. Film can show the aircraft and transport a clear idea into what it looks like and it can show the context, i.e. physical surroundings, actors etc. when visualising the airplane.

Experience is individually intrasubjective and socially intersubjective (cf. Helkkula *et al.*, 2012) and relates to “cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions associated with a specific

service event” (Padgett & Allen, 1997, p. 52). Film can make the events of one’s experience transparent. To do so, it employs a structure, made of scenes, sequences and story.

Scene is the basic unit of film construction (Monaco, 2009). Bruner (1986, p. 7) points out that “structured units of experience, such as stories (...), are socially constructed units of meaning.” A scene is a complete unit of film narration. It consists of single or multiple shots – an uninterrupted take of the camera – and takes place at a specific location and time and deals with a single action (ScreenWriting Science, 2015; Springhurst, 2015). Scenes ensue within a definite time frame, and centre on a cohesive theme, event or character experience. A series of connected scenes which shows a succession of related events is called a sequence (ScreenWriting Science, 2015). Sequences make up the story.

4.2. Technology and ubiquity

Films can be shot and edited (Kracauer, 1960) – another important property – using professional camera equipment and a crew, yet at the same time new technology, such as mobile technology (for example, digital cameras, smart phones, tablet PCs) enables the production of film clips at minimal cost. Furthermore, films can be shared with others (Heath, 2011) and be made available to users anywhere and anytime, for example, via online channels, or via the same mobile technology that helped create the films in the first place (Tercek, 2014; Tryon, 2013). Moreover, a data archive consisting of films can be established that can be subject to a range of (research) interests (Heath, 2011).

4.3. Level of detail

Fleeting details in everyday activities, that may otherwise be lost, can be recorded on film. Films “can be repeatedly analysed and provide access to the fine details of conduct and interaction” (Heath, 2011, p. 252). Watching the same scenes over again can reveal the intricacies and delicacies of reality, including human behaviour.

4.4. Time

The mechanical nature of the medium film permits exact control of time (Monaco, 2009). Film facilitates the documentation of events that either occur too fast or too slow for human perception to be visible. These techniques are called “slow motion”, “fast motion” and “time-lapse” (extreme fast motion) photography. Film can uncover natural phenomena that are obscure to the human eye (Monaco, 2009). Furthermore, there is a distinction between narrated time (the period covered by the narrative, i.e. from seconds to years) and narration time (temporal structure of the narrative, i.e. the length of the film) (Schönhaar, 1990). When real time does not equal narrative time and time is being modified, this is called “montage” (Monaco, 2009, p. 193). Such distinction between narrated and narration time, not only allows the representation of different times in different scenes, it also permits the delineation of scenes in parallel. Furthermore, it enables the spectator to view select aspects of a time-based occurrence without having to shoot it in its entirety. In summary, film permits the visualisation of sequential but also the creation of clips of parallel processes and events, including the compression (fast motion) and extension (slow motion) of events, and enables the measurement of real time.

4.5. Dimensionality

Film provides “three-dimensional visual data” (Emmison, 2011, p. 242) with the support of audio data. Film shows actors and resources in their three-dimensionality and (in connection with time) in a three-dimensional space. This enables delineation of context beyond the dimensionality of other media (Monaco, 2009). Film, in this way, offers a more dynamic and insightful experience for the viewer. Such rich experience also helps in another regard. Nickerson (1965) demonstrates that the human brain retains images with complex and content-rich information much easier and faster compared to verbalised or written information. Oliva (2005) reveals that an observer, with a quick glance at a real-world scene, can comprehend a variety of semantic and perceptual information. This phenomenal experience of comprehending everything at once occurs when watching TV or film where scenes appear quickly in front of the eye. Observers can recognise the gist of a scene in under 100 milliseconds (Oliva, 2005). For example, when creating trailers to market commercial films this is in use (Finsterwalder *et al.*, 2012). Such properties of the medium film also relate to the fact that they can appeal to multiple senses of the human being (watching, hearing and more recently, smelling) (cf. Daft & Lengel, 1986).

4.6. Actors and audience

Consumers are exposed to films from a young age (Joshi & Hanssens, 2009; Finsterwalder *et al.*, 2012). Considering that managers and employees also consume films either socially or professionally, film is a highly suitable medium to document almost any type of content. Heath (2011) points out that the viewer is free to participate in the experience much more actively than when using other media. Several perspectives are relevant here.

From an actor's point of view, films can be shot from their perspective, focusing in on actors or resources, or the camera can capture interaction between actors and / or resources. To capture these perspectives, the camera can revolve around its axes, or it can move from one point to another in space (Monaco, 2009). Actors in films can be anybody, no matter how well or poorly trained they are.

From an audience perspective, the audience can either be a dedicated target audience the film was produced for or it can also be self-directed, i.e. made for the actors to watch their own behaviour and learn from the content produced (Heath, 2011).

Based on the current gaps of the blueprinting technique lacking the means to properly capture customer experience and the characteristics of the medium film as outlined above, the next sections show the development of an integrated conceptual approach by introducing a film-based service experience blueprinting technique.

5. Developing a film-based service blueprint

5.1. Film-infusion of service research

Based on Heath (2011), three imperatives for film-based approaches can be derived for the analysis of customer experience within a servicescape: a) *action is situated and embedded in service encounters*, i.e. action emerges with regard to the local context; and the meaning of an action or activity is connected to, and inseparable from the circumstances in which it is created; b) *action is an emerging practical accomplishment*, i.e. actors, in conjunction and collaboration with other actors, are continuously engaged in co-creation and in the sense-making of action of other actors; and c) *action relies upon a logic* which consists of practices,

reasoning and common-sense knowledge, in and through which actors create their own actions in connection to the contributions of other actors.

These imperatives connect well to the co-creation of experiences as occurring in service encounters where action takes place. As indicated above by Heath (2011), such service encounters can also be viewed as the enactment of practices. Practices are defined as organised collections of activities which are linked together by interactions and are performed by different people (Schatzki, 2014). Important facets of human life can be assumed as features of practices, or as anchored in them, and furthermore, “human activity rests on something that cannot be fully put into words” (Schatzki, 2014, p. 18). Hence, practices, as exposed in service encounters, should be explored differently, other than through conventional methods, for example, by using media that go beyond words.

Schatzki (2014) formulates art as an activity, classifying it as a social phenomenon and views it as an arrangement of “linked bundles” of practices or simply “art bundles”. For Schatzki (2014), art is a constellation of practice-material bundles, i.e. practices in material arrangements, as can be seen in artistic performances, such as film, and creative industries are touted to be hubs for new practices (Lampel & Germain, 2016; Schiuma, 2011).

The notion of artistic performances has already been related to and used in service marketing by researchers who suggest that at “the heart of every service experience is the performance” (Grove & Fisk, 1992, p. 457). Predominantly, the theatre and drama metaphors have been applied to business (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and the service discipline (Daly *et al.*, 2014; Goodwin, 1996; Grove & Fisk, 1992; Padgett & Allen, 1997; Williams & Anderson, 2005). In line with McColl-Kennedy *et al.*'s (2015) notion that the traditional view where the firm provides service for the customer appears outdated, Williams and Anderson (2005, p. 21)

speak of the arts, such as theatre, offering the “crucial information that will be needed to switch services from the spectator-based to the participatory-based marketplace”. Compared to theatre, film in the context of this paper is more like “reality theatre” (Arfara, 2009, p. 112) which depicts actors’ real lives and, according to Monaco (2009), film has a much greater narrative capability than stage drama. Yet, both allow the creation of “narrative pull” (Ayers, 2008, p. 48), i.e. by deciding when to provide and when to withhold information to create tension in directed films or dramas. In comparison, the film-based blueprinting technique can capture (enacted) reality like a documentary does, still being able to capture dramatic and other moments of service interaction.

Further, a connection can be made to “ethnotheatre” or “ethnodrama” (Saldaña, 2003). “Ethnotheatre employs traditional craft and artistic techniques of formal theatre production to mount a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and / or researchers’ interpretations of data for an audience. An ethnodrama, the script, consists of analyzed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artifacts” (Saldaña, 2003, p. 218). The film-based blueprinting technique incorporates ideas drawn from ethnotheatre and -drama as will be shown in the next sections.

The art form of film and its usage has received little attention in service marketing (with some notable exceptions, such as by Bitner *et al.*, 2008; Echeverri, 2005; Pareigis *et al.*, 2012). Film is currently moving to a place articulated as the “activated audience” (Tercek, 2014) where audiences connect and collaborate with filmmakers and share their own stories. Films as practice-arrangement bundles entail a range of practices concerned with the creation, staging, execution, and consumption of performance (Schatzki, 2014), i.e. service (cf. Vargo & Lusch, 2016), and although comparable to stage drama, films enable the viewer to see events

from not only just one (camera perspective) but several points of view (Monaco, 2009). To capture “performance” and actions at the touchpoints, recommendations by Heath (2011) are put forward, which are to a) record all active participants in an activity, b) use a static camera as each camera movement of a “roving” camera distracts the filmed actors and might influence their behaviour, and c) utilise multiple static cameras to enable capturing simultaneous processes from different perspectives.

5.2. Film-based blueprinting technique

5.2.1. The “layout” – technology and ubiquity, dimensionality, level of detail

The development of a film-based service experience blueprinting technique uses the original idea of blueprinting and infuses it with film content. The first step is to create an editable and computer-based version of a blueprint. Just as with the standard blueprinting technique, all elements and interdependencies are to be mapped. Each step of the customer experience journey, related processes and actors can hold additional detail through embedded film clips. This creates an opportunity to represent additional information and details down to micro-level (Kingman-Brundage, 1989) for each activity, back office process or physical element of the servicescape without compromising clarity. Furthermore, a computer-based blueprint enables easy connectivity due to ubiquity of information available via networks and hand-held devices. A repository can be created holding blueprints and connected film clips. This not only permits storage, but also the re-use of the films and the replaying of captured events. Thus, the film-based blueprint is not simply a combination of a two-dimensional blueprint and three-dimensional film, it also contains a network of interlinked films which highlight the different aspects of the service experience onstage, as

well as backstage processes and the physical evidence. Figure 1 illustrates the film-based blueprint, exemplified by an airport check-in.

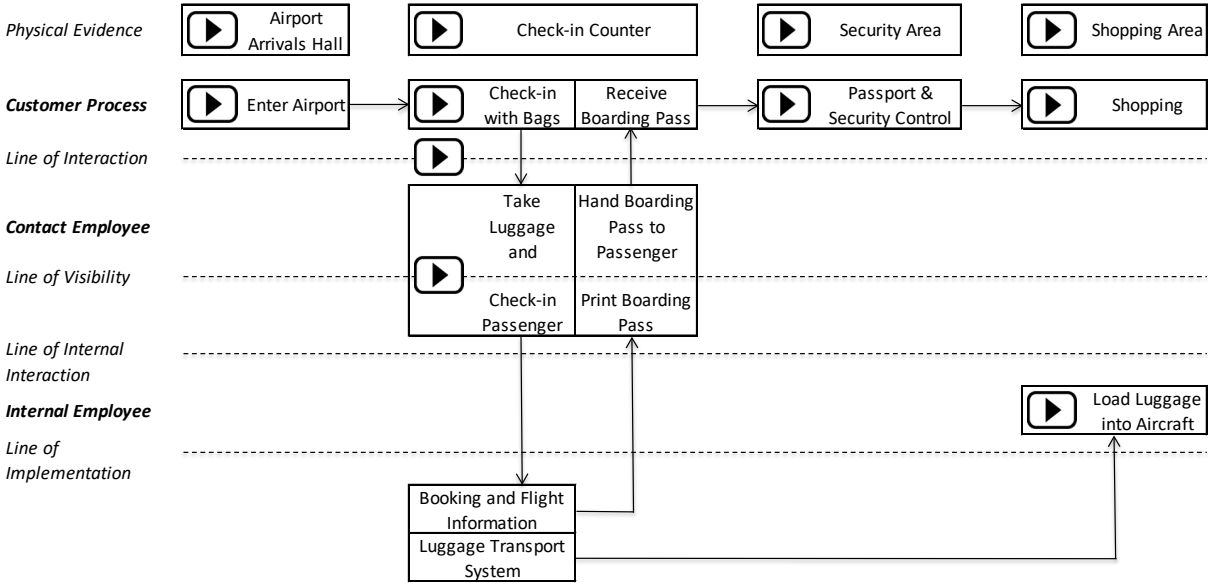


Figure 1. Film-based blueprint for an airport check-in

5.2.2. The “outer” structure – touchpoints and processes

The film-based blueprint uses the established method and structure as outlined by previous research (Bitner *et al.*, 2008; Kingman-Brundage, 1989; Shostack, 1984), i.e. on the vertical axis it depicts the actors (customer, contact employee, back office staff) and the different lines of visibility, interaction and implementation as shown in Figure 1 for the airport check-in example. Check-in staff and airline passenger interact at the line of visibility and check-in staff and, for example, baggage handlers interact at the line of internal interaction. On the horizontal axis the blueprint indicates the touchpoints, which form the customer process (airport arrival, check-in counter, security area, shopping area, boarding area etc.), connected to frontline, support and back office activities. The film-based blueprint brings a

information. For that matter, and to represent the “inner structure” of the blueprint and to highlight customers’ experience throughout interactions with elements of the service, the film-based blueprint introduces scenes, sequences and story on the vertical level of the blueprint for a more comprehensive delineation of service co-creation and experience.

5.2.3. The “inner” structure – experience and time: scenes, sequences and story

A scene is the smallest unit in a story and within the category “experience”. To express customer experience, for example, a parallel montage can depict a scene of a passenger at check-in at an airport from the perspective of the customer but also from the perspective of the service staff. Furthermore, it can show relevant support activities in another window. All this in combination creates the entire story which can then reveal why, for example, the employee could not meet customer expectations due to a lack of back office support. Yet, a story can also include multiple touchpoints and hence a sequence. For example, a customer wants to check in their surfboard at the airline’s counter (touchpoint) but is sent to the bulky-baggage counter (touchpoint). This might create multiple critical incidents when there is limited space in the airport’s servicescape to move about with bulky luggage due to the airline’s check-in desks too closely located to one another, narrow passageways, or because the customer cannot find the bulky-baggage counter. Such sequence shows that a story can last across numerous touchpoints and may, for example, assist towards optimising the servicescape.

The late actor Alan Rickman (2008) stated that “it’s a human need to be told stories”. In the context of this paper, actors are not asked to *tell* their stories, they are filmed while the stories occur, and the film tells the stories. Hence, film allows the documentation of real

activities in real-time, i.e. narrated time. “The concept of an experience (...) has an explicit temporal dimension” (Bruner, 1986, p. 7). Activities can be captured and compared. For example, how long does it take different customers to accomplish the same process, such as the check-in at the airport and what are the potential issues? Instead of measuring time and separately interviewing actors to reveal their stories, all is captured and documented on camera. Furthermore, alternative service procedures can be compared in terms of timing and the audio-visual record can be analysed. Moreover, parts of the film clips can be replayed or extended in slow motion showing distinct aspects of a process or servicescape, for example, identify causes for “jams” or damages to luggage on baggage carousels and the reasons for airline customer complaints. Equally, films can be fast-forwarded or shot in fast motion, i.e. narrated time changes. Here, the check-in procedure of an airline can be filmed to show customer flow over a certain period of time. For example, a day at check-in can be visualised, peak traffic identified and time stamps used to mark varying customer flow.

5.2.4. The “cast and viewers” – actors and audience

As per Heath’s (2011) recommendation, different perspectives of the service experience can be captured from different vantage points. As outlined, one activity, for example, the check-in can be captured from a customer’s view point, from an employee’s perspective or from a neutral perspective, focusing on the “line of interaction” and potentially zooming in and out of the action. These perspectives and related film clips can be embedded in the blueprint, as Figure 1 demonstrates (see “play” icons for check-in employee, airline customer, and service processes connected to check-in). As filming customers, for example, when checking in at an airport, might be a sensitive issue and raise potential ethical questions, such

as data capture without previous consent, customers can also be asked to send in their own clips which they consent for usage. Not only do customers qualify as an “activated audience” (Tercek, 2014), staff can equally participate in the filmmaking. Staff can be used to enact and imitate typical customer scenes which they perceive every day. Rizzolatti *et al.* (2002) find that humans are capable of imitating a sequence of action which they have never performed before just through prior observation. This is facilitated but not necessitated by understanding the action meaning. Actors might display an “approximate or a precise replica of the observed action” (Rizzolatti *et al.*, 2002, p. 52). Hence, using employees as replacements for customers to enact scenes, in conjunction with fellow staff members, appears to be a good approximation to showcase customer interactions as staff very likely have a reasonably good understanding of “customer scripts” (cf. Eichentopf *et al.*, 2011, p. 651) and practices. This directly links to ethnotheatre and ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2003, p. 218) where scenes can be condensed or multiple scenes with customer critical incidents can either be cut together or scripted and then enacted by staff in the shape similar to a “formal theatre production to mount a live performance event of research participants’ [staff] experiences” to showcase highly critical and reoccurring problems and “researchers’ [and staff’s] interpretations of data for an audience [other staff or managers].”

Staff can watch customer activities on film, or observe themselves or fellow staff enacting or partaking in real-life scenes in the form of ethnotheatre and -drama. Managers might find real customer stories and filmed interactions more comprehensible when trying to understand the service co-creation process, its potential issues and improvements. Furthermore, ideal service scenarios captured on film, suggested and enacted by staff, can

highlight new ways of co-creating value with customers to managers, and can showcase ideas for improvement for the service organisation.

6. Implementation and implications

When creating the blueprint, it is suggested that it be built up over time. It is recommended to start simple, by first filming the customer perspective of the service process, including shots of the servicescape. Then later on, more film clips can be added to display other aspects like staff perspective, back office and support processes.

Furthermore, not all interactions or actors can be filmed due to privacy concerns. Particularly, when aiming at filming customers, permissions might have to be sought. As outlined, alternatively, customers can be asked to send in their own clips and give permission for organisation-only usage. Yet, this has the disadvantage of having to analyse a potentially vast amount (cf. Echeverri, 2005) of “customer-as-film-director” clips. Using willing frontline employees who experience customer interactions every day, to re-enact typical interactions and to suggest improvements which then can be filmed, shown to management and implemented if suitable.

These clips can also be used for training purposes made available within the organisation, either online or on a repository connected to the blueprint. Such clips can help introduce new customer interaction practices. Furthermore, the film clips of customer—staff interaction, either real or enacted, will very likely help to close the divide between research and praxis (Daly *et al.*, 2014), making blueprinting a more vivid tool.

Films can be shot by professionals, for example, by using a professional film production company (such as for demonstration or training purposes), yet these can be costly.

Alternatively, amateur-style films using customers' own or staff self-produced films (for example, illustrating everyday service situations by, for example, re-enactment) using available technology, such as mobile technology, can function as a substitute should the budget not be available for professional filming and editing. As for customer produced films there might be potential issues with clip quality.

This paper highlights a novel approach towards developing a film-based blueprinting technique, which not only aims at capturing touchpoints and processes, it also focuses on providing evidence of the customer experienced service through the medium film by using clips to depict scenes, sequences and stories of interactions with the service provider and the servicescape. Both, from a practical and scholarly perspective, this film-based experience blueprinting technique advances knowledge and practical application as it enables capturing real-world (or enacted) data on service co-creation and related actors and processes. Film clips embedded in a blueprint can enrich the original blueprinting technique's level of detail down to micro level, without compromising clarity. It can save the creation of multiple blueprints. Researchers and managers alike can make use of an improved blueprinting tool to vividly capture and illustrate customer experience, related processes and the servicescape. Using employees to enact films might improve their engagement in service co-creation. These suggestions may become important factors for redesigning the customer experience. Film enables three-dimensional depictions of reality, time capture and measurement. It is a more appealing conveyance of information which is likely to be more receptive and engaging with an audience. Film can be a conduit for transporting emotions, gestures and hence the expression of experience of actors in time and space, i.e. film equally appeals to the cognitive, affective and conative mind. Film can greatly enhance the understanding of service processes

and experiences from multiple perspectives and is a valuable addition to conventional blueprinting techniques. Integrating film as an art form adds value to current business practices and research methodologies. It also allows for more creativity and 'art' to enter service research and practice (cf. Bitner *et al.*, 2008).

Furthermore, capturing more closely the customer experience using the newly developed film-based blueprinting technique allows for better marketability of the service. Based on the captured customer experience and enacted new service processes, servicescapes and customer interactions can be redesigned if needed. Film clips highlighting a new service design can be used to convey service and brand to customers making it more tangible, for example, when employees enact a service for their customers.

7. Conclusion

Scholars and industry practitioners currently using film or pictorial evidence are encouraged to use this technique. Data may need to be collected via this film-based method to test and verify the technique. The conceptualisation of this novel technique is an important step towards making the human activity embodied in customer experience less abstract but more tangible and comprehensible. Ultimately, it is the human factor which enables the creation of art and it is the human factor which transforms a service concept into a service experience for the customer.

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