

Spring 2008 | Vol. 50, No. 3 | REPRINT SERIES

California Review

Service Blueprinting:
A Practical Technique for Service Innovation

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software engine level, allowing service designers to drill down into the firm without losing the connection to customer actions and process.

For over a decade, we have worked with companies to teach and develop the service blueprinting technique, evolving its contributions and applications to the levels we describe here. Through our executive education programs, we have assisted companies in realizing significant results through service blueprinting including developing brand new services, improving existing services, and facilitating cross-functional communication in support of customer-focused solutions.

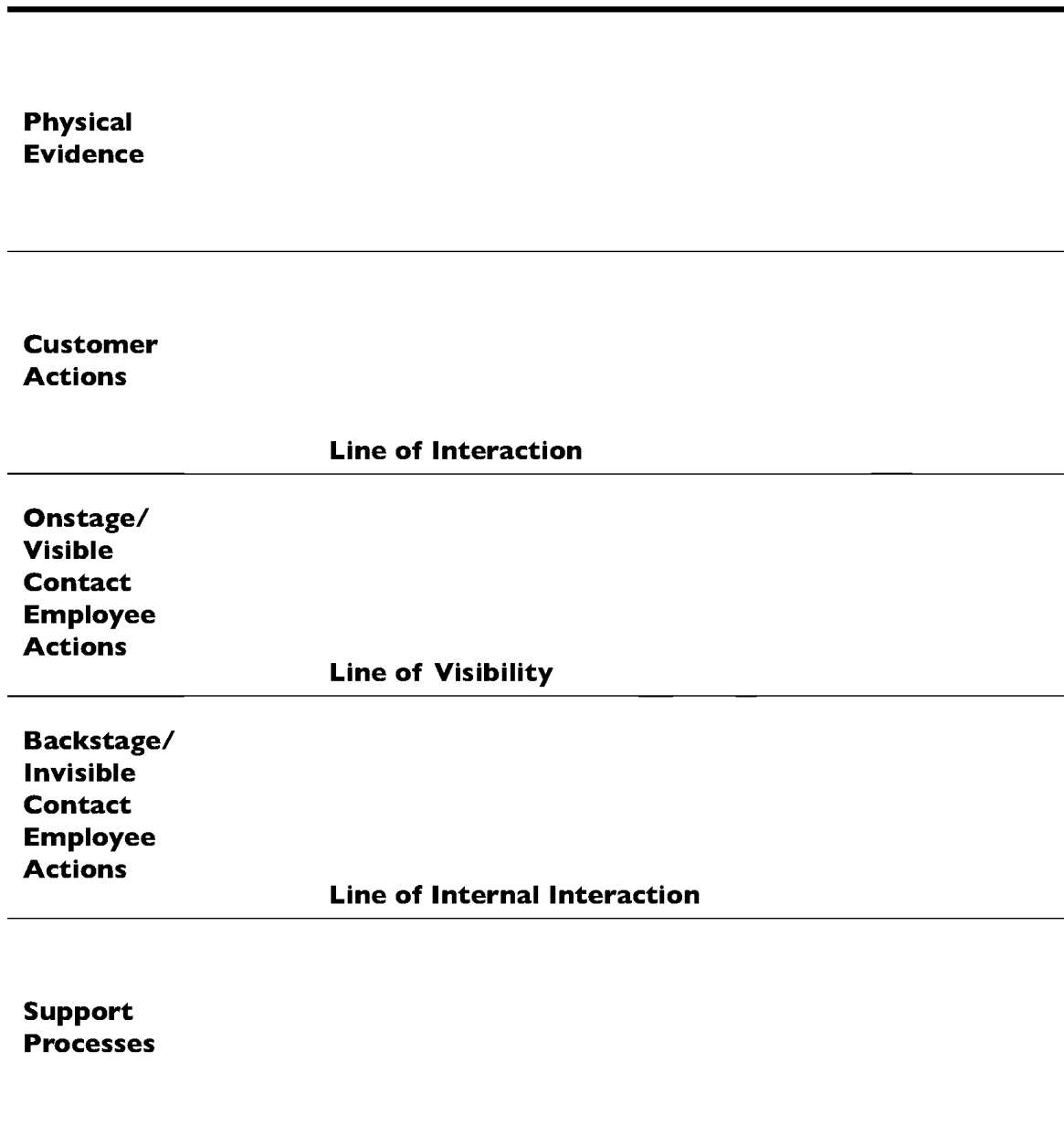
Components of Service Blueprints

There are five components of a typical service blueprint (see Figure 1):³⁰

- customer actions,
- onstage/visible contact employee actions,
- backstage/invisible contact employee actions,
- support processes, and
- physical evidence.

“Customer actions” include all of the steps that customers take as part of the service delivery process. Customer actions are depicted chronologically across the top of the blueprint. What makes blueprinting different from other flowcharting approaches is that the actions of the customer are central to the creation of the blueprint, and as such they are typically laid out first so that all other activities can be seen as supporting the value proposition offered to or co-created with the customer. The next critical component is the “onstage/visible contact employee actions,” separated from the customer by the line of interaction. Those actions of frontline contact employees that occur as part of a face-to-face encounter are depicted as onstage contact employee actions. Every time the line of interaction is crossed via a link from the customer to a contact employee (or company self-service technology), a moment of truth has occurred. The next significant component of the blueprint is the “backstage/invisible contact employee actions,” separated from the onstage actions by the very important line of visibility. Everything that appears above the line of visibility is seen by the customer, while everything below it is invisible. Below the line of visibility, all of the other contact employee actions are described, both those that involve non-visible interaction with customers (e.g., telephone calls) as well as any other activities that contact employees do in order to prepare to serve customers or that are part of their role responsibilities. The fourth critical component of the blueprint is “support processes” separated from contact employees by the internal line of interaction. These are all of the activities carried out by individuals and units within the company who are not contact employees but that need to happen in order for the service to be delivered. Vertical lines from the support area connecting with other areas of the blueprint show the inter-functional connections and support that are essential to delivering the service to the final customer. Finally, for each customer action, and every moment of truth, the

FIGURE I. Service Blueprint Components



physical evidence that customers come in contact with is described at the very top of the blueprint. These are all the tangibles that customers are exposed to that can influence their quality perceptions.

Building a Blueprint

When building a blueprint, the first step is to clearly articulate the service process or sub-process to be blueprinted. Because companies often modify service processes to fit the needs and wants of different target customers (e.g., check in process for an airline frequent flyer or first-class passenger versus other passengers), it is important to specify which segment of customers is the focus of

the blueprint. Once this has been decided, the actions of customers should be delineated first, because this component serves as the foundation for all other elements of the blueprint. At times, this can be more challenging than anticipated. Questions such as “When does the service start and stop from the customer’s point of view?” tend to generate considerable discussion. After that has been established, the contact employee actions, both onstage and backstage, can be delineated, followed by support processes. At this point, links can be added that connect the customer to contact employee activities and to needed support functions. Physical evidence is typically the last component added to the blueprint. Blueprints are ideally developed by cross-functional teams, possibly even involving customers.

Figure 2 is an example of a blueprint for a one-night hotel stay.³¹ This is considered to be a concept blueprint (i.e., it depicts only the basic steps in the process). If desired, additional boxes could be added to show each of the underlying steps in more detail. In fact, a sub process diagram could be constructed for any stage in the internal support system that would lay it out in as much detail as desired. In these cases it might even be useful to bring in other process diagramming tools to detail the underlying systems. The level of detail depicted in the blueprint is a function of the purpose for which it is being created. We have seen blueprints that capture the basics of a complex service in a few boxes and other blueprints that stretch around an entire room.

The concept blueprint in Figure 2 clearly shows the actions of hotel customers, both what they do that involves employees (and hence are moments of truth) as well as other actions (e.g., sleeping, eating food from room service) that customers engage in as part of the service delivery process. The goal is to capture the entire customer service experience from the customer’s point of view in the blueprint. Front desk employees who check-in customers are performing an onstage action as are employees who deliver room service to customers. Employees who deliver room service might also engage in backstage activities such as helping prepare the food and arranging the tray prior to delivering it to customers. There are also important support processes including the reservation and registration systems that affect the customer experience. Although presented only in a brief conceptual form here, any support processes that affect the customer experience could be described in detail, as noted earlier. As shown in the blueprint, hotels clearly have considerable physical evidence that customers are exposed to that can affect their quality perceptions.

Blueprinting in Practice

In our experiences teaching our students and running workshops with companies on service blueprinting, we have seen the technique used in many different ways. One of blueprinting’s greatest strengths is its versatility and flexibility. In fact, part of the blueprinting workshop that we routinely teach involves brainstorming its uses within the participants’ companies. This typically generates many creative ideas and adaptations. We have also seen many spontaneous

“ah-ha” moments as workshop participants immediately recognize shortcomings or solutions to issues with their own services just as a result of learning the technique—even before they actually blueprint their own services. For a guide to how we teach a blueprinting workshop, see Exhibit 1.

Here we present several selected case studies highlighting some examples of how we have assisted firms and individuals in incorporating blueprinting into their innovation, service improvement, and customer experience design practices. We report how and why blueprinting was used in each case. We also report important outcomes that resulted from blueprinting in terms of service improvements, increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, efficiencies and cost-savings, and/or innovative revenue-producing opportunities. In all of the cases reported here we either facilitated the initial blueprinting work ourselves or taught the individuals who did the work. We have chosen these cases as they represent a broad array of blueprinting objectives and outcomes, illustrating the versatility of the technique.

Yellow Transportation

From “Worst to First”

Yellow Transportation is the largest subsidiary of YRC Worldwide, a multi-billion dollar trucking and logistics business. In 2007, for the 5th year in a row, YRC Worldwide was ranked first in the trucking industry among “Most Admired Companies” by *Fortune Magazine*. However, this had not always been the case. As recently as 1997, the company was ranked at the bottom of its industry in *Fortune’s* annual “least-admired” companies list. In the intervening years many remarkable changes have taken place for the company. These included top-management’s sharing of a new customer-focused vision with all employees in the company through in-person visits and innovative meetings, creative videos, and constant reminders. Other significant changes included initiation of an effective customer-feedback process, investments in service recovery and complaint management, and huge investments in technology support that affected everything from dispatch to how dockworkers load and unload freight to customer information systems. Simple changes also made a difference. For example, changing marketing titles from “product marketing” to “service marketing” helped employees see their jobs as more customer-centric, according to Greg Reid, Executive Vice President, Enterprise Solutions and Chief Marketing Officer for YRC Worldwide. As a result of the changes, YRC has been the recipient of many awards, including kudos for innovation, technology infusion, and customer focus.

Throughout its dramatic and sustained rise from “worst to first,” Yellow proved itself to be an innovator in its industry. Throughout this process, it relied on service blueprinting for designing new services and service improvement, and for driving customer-focused change through the sales, operating, and customer service functions of the company. According to Maynard Skarka, President of Yellow Transportation, “Our senior leadership as well as individuals from across sales, operations, and our service center management are involved in our

FIGURE 2. Blueprint for Overnight Hotel Stay Service

