

# To What Extent Does Service Blueprint Design & Tracking Affect The Consumer End-Service Experience?

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## Introduction

Being able to deliver a reliable service for customers in challenging conditions like fluctuations in demand or difficulty in predicting customer requirements, is the goal of any organisation.

Organisations can influence customer perceptions of the end-service they receive by delivering reliable service under such conditions which ultimately affects how they are perceived when compared with competitors.

To cope with challenging conditions whilst being able to deliver reliable customer service, many organisations use the 'Service Blueprinting' (SB) technique. This is a customer-focused approach to delivery and innovation of service through the portrayal of a company's service delivery process. It is intended to make it easier for organisations to manage their processes and thus the reliability of the service they provide. The service blueprinting effort (SBF) is made up of two elements - service blueprinting design formality (SBDF) and service blueprinting tracking formality (SBTF).

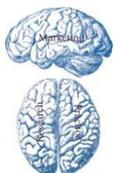
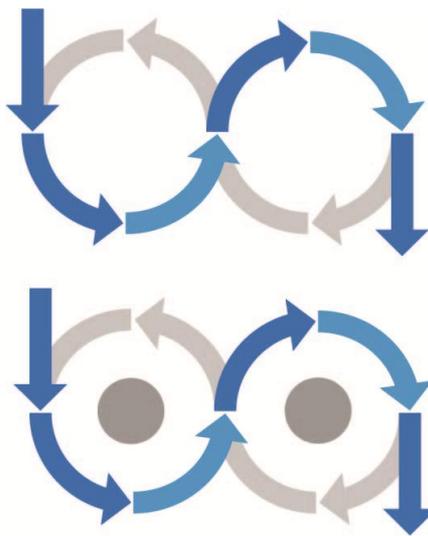
Little research has been carried out into what the effects of applying this technique are on the perceptions of a customer's end-service experience. Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite the wide use of the SB technique, there is little to no organisation or management of the effort to use it within organisations. The majority of what is available for guiding the effort to design and track the implementation of SBs comes mainly from normative work.

The answers to questions like who should participate in the SB design effort, whether a company should apply formal rules and procedures to guide the development of the SB and whether the development of the SB, as a process, should vary depending on the degree of innovation of service, therefore remain

unclear.

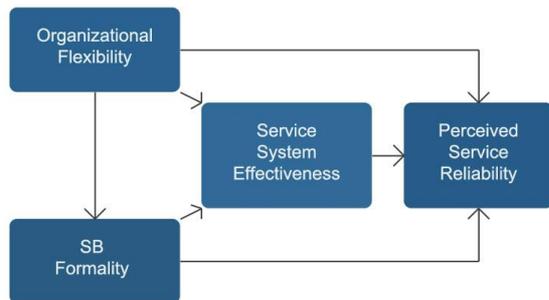
## Hypothesis

This study aims to initiate research in this area to help close these knowledge gaps, allowing organisations to produce more informed decisions around their service delivery processes.



The study will look at the formality of the management of the SBF from both the design and tracking formality perspectives, analysing the effect of SBF on the consumer's experience, using end-service experience as reflected by service reliability. Figure 1 depicts the Research Framework used for this study.

Figure 1. Research Framework



## Sample

The hotel industry is characterised by both demand unpredictability and frequently emerging unique customer requirements. To test the system of relationships presented in F1 and the effect of SBF on customer's end-service experience, data was collected from this industry.

Both front-desk employees and customers were surveyed. Information was collected from 140 middle managers who report on the managerial variables in the research framework. 140 customers were also included in the sample if they had used the same hotel in the past to report on perceived service reliability.

## Results

The data analysis clearly shows that formally designing and tracking the implementation of SBs improves perceived service reliability. Whilst increased formality has been linked with more time consuming procedures and less room for creativity, the results of this study refute this.

Increased formality helps a service organisation control the outcome of the service delivery effort better. This is especially the case when customer

demands and expectations are hard to predict or a customer's ability to participate in the co-creation of the service is limited by lack of knowledge and professional expertise. Putting this finding into practice, requires formal research of the customers' service expectations and behaviour during the SB design phase.

The data analysis also revealed that through formal design rules and procedures, service organisations produce delivery procedures in a fashion that allows them to align with the customer and overcome problems of demand unpredictability. As a result, customer expectations and behaviour become less "unpredictable." Formality in the designing and tacking of the SB therefore directly improves not only the reliability of the service but also its effectiveness. In practice, this requires having delegated managers to monitor the implementation of the blueprinting through well pre-specified criteria (KPIs) set during the design effort.

The study also revealed that as a result of having an SB, employees understand their role better and what the company expects from them during the service delivery process. Employee coordination as well as control over service procedures also improve mainly through the specification and monitoring of KPIs.

Based on these findings, it may be the management of the SB effort, not the blueprint itself that helps companies to attain higher levels of perceived service reliability.

One interesting finding from this research which may require further study is the positive relationship between organisational flexibility and formality. This relationship has been identified as fostering an internal environment characterised by "opportunistic flexibility" fostering "freedom within a framework", which is eventually associated with higher levels of perceived service reliability, such as this study has shown.

There have been few studies which have demonstrated arguments in favour of this relationship. The prevailing view is that attaining both flexibility and formality when managing a system of operations is impossible. Yet, the



results of this study showed that the more flexible the organisational environment is, the more formal the management of the SB effort becomes.

Whilst this result appears to be a departure from the little-studied norm, it is not a surprising finding. This “tight-loose” approach in managing operations is not entirely new and, in fact, leads to successful performance.

## **Conclusion**

The practical implication of this study for marketing practitioners is that formality must not come at the expense of flexibility in the application of the SB process. On the contrary, practitioners have to sustain and cultivate the agility of the organisation to ensure perceived service reliability and therefore higher customer satisfaction levels.

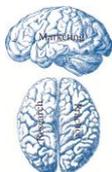
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The full reference for this study:

This research is ongoing and is currently under the review of the Journal of Business Research.

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