Chapter II

Service Concepts

Introduction

Services are something we routinely experience in everyday life as consumers. Also, depending on our profession, we may deal with services as providers. School teachers, hairdressers, and airline pilots are three examples of professions that offer services to consumers. The typical domestic dwelling is connected to several services such as services for drainage, electricity, and water supply. Architects and house builders take into account the local availability of external services and arrange the house’s drainage, heating and plumbing accordingly. Gas heating, for example, requires the availability of a gas supply service. If such service is not available, the house’s heating system must be based on an alternative fuel such as oil. This will, in turn, impact other decisions about the design of the house, such as, for example, the provision of space for an oil storage tank.

External services are provided according to some exact specifications and standards set by their providers. The electricity company, for example, will ensure that the
frequency of the supplied electricity will be either 50Hz or 60Hz, within a given
tolerance range, and that its service will be available continuously. If the company
fails to meet such service standards (e.g., due to power failures that last for longer
than a specified period), an electricity company will usually offer compensation to
its customers.

Provision of consumer services such as electricity is pretty much standardized to-
day. This in turn allows standard equipment such as cabling, sockets, and so on to
be used for wiring a house without knowing (or caring) in advance who the actual
electricity supplier is going to be. Consumers, if they choose to, can even switch to
a different supplier that offers lower rates (cheaper electricity) or a better service.
That, of course, could have never been an option if, every time the electricity sup-
plier changed, the whole house had to be rewired to match the service of the new
supplier. Furthermore, consumers, in general, do not know, nor care, how the com-
pany that supplies them with electricity acquires it in the first place (i.e., whether it
generates it in its own power stations or buys it from some other supplier). Neither
they are interested in whether the company owns the power transmission lines or
uses someone else’s transmission network.

For consumers, therefore, services such as gas and electricity operate in a transpar-
ent manner. Electrical appliances, for example, must be connected to the electric-
ity service (i.e., to the building’s electrical network) by using a standard plug and
socket. Services such as electricity and gas have standardized interfaces. In the case
of domestic electric power supply, the company stipulates the exact type of cable,
amperage, and voltage that it can provide to connect to the consumer unit; this is
the interface of the service and is specified to very exact standards.

Standard utility services such as water, electricity, and telephony are now com-
modities because of the maturity and standardization of the technologies used by
the respective industries. In other types of services, though, there is significant less
standardization, and thus the opportunity for the consumer to choose between differ-
ent services that differ significantly from each other in their characteristics as well
as in the required interface to the actual service. Interior designers will normally
provide you with a total customized service, one that is based on the size and loca-
tion of the rooms in your house, the type of furniture etc. It is extremely unlikely
that two clients will receive exactly the same advice from an interior designer. We
call these customizable services. In contrast, the services offered by the water or
electricity supply company are standardized.

During the construction of a house, a number of services from architects, interior
designers, electricians, and so forth are typically employed. Such services are essen-
tially independent from each other, but somehow, they need to be integrated under
a common architecture (a framework) that is controlled by the person or company
who have commissioned the building of the house, and/or the architect responsible
for its overall shape and design.
Sustainability in Service Operations

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