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Towards better services

*Advice, ideas, and inspiration
for business development*

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Information on the publication

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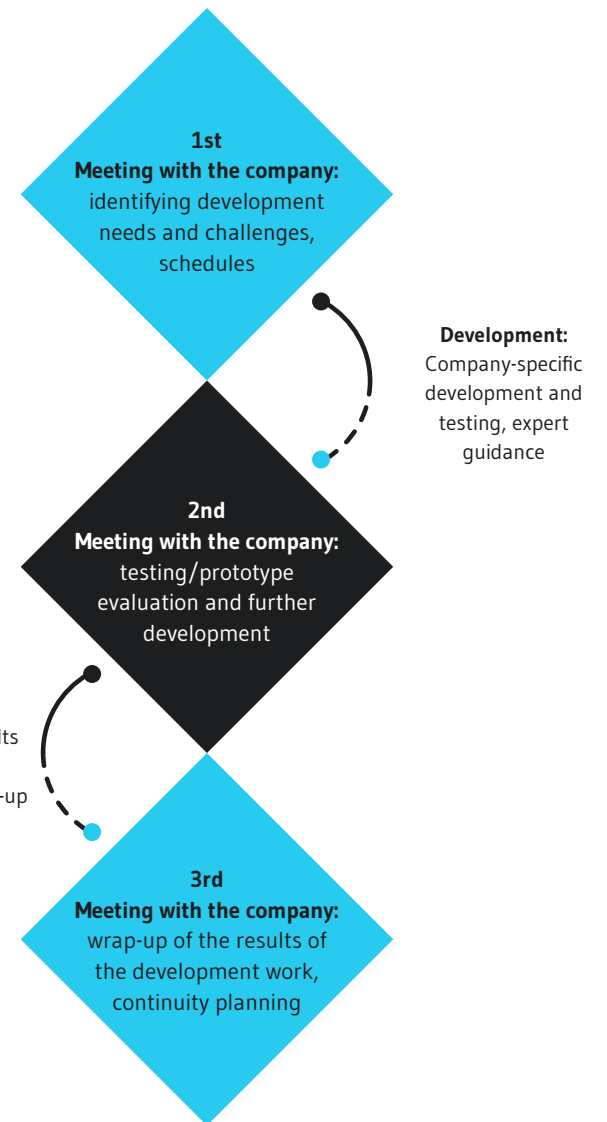
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Introduction

This publication offers an accessible and practical presentation of the development processes implemented during the Towards Better Services project's business coaching sessions applying methods of service design, management and organization development. The descriptions of development processes provided in this publication bring together the development measures implemented with several businesses.

The publication is intended as support material for entrepreneurs and personnel participating in business development. In addition, other parties with a role in supporting business development may find ideas relevant to their work.

During the business coaching sessions, we mapped the development needs of Lapland-based businesses, and, together with the companies, we identified, for example, changes in customer volume and the quickly introduced changes in the modes of operation for reasons related to the pandemic, as well as business recovery needs in the near future. Our shared objective was to develop the operations of each company to meet customers' post-pandemic needs and expectations.

The needs underlying the development processes presented in this publication ranged from customer outreach, product development, and space planning to development of the company's management and internal processes.

The development processes were intensive: They consisted of face-to-face meetings between the business developers and entrepreneurs, and some meetings between members of the personnel, short webinars intended to support the development work to be attended jointly by the companies, as well as development work conducted by the companies themselves.

1st
Meeting with the company: identifying development needs and challenges, schedules

Development: Company-specific development and testing, expert guidance

2nd
Meeting with the company: testing/prototype evaluation and further development

Results: Discussing the results and preparing for implementing follow-up measures.

3rd
Meeting with the company: wrap-up of the results of the development work, continuity planning

Figure 1. The business development process in the Towards Better Services project 2022-2023

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Development planning and management

How to implement a development process for my company?

Lack of time and planning is among the most common challenges faced in the course of a development process. It is thus important to plan the development process and set the schedule carefully before beginning work. When outlining the plan, it is advisable to choose a wide enough time frame, as ideas typically abound at the initial stages of development, and being overwhelmed by ideas may lead to inability to act, which, in turn, might delay the start of the actual work. When the process time frame is planned carefully, it is easier to grasp the big picture and identify the idea that should be addressed first. At the same time, the other ideas to be addressed later can be written down and their implementation schedule can be planned in greater detail in the course of the process. At this initial stage, a recommended practice is to adopt an inclusive approach to planning the development process by engaging personnel and partners as widely as possible.

The development process is most successful when development is supported by a well-organized development plan. It is recommended to include making use of and building partner networks in the development plan to support the work. Such networks may include business collaboration partners, subcontractors, funders, and business advisors. Whether developing something new or building on existing solutions, it is important to consider what new competencies and skills the process requires in order to succeed, where to obtain the competencies and skills needed, and what resources are required of the business.

Stages of the development process:

- Planning the process and setting schedules
- Development trials and follow-up
- Trial evaluation and further development

Thorough planning and management of the development process is also helpful in situations in which the development work is, for some reason, delayed or postponed. With the big picture in place and with the objectives and next steps clear, it is easier to resume the project.

Development processes

1. Human resource management in development work

Human resource management in development work requires management and leadership competence, ability to understand and manage wholes and to approach development work as a process.

Develop a strategy

A clear strategy states the objectives of development, as well as action plans and resources. A well-defined strategy ensures that the company's resources and efforts are allocated to the right tasks and that everyone is working towards the same goal. A strategy is a plan in which goals and objectives, actions, resources and schedules are entered.

Encourage personnel to share their ideas

When employees have the opportunity to express their views, propose solutions and share ideas, you as a leader and an entrepreneur receive valuable feedback and ideas that help you tackle challenges. Shared ideas contribute to the development of new products and services.

Enable sharing ideas and innovation

Be inclusive with your personnel. Your personnel play a major role in developing new ideas. Encourage them to share their ideas and develop them further. Create a climate in which ideas can be shared freely.

Build on existing competencies

Educate and train your personnel and yourself. New competencies promote innovation and development of operations. At the same time, investment in your personnel makes employees more committed.

Stay up to date on the results, manage the finances

Stay up to date on the key figures and results of the company. It is the only way of ensuring that your business is making progress in accordance with the set objectives and strategy. Awareness of the goals, objectives and results of the business enables developing the operations towards the desired direction.

Further reading

Laine, Pikka-Maaria & Vaara, Eero. 2011. Strategia kuuluu henkilöstölle! Dialoginen näkökulma strategiatyöhön. Teoksessa Mantere, Saku. Suominen, Kimmo & Vaara, Eero (toim.). Toisinajattelua strategisesta johtamisesta. Työsuojelurahasto. Helsinki. WSOY

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2. Inclusive sharing of development ideas

Employees are often the best experts of their own work, and for this reason, it is worth conducting business development together with them. Open communication about development needs and measures and the personnel's possibilities of participation are cornerstones of the inclusive approach in that they help build a shared understanding of carrying out successful development work.

Development example 1. **A specialized company in welfare sector**

Development need

A specialized company in welfare sector aimed to advance multiple development processes simultaneously and develop its practices concerning planning and implementation of development processes. Although the development work was targeted to a specific area, it was noted that sharing development ideas with the personnel should inform the work.

During the coaching sessions, development areas were further specified based on inclusive working methods involving answering a set of predetermined prompt questions.

Carrying out the development work

When planning development activities, it was noted that the company's development needs should be clarified in collaboration with the personnel or stakeholders / customers. The coaching sessions have also made us aware of the fact that the focus of development is often sharpened, or even changes, through collective reflection, although the underlying development need remains unchanged.

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2. Inclusive sharing of development ideas

Development example 1.	A specialized company in welfare sector

Development needs
- What are the major changes (in turnover / customer flow / personnel) that have an impact on the company's operations?
- The entrepreneur's view on development needs
- Customer feedback and wishes
- The personnel's views on development needs
- How did the pandemic impact your business and what is the current situation?

Aims of the development work, participants, schedule and measures
- Clarifying and setting the scope of the development work
- What is the schedule for implementing the desired changes?
- Who participates?
- Who is/are responsible?

Plan the inclusive whole carefully:
1. How to invite people to join in such a way that sparks their motivation to work together with the others
2. What is the expected outcome (inform the personnel of this or agree on the expected outcome together)
3. What are the steps to be taken to arrive at the desired outcome (inform the personnel of this or agree on the steps together)
4. What is the schedule (inform the personnel of this or set the schedule together)

When working with an inclusive approach, always ensure that everyone participates

1. Each work stage begins with independent work
2. All work stages give space to all participants to express their ideas
3. Respect the opinions and ideas of all. Build on them instead of criticizing them ("Thank you for bringing this point up. How would you develop it further?")

Inclusive and community-based methods that are applied face-to-face can also be translated to digital platforms.
Requires planning and personnel training, and an experimental mindset can also be helpful.

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2. Inclusive sharing of development ideas

Development example 1. | A specialized company in welfare sector

The basic steps

1 **Plan** the division of personnel / clients into groups and define the areas of development the groups are expected to comment on during the inclusive work (for example, objects for a customer survey and a personnel survey)

2 **Initiate** communication about the theme that is being prepared: Distribute information on the objectives and schedule as well as on the planned progress of the inclusive work efforts (for example, personnel groups who will comment on specific parts of the programs or point out the strengths / development needs in them).

3 **Export/upload** the headings of the development themes (as applicable) to the digital platform of your choice, where they can be worked on further at the participants' convenience. (Adjust the settings to prevent accidental changes to the comments collected).

4 **Ask** your customers or personnel to comment on areas in which they are likely to feel comfortable sharing their ideas (for example, if you ask your customers to comment on new product ideas, it is advisable to develop a few product ideas and prototypes, because requesting comments on clearly unfinished work is not appropriate and may also influence your customers' impression of the quality of your operations.)

Development outcomes

The tool is designed to be used with the personnel and / or stakeholders of the company in inclusive work aimed at effective planning of the development process. The tool allowed to define the structure of the development process and the steps of progress towards its effective implementation.

Lessons learned from the development work:

Although the ways of working described above might seem easy and self-evident, carrying them out in real-life work contexts can turn out to be more complicated than initially expected. Successful implementation requires a planning mindset and time allocated for development. It is easier to carry out a well-planned and scheduled development process than one with an undefined schedule and unclear goals.

Further reading | Pohjoisen johtamista kehittämässä Helena Kangastie & Maarit Tihinen (toim.) Pohjoisen johtamista kehittämässä (theseus.fi)

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3. Developing operating practices of a company

The development needs related to the operating practices of a business usually manifest themselves as unsmooth work processes, different kinds of problems in customer service, or as a perceived, more general development need that is, however, challenging to pinpoint with precision. It might also be necessary to assess and update the operating practices in change situations the company is facing. If the basics are not in place, it is difficult to work on any specific development area.

Development example 2. | Wellness company

Background and need for development

The company in question operates within the wellness industry. The company had multiple development needs, including ones related to marketing and customer outreach, and it was also looking to unify the operations of its several offices and clarify the distribution of responsibilities among employees in order to give the customers a logical impression of its operations. At the same time, the goal was to support each individual employee in working independently.

Choice of methods and tools

During coaching, development of the operational practices of the business was identified as the development area to be worked on. The work started with updating the operations manual.

Going through the cornerstones of a company's operations allows us to proceed towards further, concrete development measures.

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3. Developing operating practices of a company

Development example 2. — An example of the structure of an operations manual / model.

1 Vision, mission statement and strategy

- Narrative
- Vision
- Values
- Strategy
- Mission statement
- Personnel's job descriptions and responsibilities

2 The work community's operating methods and promotion of well-being

- Onboarding
- Well-being at work
- Personnel skills training
- Management and leadership, organizing work, and modes of working

3 The core of the operations and support processes

- Marketing, sales, communications
- Maintaining customer relationships
- Financial and information management

4 Evaluation of the operations

- Evaluation of internal operation models
- Evaluation of operational performance
- Customer feedback system

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3. Developing operating practices of a company

Use of the model / manual

The operations model / manual enables a more even distribution of responsibilities in the work community.

- The model clarifies shared practices and facilitates work and management.

- The operations model / manual allows to develop the problem-solving skills of the work community as a whole and allows people to influence their own work. This, in turn, fuels motivation and enhances employee retention and employer attractiveness.

- The operations model / manual can include different kinds of solutions concerning working and acting in the work community. The model can be used to make the business appear more interesting, and it can contribute to attracting more employees in the future. With the operations model / manual—which should also be continuously developed—the operations of the company can be improved on an ongoing basis.

- The operations model contributes to well-being at work and the goal is to build an encouraging community with a positive mindset.

- The operations model also helps the company to achieve its business goals more effectively.

- Customers and responding to their service needs are at the centre of the operations. The operations model / manual helps to include employees in development processes and strengthens supervisors' ability to effectively tackle leadership challenges in their own role.

Development outcomes:

As a result of the development work, the company set out to update its operations manual. The headings presented above provided structure for the work, and they were supplemented by introducing the operations principles previously updated by the company as well as by adding content used as onboarding and orientation materials.

Lessons learned from the development work:

During the early stages of the development process, it proved challenging to define the development area of the company precisely. It was agreed that there was room for clarification in some processes related to the internal operations of the company. For example, the initial idea was to address the development challenges concerning sales and marketing, but seeking solutions for these challenges was not possible because it turned out that certain internal processes needed to be clarified first.

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4. Product development

Product development does not take place separate from what is happening in the world. Rather, it takes place in interaction in networks of various actors in the area, and through engagement with customers. Product development is strongly connected to the company's environment and the area in which the company operates. The narrative of the company and its products is built on the operational environment, culture, history and the stories told. (García-Rosell, J., et al. Matkailun tuotekehittäjän käsikirja)

In product development, it is crucial to pay attention to customer orientation, customer interaction and activities in relation to the company's services and its operational environment as a whole. When conducting a product development process, it is important to identify and acknowledge that product development is an ongoing activity and that it is part of the company's everyday life and it is taking place all the time.

Carrying out the development work

Product development in a company can be facilitated, for example, by using the 'Product card' tool.

The questions on the next page are related to the specificities of product development within tourism, but the questions are also applicable to other services.

Product card

Target group: Entrepreneur, development teams, the company's personnel

Goal: To support planning and implementation of the development process

How to use: The Product card tool facilitates the inclusion of personnel and collaboration partners in the product development process.

The product card template offers a clear structure and useful tips for summarizing the essentials of the product.

The Product card tool can also be combined with narrativization.

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4. Product development

Questions for the Product card

1 Product name
- How would you describe your product in an attractive way?
- What makes it special?

2 Product description
- Tell a story about your product.
- What happens and what are the special characteristics of the product?

3 Target group
- To whom would you recommend your product?
- What makes the product particularly suitable for this target group?

4 Group size and resources
- What is the maximum group size for the product?
- How do you consider resources and scalability in different situations?

5 Special needs and accessibility
- What are the special requirements associated with your product?
- Is the product accessible to all customers?

6 Customer's equipment, gear and instructions
- What equipment and gear is the customer expected to bring and how should they prepare?
- Will you provide all the necessary equipment and gear or should the customer bring their own equipment and gear?

7 Special characteristics from various perspectives
- How does your product impact the customer, collaboration partners, employees and the production process?

8 Safety and emergency plan
- Has a safety and emergency plan associated with your product been made?
- How do you ensure customers' safety?

9 Principles of sustainable development
- How does your product embody the principles of sustainable development and responsible business?

10 Pricing and additional services
- How do you define the price of your product: What does it include and what additional services can the customer purchase for an extra fee?

Further reading

García-Rosell, J. C., Kylänen, M., Pitkänen, K., Tekoniemi-Selkälä, T., Vanhala, A., & Korhonen, R. (2010). Matkailun tuotekehittäjän käsikirja.

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5. Narrativization in a company's product development

A good product or service always has a story—here referred to as a narrative. A good narrative is one that can be used to engage customers, collaboration partners, and employees of the company. The same narrative can, however, take a different form according to the situation, for example, when presenting the product to the customer, when giving instructions to the employees, or when negotiating with a collaboration partner. However, it is important to remain logical and consistent to avoid building a contradictory image of the company, its operations, its values and products in different contexts. Narrativization should be part of the product development process from the very beginning. A narrative can serve as a starting point for product development.

Questions related to the Narrativization tool:

1 What kind of a narrative and how is it told?

2 What is your story and the story of your product?

3 What is the origin of the narrative of your product or company?
- Is the narrative related to your personal history, the history of the area, the purpose of the product or service or the benefits the product brings to the user? (roots)
- When describing your product to a client, a collaboration partner or a member of the local community, what is the stable core of the product narrative that will remain unchanged telling after telling and what are the elements that may change depending on who is listening? (leaves)

3 Is the narrative multilayered and deep enough to remain interesting over time, telling after telling?

4 Are all those who will be telling your narrative familiar enough with it so that they are able to tell it in the right way?

5 What is the role of other people in telling the story of your product?
- For example, customers in social media. How will your narrative live on in their stories and images?

Image collage exercise: Look for images, colours and slogans that are representative of the product, company or your operational environment. Assemble these into a collage and discuss how consistent the narrative is in light of the elements put together.

Further reading   García-Rosell, J. C., Kylänen, M., Pitkänen, K., Tekoniemi-Selkälä, T., Vanhala, A., & Korhonen, R. (2010). Matkailun tuotekehittäjän käsikirja.

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5. Narrativization in a company's product development

Background and need for development

An entrepreneur in the beauty business needed a change to their range of services. The company's service concept needed expansion through productization of new services of which the entrepreneur already had some ideas. The objective was to offer customers new experiences and services, ones that would be different from the existing, traditional service range. At the same time, the entrepreneur wanted to reach new customer groups and companies. The entrepreneur also sought change to their own work and wanted to update their business operations.

1 Development objectives:
- To develop a new service concept
- To expand the customer base from individuals to companies
- To develop the company's services and operations

2 The development tools used were the Product card tool combined with narrativization methods.

3 Development outcomes:
- The company developed a new product and service concept
- New collaboration partners were found
- The new services were piloted and new client companies were reached

4 The company continues to develop its services and improve its customer outreach.

Lessons learned from the development work:

Creating a new service concept is facilitated by use of product development tools such as the product card questions and narrativization methods to create a narrative around the service and the company. Product development tools help to organize the development process and help build new products alongside existing ones.

6. The role of narratives in supporting sales and customer service in times of change

Narrativization and narrative-driven service design are tools that enable to shape a company's operations with the help of narratives. Narrative-driven service design helps associate the company's history, operational environment and products with sales and contact with customers.

Narrativization and narrative-driven service design deepen customer relationships and can help a company to stand out from among the competitors. **A company's narrative** is not only a marketing effort or a sales tool, but it can help create meaningful encounters with customers. During the coaching process, the method was used as a tool to help the company undergo a change, while creating narratives to support sales.

Development example 4	Speciality store

Need for development

The company's operations had experienced significant changes. There had been a change in the production process and production location. The customers and the employees were worried about the possible effect of this on the quality of the products

Development objectives

- Additional sales
- Product knowledge
- Narratives as part of sales
- Adapting to change

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6. The role of narratives in supporting sales and customer service in times of change

Development example 4 | **Speciality store**

Choice of methods and tools:

Benchmarking (development by comparison)

- Make use of ideas from your own as well as other industries
- Seek inspiration and compare your operations with those of others, including out-of-the-box thinking

The narrative of products, services and the company

- Use narrative-driven service design
- Create a core narrative about your company's history and create a narrative identity manual
- Design the company's service environment to support the narrative

Narrativization – narrative-driven service design

- Use narrative-driven service design to create a narrative structure and plot for the company's services.
- Combine fact and fiction with the objective of creating meaningful and appealing service experiences.
- Use narratives to emphasize business, customer and value-based activities.

The chosen solution was narrativization – strengthening narrative skills to increase product sales by utilizing narratives, history and issues of responsibility. Focus was placed on the background and narratives to support sales and on supporting the long-term employees in their activities and onboarding the new ones.

6. The role of narratives in supporting sales and customer service in times of change

Speciality store

Development outcome

- Narratives helped find solutions for dealing with challenging customer service situations and questions
- Shared narratives were created for the company's employees to be applied to change situations
- The employees' narrative skills were strengthened to support their sales activities

Where to now?

New and old narratives will be integrated more firmly into onboarding and orientation activities, which allows employees to use the narratives in their work and they become an integral part of sales and customer work.

Lessons learned from the development work:

Narrativity can empower and motivate people in change situations and provide support in sales work. New narratives can be created and old ones can be replaced if, for example, the changed situation calls for new narratives. The company was able to strengthen its identity, and anxiety related to change was reduced and the employees could again be proud of their local values and history.

Source / Further reading:

Anne Kalliomäki (2014). Tarinallistaminen Palvelukokemuksen punainen lanka, Talentum

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7. Reaching new customers through customer profiling

The service design customer profiling tool is a suitable tool for increasing your understanding of your customers and for acquiring new customers. Customer-centeredness is the basis of service design and customer profiles can help you identify customers' needs and use the information to plan marketing and communications to reach the customers. Customer profiles can be useful in making a marketing plan and various targeted advertising and marketing campaigns.

Development example 5. Second hand company

Background and need for development

A company specializing in second-hand clothing and accessories sales already had a strong customer base, and was looking to expand to new markets and to reach new customer groups. Improving the customer outreach was an important part of the company's business strategy. Another objective was to clarify what kinds of new customers are worth acquiring, and what are the customers' needs, goals, and behaviour like and how can these customers be reached.

Choice of methods and tools

Customer profiling was used to better understand the customers' needs, expectations and interests, enabling targeted marketing and reaching new customers.

Carrying out the development work

Using social media and other digital tools is a major method of reaching new potential customers today. It is, thus, important for companies to know how to use digital marketing and communications.

The first development measure chosen was customer profiling, which facilitates understanding customers' needs, expectations and interests. By creating and utilizing customer profiles it is possible to create personalized and targeted marketing and thus reach new customers and customer groups.

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7. Reaching new customers through customer profiling

Customer surveys

When seeking to reach new customers, it is important to know what the existing customers value about your company's services and what new customers expect from your company's services. Customer surveys are a good and quick way of collecting information on what is valued by your customers and what they expect from your services. Information collected via a customer survey allows you to further develop your company's services and operations.

Choice of methods and tools

- A new customer group's journey
- Narrativization > usability supporting the company's sales, products, interaction with customers (narratives, history, the environment, products etc.), the narrative tree > your own version
- Customer profiling and product/ service conceptualization
- Social media plan / marketing plan

Customer profiling

Customer profiling enables to identify characteristics that are illustrative of customers. Profiles can be verbal or visual, not necessarily detailed, and they can be used to envision what potential service users are like. Customer profiling seeks to outline typical characteristics of customers and produce imaginary descriptions of users. Profiles facilitate understanding customers' actions.

- Identifying customer groups that already belong to the company's target group.
- Identifying new customers to be reached (sharing ideas, benchmarking, and personnel surveys can be used as tools in defining this).
- Creating a profile for a new customer with the help of prompt questions:
  – Is the customer a company / and organization, an individual customer or a customer group?
  – What does the customer need?
  – How does the customer behave?
  – What language does the customer use when searching for information?
  – How does the customer search for and find information?
  – What does the customer value?
  – What is the customer willing to pay for?

Further reading

Ruuska, J., Koivisto, M., Hämäläinen, K., Vilkka, H., Mattelmäki, T., Vaajakallio, K., … Miettinen, S. (2011). Palvelumuotoilu: Uusia menetelmiä käyttäjätiedon hankintaan ja hyödyntämiseen. Teknologiainfo Teknova.

8. Rethinking and updating premises

The physical premises a company operates in play a key role in the company's customer service and sales and contribute to the company's image. It is thus worth investing in the functionality and attractiveness of the premises. Customers' needs, product selection, and the company's brand develop over time, and therefore it is necessary to rethink and update premises regularly. Updating may refer to anything from minor refurbishing efforts, for example replacement of furniture or changes to the colour scheme of the space, to more extensive redecoration or renovation. When rethinking and updating premises it is advisable to consider multiple perspectives: to listen to customers' wishes and the personnel's views, and to think about the entrepreneur's goals and objectives. With premises it is also important to bear in mind that the premises should reflect the company's brand: Your premises are your company's business card.

Development example 6. **Jewellery entrepreneur**

Background and need for development

A jewellery entrepreneur was looking to update their premises to serve the customers better. At the same time, the goal was to refurbish the premises to better reflect current trends. During the development work, several development methods were discussed, and some of them were used during the coaching sessions and plans were made to use some others in the future.

Choice of methods and tools

- **Making use of customer experience** by utilizing feedback received, and preparing a customer survey to collect information on customers' wishes

- **Benchmarking /development by comparison**
  – What are the premises that have impressed the entrepreneur personally?
  – Collecting images and discussing them together with the company's personnel or other actors involved in and supporting the development work

- **Narrativization** (see Development example 3). Make use of your company's narrative in developing your premises. What is the message you would like to communicate? What are the values you want to emphasize?

8. Rethinking and updating premises

Mystery shopping

Mystery shopping refers to visits to a company's physical premises by 'mystery shoppers', customers who are in the role of developers and whose task is to assess, for example, the premises, the customer service, the product or service range, or accessibility issues. Mystery shopping is often utilized in conducting audits for hypermarkets with the objective of assessing the product range and price level. Mystery shopping services can be ordered online, or you can ask someone from your team to help you with choosing a mystery shopper.

Carrying out the development work

By combining multiple development methods, a company's representatives can contribute a great deal to the space design of the premises. Consulting specialists in selecting furniture and fixtures, materials and designing the visual appearance can be useful.

Object of assessment: The general appearance and functionality of business premises

- What makes the company stand out?
- Why would customers visit this company instead of some other jewellery store?
- Is there something that catches the eye?
- Does the store stimulate impulse purchases?
- Are the premises accessible? What kind of customer (group) can visit the premises?
- What catches the eye in the premises?
- What kind of brand image do the premises convey?
- What is the ambience of the premises like? What scents are there? What do the customers sense and experience when they step in?
- Ideas for further development: the mystery shopper presents ideas for further development, or alternatively, the entrepreneur may discuss the information gathered by the mystery shopper together with the personnel to identify development ideas.

Further reading Kugapi, Outi (2023) Käsityötilojen muotoilu Henri Lefebvren avulla. Pro gradu -tutkielma, Lapin yliopisto. https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2023032533235

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9. Attractive company and product image

A company's brand and product image are visible in the premises and products: the building, colours, clothing, scents and soundscape all embody the brand. In addition, the company's brand and product image are often presented on the company's website, brochures, flyers, and social media profiles. Building an attractive company and product image can be promoted by developing visual communication, and by seeking consistency of materials and elements that represent the brand in the company's communications. Visual communication embodies the company's image and brand, which creates images and influences the company's attractiveness and sales. Successful development work often manifests itself as attractive brochures and clear and accessible websites. Their value to the company is much more – like a product card that presents the essential information on a product, they are the core of the service.

Development example 7. | Café and Experience Services

Background and need for development

A company offering café and experience services was looking to modify its print materials and well as the materials on its social media and website to communicate the company's focus more clearly. Another goal underlying the development work was to present the company's products and services more clearly, focusing on the essentials.

Choice of methods and tools

Multiple development tools were used to facilitate visualization of product cards, social media materials and flyers. On the basis of this, prompt questions were formulated to further inform the development work:

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9. Attractive company and product image

Café and Experience Services

Benchmarking – The company's visual communication

What kind of visual appearance is the entrepreneur seeking for the business? The entrepreneur was asked to collect images and examples of attractive colours, elements and expressions.

- Visual images that help create mental imagery
- Interesting texts (font) and impressive logos

Piloting – Producing flyers

Flyers can be used to pilot, for example, a service concept and the visual appearance of a service. From among the elements collected, two colourways and fonts were selected, and images of the company's own products and spaces were chosen to support these.

- Piloting took place by producing two pilot flyers by using the Canva graphic design tool. Colourways, product descriptions and logos were placed against two different backgrounds.

- The ideas were tested with the entrepreneur and in the entrepreneur's cooperation networks.

- One of the pilot flyers was selected for use and further development. The visual appearance and colourway of the flyer chosen was found to be both in line with current trends and suitable for representing activities that are closely related to nature.

- The visual appearance designed was also to be used in
  – Roadside signs
  – Tabletop sign holders for coffee tables
  – Outdoor display stand
  – Images on the wall
  – Website and online shop

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9. Attractive company and product image

Development example 7.   **Café and Experience Services**

It was also decided to take the company's international customers into consideration in the abovementioned visual communication channels, which meant producing the materials in Finnish and in English. The company's social media channels were made visible in the physical brochures and signs by inserting a QR-code. Social media hashtags (# in Finnish and in English) were added to all materials.

Product descriptions and the related narratives were designed to be produced by the company for the website and in a summarized form for the brochures. The narratives underlying the products and services were associated with, for example, the quality of being local, the quality of being handmade, the various uses of the product, and the history of the building where the café is located. The narratives were created for enhancing the company's customer satisfaction and product value – for example, when ordering some products in the café, the customer also received a product description accompanied by the narrative.

Development outcomes:

As a result of the development work, the entrepreneur gained competence for developing communications and marketing of their own company. The entrepreneur obtained tools and a clear model outlining what and how to communicate about the products and the company in different channels.

Lessons learned from the development work:

In this and another similar development process, we concluded together with the entrepreneurs that, for an entrepreneur who takes up the challenge (and is perhaps learning by doing), productization can be the easiest if product descriptions are created through piloting a brochure or website design. This makes it possible to identify points related to pricing, communication, or sales of additional services that need to be further clarified. During the coaching sessions it was noted that communicating about the services and products can be a first step towards more effective productization and clarification of the service concept.

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10. Effective onboarding

Everything starts with onboarding. The significance of onboarding is widely acknowledged in organizations, but it has been argued to be one of the aspects of Human Resource Management that has received the least attention (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003). The challenges of onboarding are most often related to a lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities among the actors involved in onboarding, and reserving inadequate time for onboarding. (Lepistö 2005: 67–69; Ellinger & Cseh 2007; Hicks et al. 2007)

Onboarding is one of the most important processes during the life cycle of an employment relationship. Successful onboarding lays a firm foundation for the entire employment relationship and employee commitment. Onboarding is also significant from the employer's perspective, because unsuccessful onboarding reduces productivity, which will negatively affect the economic result of the business. Given the time and human resources required for onboarding, as well as the low productivity of new employees, onboarding involves high costs for the employer. Companiesshould thus invest in effective onboarding from the perspective of productivity, which means that responding to the new employee's needs and expectations is important, because it ensures employee commitment and retention.

During these coaching sessions, we have sought to develop onboarding practices by using methods from service design: the service journey and narrativization.

What are the stages of a functional onboarding process?

- Before starting work: Identify the information the employee has at their disposal before work begins. Where and how does the employee search for and find information and what information will be provided by the employer – and how will this support onboarding?

- Starting work: Here you can use the 'Work Orientation Checklist' tool (https://ttk.fi/en/publication/work-orientation-checklist/) and ensure that the aspects it covers are also covered in your company's onboarding materials and face-to-face onboarding situations.

- Task-specific onboarding: Making the employee familiar with the equipment, systems and customer service situations related to their work.

- Ongoing onboarding while working: Once work has started, where and from whom can the employee find work-related information? Make sure that the employee is assigned a mentor or provided with materials that can be consulted to seek answers to work-related questions.

- Evaluation and development of onboarding: The onboarding process develops over time as the company's and customers' needs change. By conducting regular evaluation of onboarding, you will ensure that the process remains up-to-date and contains all essential elements and activities.

Further reading

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Parempaa palvelua

11. Onboarding as a service journey

The service journey method allows for outlining the company's services and illustrating personnel's role in providing services. In the context of onboarding, the service journey helps the employee to grasp the big picture of the company's services and defines the role of each employee of the company. The service journey depicts the customer journey through the company's services and identifies the points of interaction between the customer and the employee. In addition, the method enables to identify star moments and critical points related to the service, which also allows for presenting and evaluating the company's internal processes and their functionality.

Development example 8.	Tourism company

Background and need for development

In a tourism company, the onboarding process was selected as the development objective. The company operates in a business characterized by a high employee turnover, and onboarding significantly influences the company's productivity, quality, attractiveness and employee retention.

Choice of methods and tools

The company was willing and able to adopt a more inclusive approach to development by engaging its personnel to a larger extent than before. Based on the personnel's views and narratives, the customer journey was selected as the tool for developing onboarding, and it was visualized collectively by drawing.

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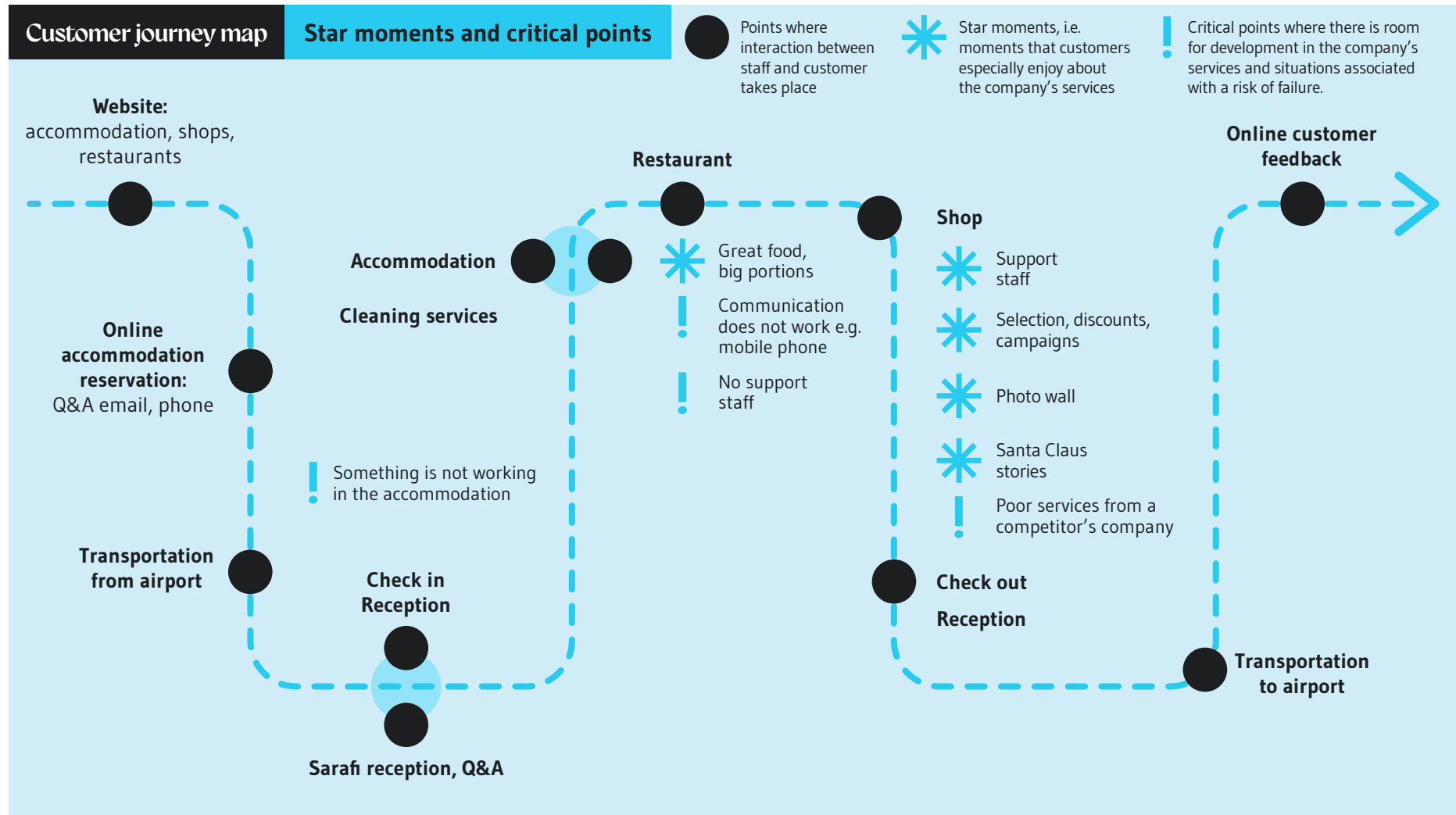
Development example 8.	Tourism company

Customer journey as a tool for supporting onboarding

1 The company's services were visualized as a customer service journey which started from the company's brochures, website and communications that the customer becomes familiar with before using the service. The company's services and the services provided by various stakeholders (for example, transportation) were added to the journey. The service journey was enhanced by adding points of interaction between customer and staff, points at which service is provided, and symbols that indicate customer behaviour and emotions.

2 From the perspective of onboarding, the service journey was translated into an electronic form and it was further enhanced by adding backstage functions, i.e. verbal descriptions of the company's internal activities related for example to employees' tasks, distribution of roles and responsibilities, instructions, and internal communications.

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11. Onboarding as a service journey

Customer journey map	Star moments and critical points

● Points where interaction between staff and customer takes place

✳ Star moments, i.e. moments that customers especially enjoy about the company's services

! Critical points where there is room for development in the company's services and situations associated with a risk of failure.

Website:
accommodation, shops, restaurants

Online accommodation reservation:
Q&A email, phone

Transportation from airport

Accommodation

Cleaning services

! Something is not working in the accommodation

Check in Reception

Sarafi reception, Q&A

Restaurant

✳ Great food, big portions

! Communication does not work e.g. mobile phone

! No support staff

Shop

✳ Support staff

✳ Selection, discounts, campaigns

✳ Photo wall

✳ Santa Claus stories

! Poor services from a competitor's company

Check out Reception

Online customer feedback

Transportation to airport

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About the project

The Towards Better Services project ran from 1 May 2022 to 31 December 2023. The development processes implemented for and with Lapland-based businesses contributed to further establishing best customer service and work practices developed during the pandemic, as well as developing new and necessary measures to respond to the post-pandemic business recovery needs of Lapland-based companies operating within the commerce and restaurant sectors. The project set out to develop the operations of a total of 15 companies by implementing a coaching process with both company-specific coaching sessions and general sessions for all companies involved.

The work done with the companies enabled to identify and establish ways of developing each company's operations and services offered to customers, and made it possible to benefit from the experiences gathered during the pandemic. The measures introduced during the project enhanced the vitality of local businesses and economy and directly impacted on the economic result of the companies involved as well as contributed to the development of their business competence.

The aims of the project were:

1. To support business recovery, and to further develop businesses and their ability to respond to change by quick adoption of development measures.

2. To provide business coaching that maps the immediate development needs of companies operating within the commerce and restaurant sectors and identifies the changes in customer volume and the quickly introduced changes in operations in response to the pandemic situation as well as the business recovery needs in the near future. The overall objective was to strengthen the development competence of each company to meet the post-pandemic needs and expectations of customers.

3. To produce an electronic compilation of best practices identified on the basis of 15 company-specific development processes to be used by Lapland-based micro enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises.

During the business coaching sessions, we mapped the development needs of each company and identified, for example, changes in customer volume and the quickly introduced changes in the modes of operation for reasons related to the pandemic, and identified each company's business recovery needs in the near future. Our shared objective was to develop the operations of each business to meet the post-pandemic needs and expectations of customers.