Chapter 4
Services and the Humans

The author examines the various aspects of influence and impact that services have on the humans and vice versa. How an interactive space is created to link both entities – and most importantly – how humans interact with each other through services of all kinds. He examines the starting points of a real world service design and implementation case that is representative of the difficulties that one faces when trying to make practice out of theory. Designing a service that would help people offer and get a better service in the European technology transfer domain is the starting point. He continues examining the users and their particular needs, then looking inside the service mediation process and the various user service scenarios. And concludes with a description of system deployment issues.

It is in the nature of humans to provide services – as it is also in the very nature of humans to consume services. The most primitive service is provided by mothers in terms of nursing their young born children. The latter are happy to receive milk for free – though they have to do something from their side too as they need to suck. Same as it is in the nature of humans to both provide (and get) services, it is also
to provide (and get) bad services.

Bad is a generic term – may be used for anything that carries a negative connotation. However, this is what I mean in our case: any service that is unsuccessfully matching the expectations, wants, preferences, capacities, capabilities and needs of its customer or consumer can be simply denounced as bad.

Humans provide services for different reasons: either for fun when they sing in company of their friends, or for earning their life when they sing professionally in front of an audience and are paid for this. In the first case, people’s attitude in case of a cacophonous hobby singer is much more tolerant than in the case of a professional singer – especially in case they had paid to listen to him or her. Of course, any successful professional singer has started as hobby singer and has advanced to earn money for this.

But this simple case does not constitute the basis of the service establishment for humans: professional accountants did not evolve from hobby ones; and secretaries did not follow a secretarial path dating back to their school or preschool activities. Same holds for bankers, prime ministers and police men. And most importantly: the same holds also for mothers who suckle and new born babies who suck.

The idea in a great majority of cases in the area of professional services is that someone starts his life as an insurance broker or her life as teacher, and that there is a learning curve and an incremental process that makes them better in hat they do. This is unfortunately a totally incorrect assumption that leads to many (otherwise avoidable) pitfalls and suboptimalities that make many of us find ourselves in unfortunate situations. An ideal world is nothing else than a universe of optimal service providers and customers. Just a brief notice: the customer side is essential to our analysis. A bad service customer damages a service same much as does a bad service provider. Or as we use to say: it takes to tango.

In an ideal world, all people would choose what best suits themselves for executing as a profession – or it would be God’s invisible hand that would dictate who would become a teacher and who an internal auditor. Unfortunately people have not shown at least collectively a superb capacity in optimally assigning themselves with service-related professions, and as far as divine intervention is concerned either it is in default or not optimal at all.

Let us examine the case of telephone support personnel. It is in all aspects a demanding task: it needs people that are capable to unfold a multitude of skills many of which lie in the area of what we tend to characterise as ‘soft skills’. And for sure, there is a demand for excellent capture of specialised knowledge in the core business domain. Now, think of all the incidents that happened to you during the last week or within the last month and which involved one or more incompetent people. It may depend on many parameters like the number of transactions you have with institutions and other entities, but in general the picture is well known to all of us: