

Organisational Studies and Innovation Review

Vol. 5, no.2, 2019

How to Improve Customer Service with the use of a Service Blueprint

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Abstract: With the significant growth worldwide in-service economies, too many companies are failing. How can we address this decline? Service blueprints are an innovative answer. One approach for visualizing service systems is a mapping technique called "blueprinting" (Shostack 1984). Blueprinting is a holistic method of seeing in snapshot form, what is essentially a dynamic, living phenomenon. A service blueprint is a picture or map that portrays the customer experience and the service system, so that different people involved in providing the service can understand it objectively, regardless of their roles or their individual points of view. They are particularly useful at the design stage of service development (Zeithaml et al. 2013). There are five key components that make up a service blueprint: physical evidence, customer actions, employee actions (onstage), employee actions (backstage), and support processes (Zeithaml 2013). The process of designing a blueprint involves the consideration of several issues:

1. Identifying processes
2. Isolating fail points
3. Establishing time frame.
4. Analysing profitability.

This paper will take a closer look at several United States service organizations: a public company, a first visit to a dental office and filing an insurance claim.

Keywords: *Marketing, Service Marketing, Service Blueprints.*

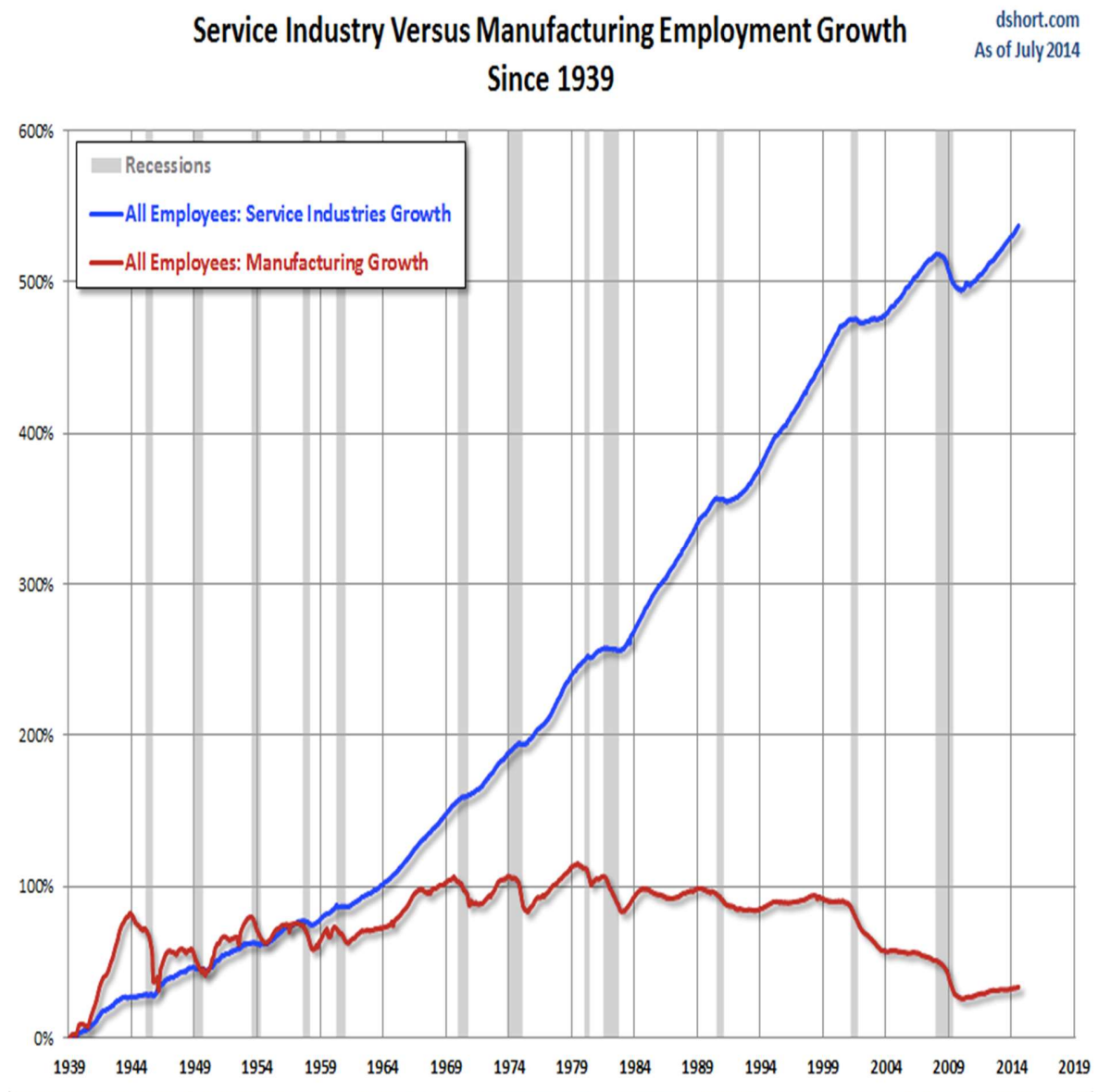
Introduction

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF.org) and the CIA World Factbook (CIA.gov), the following countries are the largest by service or tertiary output as of 2016:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. United States: | \$14.76 billion |
| 2. China: | \$5.7 billion |
| 3. Japan: | \$3.5 billion |
| 4. Germany: | \$2.4 billion |
| 5. United Kingdom: | \$2.1 billion |
| 6. France: | \$1.9 billion |
| 7. Italy: | \$1.4 billion |
| 8. Brazil: | \$1.3 billion |
| 9. Canada: | \$1.1 billion |
| 10. India: | \$1.0 billion |

With the significant growth of services in the US economy, Short (2014) states extra care must be devoted to the marketing of Services.

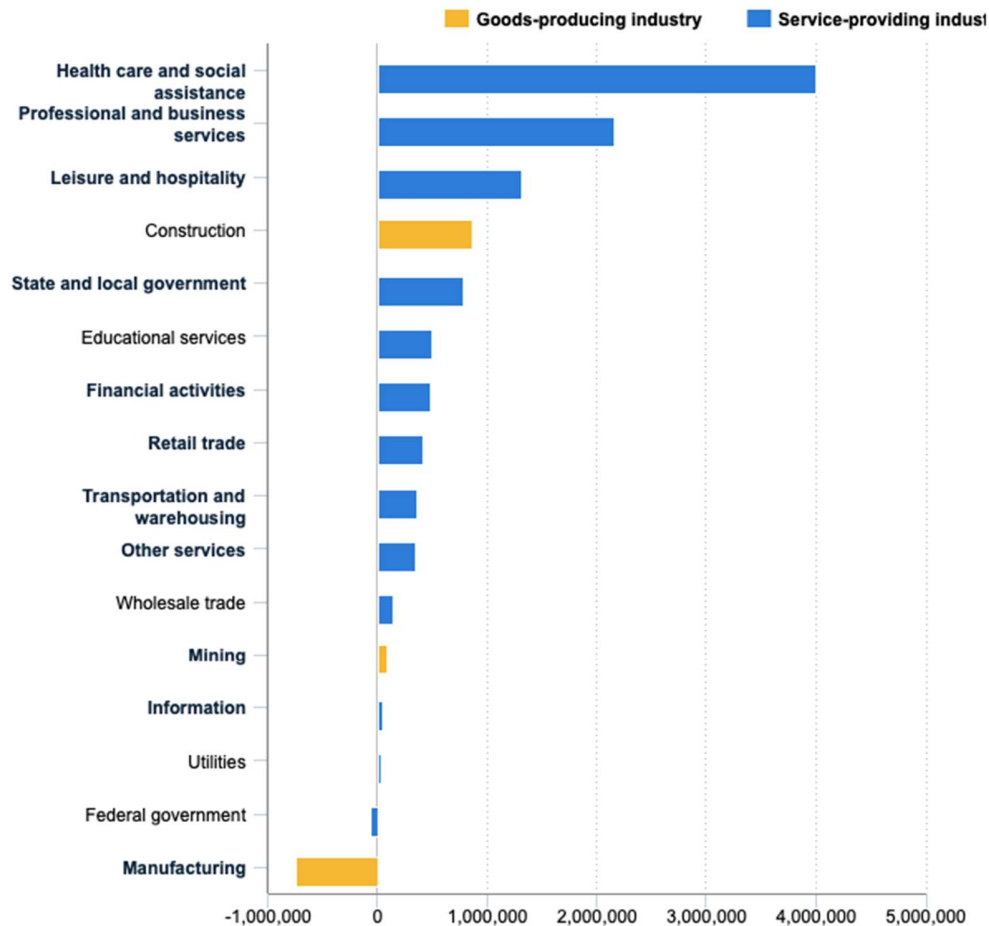
Figure 1



Service-providing industries are projected to account for most of the job growth in the economy between 2016 and 2026, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In fact, of the 11.5 million new jobs BLS projects over the decade, about 10.5 million—more than 90 percent—will be in service-providing industries (Green 2017).

Figure 2

Numeric change in employment of nonagricultural wage and salary workers, by major industry sector, projected 2016–26



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2017

Literature Review

The American Marketing Association (AMA.org) defines services as - “Activities, benefits and satisfactions which are offered for sale or are provided in connection with the sale of goods.” Services are acts, deeds, or performances; they are intangible.

The defining characteristics of a service are according to: *MSG Management Study guide*

Intangibility: Services are intangible and do not have a physical existence. Hence services cannot be touched, held, tasted or smelt. This is most defining feature of a service and that which primarily differentiates it from a product. Also, it poses a unique challenge to those engaged in marketing a service as they need to attach tangible attributes to an otherwise intangible offering.

1. **Heterogeneity/Variability:** Given the very nature of services, each service offering is unique and cannot be exactly repeated even by the same service provider. While products can be mass produced and be homogenous the same is

- not true of services. e.g.: All burgers of a particular flavor at McDonalds are almost identical. However, the same is not true of the service rendered by the same counter staff consecutively to two customers.
2. **Perishability:** Services cannot be stored, saved, returned or resold once they have been used. Once rendered to a customer the service is completely consumed and cannot be delivered to another customer. e.g.: A customer dissatisfied with the services of a barber cannot return the service of the haircut that was rendered to him. At the most he may decide not to visit that particular barber in the future.
 3. **Inseparability/Simultaneity of production and consumption:** This refers to the fact that services are generated and consumed within the same time frame. E.g.: a haircut is delivered to and consumed by a customer simultaneously unlike, say, a takeaway burger which the customer may consume even after a few hours of purchase. Moreover, it is very difficult to separate a service from the service provider. e.g.: the barber is necessarily a part of the service of a haircut that he is delivering to his customer.

The American Marketing Association (AMA.org) defines services marketing as an “organizational function and a set of processes for identifying or creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationship in a way that benefit the organization and stakeholders. In service marketing, because there is no tangible product, relationships are key.

Service marketers must listen to and understand the needs of customers and prospective customers to build loyalty and trust. Ultimately, effective relationships in service marketing will lead to repeat sales and positive word of mouth.”

Many authors have identified the many theories of identifying consumer behaviour and how to adjust to the different trends and motivation of potential clients. When we consider service marketing, Showstack (1987) states “Services are processes.”

McLuhan (1964) stated earlier that “Services are not things, he perhaps put it best and most succinctly more than 20 years ago when he declared that the process is the product. We say *airline* when we mean *air transportation*.

As processes, services have many intriguing characteristics. Judd (1964), Rathmell (1974), Shostack (1977), Bateson (1977), and Sasser, Olsen, and Wyckoff (1978) were among the first to ponder the implications of service intangibility, service perishability, production/consumption simultaneity, and consumer participation in service processes. They found that traditional marketing, with its goods-bound approaches, was not helpful in process design, process modification, or process control. If processes are the service equivalent of a product's *raw materials*, can processes be designed, managed, and changed for positioning purposes the way physical goods are.

Shostack in her landmark paper *Journal of Marketing*, April 1977 stated, “To truly expand marketing's conceptual boundaries requires a framework which accommodates intangibility instead of denying it. Such a framework must give equal descriptive weight to the components of *service* as it does to the concept of *product*.” She continues, “A *molecular* model offers opportunities for visualization and management of a total market entity. It reflects the fact that a market entity can be partly tangible and partly intangible, without diminishing the importance of either characteristic. Not only can the potential be seen for picturing and dealing with multiple elements, rather than a thing, but the concept of dominance can lead to enriched considerations of the priorities and approach that may

be required of a marketer. Moreover, the model suggests the scientific analogy that if market entities have multiple elements, a deliberate or inadvertent change in a single element may completely alter the entity,

One approach for visualizing service systems is a mapping technique called *blueprinting*” (Shostack 1984a,b). Blueprinting is a holistic method of seeing in snapshot form what is essentially a dynamic, living phenomenon. (Journal of Marketing January 1987).

Accordingly, Lovelock (1984) noted that the difficulty of researching service *attributes* for positioning purposes, which is caused at least partly by the inherent ambiguity and subjectivity of verbal descriptions. Blueprints provide visible portraits to which consumers can react, and which can facilitate exploration of more parts of the service system than just its processes. Blueprints can be used to educate consumers, focus their evaluative input on various aspects of the service system, elicit comparative or competitive assessments, and generate specific responses to contemplated changes or new services.

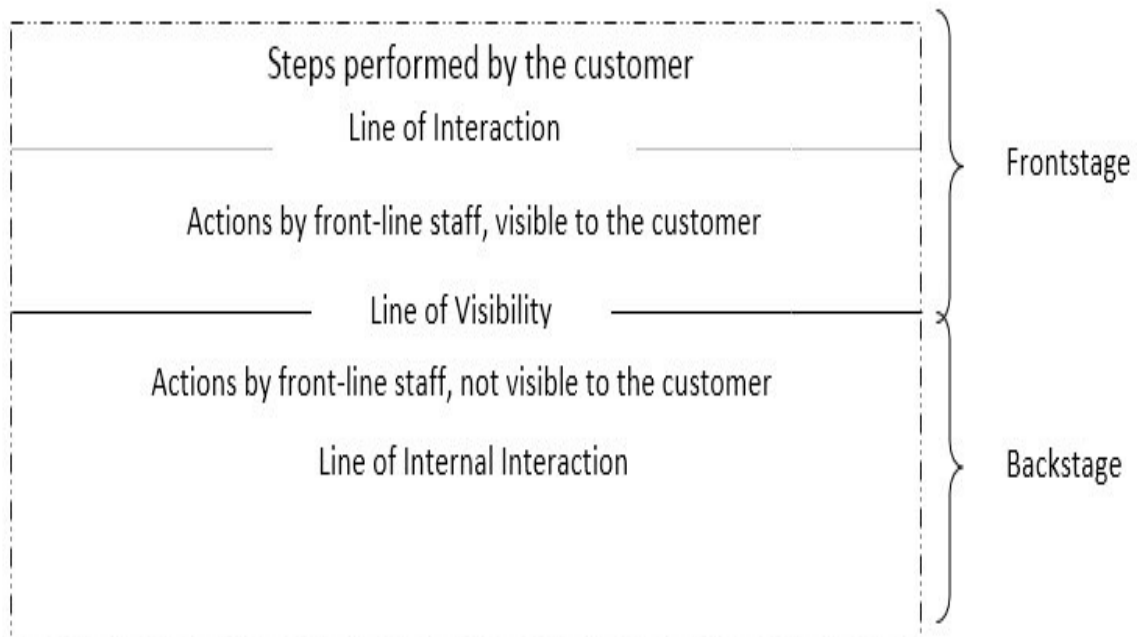
Bitner et al. (2008) defined a service blueprint as “a picture or map that portrays the customer experience and the service system, so that different people involved in providing the service can understand it objectively, regardless of their roles or their individual points of view. They are particularly useful at the design stage of service development.” The technique involves a description of the different process steps visually and in sequence, helping to define the step(s) at which the customer uses the core service and to identify the supplementary benefits that make up the augmented product (Lovelock & Wirtz 2004). Shostack (1984) extended flowcharting to service blueprinting by including the interaction with the customer in the front stage, distinguished from the invisible (to the customer) back stage.

This gave managers the opportunity to identify potential fail points and to recognize the usefulness of the technique for service positioning (Shostack 1987). Since managerial discretion is mostly over the service process, it is not surprising that the design of this process is usually from a manager's perspective and task oriented (Kingman-Brundage 1989). From Shostack's original blueprint with two sections (frontstage and backstage), the model has evolved to include five sections, or layers; Physical Evidence, Customer Actions, Onstage, Backstage, and Support Processes. Customer action and Onstage are separated by the Line of Interaction, Onstage and the Backstage are separated by the Line of Visibility and, finally, Backstage and Support processes are separated by the Line of Internal Interaction (Bitner, Ostrom, & Morgan 2008).

A *service blueprint* is a fundamental component of service design states (Taylor nd)—it's a method that allows you to identify the people, processes, and systems needed to deliver amazing service, by providing a robust organizational framework.

Service design is defined as the activity of planning and organizing people, infrastructure, communication, and material components of a service to improve its quality and the interaction between the service provider and its customer.

Figure 3: Flowchart action areas of the service process



(Source: Lovelock, Patterson, & Walker, 2001, p. 36).

Components of Service Blueprints

There are five components of a typical service blueprint (see Figure 3) (Bitner et al 2008)

1. customer actions,
2. onstage/visible contact employee actions,
3. backstage/invisible contact employee actions,
4. support processes, and
5. physical evidence.

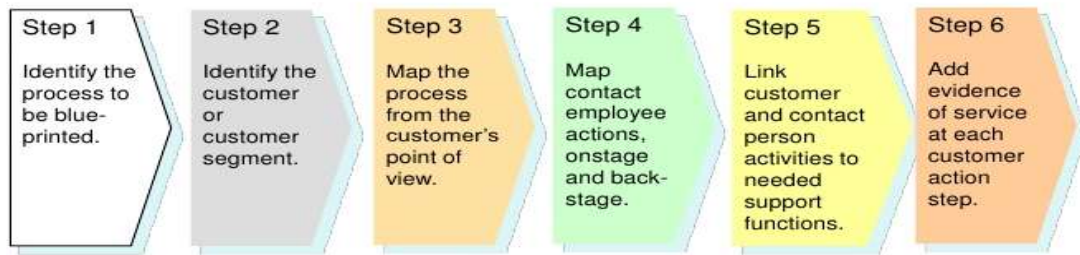
Gibbons (2017) equates “A service blueprint corresponds to a specific customer journey and the specific user goals associated to that journey. This journey can vary in scope. Thus, for the same service, you may have multiple blueprints if there are several different scenarios that it can accommodate. For example, with a restaurant business, you may have separate service blueprints for the tasks of ordering food for takeout versus dining in the restaurant.

Service blueprints should always align to a business goal: reducing redundancies, improving the employee experience, or converging siloed processes.”

Blueprints can identify weaknesses and uncover potential improvements

Methodology: A service blueprint is a picture or map that portrays the customer experience and the service system, so that different people involved in providing the service can understand it objectively, regardless of their roles or their individual points of view. They are particularly useful at the design stage of service development (Zeithaml et al. 2013).

Figure 4: Building a service Blueprint Zeithaml (2013)



Using this technology, identifying and examining the process, this paper will take a closer look at the Boarding Process of Airplanes. By utilizing a Service Blueprint. This is a controversial topic. There are many considerations that need to be recognized: the airline company, the employees, (on the ground and in the air), the clients/the passengers, the flight and all the many costs (human and financial) involved.

Figure 5: Boarding of Airplane

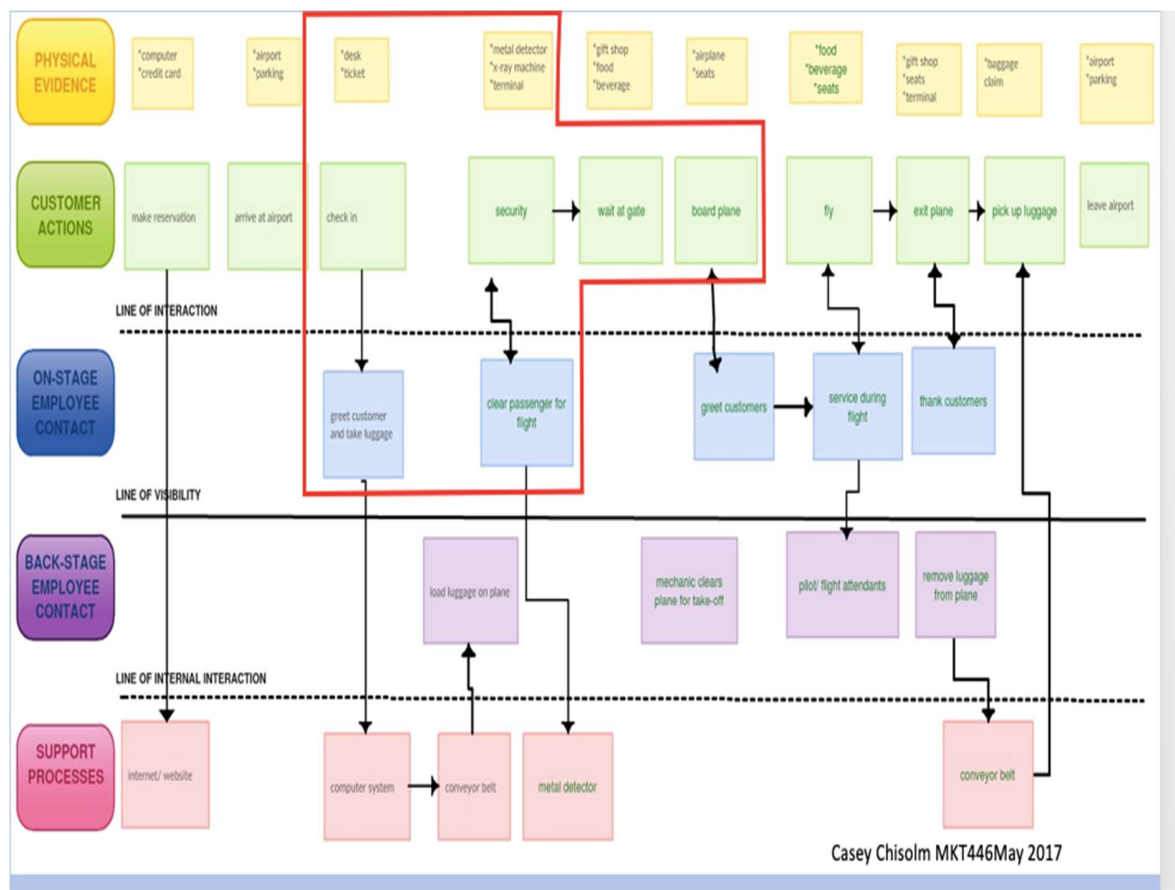
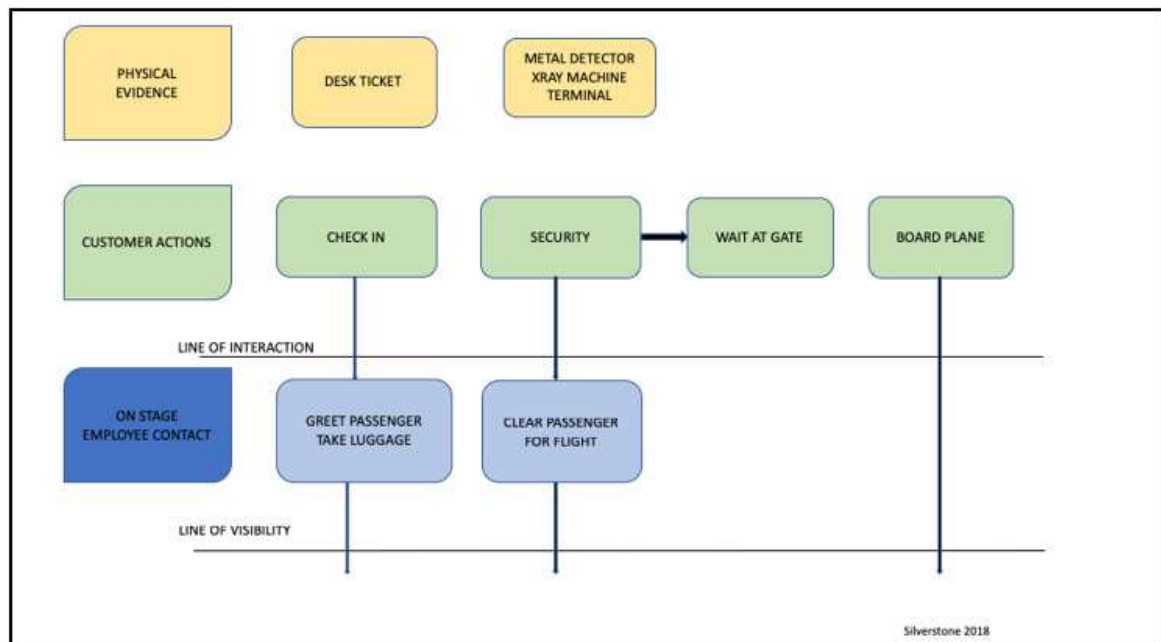


Figure 6: The Boarding Process



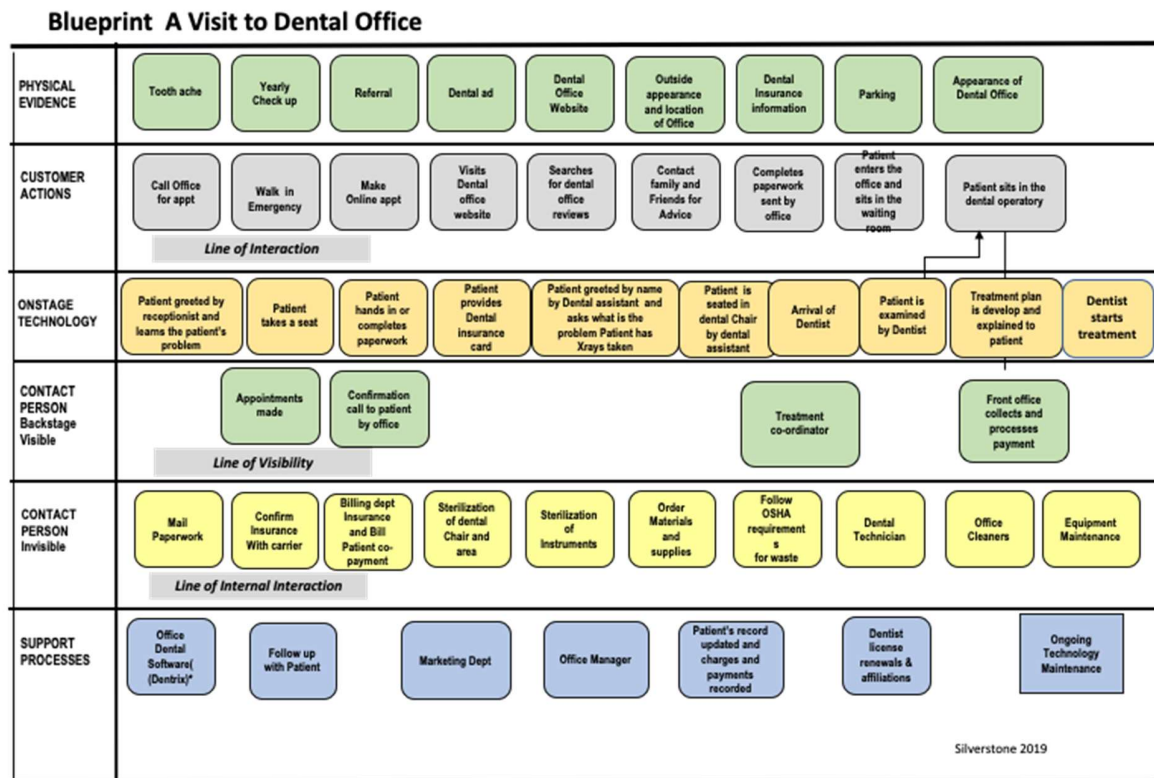
Why the Airline Boarding Process is all Wrong (Sumers 2016)

- There is an art to boarding a plane efficiently, but that's not always best for business
- Frustrated by how long it takes to board a plane?
- Don't blame airlines.
- Research is clear about how to speed up the boarding process, and airlines could implement new procedures to save time.
- Passengers probably wouldn't like the changes, however, so most airlines stick with what they have.
- There is no "standard" used in the airline industry for boarding passengers. Each airline uses its own boarding procedures and priorities.
- Factors airlines use in determining boarding priorities
 - Fare / category paid
 - Airline Loyalty; frequency/duration of flights
 - People requiring assistance
 - Online Ticket purchase/check-in
 - Use of an agent for purchase / check-in
 - Active Duty Military
 - Airline sponsored Credit Card holder
 - Factors that affect efficiency
 - TSA Pre-check eligibility
 - Inability to organize passengers effectively
 - Inoperable equipment
 - Insufficient training
 - Mobile vs. paper boarding passes

No One is winning the Boarding process. Airlines are testing eye scans, fingerprints, facial recognition to replace boarding passes

Using this same process, a service blueprint is constructed for a first visit to a dental office. One generally visits a dental office for an emergency, this blueprint is for a new patient examination.

Figure 7



According to the (Mayo Clinic n.d) during a dental exam, the dentist or hygienist will clean your teeth and check for cavities and gum disease. The dentist or hygienist will also evaluate your risk of developing other oral health problems, as well as check your face, neck and mouth for abnormalities. A dental exam might also include dental X-rays (radiographs) or other diagnostic procedures. Regular dental exams are an important part of preventive health care. Regular dental exams help protect your oral health and general well-being. A dental exam gives your dentist a chance to provide tips on caring for your teeth and to detect any problems early — when they are most treatable.

What Happens During a First Dental Visit?

- First, it is important to find a dentist with whom you feel comfortable.
- How to find a dentist? Personal referral,,flyer, ad, social media, website, direct marketing, insurance referral etc
- Location of dental office, lighting, bus route, parking, appearance, hours of operation
- Reason for visit, toothache, check-up,
- Call for an appt, online appt, walk in
- Check in to the office, complete necessary paperwork (health history, insurance)and take a seat

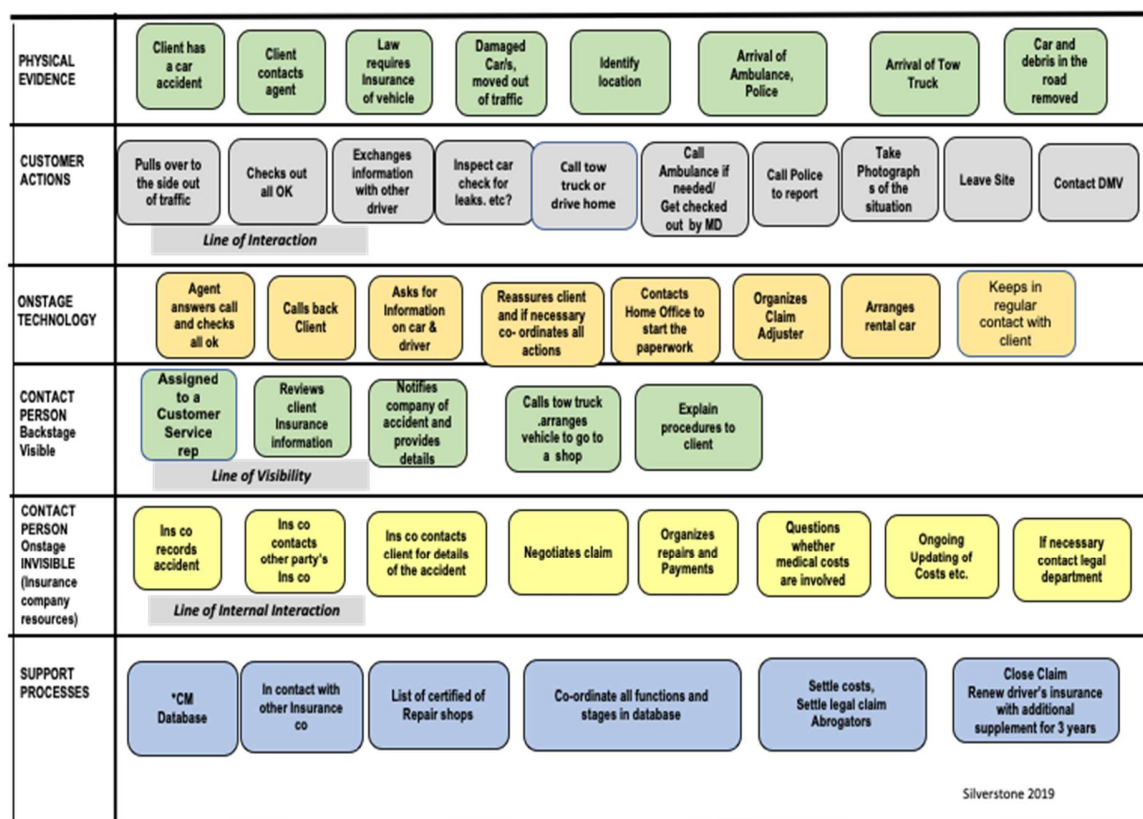
- Operatory is prepared for patient, sterile work area, instruments and supplies are laid out
- Patient is directed to the operatory, dentist examines patient and completes paperwork
- Treatment plan is approved by both dentist and patient, and treatment starts
- The Dental office personnel are the visible contact persons using onstage technology,
- The back office dental personnel, and the agent of a third party the Insurance company are the invisible contact persons (authorize payment) provide the support processes).

As demonstrated in the Dental Service blue print the six steps have been recognized, problems and “bottlenecks” can be identified. The goal is to make the patient as comfortable as possible, be aware of the different stages and make the visit a pleasant experience

The third and final example is filing an Insurance Claim after a Car Accident.

Figure 8

Blueprint for Insurance Claim



Here is the list of steps to follow (www.rmilia.org)

- Phone your insurance agent or a local company representative. Do it as soon as possible even if you're far from home and even if someone else caused the accident.

Ask your agent how to proceed and what forms or documents will be needed to support your claim. Your company may require a "proof of loss" form, as well as documents relating to your claim, such as medical and auto repair bills and a copy of the police report.

- Insurance consumers make their own choice when selecting an auto body repair shop to fix their car. Many states, including Colorado, have laws that prohibit steering to specific repair shops.
- Make sure you hire an auto body shop that provides guarantees and specific timelines on repairs. Your insurance policy has certain limits and deductibles, so find out settlement amounts before you sign off on repair costs. If you don't know where to take your vehicle to be fixed, most insurance companies will provide you with a list of repair shops that are backed by repair and labor guarantees.
- Supply the information your insurer needs. Cooperate with your insurance company in its investigation, settlement or defense of any claim, and turn over to the company immediately copies of any legal papers you receive in connection with your loss. Your insurer will represent you if a claim is brought against you and defend you if you are sued as the result of an accident.
- Keep records of your expenses you incur as a result of an automobile accident may be reimbursed under your policy. Remember, for example, that your no-fault insurer usually will pay your medical and hospital expenses, and possibly such other costs as lost wages and at least part of your costs if you have to hire a temporary housekeeper.
- Keep copies of your paperwork. Store copies of all paperwork in your own files. You may need to refer to it later.
- Talk things over with your agent or an adjuster if you are dissatisfied with the settlement offer. Check your policy to see what settlement steps it outlines.
- How is it processed?
- Your Insurance agent is the visible contact person, using onstage technology, and is the agent of a third party the Insurance company (contact person invisible and provides the support processes).
- First of all, the insurance company must confirm that your policy is in effect and that the accident is covered. After that is determined, your claim may be assigned to a claim's adjuster. The adjuster will look at the damages to your car, evaluate the loss and figure out how much you can claim under your policy. This figure will be the insurance company's estimate of what they will pay to repair your car—the total claim payment.

Discussions and Conclusions

Benefits of Service

- Provides a platform for innovation.
- Recognizes roles and interdependencies among functions, people, and organizations.
- Facilitates both strategic and tactical innovations.
- Transfers and stores innovation and service knowledge.
- Designs moments of truth from the customer's point of view.
- Suggests critical points for measurement and feedback in the service process.

- Clarifies competitive positioning.
- Provides understanding of the ideal customer experience.

With growth of services in the US economy, Service Blueprints are tools that are needed to address the requirements of client/customer interactions in the name of best practices. Service Blueprints are visible portraits that enable the identifications of service gaps within the organization that require process improvement.

In today's competitive environment, Service Blueprints are the mechanism to validate implemented measures to ensure success.

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