The Paradox of Service Industrialization and the Creation of Meaning

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ABSTRACT

The emergent interdisciplinary area Service Science Management & Engineering (SSME) considers the study of people, technology, and shared information as prime components in service systems. Frequently, the area regarding people is the one that draws less attention. The author analyzes how the knowledge and application of discoveries on how the human mind perceives and stores concepts and events has important implications regarding service design in the experience economy. Specifically, they analyzed the creation of meaning and the quality of experience assessment. The paradox of service industrialization arises when defining a continuum between maximum industrialization of the service on one end and complete personalization on the other. Under certain circumstances, industrialization, which on the one hand creates value, can also destroy it. The contribution of this work lies in pointing out research lines for Service Science (SSME).

Keywords: Creation, Customization, Experiences, Industrialization, Service Science, Service Science Management and Engineering

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergent interdisciplinary area Service Science Management & Engineering (SSME) considers the study of people, technology and shared information as prime components in service systems (IfM & IBM, 2008). However, by observing the breakthrough in this research field, it seems that, quite frequently, the area involved in the study of people is less considered than the rest. Perhaps this is a reflection of the need that companies have for great doses of technology nowadays in order to design and deliver services, or of the fact that the study of people is more complex than the study of machines. It may also reflect that this discipline is closer to Engineering schools than to other faculties within the University.

Another indication concerning the research in this field is that studies are frequently related to the area of technology whereas there is comparatively little research in the area of the scientific study of traditional services. Concepts such as user experience commonly refer to the field of human computer interaction (Norman, Miller, & Henderson, 1995), although from our point of view they are also applicable to traditional services.

Research has drawn science to the study of how the human mind perceives the envi-
venient and how it interprets and stores the events and concepts it processes. It has been pointed out, for instance, that there is a difference between the logical and the psychological meaning of concepts. The latter refers to each person’s idiosyncratic and individual experience (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 2000), so that each concept has a unique value within each cognitive structure and every cognitive structure is different. Moreover, each cognitive structure is different since it has been built by each person within a different story. A concept such as democracy may evoke different states in heterogeneous cognitive structures, even when their owners have shared similar educational contexts. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases the meanings that emerge are similar enough to allow communication and understanding (Ausubel & Robinson, 1973).

On the other hand, the set of internal representations a person has and their model of the world do not constitute a mere addition of isolated concepts but are linked creating relationships (Gentner, 1983; Novak & Cañas, 2006). In this world model, language plays a key role since it contributes to cognitive development by providing the setting of analogies and relationships and representations that allow abstraction (Gentner, 2003). Consequently, analyzing how the individual understands the messages it receives and how s/he connects them with their previous mental structure, since each person has their own, is not trivial or irrelevant.

Accordingly, each person holds a unique way of seeing the world, which has been developed from their own previous experiences and which conditions their behavior to a great extent (Beck, 1983). Moreover, a person’s assessment of an event has a consequence that may not only be behavioral but emotional (Dryden & Ellis, 1989).

This theoretical paper is intended as an analysis of the reflection on how people perceive the experiences that are a consequence of their own use of services and the subsequent implications this has on the way in which they should be designed.

It is based on the idea that in the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) the design of experiences must take into account the way in which customers subjectively perceive the interaction with a service. This subjectivity is related to the construction of meaning for each person.

2. THE HUMAN MIND: HOW WE PERCEIVE EXPERIENCES

It has been recently discovered that when the human being performs an action, observes it or imagines it, the areas of the brain involved in it are the same, and this is being ascertained also in regard to emotions (Jabbi, Bastiaansen, & Keysers, 2008). Therefore, a person’s internal world (conceptual and emotional) is of prime importance in their life. What is more, in many occasions the memories people store in their memories do not exactly correspond to what actually happened. These errors happen because the memory is a constructive process in which information is stored so that it can be retrieved to make simulations of the future (Schacter & Addis, 2007). The processes that allow us to imagine or simulate the future depend on the same neural processes involved in episodic memory (Schacter, Addis, & Buckner, 2007). Nowadays, it is therefore assumed that people’s memory does not register reality as it is, but a personal biography of an individual takes the shape of a story that is greatly influenced by the person’s environment, their values, social class, gender, religion, culture, and by their objectives (McAdams, 2007).

Everybody has created an inner world throughout their lives that does not exactly match the outside world and most certainly it does not match the inner world constructed by other people either. This model of the world is important because it is closely linked to the construction of identity, since people create their life plot from the events they experience. This plot needs to be meaningful or the person but also for those in contact with them (McAdams, 2001). Our hypothesis is that it is very likely
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