Chapter 1

Service Science and Practice

This introductory chapter aims to make clear the holistic nature of services to our lives linking the science part to the practice matters. Bringing examples for service successes and failures, this chapter shall help the reader position him or herself with the field under examination. We present and discuss the collaborative approach towards service design and the contextualisation of services as leverage for attaining competitive advantage. Critical factors are listed that concern relationship management in business service contexts and which are considered in terms of the collaboration dimension. The chapter closes with an examination of power dependencies and trust in collaborative service arrangements.

The idea behind this book is extremely simple. And the title of this book, that was designed with the help of the editors from the publisher is totally descriptive and does not contain any dose of deliberate marketing mislead. Having graduated as a computer scientist and having worked in the industry for a long period, I have accumulated an extremely great amount of experiences all of which relate to suboptimalities in service related issues: not only how one provides a service but also how
one designs this particular service, and most importantly how this specific service has been conceived and conceptualised. And – to not leave out further important parts of the service supply chain – how the recipient of the service relates him or herself with the provided service.

In a simplified world where for each service there is a provider and a supplier, both of which have consensually agreed on what exactly shall be the subject and the conditions of the interaction between them. But this simplified world does not exist at all – or it may exist under some very specific circumstances and also not for long as disruptions from the ‘outside’ world shall sooner or later emerge and will bring back the system to its usual suboptimal levels.

However, in all my encounterings with the academic community as a student or reader of scientific publications as well as in my experiences with the industry or the research communities, it seemed to me that all agreements and decisions for any type of services were made under the assumption of a smooth and friction-free operational environment. Of course this assumption had all times been proven wrong – and a great puzzlement for me was why are all steps regarding the lifecycle of a service characterised by an entire lack of common sense and an absolute stubbornness to improve aspects that are usual points of expected pitfalls? Why for a big number of easy-to-fix and obvious matters do we need a special appeal for an epiphany?

The reason is simple and relates with the title of this book: unfortunately we all have been educated to think according to clichés or templates: this is a problem of physics and that is a problem of mathematics; this is my problem and that is your problem; this is my service and that is your service. For this aspect of the service I am the responsible and for that aspect I am not.

The term holistic may make some readers raise their eyebrow: whatever relates with the term holistic or related terms like multi-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary may look like an attempt for the scientification of astrology. However, similar to the medicine that we all agree it is not an exact science like we tend to think for mathematics, we can see the de facto existence of service science. The most important issue in this exploration of service science fundamentals is to have an open mind that seeks questions – old ones and new ones. The answers may easily follow or may simply be difficult to find yet. At least, one common denominator for the majority of the service failure stories that I have experiences in all these years related to a simple fact: people denied to address the problem (the service as well) as a whole and tended to fragment it into non-sense making pieces, some of which they had fanatically ignored (e.g. as supposedly non relevant), some other they characterised as not of their responsibility, and finally selectively chose to address some parts that they thought of as being of their responsibility and – very important … - possible to solve and manage in their own mystic scale of computational capabilities.
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