

FACILITATING SERVICE CO- PRODUCTION: A DRAMATURGICAL PERSPECTIVE

ZAGROS HATAMI

AALTO UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ART AND
DESIGN

ZAGROS.HATAMI@AALTO.FI

ABSTRACT

Unlike products, the production and consumption of service occur simultaneously with service users acting as co-producers of service. This role is significant as the quantity, quality and experience of service is often reliant on the quality of user efforts. Thus, service designers need to consider the co-productive roles various service actors are required to play at the time of service consumption. This awareness allows designers to facilitate this role taking process by setting the stage for users as well as other service actors to successfully play their part in the production of service. As service interactions are dyadic social interactions, a dramaturgical perspective can inform service design in design, staging and facilitation of service actor roles in service co-production. This perspective highlights the importance of the definition of situation and user ability in role performance. Attention to user roles and privileges, the presence of other service actor roles, the ability in fulfilling desired roles, the setting, required tools and service evidence can inform service design process in facilitation of user participation in successful service co-production.

Further investigation is needed to evaluate the adoption of this perspective in design of services.

INTRODUCTION

The design of services demands different considerations due to the characteristics that distinguish them from tangible goods. Highlighted in the services marketing literature (Fisk, Grove & John 2008; Rathmell 1966; Regan 1963; Shostack 1977; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1985), these characteristics are: *intangibility*, *inseparability*, *heterogeneity*, and *perishability*. Among these, *inseparability* explains the best the participatory nature of service production.

Unlike tangible goods, the production and consumption of service unfold simultaneously. This inseparability makes the service users integral to service production:

The person being served (the client or consumer) is inevitably part of the production process, if there is to be any production whatsoever. Therefore, the resources, motivations, and skills brought to bear by the client or consumer are much more intimately connected with the level of achieved output than in the case of goods production. The output is always a jointly produced output (Garn et al. 1976, p. 1214).

To describe this joint production, Elinor Ostrom, the 2009 Nobel laureate in economics, coined the term *co-production* in the 1970s. To Ostrom and her team, co-production “involves a mixing of the productive efforts of regular and consumer producers. This mixing may occur directly, involving coordinated efforts in the same production process, or indirectly through independent, yet related efforts of regular producers and consumer producers” (Parks et al. 1981, p. 2).

The term co-production has been used in other contexts as well. Normann and Ramirez (1993) discuss the *co-production of value* in relation to their proposed value constellation model. The notion of user role in value creation is also highlighted in service-dominant logic

where value is viewed to be “always co-created, jointly and reciprocally, in interactions among providers and beneficiaries through the integration of resources and application of competences” (Vargo, Maglio & Akaka 2008, p. 146). Boyle and Harris (2009, p. 3) define co-production as an “equal partnership between ‘providers’ and ‘users’ of services” that “affords equal value to different kinds of knowledge and skills, acknowledging that everyone has something of value to contribute.” Their paper focuses on “full co-production” where both professionals and users equally partake in both activities of service design and delivery. This paper, however, does not address value co-creation or service co-design. Here, the focus is the co-productive role of service users at the time of service consumption as highlighted by Ostrom’s definition.

User participation in service co-production provides several opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it facilitates the offering of customized services, on the other hand, it makes services vulnerable to the quality of user input (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2009). In dealing with these challenges, two approaches are noted. Some have advocated a separation between production and consumption of service, where possible, to limit direct user contact with service production allowing operation in peak efficiency (Chase 1978). Others have called for the utilization of the productive capabilities of users considering them as “partial” employees of service organizations (Mills & Morris 1986).

Increasingly, the second approach is gaining attention as many services, such as self-service, personal development and collaborative services, demand high levels of user participation making users responsible for the quality, quantity and experience of service (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2009). This highlights the importance of service co-production efforts in the service encounter. Services marketing and management disciplines have traditionally focused on service processes, however, Morelli suggests that “the focus on customers’ participation moves the centre of service processes much closer to the customers” (2009, p. 3) where the service design focus on service encounter can compliment the services management perspective.

Holmlid (2009) highlights the shared tradition of both service design and participatory design in engaging users in the design process to achieve participatory, cooperative and emancipatory objectives. These methodologies participate users in *design before use* whereas service co-production deals with the user participation in *use after design*. Thus, new approaches need to be explored to inform designers of the use context and interaction so that the desired co-productive roles can be designed with the aim of service co-production facilitation.

As service encounters are dyadic human interactions (Solomon et al. 1985), the understanding of the service interactions can greatly inform service design and

provide the required framework for staging effective co-productive roles. A dramaturgical perspective can provide such understanding since service is often likened to theatrical performances (Grove & Fisk 1981; Grove, Fisk & John 2000). Fisk et al.’s Service Theatre Framework (2008) views the total service performance as the dynamic interaction of actors, audiences and the service stage. Understanding these dynamic interactions from the perspective of dramaturgical sociology might provide designers with the necessary insights to approach service co-production facilitation.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

MEANING, SELF (ROLE) AND OTHER ROLES

Dramaturgical sociology is a perspective rooted in symbolic interactionism. Brissett and Edgley (1990) suggest that the accomplishment of *meaning* in human interactions is the main concern of dramaturgy. According to them, meaning, on one hand, is a “behavioural outcome of human activity” (1990, p. 2) as it emerges out of what people do, and on the other hand, it defines the characteristics of the social act. It is important, however, to note that meaning is established in this perspective. As they explain, it is not simply a reflection of either cultural/institutional arrangements or psychological/biological realizations. As meaning emerges out of social life, the “how” of people’s doings is focused instead of the “what” or “why.”

In dramaturgy, human behaviour not only happens to occur in situations, but also it is fully *situational*. As meaning emerges from human behaviour in social situations, it is situationally relative. However, “situations do not simply define themselves. They must be constructed by symbolic communication and hence social life must be *expressive*, whatever else it might be” (Collins & Makowsky 1972, p. 207). According to Brissett and Edgley (1990), the expressive/impressive dimension of human activity highlights the dramatic nature human behaviour leading the dramaturgists to view life as a theatre in which people behave in accordance to life situations when interacting with others. These expressive means allow individuals to define, influence or adjust to situations while presenting themselves in favourable ways.

What is interesting in dramaturgy is that self itself is a meaning and thus, situationally relative. Goffman (1959, pp. 252-3) argues that self cannot be abstracted from the individual’s social situation:

This self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses . . . this self is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has specific location . . . [The individual] and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not

reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments.

Thus, situations provide the context and opportunity for the emergence of the self, or role, played in social interactions. Brissett and Edgley (1990) emphasize that role playing is not a simple conformance to a set of prescribed acts by merely taking roles and fulfilling expectations. Instead, as people are expressive in their actions, they play with their roles and engage in the role making in accordance to the definition of the situation presented to or defined by them. A combination of explicit and implicit information, signs and symbols establish the definition of situation and provide the cues on how to behave and what to expect from others in the course of social interactions. Moreover, as roles allow people to relate to one another in given situations, without one or more relevant “other-roles,” “self-roles” cannot exist (Turner 1990). For example, the role of “parent” will have its meaning only in relation to that of a child. Therefore, other-roles present in situations have great importance in emergence of self-roles.

THE DEFINITION OF SITUATIONS AND THE FRONT REGION

To better understand the establishment of the definition of situation, Goffman (1959) proposes three regions for human interactions: *front*, *back* and *outside*. Among these, the front region is the most significant for a given performance since this is where the definition of situation is established and the performance takes place in front of an audience.

According to Goffman, The front itself has two components: the *setting* and the *personal front*. Setting provides the physical environment or the “scenic parts of expressive equipment,” involving “furniture, decor, physical layout, and other back ground items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it” (1959, p. 22). The personal front refers to the expressive equipments identified with the performers themselves: “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (1959, p. 24). Unlike the setting elements that are usually fixed and immovable, the sign vehicles of the personal front are movable, transitory and can change from one instance of performance to another. Goffman divides the elements of personal front further into *appearance* and *manner*.

The combination of the setting, the personal front elements of appearance and manner as well as the expressions given and given off work together in fostering the definition of situation from which the human behaviour, self (role) and meaning emerge during social interactions. The understanding and utilization of these elements in a coherent manner can facilitate role establishment and performance.

ABILITY

While dramaturgy highlights the significance of situations in emergence of roles, ability cannot be neglected. For no matter how calm the lake, how sunny the sky and warm the weather, if one is not capable of swimming, the role of a swimmer will not be filled. Of course, the existence of the right conditions will enhance the performance when one has the capability of performing the task:

we might go on to claim that it is just because the activity can be seen as an image of that sort of activity that it allows room for considerations of style, for an aesthetic dimension. That a man fills the role at all is not usually a question of style; to be a surgeon at all is mainly a question of ability, or qualifications. Or what he usually does to the patients confided to his care. Doing the job is a technical matter; but the surroundings in which the job is done offer the chance to do it in style rather than merely. In something like surgery, style is very much the man - bound up with how an individual manages the demands on him; but it is also an element in the role, in the sense that an account of the style in which a role can be filled is one of the things we would want to know about any role before we felt we understood it (Ryan 1978, p. 74).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE DESIGN

The dramaturgical perspective highlights the definition of situation as well as ability. These can translate to various service encounter elements such as the setting (the servicescape), the personal front (appearance and manners of service representatives and other present in the social environment), and the user capabilities in performing desired roles. This perspective not only makes designers aware of the impressions formed through the above mention elements, but also provides a list of areas that can be influenced by design in order to shape user impressions and facilitate the emergence of desired co-productive roles.

THE SERVICE CO-PRODUCTION FACILITATION CHECKLIST

The following checklist is proposed as a guide for designers to consider when designing and staging desired co-productive roles:

- User role and privileges
- Other roles
- Ability
- Setting
- Tools/evidence

User roles and privileges explicitly specify the role of the service actors and their privileges at a given instance in the process of service co-production. These could include task-oriented and functional roles or transient metaphoric roles and awarded privileges. The *other roles* include all other service actors who have a collaborative relationship with the user in service co-

production. These can include the service provider, other customers, online users and the community. This recognizes the collaborative nature of service co-production. It also provides the required contextual information for the establishment of the desired role. The *ability* raises the importance of any training, tools or information required for the staging of the desired roles. Ability can be internal and/or external to the user. The *setting* points to the elements of servicescape where the service co-production takes place. Finally, *tools/evidence* supports any required tools or tangible artefacts that can support the performance and staging of a desired service performance.

A checklist, comprised of these five elements, provides service designers with a snapshot of the elements required for the establishment of the desired service roles. This promotes a comprehensive understanding of the elements influential in the establishment the definition of situation and the emergent roles in the co-production of service.

A simple example illustrates the potential use of this checklist.

EXAMPLE

Imagine a new security procedure introduced in an airport. The efficiency of the user participation in service co-production is essential to the passenger flow as well as their service experience. Due to the recent enforcement of this security procedure, most passengers are first-time users. This procedure involves digital fingerprinting of passengers. Passengers are permitted to proceed to the secured zone after obtaining security clearance.

Table 1: Service co-production checklist for a passenger in the airport security example

Checklist item	A service design team's considerations
User roles and privileges	Orderly line-up and compliance to instructions; self-administration of digital fingerprinting
Other roles	Airport security personnel, fellow passengers and others present in the area
Ability	First-time users with no prior knowledge of the procedure or devices used.
Setting	Airport security check, waiting area, counter and the gate to secured zone
Tools/evidence	Fingerprinting device, signage and signals guiding passengers through the procedure

The service co-production checklist, filled out from the perspective of a passenger, can draw a snapshot of the service co-production landscape (see Table 1). This enables the design team to actively consider and define the desired co-productive roles of the user in a given service encounter. This also promotes a systematic and

consistent treatment of all the essential ingredients necessary for the establishment of the definition of situation in the staging of the desired service roles. Attention to user ability ensures that both the internal and external dimensions of ability in role performance, such as the user self-efficacy and the usability of the present elements, are considered.

DISCUSSION

Dramaturgical perspective on social interactions can provide a good starting point for research on service co-production facilitation. Further research is required to evaluate the adoption of this perspective in service design. The implications of dramaturgy for service co-production facilitation are most evident in face-to-face services. The application of this perspective in digital services needs to be explored in future studies.

REFERENCES

- Boyle, D & Harris, M 2009, *The Challenge of Co-production*, NESTA, London.
- Brissett, D & Edgley, C 1990, 'The Dramaturgical Perspective', in D Brissett & C Edgley (eds), *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Source Book*, 2 edn, Aldine de Gruyter, New York, pp. 1-46.
- Chase, RB 1978, 'Where does the customer fit in a service operation?', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 56, no. 6, pp. 137-42.
- Collins, R & Makowsky, M 1972, 'Erving Goffman and the theatre of social encounters', in R Collins & M Makowsky (eds), *The Discovery of Society*, Random House, New York.
- Fisk, RP, Grove, SJ & John, J 2008, *Interactive Services Marketing*, 3 edn, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York.
- Garn, HA, Flax, MJ, Springer, M & Taylor, JB 1976, *Models for Indicator Development: A Framework for Policy Analysis*, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.
- Goffman, E 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Anchor Books, New York.
- Grove, SJ & Fisk, RP 1981, 'The Dramaturgy of Service Exchange: An Analytical Framework for Service Marketing', paper presented to American Marketing Association's 2nd conference on services marketing, West Palm Beach, Florida, 1983.
- Grove, SJ, Fisk, RP & John, J 2000, 'Services as Theater: Guidelines and Implications', in TA Swartz & D Iacobucci (eds), *Handbook of Services Marketing and Management*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, pp. 21-35.
- Holmlid, S 2009, *Participative, co-operative*,

emancipatory: From participatory design to service design, Oslo.

- Mills, PK & Morris, JH 1986, 'Clients as "Partial" Employees of Service Organizations: Role Development in Client Participation', *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 726-35.
- Morelli, N 2009, *Beyond the experience. In search of an operative paradigm for the industrialisation of services*, Oslo.
- Normann, R & Ramirez, R 1993, 'From Value Chain to Value Constellation: Designing interactive strategy', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 65-77.
- Parks, RB, Baker, PC, Kiser, LL, Oakerson, RJ, Ostrom, E, Ostrom, V, Whitaker, GP & Wilson, RK 1981, 'Consumers as Coproducers of Public Services: Some Economic and Institutional Considerations', *Policy Studies Journal*, vol. 9, no. 7, pp. 1001-11.
- Rathmell, JM 1966, 'What Is Meant by Services?', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 32-6.
- Regan, WJ 1963, 'The Service Revolution', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 57-62
- Ryan, A 1978, 'Maximizing, moralizing, and dramatizing', in C Hookway & P Petit (eds), *Action and Interpretation: Studies in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 65-81.
- Shostack, GL 1977, 'Breaking Free from Product Marketing', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 73-80.
- Solomon, MR, Surprenant, C, Czepiel, JA & Gutman, EG 1985, 'A Role Theory Perspective on Dyadic Interactions: The Service Encounter', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 99-111
- Turner, RH 1990, 'Role Taking: Process versus Conformity', in D Brissett & C Edgley (eds), *Life as Theater: A Dramaturgical Source Book*, 2 edn, Aldine de Gruyter, New York, pp. 85-100.
- Vargo, SL, Maglio, PP & Akaka, MA 2008, 'On value and value co-creation: A service systems and service logic perspective', *European Management Journal*, vol. 26, pp. 145– 52.
- Zeithaml, VA, Bitner, MJ & Gremler, DD 2009, *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus across the Firm*, 5 edn, McGraw-Hill.
- Zeithaml, VA, Parasuraman, A & Berry, LL 1985, 'Problems and Strategies in Services Marketing', *The Journal of Marketing*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 33-46