USING SCRIPTS TO UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER'S SIDE OF THE SERVICE PROCESS

Competitive Paper

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Abstract

Purpose: Although much research has been done on customer integration and customer orientation, most work has focused on the supplier side of the company. We want to show that more attention for the customer's perception of the service process might result in superior results in value creation. Therefore we focus on customer scripts as a cognitive concept.

Research method: We review relevant literature from research on customer integration, presentation of service processes and script theory, including an empirical validation of the effect of scripts on the overall service performance.

Research findings: Scripts do have a positive influence on service performance, namely on customer satisfaction. Besides, in different service settings, customer scripts can help to reduce transaction costs.

Main contribution: Our work helps to better understand the service process from the perspectives of both participants. It is a necessary step to build a bridge from individual, collaborating firms to real joint value networks that need a common understanding of the process.

Keywords : customer script, customer process, blueprint, value co-creation, customer integration

Introduction

Over the last few years, customers have changed their role. No longer are they passive recipients of values that firms produce, but they were empowered to be co-creators of the value outcome. Along with this, value creation by itself required a new conceptual foundation, considering the joint activities of customers and suppliers. Much work in this was done by the Service-dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004, Gummesson 2006) that both withdraw from the separation of goods and services and from the separation of suppliers and customers. In their logic, every value exchange process could be called a service. With this term, they described a mutually agreed, interactively designed process of value creation, referring to material as well as imateriel outcomes. Each service is composed of two or more service participants that benefit in their distinct sense.

The Service-dominant Logic is only the most extreme formulation of ideas that were already discussed for several years. For example, the Resources-Processes-Outcomes-Approach (RPO), showing several consents with the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), was developed back in the early 1990's. Despite its prominence in recent debate, the SDL still needs some clarifications.

One such clarification has to develop an understanding of how customers and other service participants know about their potential contribution to the value creation process. Here, coordination and an exchange of information is needed. Charged with unequal distributions of information, coordination stays against the background of potential transaction costs.

Our proposition is that customer scripts could help to reduce transaction costs in transactions that include joint, interactive value creation processes. Customer scripts are implicit expressions of the process that exist in the mind of customers. Hence, a codification of scripts would be able to create a certain level of process apparentness, as the service blueprint already does on the supplier's side.

Our work is an extrapolation of the doctoral thesis of our co-author van Stiphout (Frauendorf 2006). Using her basic reasoning on customer scripts, we show the importance of scripts in interactive value creation. In addition, we try to clarify and extend some critical arguments in her reasoning. A centre piece of the work is a typology of services that introduces a script-based management tool. This tool will help firms in three ways: To understand the customer process, to help customers understand their role, and to improve the process by mutually reducing transaction costs.

An Overview of Interactive Value Creation

In service research, interactive value creation has been discussed for a rather long time. Originally, interaction with the customer was one key characteristic to distinguish goods from services (Lovelock and Gummesson 2004). Later, this perspective could not be held up, as it created some definitional problems (Kleinaltenkamp 1997; Brodie et al. 2008). However, the degree of customer participation was still seen as a thoughtful dimension to identify different types of outcome (Engelhardt et al. 1993; Vargo and Lusch 2004).

What conventionally is named a service can be considered a value creation process with a rather high level of customer participation. Trying a definition, "a process is any purposeful activity or group of activities that result in an outcome… [that] requires input such as human intelligence, information, machines, and materials" (Haksever et al. 2000, p. 152). In contrast to what sometimes is debated in research, we assume that such a process can result in physical output, a service or a combination of both as a result. The crucial thing about this is the interaction with the supplier. (Kullven and Mattson 1994). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p.5) state that "the co-creation experience of the consumer becomes the very basis of value". In align with Edvardsson (1997), we focus on the customer's side in the interaction between customers and their suppliers and call this a customer process.

In the beginning, business researchers discussed processes under the light of how they work and how they can be organized efficiently, focussing both on quality and performance. (Shostack 1984; Johnson et al. 2000). Though most did not, some conceptualizations of the process included the integration of customers as an option of the process design. However, no model explicitly deals with the customer as an active, powerful participant. In particular, little is known about how customers form their own process image although they as well as suppliers need something that leads them through the process (Frauendorf 2006).

A prominent example of a supplier-focused process image is the service blueprint. The blueprint is regarded to create the fundamentals for a customer-oriented organization of the firm and to provide process transparency for all participants throughout the whole process (Lundkvist and Yakhlef, 2004; Fließ 2006). In its conventional conceptualization, the process activities are ordered chronologically and positioned in different levels of activities, where higher level activities are those that are closer (and potentially visible) to the customer (Shostack 1992). This idea can be amended by an advanced understanding of customer integration: A further distinction between activities that are directly induced by the customer and those that are not helps to identify those activities that simultaneously require the customer to deliver some external resources.

Many blueprints certainly will never be communicated to the respective customers, limiting their potential to fulfil their mentioned tasks. In addition, blueprints only map firm activities. As a consequence, new informational asymmetries might rise, since it is only the supplier who provides information to the customer. Though they usually are assumed to have positive effects on transaction costs, at least to some part the effect might be exactly the opposite.

A simple solution might be a simple mirroring of the blueprint beyond the line of interaction (Fließ 2001, see also figure 1). As usually customer processes exist only as implicit structures (Nooteboom 1999), such a blueprint is more difficult to gain. However, it marks the latest and most advanced state of the blueprint concept.

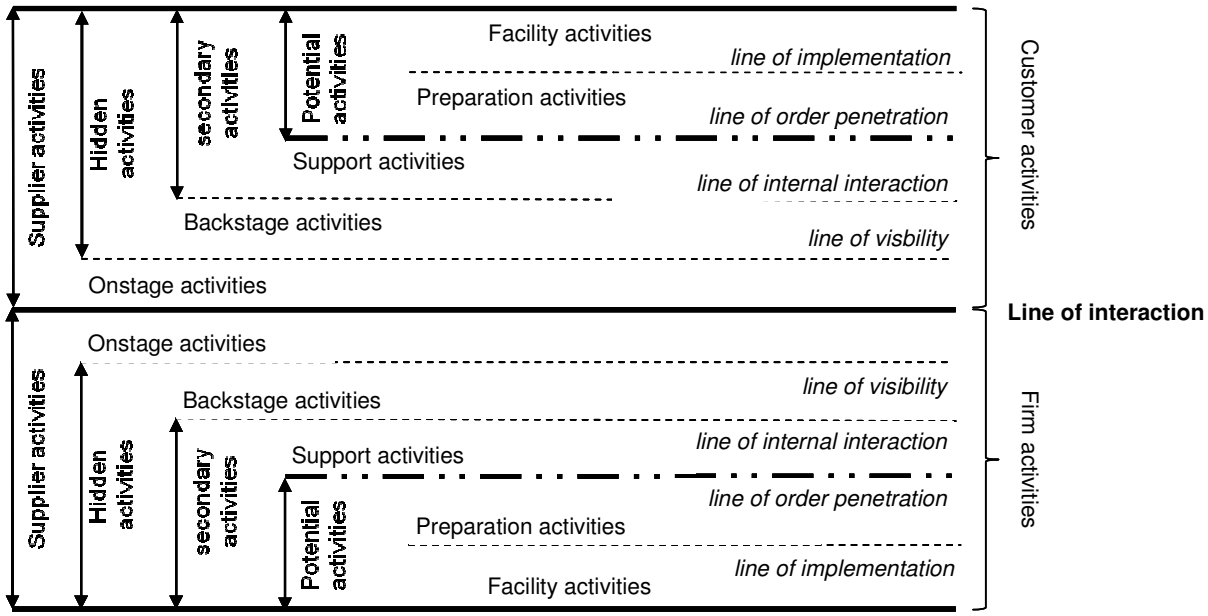

Figure 1: Extending the service blueprint structure to the customer's perspective

Customer integration also changes the allocation of responsibilities among process participants. Traditionally, suppliers alone beard the responsibility for a qualitative and performant process outcome. However, if some tasks are given to the customers, responsibilities also need to be reallocated. This might turn out as problematic, when

customers have no clear evidence of their responsibilities. Suppliers can overcome the problem by helping customers to adopt their responsibility and learn about their role(s). As a result, efforts in co-creation and co-production should result in superior outcomes with fewer mistakes and a higher process quality (Edvardsson 1997). Then being based on symmetric information provision, interaction would also lower transaction costs.

Transaction costs are a by-product of economic activities that need a certain level of coordination. This concerns both market transactions and hierarchical transaction within companies. Aside, customers and suppliers are confronted with transaction costs. These costs are "costs of resources utilized for the creation, maintenance, use, and change of institutions and organizations. They include the costs of defining and measuring resources or claims, the costs of utilizing and enforcing the rights specified, and the costs of information, negotiation, and enforcement" (Furobotn and Richter, 1997, p.40).

In the Service-dominant logic, value creation is not limited to the activities that are usually included in models like the service-blueprint. Instead, SDL supporters argue that a major part of value creation is rooted in the use of the exchange object. Giving the object a sense by means of its adoption, the continuously changing usage of process steadily impacts the value base (Vargo 2008). Thus, suppliers are challenged to predict different usage settings and to design flexible products that can handle distinct contexts. However, more flexibility again raises the need for coordination and imposes further transaction costs.

As already said, a powerful attempt to counteract transaction costs would create transparency among participants. Yet, in an interactive process, transparency has to be supported by all participants. Thus, customers also have to regard the costs of a transaction. Having a script of the process in their mind would allow them to follow the process path along the integrative activities. Then, communicating the script to their partners, customers could enhance transparency on those activities that otherwise might be invisible to the supplier.

As a result of owning more responsibilities, customers also owe the justification of their task's impact. In a provoking sense, customers become something like part-time employees during the process. Mills and Morris (1986) describe the quality of customer participation as the customer's service customer performance. They and others perceive high service customer performance as crucial for a firm's success. On the other side, weak service customer performance can negatively affect the supplier company in general (Lovelock and Young 1979, Mills et al. 1983).

For instance, efficiency can be enhanced or weakened by customer integration. On the one hand, customers are responsible for additional uncertainty, as stated above (Danet 1981). On the other hand, customer integration can improve the overall level of efficiency: Customers are something like a valuable, but cheap resource of product-related thoughts and power (Larsson and Bowen 1989). As any resource and in particular as a firm's employees, customers can be viewed as being positioned inside the management sphere of the company (Mills et al. 1983). However, certain characteristics of the institutional environment (supplier, customer, outcome, and market) might affect the actual intensity of customer participation (Kalaignanam and Varadarajan 2004). If customer participation is said to induce transaction costs, a positive relation between higher levels of customer participation and higher levels of transaction costs seems to be obvious.

Scripts in the Customer Process

Van Stiphout, one of our co-authors, investigated the role of scripts in the customer process (Frauendorf 2006). In her work, she presented scripts as cognitive concepts that exist in customer's implicit thoughts. They organize knowledge about activities that customers perform in the value creation process. The application of learned action sequences can turn scripts into routines. Schank (1975, p. 240) says "a script is an elaborate causal chain which

provides world knowledge about an often experienced situation." That is, scripts usually address dynamic events that are quite renowned to the script owner. A thoughtful application of this might be the value creation process. As in any comparable situation, customers would develop expectations about how to participate individually in the process (Abelson 1981). The result would be a script as something like an actor's script in theatre, laying the fundament for a good stage performance. In the interaction between suppliers and customers, a precise process image educates customers about their role and their responsibilities (Lord and Kernam 1987).

Aside to scripts, schemata represent a collection of objects. Taking scripts and schemata together, they build a mental model (Norman 1983). In a service setting, the process would mark the script-related event, while the service outcome would equal the object, both together creating a distinct mental model of the service. On a general level, a mental model of the service might already exist before its subparts will be precisely defined (Edvardsson 1997).

In general, service scripts deal with distinct processes and the connections between the various actors in the process. Since a service process usually included more than one participant, scripts might also be confronted with shared interpretation of each actor's role. Being related with their context, service scripts are a form of a situational script (Schank and Abelson 1977). In a service situation, the common basis of all participants is their interest in value creation. This basis is weakened when value descriptions vary too much among actors. Information exchange helps to implement a shared understanding or at least complementary understandings of all actors.

All in all, scripts describe the expected behaviour in familiar situations. As an expression of episodes, they also guide behaviour in future applications on similar situations. The higher the similarity to known situations is, the better the script works as a stable pattern (Abelson 1981). As a consequence, they are only partially applicable to completely new service settings, unless efforts are taken to procure familiarity with the new process. Clearly, this would be a marketing task.

Other tasks are related with scripts. A structured overview of further tasks that scripts can be used for contains five groups that we form in align with Van Stiphout (Frauendorf 2006). This overview is given in table 1.

Task	How it works
Anticipate (Ashforth and Fried 1988)	Behavior being limited to a fixed sequence, action sequences of partners can be anticipated.
Control (Tansik and Smith 1991)	Implicit control works through comparing real action with the scripted routine.
Evaluation (Ashforth and Fried 1988)	Taking he script as reference, interpreting deviances from the script leads to an evaluation of quality.
Economize (Berger and Luckmann 1966)	Coordination can rely on a structure and becomes easier, with a reducing effect on transaction costs in bargaining actions.
Transfer (Tansik and Smith 1991)	By establishing analogies, scripts can be transferred to new or altered, but related situations.

Table 1: Tasks of the service script throughout the service process

As we already discussed customer participation in the context of transaction costs, we will focus on service scripts and their economic influence. Over the service process, transaction costs might arise from various sources, in general being related with uncertainties (Kleinaltenkamp 1997). One such source might be a lack of knowledge about the distinct interaction. Fließ (2001) put this in her concept of process apparentness: Process apparentness is low if there is missing knowledge about when and where to contribute to the process, either by actively using own forces or just by delivering necessary resources. In addition, the

customer is confronted with a higher risk perception concerning quality and characteristics of the outcome. At the same time, the supplier cannot be totally sure that the customer will deliver all his required external resources properly and in due time.
As a consequence, firms try to include the risk in their calculations, thus increasing the costs of the value creation process. Aside costs, the quality (or perceived value) of the outcome is also affect. Thirdly, planning uncertainty is induced, since unclear expectations about the process impede a systematic planning of required behaviour, leading to false, improper estimations of the probability of unexpected behaviour (Fließ 2001).
In such a situation, firms are usually advised to control uncertainty be generating knowledge. Yet, informational deficiencies cannot only be reduced by newly created knowledge, but also by the transfer of existing information. If both approaches are not possible, then institutions and accepted routines still might help in managing uncertainties, as both include a distinct description of the expected behaviour.
A script can serve in all three ways. As such, it can amend the traditional, firm-oriented service blueprint. It enables a reciprocal understanding of the entire service process. Its functionality, though, is limited due to the concept's cognitive character: It deals with implicit or tacit knowledge and information and it is difficult to transfer or codify the script. Each effort on this will entail a loss of information, provoking significant transcription errors. The result is a little bit paradox: At first intended to reduce transaction costs from another conflict of interests, taking another perspective, scripts might in fact also create new transaction costs when it is about exchanging the scripts themselves. If there are some precautionary measures that explicitly focus on the exchange of scripts, misguided service scripts might be hindered from originating. Besides, we argue that additional transaction costs will in general be lower than the positive effect that scripts have nonetheless.
As mentioned before, scripts are context-related. Certain patterns and characteristics of the script object will influence how actually a script is composed and internalized. Among the most influential factors are customers, suppliers and the process structure itself. They also may change the credibility of the script, as Van Stiphout (Frauendorf 2006) investigated. There, she recognized that customer's ex-ante knowledge about the service process helps customers developing their own service script when being involved in the process.
Additionally, she showed that the process structure is also worth looking at. Depending on (1) how easy it is to learn the process activities, (2) how visible these activities are, (3) how consistent the process design is, (4) how robust the design is, and (5) how controllable the service process appears, the influence of these process characteristics changes the credibility and functionality of the service script (Frauendorf 2006).
Figure 2 shows the overall model of Van Stiphouts original study. It's the background of our statement that scripts can contribute to higher performance levels of firms. Here we say that a successful process usually will also be a performance-increasing process. Hence, process success can be regarded as an expression of general success. Van Stiphout used the German telecommunications, internet and media services sector to check the framework's validity in an empirical context.

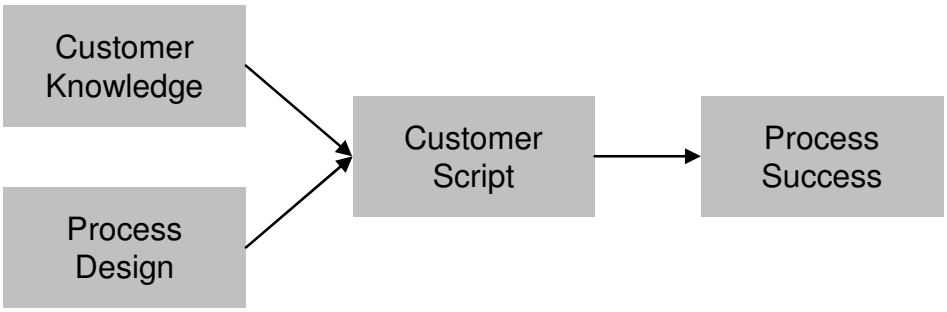

Figure 2: The model framework of Frauendorf (2006)

Process success again was split up into two components. First, process efficiency was said to be a dimension of process success. The reasoning was based on the clear economic impact on financial firm performance: The more efficient a process, the less costs are induced. Second, customer satisfaction is the value-related, customer-oriented success dimension. It was here that scripts showed a significant positive impact, while efficiency remained unchanged regardless the distinct script (Frauendorf 2006). Table 2 reports the results for each part of the model framework.

Hypothesis	**Spearman-Rho correlation coefficient**	**R^2**	**F-Value**
(1) Customer knowledge significantly influences how strongly established the customer script is.	0.496	0.265	<0.05
(2) Patterns of the process design of the service provider significantly affect the customer script.	0.73	0.517	0.00
(3a) The customer script significantly influences the service process success in terms of customer satisfaction.	0.728	0.759	>0.05
(3a) The customer script significantly influences the service process success in terms of process efficiency.	0.147	0.028	0.225

Table 2: Statistical validity of the script model

Hence, there is a relation between scripts and performance, and therefore scripts might be included in management. That there is no effect on efficiency might be the outflow of general processes that, so far, integrate customers only partially. As a consequence, the major part of costs is made up of firm-related reasons. However, even in this setting, a more precise understanding of the service production and delivery process enables customers to find their distinct role in the process, knowing where and when to contribute to the firm's activities.
The transferability of the script between various actors was called a problem. Definitely, it is. A script cannot have significant effects unless customers are willing to share it with the firm. Even before, the willingness of customers is also a prerequisite that scripts are developed at all. Here, firms are required to implement measures comparable to those which are used for maintaining and developing employee skills. Again, this points on the appearance of customers as partial employees, with their salary being the produced value. In particular, these measures include activities to promote the use and communication of scripts (Xue et al. 2005). In that way, scripts might become a tool as common to customers as blueprints are to hired employees (Kingman-Brundage 1991). "Hence, the service script can be regarded as the client's personal surrogate process map; it serves as a guiding pattern and gives implicit instructions how much participation the service situation necessitates and what actions to perform." (Frauendorf 2006, p. 114)
However, a company has only limited power over customers. The communication of a script cannot be commanded as in hierarchical structures, since after all the customer remains the dominating principal in the exchange process. Hence, all attempts to motivate customers

eventually might turn out as worthless, if customers fail to do this on a voluntary basis. New institutional economics educates us that customers might chose not to share (script) knowledge if the partner is not credible enough. In another case, customers might share a lapse of trust in their own script. In addition, the cultural background and consumption preferences may also influence the willingness of participating actively. Regardless the reason, companies have to motivate customers to transfer their image of the process to other actors: Clearly, this relates to the tasks of marketing which, hence, gains strategic importance in the context of interactive value co-creation.

Differentiating the Application of Service Scripts

Typologies are quite popular in business research, though many of them never gained real practical relevance. On the contrary, the barely scientific definition of the agricultural, the industrial service sector is rather common in practice, regardless its shortcomings. Vargo and Lusch (2004) conclude that any concept to distinguish different types of outcomes will never be appropriate. According to them, the unifying term service is the better solution. Relating this to our work, the service is similar to the interactive service process. Yet, in our mind, this service process leads to the final outcome, while it is already the outcome for them.

We support their view that most typologies were inadequate as general guidelines for management. Nonetheless, many of them could be applied very well in their distinct niche. Hence, while we withdraw from general typologies, we see advantages of applying typologies to specific topics. In addition, we understand a typology as a tool to identify certain tendencies, not to deliver precise judgments (Engelhardt et al. 1993).

In this section, we want to present a typology in the context of interactive value creation. Being aware the problematic character of typologies, from the very beginning, we limit its applicability to script-related thoughts. Concerning scripts and customer integration, our typology fills a gap: Most practice tools in the context of service processes focus solely on the internal activities of the service operator. The customer as an active part of value creation has not yet been fully integrated.

Following that, we try to classify services based on a two-dimensional matrix, where both dimensions are closely related to the script concept (Frauendorf 2006). The aim is to identify distinct clusters of situations which equal each other in how scripts can be used to minimize transaction costs (Figure 3). The first dimension positions services according to the necessity that the customer script has for the customer. The correlation is as follow: The more complex the service process, the higher is the necessity of a script. The other dimension deals with the ability to learn and adopt a script. Note, that the harder it is for customers to learn script, the harder it is for suppliers to teach that – and vice versa. Different position in the matrix mirror distinct challenges by transactions costs, implying varying institutional mechanisms to handle the situation.

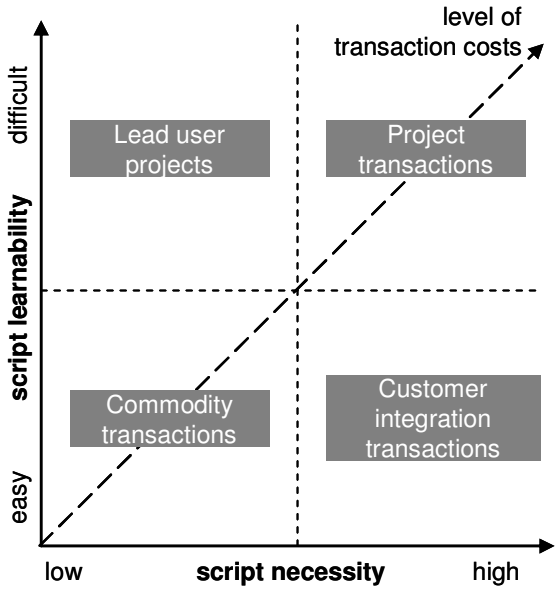

Figure 3: An integrated service typology for the analysis of transaction costs in various service exchange situations

In fact, the two dimensions of the matrix are the general expression of further issues that we handle as sub-dimensions (Figure 4). For each sub-dimension, their effect on either of the dimensions is shown as positive or negative. The general message states that the effect on the dimensions is always antithetic, because the sub-dimensions have a distinct impact on the complexity of the service process. Now, if complexity of interaction increases, than usually it will be more difficult to learn the script, while at the same time clear guidance patterns throughout the whole process are more necessary than in less complex situations. With more interaction between suppliers and customers, customers are required to perform well on their tasks, ensuring an equally satisfying outcome. Yet, we argue that a more pronounced sub-dimension will result in a higher positive net effect, in align with our reasoning that the advantages of increased customer participation exceed the disadvantages.

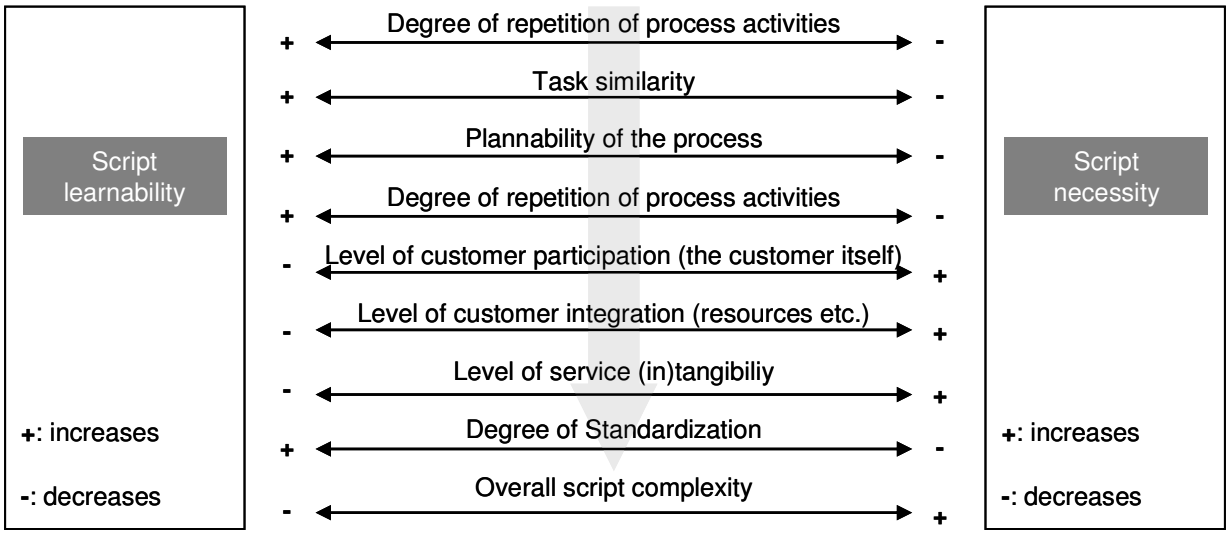

Figure 4: Antithetic effects of the sub-dimensions of the integrated service typology

As a result, the typology helps to implement an action plan for improving the general process efficiency in the context of learning and customer integration. Besides, managers will be able

to identify opportunities for further interactive value creation. We illustrate this with examples for each quadrant of the matrix in figure 3. Therefore, we use examples from the B2B world. We perceive this as appropriate, for customer integration is more advanced in a B2B context than it is in B2C. Complementing our verbal explanation of the examples, figure 5 gives a visual presentation of how to change the script in order to reduce transaction costs.

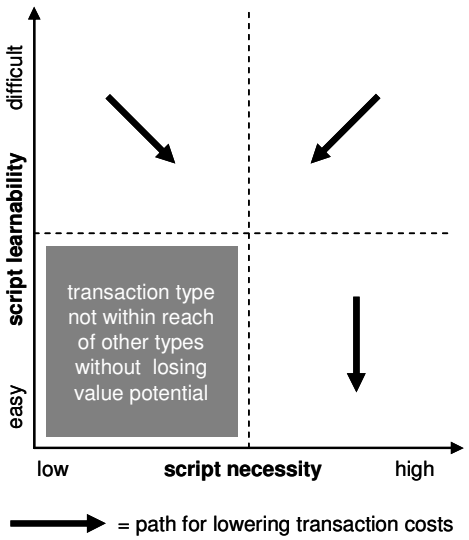

Figure 5: Ways to cut transaction costs for the distinct types of the integrated service typology

We first discuss the upper left quadrant of the matrix. Here, script necessity is low, while at the same time scripts are difficult to learn. This setting forms a high load of transaction costs, as there is barely anything like previous experiences with the process. Not having any connection to the process makes it difficult to learn and adopt to the new situation. As the process, however, is not very complex (limiting the necessity of a script), the learning difficulties are the main source of transaction costs. Obviously, this quadrant entails a lot of situation where innovations shall be marketed. Here, one quite illustrative example would be a lead-user project. In the context of customer integration, lead-users also contribute to the development of process structures. Such project are characterized by an intense and frequent collaboration between suppliers and customers, nearly totally integrating the customer into the firm's activities for a limited time span (Lüthje and Herstatt 2005). Clearly, repeated interactions help to build-up some knowledge and to connect the project with other experiences, opening up a way to transform the project into ohne with less transaction costs. Though, at the same time, the more frequent contact between firms increases the overall complexity, we assume a positive net effect on process efficiency. We back our assumption on the idea that standardizing parts of the interaction process might limit the unintended rise of complexity (Frauendorf 2006)

The next quadrant, in the upper right corner of the matrix, shares with the first one a problematic situation if it is about learning scripts. In addition, scripts are rather necessary here, such that scripts cannot be ignored. (Admittedly, this is a policy which might be another solution for the first presented quadrant.) Large investment projects which are widespread in B2B environments are a good example for that. Keep in mind that projects also pay a role in the B2C sector, as for example weddings are nothing else than an event project. Common for project transactions is that many partners will never have collaborated before. Obviously, this reduces the range of encounters that might help in learning and communicating process structures. Simultaneously, the high complexity of project transactions definitely makes a close contact between all partners an essential part of the process. In consequence, customers

are forced to develop their own process image or, as we call it, their distinct customer service script. As a result of both dimensions being pronounced strongly, transaction costs will be high. Attempts to reduce their pronunciations might include the communication of process abilities and typical workflows by the firm (giving customers the opportunity to find the access point). A second measure might be the reduction of the internal complexity of the process by structuring it in standardized, flexibly combinable process modules.

Figure 4 describes the lower right quadrant as the one including transactions that are based on customer integration. Evidently, customer integration occurs in the upper right quadrant as well. Yet, situations exist were customers are integrated based on fairly easy scripts, with no difficulties in learning them. In many cases, this is the result of previous contacts where information was already exchanged between the transaction partners. Hence, transparency of the process is significantly higher in this field of the matrix, with a major source of transaction costs being discarded. In the reverse, the integration of the customer creates a certain level of complexity and, thus, transaction costs. As in the before-mentioned situation, modularized standardization of process elements might limit this effect.

The fourth case is neither characterized by a necessary script nor by a difficult script. In a B2B environment, this concerns nearly all commodity transactions, being related to standardized services. In such transactions, customer integration is heavily restricted. Besides, transactions repeat in a very frequent manner. Finally, complex activities remain in the autonomous sphere of the supplier. As a consequence, transaction costs are low and a very basic script is sufficient for customers to meet their co-production targets. However, in most cases, such transactions will not include goods and services that contribute a substantial high load of value. Hence, whether the cost-value margin is better or not depends on the distinct case.

Conclusions

In align with so many researchers we acknowledge that an active contribution of customers to value creation is the next step toward enhanced value creation. Regardless specific adjustments of terms and relevant distinctions in some theoretical details, customer integration found its way both into academia and business practice.

However, most conceptual work in marketing has overly focuses on the provider's perspective. The customer is frequently mentioned as being a central element of value creation, but he is merely taken as an exogenous factor rather than an endogenous variable of the value creation process. In consequence, customer integration bears a strong bias: The true capabilities of customers to integrate are not sufficiently researched and just as little is known about customer behavior during the interaction.

As we tried to outline, scripts are a good way to structure such knowledge and to make it explicit and available to others. Scripts refer to customer's thoughts about the interactive value creation and his role in this process. They are guidelines and orientation points, in its power reflecting previous experiences.

Empirically, we find support for our reasoning that scripts are beneficial for the service process. In particular, strong scripts increase the level of customer satisfaction in the service process. Although enabling (more) successful service processes, however, scripts by themselves are also the outcome of former successful processes, too,

For firms, customer scripts are a valuable contribution to their planning activities. They could use them to amend their supplier-focused service blueprint with a distinct view of the customer activities. Unfortunately, the potential is limited, since scripts represent tacit knowledge and share some difficulties when they shall be codified and transferred to others. Integrating the customer in new service development could reduce this problem, because customer's experiences could be shared with the company from the very beginning. Customer

integration could be implemented in two ways: Firms could change their own behavior in order to fit better with customer characteristics or they could try to train and control customer behavior in a desired direction.
This paper should not mark the final point in research in scripts. For example, all four field of the matrix that we presented need some empirical work to validate our managerial statements. However, at this point of time, we deliver an approach to find a real understanding of customers in interactive value creation, leaving the traditional focus of customer-related research on the buying behavior of customers.

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