



**SUCCESSFUL SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION:  
DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK AND  
INVESTIGATING BEST PRACTICES FOR  
SMOOTH TRANSITION AND CONTINUITY**

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## ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

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Service design typically follows a project-based approach. The transition from the project to the operational phase is pivotal and often entails organisational change. However, within service design literature this transition, called service implementation, is a marginally researched topic.

This study advances the understanding of the research on service implementation, contributes to service design research by offering insights into the challenges and best practices related to service implementation, and proposes a framework for service implementation.

Existing service implementation frameworks have been built on theory and the views of service designers, excluding the employees implementing and working with the services. The study fills this research gap by combining input from both service designers and service business practitioners to inform the creation of a practice oriented service implementation framework.

The research follows a pragmatic research philosophy, has been conducted through qualitative research, and utilises a modified grounded theory research strategy. The data was collected through in-depth theme interviews and analysed using coding and clustering.

The proposed framework helps mitigate potential negative outcomes of service implementation, supports agency, and allows the project organisation and service business to set realistic targets for implementation and accompanying change.

The research supports existing service design theory on many levels, but discovers new factors, such as business case and organisational capabilities, impacting the success of service implementation that have not been identified by prior research.

**Keywords:** service implementation, service implementation framework, service design, service development

x The thesis does not contain personal data other than the author's own

# TIIVISTELMÄ SUOMEKSI

## Lapin yliopisto

**Tiedekunta:** Taiteiden tiedekunta

**Työn nimi:** Successful service implementation: developing a framework and investigating best practices for smooth transition and continuity

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Palvelumuotoilu noudattaa tyypillisesti projektiperustaista lähestymistapaa. Siirtymä projektivaiheesta operatiiviseen vaiheeseen on kriittinen ja edellyttää usein muutoksia palveluorganisaatiolta. Palvelumuotoilun kirjallisuudessa tämä siirtymä, palveluiden jalkauttaminen, on vähän tutkittu aihealue.

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma edistää ymmärrystä palveluiden jalkauttamisen tutkimuksesta sekä tuottaa lisätutkimusta palvelumuotoilun alalle nostamalla esiin palveluiden jalkauttamiseen liittyviä haasteita ja parhaita toimintatapoja sekä ehdottaa viitekehystä palveluiden jalkauttamiselle.

Olemassa olevat palveluiden jalkauttamisen viitekehykset perustuvat teoriaan tai palvelumuotoilijoiden näkemyksiin aiheesta, jättäen tutkimuksen ulkopuolelle työntekijät, jotka jalkauttavat ja työskentelevät palveluiden parissa. Tutkielma täyttää tämän tutkimusaukon yhdistämällä sekä palvelumuotoilijoiden että palveluliiketoiminnan edustajien näkemykset ja kokemukset sekä luomalla näihin pohjaavan viitekehysten palveluiden jalkauttamiselle.

Tutkielma noudattaa pragmaattista tutkimusfilosofiaa, on toteutettu laadullisen tutkimuksen menetelmin sekä hyödyntää grounded theory -tutkimusstrategian periaatteita. Tutkimusaineisto koottiin teemahaastatteluilta sekä analysoitiin koodaamalla ja teemoittelemalla.

Ehdotettu viitekehys auttaa vähentämään palveluiden jalkauttamisesta syntyviä mahdollisia negatiivisia seurauksia, tukee toimijuutta sekä mahdollistaa realististen tavoitteiden asettamisen jalkauttamiselle ja muutokselle.

Tutkimustulokset tukevat olemassa olevaa palvelumuotoilun teoriaa monilla eri tasoilla, mutta löytää myös uusia tekijöitä, kuten liiketoimintasuunnitelma ja organisaation kyvykkyydet, jotka vaikuttavat palvelun jalkauttamisen onnistumiseen, mutta joita ei ole tunnistettu aiemmassa tutkimuksessa.

**Avainsanat:** palveluiden jalkauttaminen, palveluiden jalkauttamisen viitekehys, palvelumuotoilu, palveluiden kehittäminen

x Tutkielma ei sisällä muita kuin tekijän omia henkilötietoja.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Service design typically follows a project-based approach. The shift from project to operational phase is pivotal, and often entails organisational change. However, within service design literature, the transition from project to practice remains relatively underexplored.

Service design in the context of service implementation is a marginally researched topic. This study will contribute to service design research by providing further insights into an under-researched area, service implementation, through qualitative research.

This introductory chapter discusses the considerations leading to the selection of the research topic, outlines the research goals and limitations, and defines the key terms relating to the study.

## 1.1 Background and selection of the research topic

Research in service design has primarily concentrated on defining what services are and the process of designing them, rather than addressing the implementation aspect (Kimbell, 2011). Little is known about how to successfully implement services, and few design agencies include implementation as a part of their work or deliverables (Overkamp & Holmlid, 2016, p. 206).

Service implementation and service design's role in service implementation has received little attention in research. Service designers are praised for their ability to empathise with customers and translate their needs into service concepts, but criticised for their inability to implement said service concepts.

I found some papers ( e.g. Bækkelie, 2016; Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009) discussing certain aspects of service implementation, such as change management, and the role service design and designers play in service implementation. These papers, however, did not offer a comprehensive view on the service implementation process nor discuss the factor impacting the success of service implementation.

Three proposed frameworks for service implementation (Christiansen, 2014; Weisser, Jonas & Mager, 2018; Yu, 2021) have been created prior to this study. The research behind these three frameworks focus on the experiences and views of service designers, not the employees implementing and working with the services.

I saw an opportunity to fill this research gap by combining qualitative input from both service designers and service business practitioners to inform the creation of a service implementation framework.

My background in both business and design brings a level of personal interest into the research topic. I wish to create something concrete that can facilitate the implementation of services, offer a benchmark to the people involved in the implementation, and, hopefully, lead to more successful and sustainable services in the future.

## **1.2 Research goals and research questions**

The study explores the research topic through one main research question with the help of two sub questions.

The main research question is:

*How can qualitative research advance our understanding of service implementation and contribute to the development of a framework for its successful execution?*

And the supporting sub questions are:

*What factors support and hinder service implementation?  
What role does a service designer have or could have in service implementation?*

The study aims to advance the understanding of the research on service implementation, as well as challenges and best practices in service implementation, through qualitative research. Through a modified grounded theory approach the study proposes a framework for service implementation, and offers insights into the role of a service designer in the context of service implementation.

The results will be compared to prior research on service implementation to see if they validate or contradict service design theory, and bring out areas of interest for further research. The newly created framework will be evaluated against other service implementation frameworks to see how it compares to frameworks created with other methodological approaches.

## **1.3 Definition of key terms**

For easier reading, I wish to define some key terms that appear in this study. Terms defined by others are referenced, otherwise, the terms are defined by the writer.

*Service design* is a relatively new field of study, constantly evolving (Kimbell, 2011). It has solidified its position as an independent design discipline, drawing upon components from diverse fields spanning psychology to management (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2016, p. 48). Service design definitions are plentiful and often broad, reflecting the diversity of perspectives among practitioners in the field. In this study



service design is defined as a human-centred discipline that employs a holistic and collaborative approach to designing services that generate value to all stakeholders throughout the service lifecycle through interactions, processes and technologies.

A *service designer* specialises in the design and improvement of services to enhance the overall customer experience, and deliver value to both customers and service providers. Service designers use a combination of research, creativity, and problem-solving skills to understand customer needs, identify pain points in the service delivery process, and develop innovative solutions to address them. They work collaboratively with stakeholders across different departments and disciplines to co-create service experiences that are user-centric, holistic, and sustainable.

A *service business practitioner* is an individual who specialises in the management, development, or delivery of services within a business context. This role encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, including understanding customer needs, designing service offerings, managing service delivery processes, and ensuring customer satisfaction. They typically possess expertise in areas such as customer experience management, operations management, and business strategy, enabling them to effectively develop, implement, and optimise service-related initiatives to drive business success.

*Change management* has been defined as the process of continually renewing an organisation's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers (Moran & Brightman, 2001, as cited in By, 2005, p. 369). Change management involves identifying the need for change, assessing its impact, and developing strategies to effectively manage resistance, mitigate risks, and facilitate the transition to a desired future state. Change management aims to ensure that changes are successfully adopted, integrated, and sustained across all levels of the organisation, while minimising disruptions to operations and maximising benefits realisation.

#### **1.4 Limitations of the research**

The qualitative research of the study is limited to the Finnish market, and the interviewees have been selected to represent a wide range of expertise, level of seniority, and industries. As the data set is small, 11 interviews, the results cannot be generalised to a large extent, but they do offer valuable insights into the research topic, and support the creation of a framework for service implementation.

With my prior experience in both business and design I feel I was able to stay unbiased throughout the data collection and analysis process, and remain open to the ideas and observations emerging from the data. I will discuss my observations and personal notions in chapter 6 of the study.

The ethical considerations relating to the study will be addressed in chapter 3 where the research design is presented.

### **1.5 Summary of the methodology and structure of the thesis**

The research follows a pragmatic research philosophy, has been conducted through qualitative research, and utilises a modified grounded theory research strategy. The data was collected through in-depth theme interviews, and analysed using coding and clustering.

The study first explores the topic of service implementation through existing service design theory and frameworks, and identifies an area for further study. Then follows a description of the methodological approach and research methods. Interview findings with service designers and service business practitioners are described and the results presented, focusing on key factors impacting service implementation. Conclusions are summarised, and a framework for service implementation presented. Lastly, the impact of the study is discussed, and further research suggested.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents service design research related to service development, service implementation, and change management, and references implementation practices from related fields of study. Three frameworks for service implementation are presented, and a research opportunity defined.

Before the study proceeds into the literary review, a short description of the service design process is given to offer the reader a reference point for when other processes relating to service creation and development are discussed.

### **2.1 Service design process**

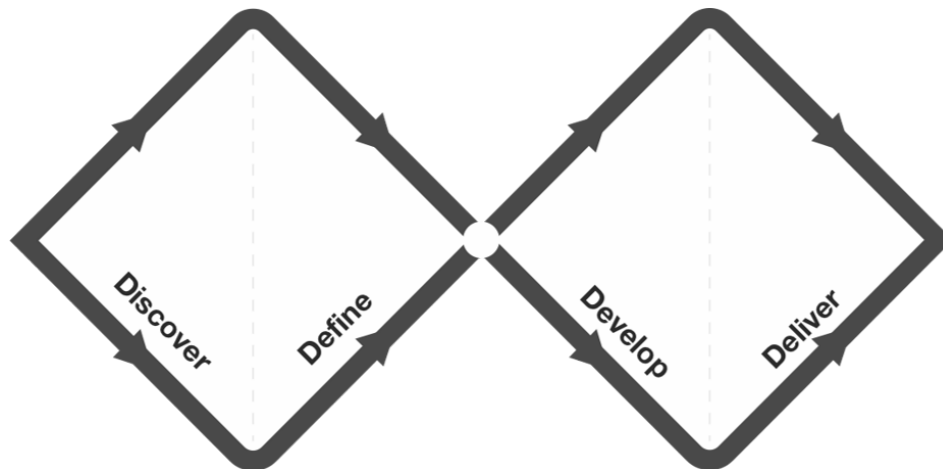
Service design generally revolves around creating experiences that are user-centred, holistic, and iterative. Marc Stickdorn (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2016, p. 26) has outlined five key principles for service design; user-centred, co-creative, sequencing, evidencing, and holistic.

More broadly, services should be experienced through the customer's eyes, all stakeholders should be included in the service design process, the service should be visualised as a sequence of interrelated actions, intangible services should be visualised in terms of physical artefacts, and the entire environment of a service should be considered (ibid.).

These principles serve as a guiding framework for service designers to create innovative, user-centred, and sustainable services that meet the needs and expectations of users while delivering value to organisations.

The service design process is a systematic approach to create new and improve existing services. A commonly used design process in service design is the Double Diamond design process developed by the UK Design Council (Design Council, n.d.). The Double Diamond design process is a methodological framework used to guide the creation of innovative solutions to complex problems.

The Double Diamond design process is iterative, with each diamond representing a cycle of divergent and convergent thinking. The process consists of four phases: discover, define, develop and deliver (figure 2.1).



*Figure 2.1: The Double Diamond design process (Design Council, n.d.)*

In the first diamond, understanding and insights on the problem are gathered, and the design challenge defined. In the second diamond, solutions for the challenge are sought, and the solutions tested. (ibid.)

Understanding and insights on the problem are gathered through research, and by empathising with the users to recognise their needs, motivations and pain points. By synthesising the research findings and identifying key insights, the design challenge is defined to guide the design process.

Creative solutions to the design challenge are explored through brainstorming and ideation. Potential solutions are developed and tested by building tangible service evidence, such as prototypes, and the most promising service concepts are refined by user feedback.

The Double Diamond design process encourages flexibility, creativity, and collaboration, allowing designers to explore a wide range of possibilities before converging on the best solutions.

Throughout the service design process, collaboration and co-creation are key principles, with stakeholders actively involved in shaping the design and implementation of the service. The process being iterative, with each stage informing the next, it allows for continuous improvement and innovation.

## 2.2 Service design in service development & implementation

The service development process can be described having four phases: the ideation phase, the project formation phase, the design phase, and the implementation phase. The outcome of the service development process constitutes the prerequisites for the service by three concepts: the service concept, the service process, and the service system. (Edvardsson, 1997, p. 40). Service design can be seen as a pivotal stage for service development as it focuses on these three prerequisites for achieving service quality.

In service design, the result of the initial phases of service development is the formulation of the service concept. The service concept defines 'the how' and 'the what' of service design, ensures integration between 'the how' and 'the what', and helps mediate between customer needs and an organisation's strategic intent (Goldstein, Johnston, Duffy & Rao, 2002, p.134). The gap between customer needs and the service the organisation intends to provide can be avoided at the design stage by ensuring that the design intent is focused on satisfying customer needs (ibid., p. 124).

Service implementation is referred to the process of transition from designing a service concept, structure, and delivery process to putting the intended service experience into action and operation (Yu, 2021, p. 908). The aim of implementation is to translate ideas into practice within the organisation providing the service with the ultimate goal for the organisation to autonomously carry out the designed plans.

Yu and Sangiorgi (2014) examined how service design research contributes to new service development, and found that service design research focused mainly on the design phase with limited considerations for how the design phase can be linked with the development stage. They also found that how services are designed and how services are implemented require coordination and alignment - if the two parts are disconnected, it might result in the generation of service concepts that cannot be actualised in the current service delivery system (ibid., p.201).

The research of Bækkelié (2016) suggests that effective service implementation practices commence in the early stages of development, integrating organisational considerations and aligning stakeholders. Service implementation is an aspect to be taken into account during the service design phase to enhance the readiness of service delivery systems, encompassing actors, resources, and technologies (Overkamp & Holmlid, 2017, p. 205).

Some studies (e.g. Almqvist, 2017; Bækkelié, 2016) have found elements from the design phase that should be considered in the development and implementation phases. In their research Almqvist (2017) found that as decisions made in early phases of the development project are influenced by customer insights, the project might drift away from the identified customer needs in later project phases, especially after the service designer has left the project. This can lead to a mismatch between customer

needs and the service experience due to decisions in the later phases being made without, or with limited, consideration of user insights (Almqvist, 2017, p. 7).

Bækkelié (2016, p. 9) noted that implementation is not the end of the design process because the design process, on principle, never ends. Planning for implementation in the beginning of the design process and ensuring anchoring in all levels of the organisation is very important for the success of the implementation (ibid.).

The same researchers (Almqvist, 2018; Bækkelié, 2016) have researched the creation of visible and tangible service evidence, such as physical products and service environments, in relation to service implementation, and found their role important in transitioning the service concept from design into operation. Additionally, in the event that service innovation involves external designers, the handover activities involving tangible deliverables assume a crucial role in service implementation (Almqvist, 2018, p. 671)

### **2.3 Implementation practices in related fields**

In product design implementation is seen as part of the development process - implementation takes place at the end of the development process where a prototype is developed and a product launched (Buijs, 2003, p. 87; Dobocan & Blebea, 2014, p. 348). To successfully launch a product a company needs resources, technological capacity and market information (Dobocan & Blebea, 2014, p. 348). To address challenges with product launch Buijs (2003, p. 90) proposes viewing the implementation or launch strategy for a product as a process that runs parallel to product development.

Finding the right strategy for product launch can determine the success of the launch. Research on launch strategies has uncovered best practices and success indicators (e.g. Rossi, Kerga, Taisch ja Terzi, 2014, p. 456), advocating an approach that prioritises not only the company and the customer but also other significant stakeholders involved in the launch (e.g. Owens, 2007, p. 19). Ideally, these stakeholders are integrated into the product implementation planning team (e.g. Kou & Lee, 2015, p. 679; Smith, 2011, p. 138).

Software and interaction design also view implementation as part of the development process. In these fields implementation is typically regarded as the final stage of the development process where the design of a system is converted into a functional software (Kienzle, 2008, p. 37; Serrano et al., 2008, p. 153). In some examples of software design (Serrano, Juras ja Nigay, 2008, p. 153) end-users can be seen as stakeholders or contributors to implementation as they have control over the implementation strategy of various software components when installing the software, allowing them to determine the specific functionality of each component.

Parallels from other fields of study to service design in regards to implementation can be found in planning for implementation early on in the development project, and engaging stakeholders in the planning and execution of the implementation.

Fields related to service design mostly see implementation as the delivery of generic resources and process models, whereas service implementation also involves development and change of the service organisation as well as adaptation in use of resources and service processes models (Overkamp & Holmlid, 2016, p. 205).

## **2.4 Service design in support of organisational change**

70 percent of all change initiatives fail (By, 2005, p. 370). The introduction of new services often results in organisational change, and when projects fail, it is mostly due to implementation failures rather than design flaws (Lin, Hughes, Katica, Dining-Zuber & Plsek, 2011, p. 77). Hence, the challenge in organisational change may not lie in devising a new organisational structure, but rather in effectively managing the implementation process.

The implementation process can be inherently challenging as it requires navigating through a process of change. Lønvik, Pettersen & Verhulst (2016, p. 1) suggest that the implementation of service design projects may be treated as a type of change management. As a discipline, service design comes equipped with tools and approaches relevant to supporting organisational change. It does, however, lack theoretical perspectives on what processes of implementation and organisational change actually entail (ibid., p. 5).

Junginger & Sangiorgi (2009) researched the potential of service design to generate and implement internal changes within an organisation. Through case studies they found that the change required to implement the service concept depends on the level of depth the project reaches into the organisation (ibid., p. 8). If service design and suggested improvement remain at the periphery of the organisation, the impact will remain small. Deeper organisational insights and transformative impacts can be gained, if service design reaches a deeper level in the organisation.

Based on their research and practice experience, Junginger & Sangiorgi (2009, p. 8) suggest that organisational change theories and methods are of particular relevance to service design as it matures as an area of practice and research. They also encourage service designers to reflect on their position and role within the organisation, and move from playing the role of 'directors' to playing the role of 'enablers', 'facilitators' and 'connectors' in a participatory design process that iteratively 'builds capacities from within' (ibid., p. 2).

Inspired by the research of Junginger & Sangiorgi, Lin & al. (2011) conducted a case study on service implementation where they explored the value of change management theories with design practice. Using change management theories to guide the design

team during the implementation process resulted in a redesign of the design team's implementation methods, and inspired a more human-centred approach to spreading the service design concept with the people delivering the service (ibid., p. 78).

In their initial service implementation approach Lin et al. (ibid., p. 77) found that the frontline staff didn't believe in the need for change, and instead of coaches they needed facilitators to help them see and feel the reasons behind the change. The researchers adjusted their implementation approach based on change management principles, and came up with a 'soft-start' process that would purposefully create conversations and other opportunities for interaction with the service design before implementation (ibid., p. 78). This adjustment in service implementation resulted not only in increased adoption and performance, but the level of the sustainability of the change over time.

Service design and change management have several commonalities. They are both approaches that in some way contribute to change, and they have largely intangible outcomes. (Lønvik et al., 2016, p. 7). In their literary study combining insights and approaches from the fields of service design and change management, Lønvik et al. (ibid.) defined three principles for grounding projects in the organisation and gaining support for the. The three principles for achieving this type of readiness for change are; stakeholder management and involvement, considering the implementation process a key activity in service design, and making sure organisations understand the value of design as a strategic resource (ibid.).

## **2.5 Existing frameworks for service implementation**

Three frameworks or models for service implementation have been created prior to this study, all in the last ten years. Here they are presented in order of their year of conception.

### **2.5.1 Christiansen's conceptual framework for service implementation**

In their conference paper Christiansen (2014) presented a conceptual framework for service implementation based on existing theory. The framework considers implementation as a mindset, rather than a phase, within which service designers operate from the early stages of a service design project (ibid., p.1). Additionally, the study investigated how service designers accommodated effective implementation.



The conceptual framework (figure 2.1) was built on two core concepts: service implementation strategy and service implementation tactics. Christiansen (ibid, p. 3) defines service implementation strategy as the overall plan for how the aim is reached through specific service implementation tactics. Service implementation tactics are defined as specific actions, methods or approaches that aim at accommodating the implementation of service solutions in a specific context (ibid.).

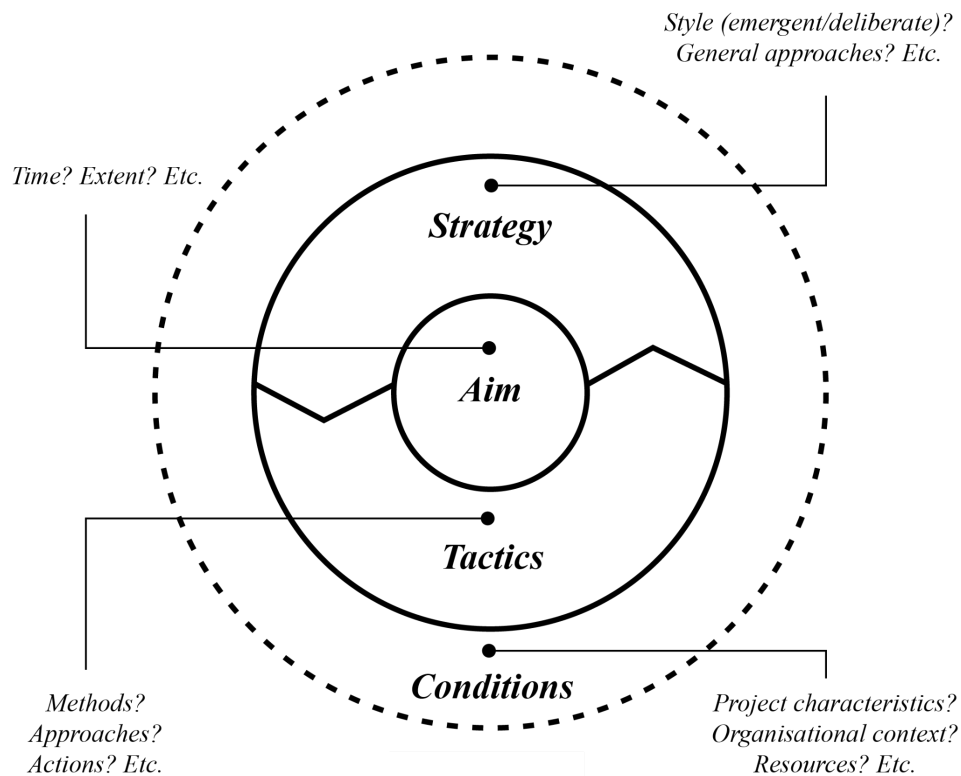


Figure 2.2: A conceptual framework for service implementation (Christiansen, 2014)

Christiansen (ibid.) notes that service implementation tactics are not tied to the last phase of the design process, but can be decided or acted upon in earlier phases of the process. Examples of these tactics are given as service blueprinting, prototyping, and infrastructuring. Christiansen (ibid.) deduces that the meaning of service implementation becomes more complex when it's not reduced to a specific phase of a process - it is rather a mindset in which the design and project team operate during the entire project, and which requires a way of thinking that is focused on accommodating implementation.

In addition to implementation strategy and tactics, the conceptual framework includes service implementation aim and conditions. Aim refers to the intention or objective of implementation. Conditions refer to the project characteristics, organisational context, resources, etc. which are given, but not necessarily static (ibid., p. 4).

## 2.5.2 Weisser, Jonas ja Mager's implementation model

Weisser, Jonas and Mager (2018) conducted a three year qualitative study with external service designers, service providers and consulting agencies through interviews and workshops to identify influencing factors, frequent barriers and future potentials around implementation projects of complex service design concepts. Their study resulted in 24 influencing factors acting as a base for an implementation model called KUER (figure 2.2).

The implementation model, KUER, consists of four phases: 'key prerequisites', 'understand & discover', 'enable & define' and 'reinforce & deliver'. The 24 influencing factors are attributed to the four phases. Six of the factors were described as necessary 'hygiene' factors and eighteen as 'desired' factors. (ibid., p. 36)

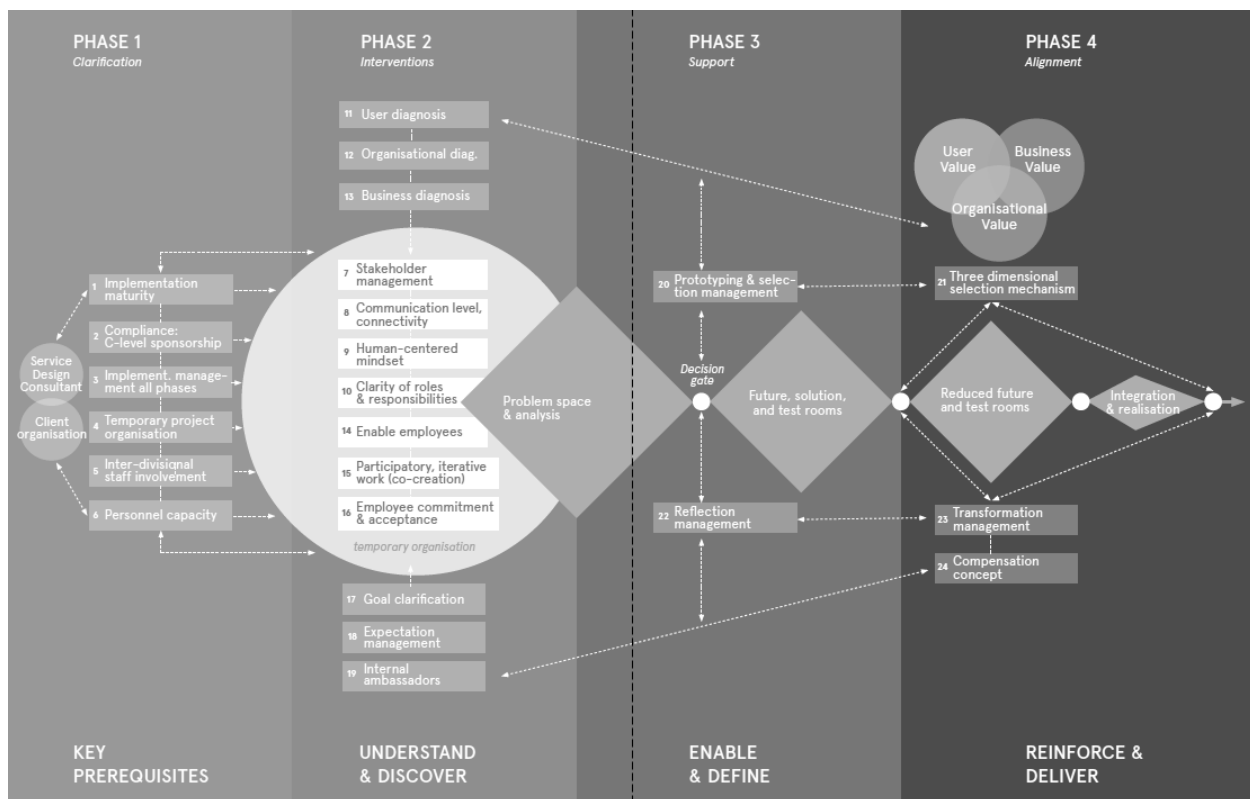


Figure 2.3: The KUER implementation model (Weisser et al., 2018)

The six 'hygiene' factors were all attributed to phase 1 'key prerequisites', and were seen as essential for successful implementation. These six factors were identified as: implementation maturity, compliance/c-level sponsorship, implementation management at all phases, temporary project organisation, interdivisional staff involvement, and personnel capacity (ibid.).

In phase 2 'understand and discover' a temporary project organisation is set up and extensive diagnostics are carried out. Users, the client organisation and economic parameters must be analysed. Solutions developed in phase 3 'enable and define' are tested in rapid cycles with users, employees and relevant stakeholders and evaluated at decision nodes using a three-dimensional selection mechanism. As activities to support the process and its orientation are used iteratively as required, the transition to the integration phase 4 'reinforce and deliver' is seamless. (ibid.)

Besides identifying the six key factors behind successful implementation, another key finding of the study was the importance of collaborative approach. The study found that through early involvement, employees can experience user problems first-hand, recognise their own meaning in the insights found, and thus develop the necessary acceptance for the possibly new or even uncomfortable changes ahead (ibid., p. 39).

In regards to service designer's role in implementation, the study found that in ideal situations service designers support the project and client organisation in three ways: as process, specialist, and mindset consultants. Notably, if service designers are not responsible for or do not want to control the process, a successful later implementation is questionable (ibid.).

### 2.5.3 Yu's theoretical framework for service implementation

Yu (2021) presented a multi-dimensional theoretical framework for service implementation based on literary study (figure 2.3). The framework consisted of four levels: networked systems, organisation, actor and process/resource levels.

	Development	Adoption & Diffusion	Business as Usual
<b>Networked Systems Level</b>	Organizations as value co-creation partners are invited and their business partnerships are made.	Networked organizations are mobilized to co-implement the service.	Networked organizations are supported to continue the implemented service innovation.
<b>Organization Level</b>	Organizational contexts, structures, and resources are developed for targeted service experience.	Service innovation is communicated and diffused throughout organization for its implementation.	Organizational units are empowered to sustain the service on a long term basis.
<b>Actor Level</b>	Individuals are motivated to become a service delivery actor to co-create service experience.	Individuals' mental models are shaped to adopt and operate new service practice and processes in their work.	Individuals are supported to sustain service innovation in their ordinary practice.
<b>Process/Resource Level</b>	A service process is structured and physical/technical products and facilities are developed.	A service process and physical/technical products and facilities are deployed and activated.	A service process is routinized and physical/technical products are integrated into a daily service process.

Figure 2.4: A theoretical framework for service implementation (Yu, 2021)

Service implementation at networked systems level involves activities and processes to enable service enactment and diffusion across multiple organisations networked for value co-creation, while service implementation at organisation level refers to activities and processes to prepare an organisation for adopting service innovation and help the organisation sustain it. Service implementation at actor level indicates activities and processes to affect and motivate individual actors to adopt and diffuse service innovation, and service implementation at process/resource level involves activities and processes to support developing and specifying a service delivery process in which specific steps and various resources are integrated. (ibid., p. 912)

The service implementation activities within these levels were broken down to three silos based on their purpose: development, adoption and diffusion, and business as usual. The development practices intended to set up service delivery system resources

so that they may be ready for being implemented, the adoption and diffusion practices aimed to put service delivery system resources into action and to help actors adopt and spread service innovation, and the business as usual practices intended to embed innovation in ordinary organisational processes, practice, and culture for its routinisation (ibid., p. 913).

Through an interview study Yu (2021) contextualised service design practices into the framework. The semi-structured interviews with in-house and external service designers focused on the issues designers had faced in service implementation projects, and on the design approaches used to address the issues.

The study found that at the networked systems level the service designers faced challenges involving and aligning different companies. At the organisation level the main challenges were that the actors creating service concepts are usually different from the ones implementing them, and conflicts arising from stakeholders' different interests or responsibilities. (ibid., p. 918)

A main and common challenge at the actor level was reported to be individual actors' defensive disposition against any changes to their work. At the process/resource level one of the challenges identified was that the conceptual and visual outputs, such as service blueprints, were rejected by business and operations units unless supplemented by functional and technical specifications. (ibid., p. 923)

The study's findings were that service designers contribute to service implementation at the organisation and actor levels whilst highlighting the need for advancing design practices at the networked systems and process levels (ibid., p. 908).

For the organisation's service adoption process, designers actively used envisioned customer service experience as a strategic instrument for taking employees on board, getting buy-in, and mobilising people toward organisational service system implementation. Customer experiences concretised by visualisation and communication skills helped siloed organisational units recognize how they constitute the holistic service system enabling seamless customer experience. (ibid., p. 925)

For the actor's service adoption process, designers highly appreciated the value of an individualistic approach. They converted organisational service delivery goals into actors' individual value and benefit by zooming in on individuals' real needs and desires. ((ibid., p. 926)

Yu (2021) found that a business and economic approach was effective in engaging client organisations on the network systems level, and one of the most needed competencies for designers to acquire in order to succeed in service implementation. To implement service at the process/resource level, designers' operational and technical adaptation of service design artefacts was required, but this was found to be limited in service design practices (ibid.).

## **2.6 Defining the research opportunity**

The three service implementation frameworks presented here focus on the experiences and views of service design practitioners, but not service business practitioners. This study aims to combine the views of both groups when investigating the factors impacting service implementation, and building a framework reflecting those factors.

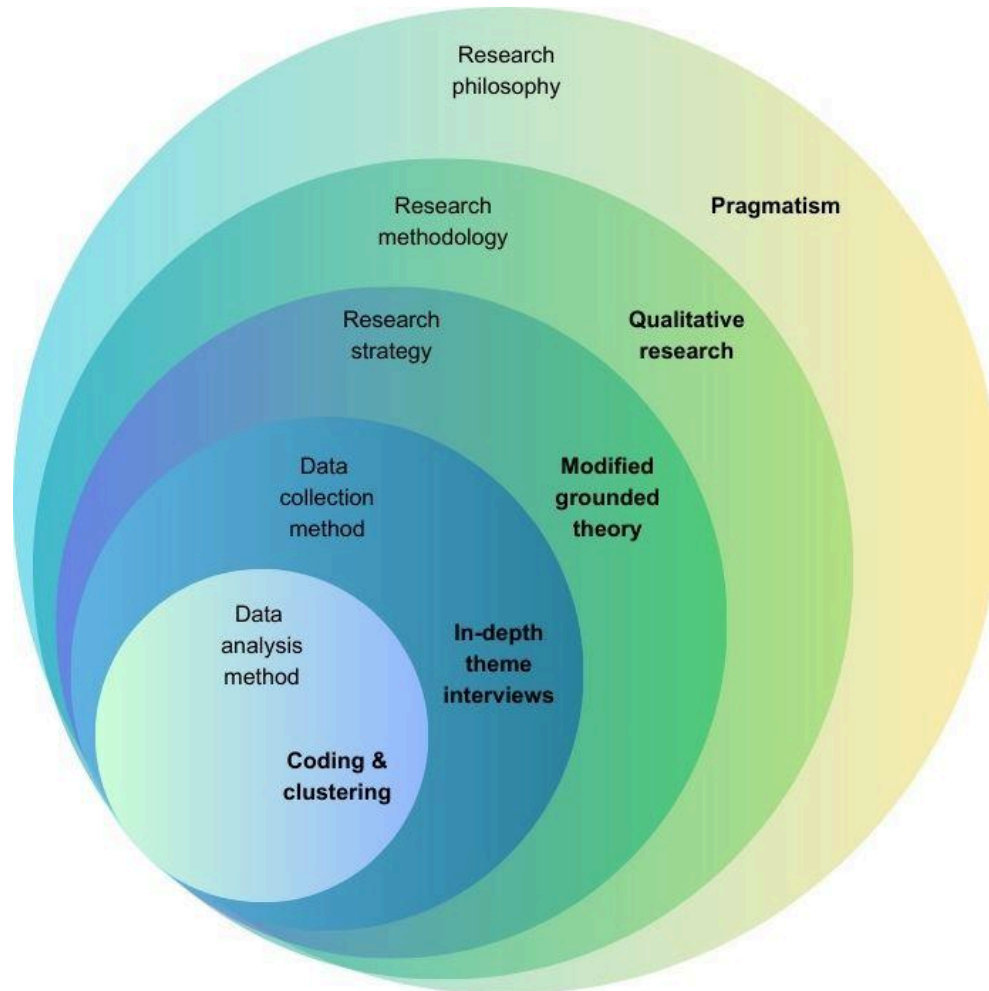
The three previously created frameworks present three different research approaches to base a service implementation framework on. Christiansen (2014) built their framework on theory, Weisser et al. (2018) based their model on empirical data, and Yu (2021) built their framework on theory and contextualised it with design practices. This study will build the service implementation framework on empirical data.

Next chapter will present the qualitative research strategy and methodology in more detail.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter describes how the research challenge was approached and the data collected and analysed, and evaluates the ethical considerations for the study.

Figure 3.1 presents the research design for this study from the research philosophy to the data analysis methods.



*Figure 3.1: Visual presentation of the research design*

Each area of the research design will be discussed in more detail in the following two subchapters. First, I'll briefly address the research philosophy, methodology and strategy of the study, then, I'll present the research data collection and analysis methods in more depth. At the end of this chapter I'll assess the ethical aspects of the study.

### **3.1 Research philosophy, methodology and strategy**

Pragmatism as a research philosophy refers to an approach that focuses on the practical implications and utility of research findings. It emphasises the importance of selecting research methods and techniques based on their effectiveness in addressing real-world problems and informing decision-making. Pragmatism links theory and practice, but it is the practical and experiential that is essential to the relational construct of pragmatism (Given, 2008, p. 674).

As pragmatism emphasises practicality and usefulness it is well suited as a research philosophy for this study as it encourages me to consider the practical implications of the findings, and to focus on how the generated framework can be applied to inform practice and solve real-world problems.

Qualitative research is a methodological approach used to explore and understand complex phenomena by collecting and analysing data such as words and observations. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 6) Qualitative research aims to provide detailed analyses of various phenomena, enabling researchers to explore complex issues, reveal trends, and formulate new theories.

Qualitative research as research methodology is appropriate for this study as the aim is to gather and understand practitioners' experiences with service implementation, and use their knowledge to inform the construction of a framework for service implementation.

This study uses inductive reasoning to develop theory from empirical observations. Inductive reasoning is of particular relevance in qualitative approaches that are used to extend existing theory into a new setting or to develop understanding and theory where none currently exists (Given, 2008, p.431).

Grounded theory research approach is a qualitative research methodology aimed at generating theory directly from data. In this approach, researchers gather and analyse data systematically, typically through interviews, observations, or documents, to identify recurring themes and patterns. The goal is to produce a theory based on data that describes, interprets and explains the phenomenon under study (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 251). Grounded theory uses induction to systematically develop higher-level propositions that explain the structure of data (ibid., p.431).

Grounded theory method focuses squarely on the analytic phases of research, although both data collection and analysis inform and shape each other and are conducted in tandem. The analytic strategies are inherently comparative and interactive; this method guides researchers to make systematic comparisons and to engage the data and emerging theory actively throughout the research process. (ibid., p. 375)



Grounded theory as an approach is especially justified when the studied situation and context are new in some way, there is no established theory about the topic, or when the research aims to reveal previously unrecognised perspectives in the scientific debate about the phenomenon (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 253).

As the topic of this study, service implementation, has no established theory, and including service practitioners in the data set was anticipated to bring out new perspectives on the topic, grounded theory was seen as a suitable research strategy for this study. Where this study deviates from the traditional grounded theory approach is in the analysis process. I'll describe this process in more detail in the following subchapter.

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis methods

Figure 3.2 describes the research process for this study. The data was collected through in-depth theme interviews, and analysed using coding and clustering. Based on the empirical research I formed a framework for service implementation which will be presented later in this study.

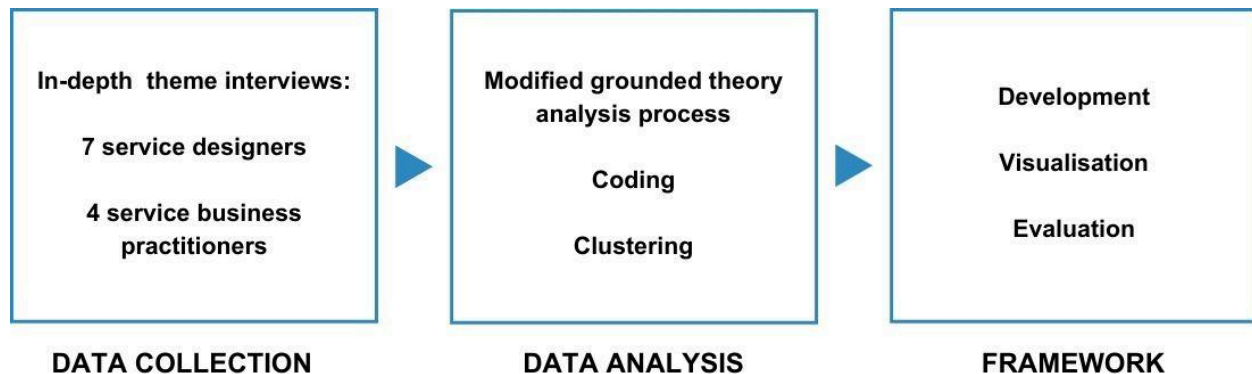


Figure 3.2: Visual presentation of the research process

In grounded theory research, data collection takes place according to the same principles as in qualitative research in general. The most common data collection methods in grounded theory approach are open or themed interviews and observation (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 255).

The data for this study was collected through individual interviews. As a method, the interview focuses on the contents of consciousness and thinking, and its goal is to collect material that makes it possible to make credible conclusions about the phenomenon under study (ibid., p. 103). Based on the literary review I had a view that the research topic, service implementation, is multifaceted, and to gain an

understanding of the complexity of it I chose to collect the data through in-depth theme interviews.

In-depth interviews are interviews in which participants are encouraged and prompted to talk in depth about the topic under investigation without the researcher's use of predetermined, focused, short-answer questions. In-depth interviews are suitable for data collection in a variety of research methodologies, including grounded theory and ethnography, and are often used as a stand-alone method of data collection without reliance on an underlying philosophical approach. (Given, 2008, p. 423)

In a theme interview, the topics, or themes, of the interview are determined in advance. However, the method lacks the exact form and order of questions typical of a structured interview. The interviewer ensures that all the theme areas decided in advance are reviewed with the interviewee, but their order and extent varies from one interview to another. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p.87)

In this study, in-depth theme interviews offered flexibility to discuss the research topic, service implementation, without restrictions in the form of predefined constructs or questions. Through the interviews I was able to encourage the interviewees to speak freely, change the order in which the topics were discussed, and choose my wording and way of asking questions to match the interviewees' preferences of discussion.

The benefit of the interview as a research method is that the researcher can choose people who are known to have experience from the phenomenon under study as interviewees (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, 106). For this study I chose to interview service designers and service business practitioners with experience in service implementation. The interviewees were recruited via professional networks with the object of finding interviewees with varying levels of professional experience representing a diverse set of industries.

I interviewed seven service designers and four service business practitioners for the study. The designers' design experience spanned from 2 to 14 years and the practitioners service business experience from 12 to 24 years. The interviewees' industry background ranged from the public sector to finance and information technology. Most service designers worked in in-house roles, while some had consulting experience.

The video interviews were undertaken between October and December 2024. Each interview was conducted for 50 to 90 minutes, and was both video and audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed with an AI assisted tool, Good Tape. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and the interview data was translated to English during the analysis process.

The grounded theory analysis process has three distinct phases; theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and verification (Glaser & Strauss, 1976, as cited in Anttila, 2005, p. 377). These stages form an iterative process to support the creation of new theory.

In the first phase, theoretical sampling, the researcher reviews all research material in detail while focusing on finding common themes in the data, and creating a rough definition of the phenomenon under study. In this phase the researcher collects, codes and analyses the data over and over again while evaluating what data to collect next (ibid., p 378). The aim of the first phase is to create labels, or codes, for meaningful segments of the data.

The second phase of the analysis, theoretical saturation, consists of re-grouping the data into categories and subcategories through axial coding to look for connections between the categories. The aim of this phase is to search for one or more main categories from the data. The purpose of categorisation is to expand the handling of the data, and the researcher will return to data collection until they can no longer find data to generate new categories, and thus reach theoretical saturation. (Anttila, 2005, p 381)

In the third phase, verification, the researcher either tests their hypothesis to other data or returns to data collection to test their assumptions. The whole analysis, or coding, happens through the method of constant comparison. (ibid., p 383)

In this study I employed a modified version of grounded theory in a sense that I created theory based on qualitative research data by collecting and analysing the data in the spirit of grounded theory. The data was collected and analysed by methods commonly used by grounded theory, in-depth interviews and coding, respectively.

Where the approach of this study differs from the traditional grounded theory approach, is that the data collection and analysis was not an iterative process (figure 3.3).

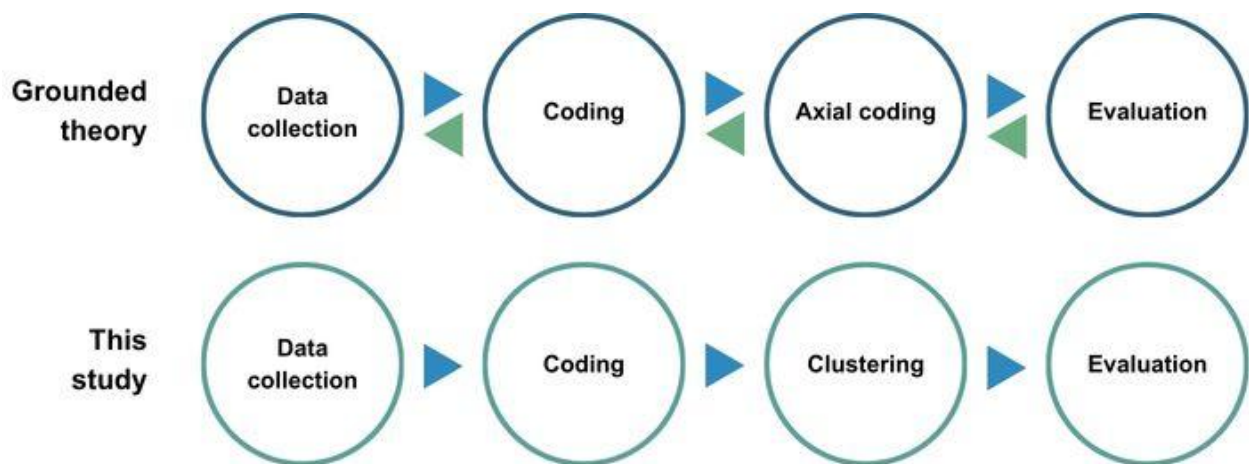


Figure 3.3: Data collection and analysis process comparison

The traditional grounded theory data collection and analysis process iterates between the steps until theoretical saturation is reached. Throughout the analysis process, grounded theory emphasises reflection and constant comparison, with researchers continuously revisiting and refining their interpretations in light of new data and insights.

In this study the data was collected and analysed in a straightforward order, and no further data was collected after the coding process was completed. The resulting theory, service implementation framework, was evaluated against existing theory at the end of the analysis process. The comparison will be presented in chapter 5.

The decision to modify the grounded theory analysis process was made to tailor the approach to fit the scope of the research, master's thesis. Data sets in master's thesis tend to be small, and time horizons short by design, making theoretical saturation impractical given the academic restriction and requirements.

In the research analysis part of this study I examined the data systematically to find patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the research questions. To organise and interpret the data I used coding.

In qualitative research coding is the process of generating ideas and concepts from raw data such as interview transcripts, fieldnotes, archival materials, reports, newspaper articles, and art. The coding process refers to the steps the researcher takes to identify, arrange, and systematise the ideas, concepts, and categories uncovered in the data. Coding starts with attention to very fine details and evolves into emergent categories that are applicable at much higher degrees of abstraction. (Given, 2008, p. 86-87)

Codes that occur repeatedly formulate constructs that seem to be shared by most or many of the participants of the study. When sufficiently grounded in the data collected, they become the study's themes. (ibid., p. 870) Themes emerge from clustering similar codes, and from those themes it is possible to generate hypotheses about how the categories are related (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 229).

Themes can be considered as answers to the research questions as they are drawn from the research data and are responsive to the purpose of the research (ibid., p. 212). In this study I clustered related codes into broader themes based on similarities and patterns emerging from the data.

The themes supported the creation of a framework that captured the key findings from the data. By exploring the relationships between the themes and analysing their perceived importance by the interviewees, I was able to generate an understanding of the research topic, and draw conclusions. I will describe the analysis process in more detail in chapter 4 where I discuss the results.

Grounded theory involves the researcher keeping a diary of their experiences and preliminary ideas, as well as recording theoretical memos and sorting them throughout the analysis process. By recording, among other things, the questions raised by the

material, their own thoughts and, as the analysis progresses, also the similarities and differences between the material and previous literature, the researcher is able to understand the details and the whole of the material. (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 256)

As part of my work process I collected and organised my thoughts and observations through autoethnography. The data from autoethnography was not used as part of the data set in the creation of the framework, but it supported the reflection and discussion in chapter 6.

### **3.3 Ethical considerations and limitations**

The research was conducted with openness, honesty and responsibility to achieve useful results that reflect reality and provide practical solutions to the research problem. The research methods were chosen to serve this purpose.

When choosing research participants a wide net was cast to reach a diverse and good representation of the practitioners experienced with the research topic, service implementation. No one was discriminated against, and everyone interested in participating in the study was included in it.

The research results reflect the views and experiences of the research participants, but the results are interpreted from the viewpoint of the researcher, and thus their prior experiences impact the interpretation.

The data in this study has been collected, stored, analysed and reported anonymously following the good research practices outlined by the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2023, p. 11). All digital tools used for data collection and handling comply with the University of Lapland's privacy policy. The research participants were informed via signed consent form of the data collection, use and storage principles. The participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Next in the study a more detailed analysis process is described, and the research results are presented.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This chapter presents the research analysis and findings of the study. First, the analysis process is described in more detail, then the research findings relating to the interviewees' experiences with service implementation are discussed.

Subchapter 4.2 addresses the aspects of planning for service implementation. In subchapter 4.3 the interviewees' experiences and take-aways from successful and failed service implementation cases are discussed in detail. Subchapter 4.4 touches upon the organisational capabilities that support or hinder service implementation. In subchapter 4.5, the role of a service designer in service implementation is discussed, and lastly in subchapter 4.6, the research findings are summarised.

### **4.1 Analysis process**

In this study I used coding to categorise and label the data from the interview transcripts as part of the data analysis process. The codes were assigned to different topics based on the content, meaning, or significance of the data. Coding facilitated the identification of key insights, and visually helped data organisation.

I clustered the related codes together into broader themes based on similarities or patterns observed in the data. The clustering helped me organise and synthesise the codes to develop a framework that reflects the underlying structure of the data. I was able to identify overarching themes emerging from the data, interpret the findings, and find answers to the research questions.

I started reading through and analysing the interview transcripts after all interviews had been conducted, without any assumptions on the organisation or classification of the data. I created high-level headers, such as 'lessons learned from failed service implementations' or 'challenges faced in service implementation', when they arose from the data, while keeping in mind I was looking for answers to the research questions.

For each comment or notion I created an individual note, and allocated it under the applicable high-level header. After all interview transcripts had been read over, I coded and clustered the notes under each header. The resulting themes were cross-referenced to identify key insights, and used to create the framework. I used a cloud based application, Miro, to organise the notes.

Figure 4.1 shows an example of how the interview data was coded and clustered. This is an example of topics discussed in relation to successful service implementation with the service designers.



Figure 4.1: Example of data coding and clustering

First I combed through the interview transcripts, and picked out all notions and comments relating to successful service implementation experiences. I translated them to English, and allocated a note to each. The notes were colour coded so each interviewee had their own colour. This facilitated spotting patterns in the data, and to drill down to individual comments later on in the analysis process. In this particular example I found 49 individual comments or notions relating to experiences with successful service implementation.

I then combined comments relating to the same topic, and assigned a code to each grouping. This resulted in 14 codes. Next I clustered related codes together, and identified seven distinct themes representing the factors behind successful service implementation.

I performed the same analysis process for the data gathered from the interviews with the service business practitioners, and, coincidentally, ended with seven distinct themes as well. I cross-referenced the two data sets, and identified five themes shared by both interviewee groups, with additional two themes for both groups.

Next in this chapter I will present the research findings through the identified themes, and provide further insights into the findings by discussing the data behind the themes, and by using direct quotes from the interviews.

**4.2 Planning for service implementation**

Preparing and planning for the implementation phase of a service concept development project was discussed at the beginning of the interviews as a lead up to the research topic. The interviewees were prompted to bring up top of mind thoughts on the topic of implementation, and discuss factors that should be considered when planning for service implementation

The service designers' sentiments on implementation were mostly negative. The implementation phase was seen as a very laborious part of the project with concerns around whether the service concept and the organisation were ready for the implementation. The service business practitioners felt relief of finally launching something they'd been working on for a long time while simultaneously feeling anxious and expectant about how the customers and customer facing employees would react to the service concept.

When discussing top-of-mind topics on service implementation both service designers and service business practitioners brought up topics around project management and change management (figure 4.2). In addition the designers discussed topics around the business case, resourcing and communication, while the practitioners focused on topics around the actual launch of the service.



*Figure 4.2: Results: top-of-mind topics regarding service implementation*



The discussion around project management and execution revolved heavily around planning not only for the project, but for the implementation as well. The service designers were more focused on having to compromise on the execution of the service concept with the original discovery of customer needs getting lost in the process. The service business practitioners on the other hand approached the topic of execution from an internal stakeholder point of view, and how the multitude of stakeholders would add complexity into the planning and execution of the service implementation.

Service business practitioners took a holistic view on change management with the discussion ranging from individuals' attitudes towards change and taking ownership of the change, to the project and management teams understanding how the change impacts different parts of the organisation and individuals differently. With service designers the discussion around change management remained superficial in the early stages of the interviews.

The service business practitioners brought up the practicalities of launching a service as top of mind on the topic of service implementation. They highlighted the importance of planning and executing the launch so that the service was easy for both the customers and internal users to make the most use of, and tracking the use of the new service to see how it implements.

The service designers discussed topics around business case, resourcing and communication as well. Understanding what and why a service concept is being developed, does the concept cover both customer and business needs, and what are the restrictions around implementation were the main points on business cases brought up by five of the seven service designers. The discussion on resourcing and communication related to having the right people involved in the project and implementation, and having all stakeholders sufficiently informed during the project.

There was significant consensus between service designers and service business practitioners when discussing topics that need to be considered when planning for service implementation. Both groups mentioned the same five high-level topics: business case, resourcing, project management, change management, and stakeholder involvement (figure 4.3).



*Figure 4.3: Results: considerations when planning for service implementation*

In addition to the basics, such as matching customer and business needs, of building a solid business case, the service business practitioners presented views on clearly defining what will change as part of the service implementation, and setting individual and team targets to match the change to encourage successful implementation. The service designers brought up the need to use the right customer data to base the ideation and innovation on in support of the business case.

The discussions on resourcing and stakeholder involvement were intertwined. Both interviewee groups mentioned the importance of identifying and involving all stakeholders in the project at the right time. The service practitioners proposed involving the customer facing employees in the project early on to ensure their engagement and support later on in the implementation phase. The practitioners also brought up the topic of budgeting for the implementation as part of the discussion around resourcing.

A significant part of the discussion on preparing for service implementation was dedicated to project management. Planning and processes were the sublevel topics discussed by both interviewee groups. It was deemed crucial to plan for the implementation phase early in the project, and be prepared for surprises when implementing the service. The service business practitioners also suggested including an after-care and follow-up phase to ensure successful implementation and change. Mapping out end-to-end processes and changes in the processes were seen to help identify where to focus on in different phases of the project.

The service designers also recognised the importance of having strong project leadership driving the project. The project team leader needs to have a clear vision of the implementation and change, and be ready to steer it. The service business practitioners brought up the need to look at the organisation wide project portfolio to ensure there are no competing interests, and that the customer facing employees are not overworked and overwhelmed by too many projects and changes taking place simultaneously.

Understanding the impact of the change the service implementation brings, and individuals' reaction to the change, were brought up by both service designers and service business practitioners when discussing change management in preparation for implementation. Defining what will change, who the change will impact, how it will impact them, and what support they might need were seen as critical when planning for implementation. It was also seen as crucial to be prepared for change resistance, and plan how to overcome the resistance.

*“When one understands how the change will impact various stakeholders, they can be brought into the project at the right time” - service business practitioner*

The service business practitioners suggested discussing and factoring change management into the project planning, and building a communication plan around change management. They also recommended managing expectations relating to the change, and being transparent about the change - what is changing, what the change will enable, and what restrictions or limitations the change might have. Here again the practitioners took a practical view on planning for implementation by suggesting involving change agents from the customer facing teams to support change management. By involving individuals that are open to change and get excited about change they will influence their colleagues, build momentum, and even get the sceptics to welcome the change.

### 4.3 Learnings from implementation successes and failures

With all interviewees we discussed cases where service concepts had been implemented well, cases where service implementation had failed, the lessons learned from these cases, and challenges faced in service implementation in general.

The consensus among service designers was that the key success factors around successful implementation were: strong and comprehensive business case, customer centricity driving the concept development, strong project management, sufficient resourcing, and change management (figure 4.4). In addition the successful projects had utilised co-creation, and the feasibility of the service concept had been validated prior to entering the implementation phase.



Figure 4.4: Results: factors behind successful service implementation

The service business practitioners highlighted the same key success factors as service designers: strong business case, focus on customer centricity, strong project management, sufficient resourcing, and emphasis on change management. Moreover, they brought up the importance of communication and organisational capabilities supporting the development work and change.

When discussing the cases where service implementation had failed the consensus from both groups on reasons for failure were insufficient resourcing, weak project management and execution, and poor change management (figure 4.5). The service designers also brought up reasons for failure as: weak business case, poor communication as well as organisational capabilities lacking. The designers also reflected on their own role in failed projects, and if the outcome might be different, had they done something differently. One factor leading to failed service implementation identified by the service practitioners was the lack of customer centricity.



Figure 4.5: Results: factors behind failed service implementation

For both interviewee groups the key take-aways from the implementation successes and failures were the importance of identifying and involving stakeholders early on in the project, and having clear and relevant communication around the project and the change (figure 4.6). The service business practitioners also brought up the importance of having a strong business case behind the project, and placing focus on change management to ensure successful implementation. They also recognised the need for thorough testing prior to implementing the service concept.



Figure 4.6: Results: key take-aways from implementation successes and failures

The service designers highlighted the importance of building a strong collaboration with their business partner, and understanding the impact of the change the implementation brings as additional take-aways to consider when taking on new development projects in the future. The designers also reflected on their own role and work in the projects, and identified an important lesson learned in clearly defining their role and responsibilities in the project, but also bringing forward their overlooked capabilities that might benefit the project. The role of service designers will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

Next the study will go into more detail on the main factors driving the success or failure of a service implementation.

#### **4.3.1 Business case**

A business case is a value proposition document that outlines the rationale, justification, and financial analysis for undertaking a project. It typically includes an assessment of the potential benefits, costs, risks, and strategic alignment of the proposed initiative. A business case provides a basis for decision making, outlines the project scope and plan, guides resource allocation, helps gain buy-in, and acts as a benchmark when evaluating project results.

For many interviewees the first thought on successful service implementation was a strong and comprehensive business case. This entailed having a clear reasoning behind why the service was being developed and justifying the “why”. If there was a clear need for the change from within the organisation as well as from the customers, the project didn’t need much justification. The bigger the need for the change internally, the bigger the benefit, especially in cases where solving an issue for the customer facing employees would lead to them solving customers’ issues faster and more efficiently.

The same applied for cases where the demand for the change came from outside the organisation and their customers. When the change was based on a legal requirement or a directive, such as in the insurance, energy or the public sector, the reasoning for the change was easily justified, resulting in successful service implementation.

The view of the service business practitioners was that keeping the scope of the project compact from the formation of the business case to execution resulted in successful implementation. They also noted that in order to succeed in service implementation the organisation needs to share a common and realistic vision of the change, and have the readiness to compromise so as to achieve that common vision.

Matching customer and business needs was seen as a challenge in service development in general as noted by the service business practitioners. However, they had also found that business benefits tend to follow a customer centric approach to service development.

*“Finding the sweet spot where the business targets and the customer point of view meet, i.e. finding a way to meet customer needs and executing it in a way that serves business targets.” - service business practitioner*

The service designers brought up a weak business case as one reason for failure in service implementation. In unsuccessful cases the reasoning or “why” behind the service concept development hadn’t been justified thoroughly enough. There were examples of trying to solve the needs of wrong stakeholders or customer groups, and in the public sector instances where the vision didn’t match the reality or legal restrictions. Multiple designers also brought up examples where the business case was based on the leadership’s idea for a service, instead of customer insights, resulting in a failed implementation due to there being no customer demand for the service.

#### **4.3.2 Customer centricity**

Customer centricity is a business approach that prioritises the needs, preferences, and satisfaction of customers at the core of all decision-making processes and activities within an organisation. It involves understanding and empathising with customers, anticipating their desires, and aligning products, services, and experiences to meet or exceed their expectations. Customer-centric organisations strive to build strong relationships with customers, cultivate loyalty, and drive long-term value by consistently delivering exceptional customer experiences.

The consensus among all interviewees was that for a service concept to truly implement successfully the change behind it should be driven by customer needs. The customer and their needs should be at the heart of the development work, and there should be a genuine desire in the organisation to want to know what the customers’ needs are, and to offer them a service that matches their needs. There should be no room for presumptions or prejudices about customer needs.

*“A successful project might not be the easiest one, but one where we’ve been able to meet customer expectations.”  
- service business practitioner*

Some of the challenges faced by the service designers were customer understanding remaining superficial, organisations pushing for services that haven’t been researched from the customer point of view, and fundamental customer needs popping up late in the project when they hadn’t been researched properly in the early stages of the project.

The designers noted that it's critical to ensure the customer needs have been correctly identified, and that they are backed by deep qualitative research. The service designers felt that when their business partners were committed to meeting the customer needs, they were more interested in participating in the development work. However, the designers also noted that customer centricity and customer understanding might mean different things to different people in the organisation, so it's important to share the same view on the development needs before execution.

The service business practitioners brought up the notion that continuous development based on customer feedback can also be seen as service implementation as that's where the service takes life. In their examples of successful service implementation the continuity of service development based on customer feedback after the initial launch was one key success factor. In some examples this service development continued over several years.

*“Continuous service development exceeds customer expectations and gives them added value”  
- service business practitioner*

#### **4.3.3 Stakeholder involvement**

A stakeholder is an individual, group, or entity that has an interest, concern, or investment in a particular project, organisation, or system, and whose actions or decisions can influence or be influenced by its outcomes. Stakeholders can include employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, regulators, and members of the community, among others.

For both interviewee groups one of the main learnings from prior successes and failures relating to service implementation was the importance of identifying and involving stakeholders early on in the project.

By identifying all stakeholders the project team was able to collect the views and needs of everyone the service implementation might impact. The possible overlaps and conflicts between different stakeholders' needs would feed into the development work and support the planning for change management.

It was seen as critical to create and foster a low threshold for all and any stakeholders to get involved in the project. By involving stakeholders in the development work they were given an opportunity to be heard and have their input into the service concept, which in turn made them more committed to the implementation and more receptive to change. All interviewees agreed that the earlier the stakeholders were brought into the project, the better.



*“ [In a successful implementation case] the groundwork was laid with end-users, and they were involved in the project early on.” - service business practitioner*

In some cases the service implementation had failed because not all stakeholders had been identified correctly or involved in the development work resulting in a solution that wasn't feasible or that faced change resistance. The service designers found it at times challenging to sell the projects to stakeholders. They suggested approaching this challenge by identifying the right individuals in the stakeholder groups to involve, and holding a workshop with them to justify the project and bring them onboard.

Four out of seven service designers named co-creation as a key factor behind successful service implementation. Co-creation involves collaborating with various stakeholders to shape the design process, where participants with diverse roles come together to provide varied insights. This approach enables designers to gain more comprehensive perspectives on what should be incorporated into a product or service.

In the research co-creation included involving stakeholders in the development work through participatory methods, but the service designers suggested involving especially business representatives and subject matter experts in the co-creation process. In their view this ensured that the solution that was being created not only met the needs of the customers and stakeholders, but was also feasible to implement. Through co-creation and by ideating and finding solutions together the project team was able to commit people to the project and service concept, which in turn would trickle successfully into change management.

Reflecting on failed service implementation, the service designers noted that in those cases co-design and ideation hadn't taken place properly as project management had bypassed this phase of the design process by either pushing a solution based on their presumptions or looking for a “hero design” to solve all needs. The learning from these types of cases was to educate on, advocate and protect the co-design phase, and to involve the project manager in the service design phase.

#### **4.3.4 Project management**

Project management is the discipline of planning, organising, executing, controlling, and closing projects effectively and efficiently to achieve specific goals and objectives within defined constraints, such as time, budget, and resources. It involves coordinating various activities, tasks, and stakeholders to ensure successful project completion while meeting quality standards and delivering value to stakeholders.

In the discussions around previous successes and failures, topics relating to project management and execution received a lot of attention with both interviewee groups. Especially the topic of planning was seen as a key factor in both successful and failed service implementation experiences. In the most successful implementation cases all project phases had been meticulously planned.

Planning involved many aspects from having a project plan in place to planning for the roll-out of the service. Many interviewees found it important to plan for the implementation already at the beginning of the project to ensure successful implementation. By planning the implementation early on the project team can ensure sufficient resourcing for the implementation phase, that they're not implementing too many changes at the same time, and that the changes they are implementing have been validated and tested prior to implementation.

When planning for the implementation the key take-aways for the service designers were to pilot the service for smaller customer groups or organisations prior to progressing to larger customer or user groups. For service business practitioners the key take-aways were to create a realistic and flexible plan for the roll-out, and to allocate enough time for the implementation so it doesn't become hurried. Moreover, in the successful examples all processes relating to the service concept had been finalised and validated prior to implementation.

Relating to planning the topic of preparedness was brought up by both interviewee groups. The service business practitioners noted it important to conduct a risk assessment prior to commencing the project, being prepared for surprises, and having efficient risk management procedures in place. The service designers also recognised the importance of anticipating potential issues, and tackling them actively once identified.

*“There will always be surprises when you're implementing a new service. Surprises you haven't prepared for. You need to have a plan B in case plan A doesn't work.”*  
- service business practitioner

In addition to planning, the ways of working were seen as important by all interviewees. In successful service implementation cases efficiency had been achieved by discussing and agreeing upon the ways of working among the project team and stakeholders - in some examples the development work followed the service design process, in others the work had been done in sprints. Success was also found through sparring with stakeholders and end-users throughout the project as well as through peer-to-peer support.

It was also noted that successful project teams knew how they were tracking against the project plan at any given time, and they collected feedback on their work from outside the project team throughout different project phases. In failed cases the work had been done in silos, and no attention had been paid to individuals' different ways of working, such as generational differences or aptitude to working with technology.

Those interviewees working in a consulting role also brought up the importance of studying and understanding the client's industry and their organisation's ways of working as factors impacting not only to the success of the implementation, but their own role in the project. Consulting service designers also found it beneficial to gather an understanding of the client's prior experience in service concept development, and how their organisation plans and designs, in order to adjust the designer's approach to the project.

One additional topic relating to project management discussed by the service business practitioners was aftercare. In failed examples of service implementation there had been no follow-up to see how the service implemented or clear targets set to direct the new ways of working. There had also been no key performance indicators (KPIs) set up to track the performance and use of the new service in order to understand why customers might or might not be using the new service.

To successfully implement a service the business service practitioners saw it crucial to plan and allocate resources for aftercare to ensure the service concept implements as planned, the internal users know how to use it and have an incentive to use it, and the customers using the service are having their needs met.

#### **4.3.5 Resourcing**

All interviewees mentioned resourcing as a pivotal factor to succeed in service implementation, the main focus being on human resourcing. As with project management many noted the importance of planning and allocating sufficient resources for the implementation phase of the project as well as the aftercare once the service had launched.

The service business practitioners brought up the connection between customer centricity and resourcing - in failed examples of implementation a minimum viable product (MVP) of the service was launched with no resources allocated for further development resulting in customers failing to use the service.

A multidisciplinary development team was seen as a success factor by both service designers and service business practitioners. It was perceived to result in a more holistic solution with representatives from different disciplines bringing new viewpoints and ideas to the project. Diverse approaches supported also with stakeholder identification and involvement.

In addition to having enough resources allocated to the project, it was also seen important to have the right resources, especially from all relevant stakeholder groups, allocated to the project. One service designer suggested allocating a dedicated resource to focus on the needs of each stakeholder group, and acting as an advocate to that particular group.

Attributes such as commitment and motivation came up frequently when discussing resourcing. A successful project team consisted of motivated individuals who felt ownership of the project, presented themselves unified to the outside, and were genuinely excited to bring new service concepts to customers. In contrast, in the failed cases there was no or low commitment, the work felt forced, and the team members were doing the bare minimum resulting in the project dragging on for too long or never making it to the implementation phase.

*“[In a successful implementation case] the key was a motivated core team. The team took ownership of the project. Individuals’ motivation mattered.” - service designer*

In failed examples there was also a lack of consensus within the project team on how to execute various project phases with different individuals working in design, development and implementation phases. The service designers also gave examples where service design didn't have a major role in the project or the designer was completely sidelined. The designers had also faced challenges with overlapping work being performed by different departments, and cross-departmental cooperation missing completely.

Additional contributing factors to success, as mentioned by the service designers, were generous resources allowed in the early stages of the project to conduct research, ideation and co-creation thoroughly, and having their business partners committed to collaborating with the designers. When using external service designers on projects, it was seen important to define the roles of internal and external designers clearly to maximise the use of each designer's skillset, and also plan for the exit of consulting designers from the project.

#### **4.3.6 Change management**

The role of change management in the success or failure of a service implementation was discussed deeply with both the service business practitioners and the service designers. As with project management, planning and preparedness were seen as key in change management. Thorough planning of change management involved planning for implementation support, training, and communication. The topic of communication will be addressed in more detail in the next subchapter.

The service business practitioners saw it essential to plan for expert support in the implementation of the service concept as well as in the use of the service, preferably customised by stakeholder and user groups based on their needs. It was seen as beneficial to share experiences and best practices across stakeholder groups. This type of cross pollination was considered a good way of engaging and committing stakeholders to the change.

*“ [In a successful implementation case] we did a very detailed plan for change management and support on stakeholder level.” - service business practitioner*

Stakeholder and end-user training goes hand in hand with support. Detailed training plans and instructions were seen as important, aided by the training being held by individuals who understand the user's role and ways of working, and who can simultaneously offer peer-to-peer support. It was noted that in examples of failed implementation the knowledge hadn't transferred to stakeholders and end-users due to poor training and support.

The role of change agents was mentioned earlier in this study. The interviewees felt that by getting the right people in the organisation excited about the change and the new service will not only support implementation, but change management as well. Employees committed to the change will support their peers in accepting the change. One service designer noted that if there are no change agents in the affected teams, implementation will be difficult.

Preparing for change entails managing expectations, understanding the impact of the change the service implementation brings, and understanding individuals' reactions to change. The larger the scope of the project, the more the project team needs to put effort into managing the expectations of various stakeholders. The service business practitioners noted that some failed cases of implementation hadn't grasped the importance of managing expectations - the more stakeholders a project has, the more needs and demands there are for the solution, and eventually the more compromises will have to be made. Managing expectations poorly leads to negative reactions to change.

*“ We all need to cross the threshold to our discomfort zone when implementing something new. We need to think about how to meet and respond to change resistance, and how to get people to have the right attitude towards implementation.” - service business practitioner*

A key learning from successful implementation cases for service designers was to create a big picture with the project team and the stakeholders by looking at the customer experience, the employee experience and the business impact the change imposes. By understanding the impact of change one is better able to understand the individuals' reaction to change.

If all relevant stakeholders have been engaged in the development work, the project team will have a good understanding of their pain points and possible compromises they might have had to make in regards to the service concept. This should pave the way to understanding possible negative reactions to change, give the ability to discuss any resistance to change, and help plan for how to tackle the resistance. A learning from previous experiences with service implementation for service business practitioners was having the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes, and practising empathy when facing resistance to change.

The resistance to change might also arise from factors outside the project from competing priorities, as noted by one service designer. This can be anticipated and tackled by having discussions with all the stakeholders in the beginning of the project to understand other initiatives taking place in the organisation, and how they might impact the implementation of the project.

As brought up earlier in the study, service implementation is more likely to succeed, if individual and team targets have been set to match the change. A service designer mentioned in their interview having faced resistance to change from operational service management when the change brought on by the new service concept was not part of their team's KPIs. A service business practitioner suggested addressing this challenge by setting clear and measurable targets to reflect the new service and ways of working, monitoring the targets, and taking action when necessary. They noted that if the targets relate to the old way of working, nothing will change.

#### **4.3.7 Communication**

The topic of communication came up with both interviewee groups when discussing successful and failed service implementation cases. The service business practitioners highlighted that in the successful cases the internal communication was good with a lesson learned in communicating clearly and transparently why a service concept was being developed and implemented, and ensuring all stakeholders understood the need behind the service as well as the benefits it would bring. It was seen crucial not only to communicate the "why", but also who the change impacts, and how it impacts them.

*“The clarity of communication is crucial - what's clear to the core team might not be clear to other stakeholders.”*  
*- service designer*

In examples of failed implementation the communication around the project and service implementation was deemed poor by both interviewee groups. The service designers gave examples of disconnect in communication where different people had been responsible for communication towards different stakeholders, and where the project team didn't reach everyone the change impacted. There were even cases where customers and end-users didn't receive any communication about the service and the change related to it.

Learnings from failures were to have a detailed communication plan with clear roles and responsibilities, a common and transparent message regarding the change, and guidance to support the implementation and change. The service designers also saw it important to ensure the communication takes place through the right channels at the right time to reach the intended receivers.

#### **4.3.8 Service concept feasibility**

Another factor impacting the success of service implementation is the feasibility of the service concept. Here feasibility refers to the extent to which a proposed service concept is practical, achievable and viable for implementation, and whether the objectives behind it can be realistically accomplished.

A service concept is a detailed description or visualisation of the intangible elements that constitute a service offering. It outlines the key features, benefits, and attributes of the service, as well as the underlying value proposition and customer experience. It serves as a blueprint for designing, developing, and delivering the service, guiding decision-making and ensuring consistency in its implementation across different channels and interactions.

The topic of service concept feasibility was brought up by service designers, but not by service business practitioners, in the discussions. The designers saw a risk of failure in terms of feasibility especially in projects where an MVP of the service was launched without any further development to ensure the service concept matches customer needs.

*“Often I come across a challenge where only a Minimum Viable Product is designed, nothing more. Nobody looks forward.” - service designer*

In many examples of failed service implementation there was a disconnect between the vision for the service and the reality of the business environment. Especially in heavily regulated industries, such as the insurance and the public sectors, the organisation's leadership might have a fancy vision of what the service concept should be, but the concept wasn't feasible to implement due to industry regulations, legal requirements or restrictions.

The service designers had also noticed that when using external designers the service concept often remained on too high a level to be feasible for implementation. They saw this could be prevented by giving the external designers a detailed design brief, and guiding their work throughout the design phase of the project. They also noted that involving the right stakeholders in the ideation and innovation phase would result in a "reality check" in regards to the feasibility of the service concept.

Some designers had come across views that because customers had to use the organisation's services, due to it being a public sector service or the only service on the market, the organisation didn't see a need to invest in the feasibility or ease of use of the service. Additionally, some service concepts that had been created and implemented due to an external force, such as a legal requirement, resulted in being difficult to use.

Much of the discussion revolved around the technical aspects of the service concept. The designers saw it pivotal to have the technical specifications of the solution correct and mapped out, and ensuring the organisation's operating model and other systems supported the new service concept prior to implementation. In one example of a failed service implementation the project team had created a solution deemed outdated by the time it entered implementation as supporting technical solutions within the organisation had been upgraded unbeknownst to the project team.

#### **4.4 Organisational capabilities**

Organisational capabilities can be seen as intangible, strategic assets that organisations utilise to achieve their objectives and meet their customers' needs. Organisational capabilities can include knowledge, expertise, resources, technologies, and processes an organisation possesses, unique to the organisation. Examples of organisational capabilities are organisational culture, innovation, leadership performance, innovation and agility.

In this subchapter we address the organisational capabilities supporting or hindering service implementation that came up in the research; organisational readiness for implementation, organisational readiness for change, and organisation's design maturity.



#### 4.4.1 Organisational readiness for implementation

Organisational readiness for implementation consists of various factors supporting the implementation of a new process, system or service. Examples of these factors are processes, resources, knowledge, and leadership capabilities. Here we focus on organisations' readiness to implement services.

When considering organisations' readiness to implement service concepts the consensus among all the interviewees was that the readiness varies by organisation, but most of them felt that the readiness for implementation was good in their current organisation. Interviewees working in the public sector as well as interviewees working as consultants in the public sector had the view that public sector organisations' readiness for service implementation was weaker than in the private sector.

The key factors driving the readiness for implementation were identified as leadership support, company culture, and other organisational capabilities, such as processes and resources.

Three out of four service business practitioners brought up leadership support for the project and implementation as critical for the success of the implementation. In their view implementation happens from top down and commitment from the organisation's leadership facilitates the implementation in lower tiers of the organisation. As one practitioner noted: the bigger the change, the more support is needed from leadership. In examples of failed service implementation the leadership focus and support hadn't stayed with the project team until the implementation phase, thus impacting its success.

*“ [In a successful implementation case] we had support from very high up in the leadership team. It was imperative.”  
- service business practitioner*

The service designers with experience from working in the public sector brought up examples of centrally governed organisations having limited ability to implement services due to the leadership structure and attitude of protectionism. There was a view that the leadership team had distanced themselves from the operational level, and didn't really know nor understand the customers.

One aspect of company culture affecting an organisation's readiness to implement services was found to be their view on customer centricity. If the organisation was truly focused on customer centricity, their readiness and ability to implement was greater. The service designers had the view that the more time employees and members of the management team spent with customers, the more in tune they were with the customers' needs, and the easier it was to develop and implement services.

Another aspect of company culture, the organisation's ability to experiment, was also seen as a factor driving its readiness to implement services. One service designer also noted that the more open the organisation was to experimentation, the lower the threshold for implementation became.

*“If the organisation was more open to experimentation, the threshold for implementation might be lower, and the boldness to implement would grow.” - service designer*

Organisation's ability to plan and budget for development work was seen as a basic requirement to even reach the implementation phase. The way a service development project was planned, managed and executed was seen as a key factor in impacting the readiness to implement. One service designer noted it being of essence for an organisation to have the right people and skill sets to implement, change and work more dynamically.

Resourcing came up as an important aspect of organisational capabilities impacting the organisation's readiness to implement services. Organisations with multi-disciplined project teams were perceived to have better readiness for implementation, as was having the right resources involved in the project. Organisations successful at implementing services had an understanding of what types of employee skills and capabilities were needed to reach their target. Organisations' design and technological expertise impacted their readiness to implement as well.

The service business practitioners found supporting factors for readiness to implement having robust processes in place, and customer facing employees being interested in developing and trying out new things. Factors hindering the readiness to implement services were the lack of or poor level in decision making, and in the inability to compromise and prioritise on competing stakeholder needs or development projects.

#### **4.4.2 Organisational readiness for change**

Organisational readiness for change is a combination of internal factors that determine the organisation's ability to initiate, implement and upkeep change. Examples of these factors are employees' desire for the change, leadership's ability to support the change, organisational culture, and the organisation's ability to incorporate change into its existing structures and systems.

Organisations' readiness for change was perceived to vary across organisations. It was considered lower in the public sector than in the private sector organisations. Service business practitioners had a slightly more positive outlook than service designers when assessing their current organisation's readiness for change.

The practitioners had seen an increase in the amount of change taking place in their organisations, and the readiness for change improve in the past decade or so. However, they had also heard feedback from customer facing employees that the pace of change was sometimes too fast or too many things changed at the same time.

The factors impacting organisational readiness for change were identified as leadership, customer centricity, and other organisational capabilities, such as ways of working.

As with readiness for implementation the service business practitioners held the view that change management starts from top and middle management and trickles down to operational level. Managers were seen to have an important role in how they manage and coach their team to be more receptive to change.

*“It's not enough for top management to make fancy speeches that the world is changing and we need to change too, and then throw the ball at the individual. There needs to be leadership and support for the change.”*  
*- service business practitioner*

The service designers shared the view that strong leadership was needed to drive the change, especially in multi-organisational projects. It was seen as important for someone to have the vision and the will to drive the change, have an understanding of the big picture, and what was required to achieve the change.

The designers had noticed challenges in the way change was being led. They'd seen examples where change management took place in silos, and management teams not having the capabilities and tools to manage different types of employees. Both service designers and service business practitioners highlighted the importance of not undermining the impact of change, understanding how change affects people differently, and supporting individuals through change.

Several service designers gave examples of cases where their business partners wanted to change and renew their operations to be more customer centric, but failed to do so for various reasons. Two service designers shared examples where service concepts had been created based on customer insights, but the concepts turned out to be different from what the service business had anticipated. Implementing the service concepts would have required for the service business to change and adapt to match what the customers wanted, but they weren't willing to do so.

One service designer gave an example where the organisation's leadership was happy with the new service concept and impressed by the preliminary results, but implementing the concept would require too many changes from the service organisation, so the implementation was never continued past the pilot phase.

*“ The service business leadership were really impressed with the results, and understood what can be achieved when operating in a customer-centric and proactive manner. But the implementation would require too big a change from the service business that they chose not to implement.”*  
- service designer

Another service designer shared an example where a representative of the service business was a member of the project team, had been involved in the development of the service concept, and signed off on the proposed change from their point of view, but nevertheless the service business leadership shot down the concept. The service organisation simply wasn't ready for the change. The service designers called for bravery from the service organisations and their leadership, and would encourage them to strive for customer centricity, experiment, and future-proof their business.

The service business practitioners also recognised the role organisational culture and mindset play in the organisation's readiness to change. The more agile and customer centric an organisation was, the better they were equipped to handle change. Agile ways of working and ability to prioritise when many changes are taking place simultaneously were seen as factors supporting change. They also noted that often internal communication focuses on the big changes with smaller ones getting overlooked, so emphasis should be put on communication.

#### **4.4.3 Organisation's design maturity**

Organisation's design maturity shows how customer centric its design processes and operations are, and how well the design function is integrated into its strategy and business functions. Design maturity measures an organisation's ability to listen to customer feedback, encourage innovation, and design better products, services, and customer experiences. Organisations with high design maturity use design as a tool to drive business outcomes, build design-centric teams and processes, and utilise various design methods such as customer research, ideation and prototyping effectively.

When discussing organisational capabilities with service designers organisations' design maturity came up with six of the seven service designers. As with organisational readiness to implement and change, design maturity was perceived to vary between

organisations and departments. It was also perceived that design maturity was low in the public sector compared to the private sector.

The designers noted that an organisation's design maturity impacts how service designers are being used, and that it was beneficial for designers to identify each organisations' and collaborator's design maturity, and adjust their approach accordingly. If it was someone's first time working with a service designer, it was seen as important to educate them on service design principles and methods, and manage their expectations.

Organisation's design maturity also impacts how design services are being bought and sold. Organisations with low design maturity don't know how to plan for design projects and their implementation, and often end up buying the wrong types of services. Some examples given by the interviewees were buying a senior designer to perform a junior designer's tasks, giving the designers a too high level design brief resulting in an unrealistic service concept, and running out of budget before the implementation phase.

Consulting service designers tackled client's low level of design maturity by reviewing and re-defining the design brief together with the client, developing design methods and ways of working together with the client and the stakeholders, and focusing on aftercare to ensure a long term relationship. However, they did note that while a service designer might have the capabilities and skills to support service implementation and there being a market for it, they lacked the imagination to sell it.

## **4.5 The role of a service designer**

In addition to finding the key factors impacting the success of a service implementation, this research set out to find, if service designers played a role in the implementation of a service, and how their role supported the implementation.

### **4.5.1 Service designer's role currently**

There was consensus between the service designers and the service business practitioners regarding the role of the service designer in a service development project - the role was seen as limited to the early phases of the project responsible for collecting and validating customer needs. The designers had no role in the implementation phase.

As brought up earlier, the service designers reflected on their own role and responsibilities in various service development projects, and noted that they often felt their skills were underutilised thus unnecessarily limiting their role in the project. Both designers and practitioners agreed that service designers were in demand in their organisations, and often their role was limited due to time restraints - once the project was past the design phase, the designers were needed elsewhere.

Six out of seven service designers were interested in participating in the implementation phase of the service development project, and all of them saw the value of their involvement in the implementation phase. However, they understood that an individual designer's capabilities affect their ability to participate in the later stages of the project. The service business practitioners also noted that service designers might not have the understanding of how service implementation impacts customer facing employees and the necessary knowledge to support them in the implementation phase.

No correlation was found between a service designer's role in the service development project and the success of the implementation of the resulting service concept. Therefore, it can be deduced that the success or failure of a service implementation is not the result of a service designer's involvement in the project. However, both the service designers and service business practitioners saw an opportunity for the role of a service designer to expand past the early phases of the project, which in turn might result in a successful service implementation.

#### **4.5.2 Service designer's role in the future**

When discussing what a service designer's role could look like in service development projects, both service designers and service business practitioners shared views in three areas; service designers could verify the identification and engagement of all stakeholders, ensure customer centricity drives the project by acting as a link between the customers and the project team, and support in creating direction for long-term development work by working with their business partners. The practitioners also saw an opportunity for the service designers to have a more active role in change management.

The service business practitioners saw a benefit in bringing the service designer into the project early on to participate in the early discussion with stakeholders. The designer could help identify their needs, understand how different stakeholders' needs might conflict with one another and feed this into the project.

A case for service designers' longer involvement in service development projects was seen in ensuring the project team doesn't lose sight of customer centricity. Service designers noted that if the designer is not involved past the early phases of the project, the resulting service concept might not reflect customer needs. Besides verifying that the service concept matches customer needs, they could verify its feasibility for implementation as well.

Customer centricity should be the focus of long-term service development, as noted by both interviewee groups. With their ability to empathise with the customers, the service designers could exceed customers' expectations by anticipating their needs, and use them as an input for future service development. The business practitioners saw

parallels to agile ways of working in collaborating with service designers on continuous service development.

The service business practitioners could see the service designers getting involved in the change process as well. Service designers could follow up and validate the impact of change, stay on the pulse to see if the change is going in the right direction, and bring forward a deeper understanding behind the change drivers. Designers' capabilities, such as their facilitation skills, could also be utilised to justify the need for change to stakeholders, and support them throughout the change process.

In addition to service designers' skill set, design tools were seen to have potential in supporting service implementation. The service designers noted that implementation should also be designed, and the designers could support it through ideation and visualisation or even a multi-method approach to change. The service business practitioners saw benefits in working side by side with a customer journey map and a process map to ensure successful service implementation.

*“Implementation is the responsibility of the business partners, but it might be beneficial for the service designer to design how the implementation takes place since they’ve already designed the service concept.” - service designer*

Both designers and practitioners saw that to deepen the designer's involvement in the service development project it would be beneficial for them to understand business and operational aspects as well as practicalities. The designers also noted that in order to work more efficiently, they need to steer away from design jargon and speak their business partners' language instead.

## 4.6 Summary of results

This chapter presented the research findings on factors impacting service implementation and service designers' role in the implementation. Figure 4.7 summarises these findings. In the graph the size of the sphere indicates how much weight was put on any given topic by the interviewees - the bigger the sphere, the greater the impact on service implementation.

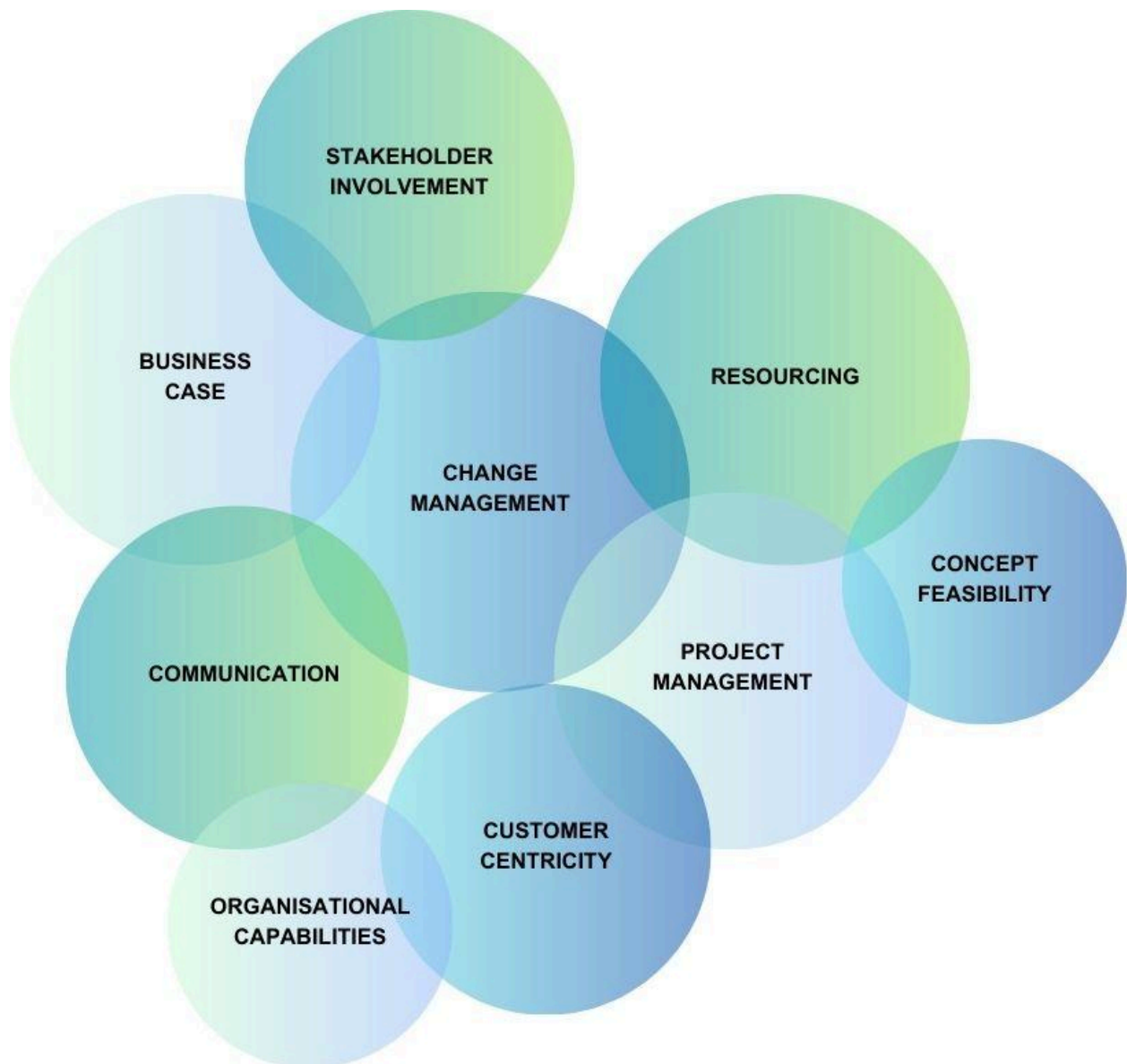


Figure 4.7: Summary of results: factors impacting service implementation



Change management came up as the most impactful factor determining the success of service implementation. Change management was considered a crucial aspect of planning for implementation, and was deemed the most challenging as well. It was a key factor behind both successful and failed examples of service implementation - when change management had been planned and executed well, the implementation was likely to succeed. The management of expectations, the use of change agents, and tying KPIs to the new ways of working were highlighted as elements of well planned change management.

The research results emphasise the importance of having a solid business case behind the service concept to ensure a strong base for the service development project. A strong business case where customer needs and business benefits met, that was realistically budgeted, and had leadership support led to successful service concept development and implementation.

Resourcing, mainly human resourcing, was seen as another pivotal factor behind the success or failure of service implementation. Resourcing was also seen as a topic to consider when planning for implementation, but also as one where challenges might arise. Having a multi-disciplined team with the right capabilities and skill-sets involved in the project was considered critical to the quality of work in service development and implementation.

The research found skilled and dedicated project management having an important role in how a service concept is implemented. Planning for the implementation phase early on was seen as a key task for project management. Good project management was found to include risk management, suitable ways of working, and implementation aftercare.

Clear and transparent communication around the service concept development and implementation, and the change they bring, was found to be critical for a successful service implementation. Communication was seen as an important element of change management as well.

Customer centricity was found to be one of the key factors behind examples of successful service implementation. The need for a new service or a change in an existing service should be driven by customer needs backed by qualitative data. Service that anticipates and adapts to customer needs continuously was seen as beneficial not only for the customer, but for business as well.

Stakeholder involvement and co-creation were seen as factors to consider when planning for implementation and as key lessons learned from prior experience. However, they were not factors mentioned behind successful or failed examples of service implementation. A key take-away from the research was identifying all stakeholders in the beginning of the project, and involving them in the project at the right time. Co-creation was seen as beneficial in engaging and committing stakeholders to service development and implementation.

The service designers saw service concept feasibility as a factor impacting successful service implementation cases, but also as one causing challenges. To succeed, the vision of the service concept should match reality and customer needs, meet technical requirements, and continue to be developed past the initial MVP release.

Organisational capabilities, such as organisational readiness for change, were seen as factors supporting service implementation. Company culture, leadership capabilities and support, and organisation's design maturity were brought up as examples of organisational capabilities facilitating the implementation of service concepts.

Service designer's role was seen as non-existing, but with potential to expand, in terms of the implementation phase of the service development project. The role of a service designer was seen as contributing in facilitating stakeholder collaboration, understanding customer needs, and ensuring continuous development. The research also highlighted the importance of building solid relationships with business partners, and utilising future-looking discussions and tools.

After this detailed presentation of the results, the study will next draw conclusions on the research findings.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter of the study discusses what the research and results tell us about service implementation. First, we revisit the research premise, then, I discuss the results in the context of service design theory and research, and lastly, I propose a practice-based framework for service implementation, and mirror it to existing frameworks and models.

### 5.1 Revisiting the research premise

The study sought to advance the understanding of service implementation through qualitative research, and contribute to it by developing a framework for successful execution of service implementation. In support of this objective the study explored the factors that advance and hinder service implementation. Additionally, the study looked into the role service designers play in service implementation.

Based on the research it can be deduced that service implementation is a complex research topic as the act of implementation is only one part of a much larger process. Many steps need to be taken before service development reaches the implementation phase, and every single one of these steps impacts the success of the implementation. And the process does not stop with implementation as the change brought on by the service development and implementation needs to be fostered to truly succeed in service implementation.

Additional complexity is introduced by various stakeholders, internal processes and tools, and the organisational environment in which the service is being developed and implemented. Therefore the planning for implementation should start already at the beginning of the service development process.

The research found that qualitative research is an effective way to examine service implementation as it offers a holistic view of the various aspects of implementation as viewed and experienced by practitioners. Including service business practitioners, in addition to service designers, in the data set offered valuable insights for the research, especially into organisations' internal factors impacting implementation.

Approaching the research subject through examples of successful and failed implementation experiences, and the learnings they brought, highlighted some topics, such as organisational capabilities, that had not been identified as important factors impacting implementation in earlier studies. These case examples brought a level of concreteness to the research topic, and allowed the discussions to reach a deeper level, ultimately leading to the construction of a practical framework for service implementation.

Bringing into the conversation the role of a service designer in service implementation helped the interviewees reflect on the roles and responsibilities, methods and ways of working, and workflows of service development projects in general. This encouraged

further contemplation on the potential service design could have in the context of service implementation, and designing the implementation itself. This will offer a compelling topic for further research.

## **5.2 Research results in the context of theory**

The research findings show many parallels to service design theory and research. The research confirms the notion of service design taking place in the early phases of the service development project (e.g. Yu & Sangiorgi, 2014; Almqvist, 2017). The role of service design limits mostly to gathering customer insights, and feeding them into the service concept design process. Service design or designers rarely have a role in service implementation.

Customer centricity is a core element of all service design theory and research (e.g. Shah et al., 2006; Yu & Sangiorgi, 2014). In this study customer centricity came across as an overarching theme guiding the work of service designers and business practitioners, ultimately resulting in successful service implementation.

The involvement of stakeholders via participatory methods, such as co-design, and the consideration of their needs and interests, were found to lead to the design and implementation of a feasible and sustainable service. This finding matches those of prior service design studies (e.g. Lønvik et al., 2016; Weisser et al., 2018), especially the importance of identifying all relevant stakeholders, and involving them in the development project at the right time.

The research findings concur with theory (e.g. Bækkeli, 2016; Weisser et al., 2018) in that the planning for service implementation should start at the early stages of the service development project, and sufficient resources should be allocated to it in order to ensure successful implementation.

As change is always involved in service implementation, the research participants highlighted change management as the most impactful factor supporting or hindering implementation. The research found parallels to the study of Lønvik et al. (2016) in treating service concept implementation as a form of change management.

A human-centred approach to implementation utilising change management theory and practices, such as Lin et al. (2011) suggested, was supported by the research findings. Understanding how change impacts individuals differently, and the ability to support them through the change received much attention in the research.

The research found that when managing change, it's crucial to effectively communicate the envisioned future state and its advantages, ensuring that the organisation comprehends the necessity of the change. This finding concurs with Lønvik et al. (2016) in that consistency in communication, and being open to feedback are important aspects of enabling and supporting the change process.

Another parallel to prior research was that the level of organisational capabilities, especially readiness for change and design maturity, support service implementation. A high level of readiness for change leads to more effective implementation (Weiner, 2009, p. 1). The research supports this statement, but expands the theory of Lønvik et al. (2016) on achieving readiness for change to include leadership capabilities and organisational processes.

An aspect of the theory of Lønvik et al. (2016) is ensuring an organisation understands the value of design as a strategic resource. Kimbell (2011) noted that design is often introduced in the periphery of the organisation, and commonly seen as a separate phase of a project that comes after strategy. Junginger & Sangiorgi (2009, p. 8) found that the deeper design is embedded in the organisation, the more transformative change can be gained via service implementation. This study found that organisation's design maturity has a direct impact on the quality and feasibility of the designed service concept, and ultimately, how well it implements.

One finding that came up in the research, but not in theory, was the importance of a solid business case behind the service development project. Perhaps this is due to prior research focusing on the views and experiences of external service designers that work only on the design brief and budget they're given, and don't have visibility into their clients' internal business processes and documents, and thus don't consider the business case as an important factor.

Although the role a business case plays in service development was not mentioned as such in prior studies, the components of a business case, such as defining the "why" and the "what", were found in prior service design research (e.g. Goldstein & al., 2002) as important characteristics of a service concept.

In regards to the readiness of service designers to support service implementation, the research findings were in line with prior service design research. The research found that designers would benefit from gaining a deeper understanding on the business and operational aspects of service development and implementation. Weisser et al. (2018, p. 39) concluded that service designers who want to support the implementation must acquire skills from organisational consulting, especially business management.

The research findings validate the research opportunity aligned in chapter 1 - the qualitative research findings validate theory, but also present an opportunity to deepen the understanding on service implementation by including service business practitioners in the data sample.

Next the study presents a service implementation framework created on the basis of the findings from the qualitative research, and discusses how the framework compares to the existing frameworks presented in chapter 2.

### 5.3 Proposed framework for service implementation

Based on qualitative research I developed a framework for service implementation that is grounded in the data and reflective of the research participants' experiences. The framework is practice oriented, practical, and supports agency.

The framework (figure 5.1) comprises four key areas of a service development project and four overarching elements that support successful service implementation. The four key areas of a service development project are: business case, resourcing, project management, and change management. The four overarching elements supporting successful service implementation are: customer centricity, stakeholder engagement, organisational capabilities, and communication.

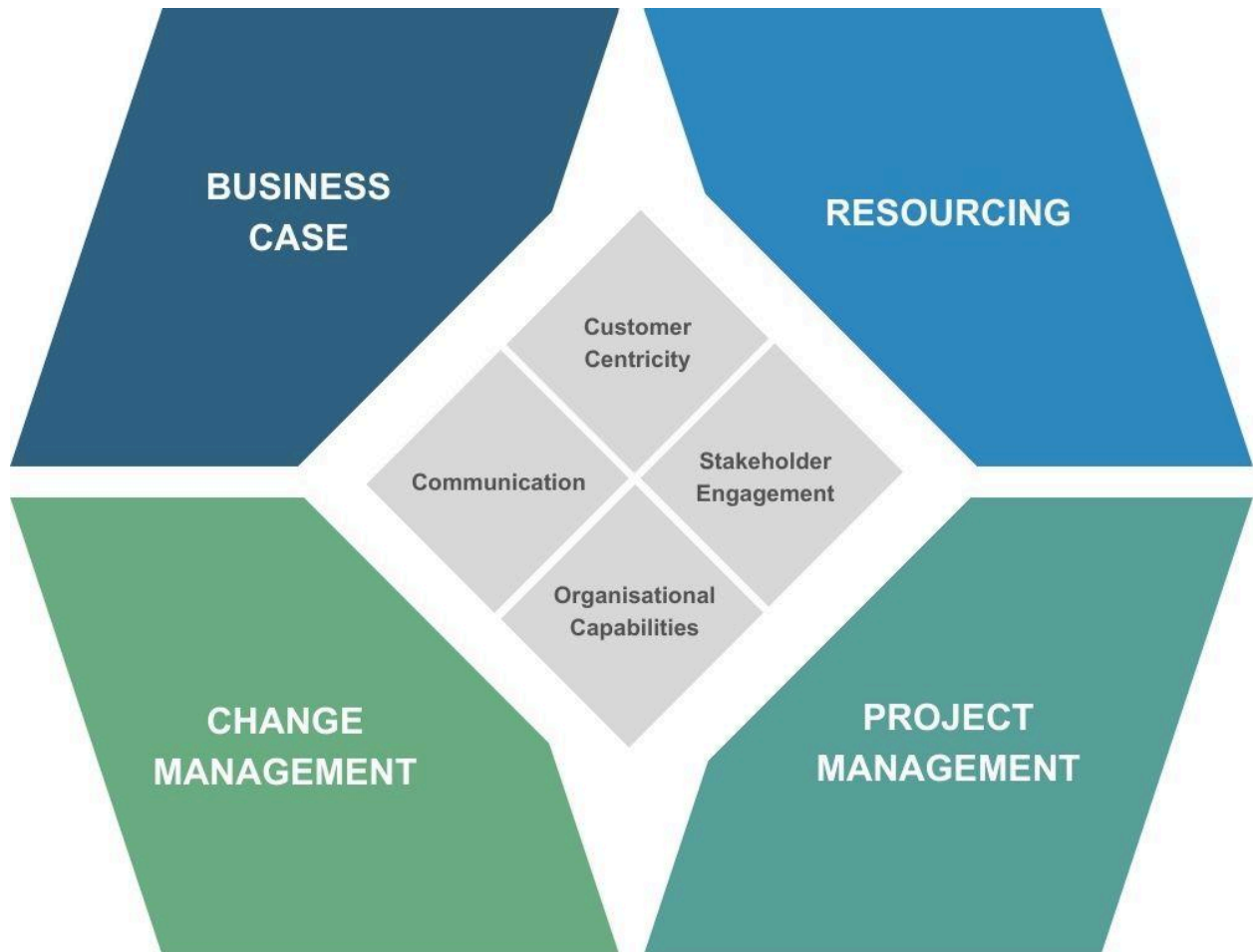


Figure 5.1: Proposed framework for service implementation

A strong and comprehensive business case that combines customer needs and business benefits, justifies the need for business development and change, and is backed by leadership sets the foundation for successful service implementation. A multi-disciplinary project team and resourcing that allows time and man hours for implementation, change management, after care and continuous development ensures the creation, implementation and maintenance of a feasible service concept that matches customer needs.

Strong project management is the cornerstone of successful service implementation. A skilled project management team plans, prepares and leads the project, and the project team, to success. Ultimately, how well the change service implementation brings is managed, defines how well a service concept implements. Understanding change and its impact, planning for change, communicating about the change, and supporting the change are crucial to the success of service implementation.

Figure 5.2 depicts in more detail the most important components of each of the four key areas of a service development project.



Figure 5.2: Components of the four key areas of a service development project



Of the four overarching elements supporting successful service implementation, customer centricity can be seen as the driving force behind a service development project. Customer needs act as a thread that runs from the business case all the way to service implementation and continuous service development, and if the thread is broken, the implementation will likely fail.

Engaging stakeholders with the service development project through co-creation and participative methods not only ensures a holistic service concept, but commits them to the implementation of the concept and the change it brings. Transparent communication towards stakeholders, customers and the organisation as a whole facilitates change management and service implementation.

Last of the overarching elements supporting service implementation is organisational capabilities. Where the organisation is on their own development path regarding their level of customer centricity and readiness for change, especially, creates the environment in which the project team operates. The further the organisation is on their path, the more fruitful the environment for service development and implementation.

Figure 5.3 outlines in more detail the most important components of each of the four overarching elements supporting successful service implementation.



Figure 5.3: Components of the four overarching elements supporting service implementation

The framework can be used as a guiding tool when planning for service development projects, and as a sounding board throughout the project. It encourages the development team and stakeholders to explore fresh viewpoints on the project, engage in collective reflection, and come up with actionable options.

This approach mitigates potential negative outcomes and unrealistic expectations early on, safeguarding both the quality and the reputation of the service development project. Understanding the factors influencing the success of service implementation allows the project organisation and service business to set realistic expectations and targets for the implementation and change.

When comparing this framework to the ones presented in chapter 2, the most parallels can be found with the KUER model proposed by Weisser et al. (2018). I conclude that the high amount of similarities reflects the data the framework was built on - Weisser et al. (2018) built their model on qualitative data, as did this study, while Christiansen (2014) and Yu (2021) built theirs on theory.

Many of the 24 influencing factors defined by Weisser et al. (2018, p. 36) can be found in this research and framework as well. The six 'hygiene' factors that were identified in the KUER model as essential for successful implementation; 1) implementation maturity, 2) compliance/c-level sponsorship, 3) implementation management at all phases, 4) temporary project organisation, 5) interdivisional staff involvement, and 6) personnel capacity, were found in the research. However, while this study found them important factors influencing the success of service implementation, they were not deemed as essential by the qualitative research data.

'Implementation maturity' corresponds to readiness to implement and 'compliance/c-level sponsorship' to leadership support in this study, which were both considered as organisational capabilities, an overarching element that supports service implementation in the proposed framework. 'Implementation planning', 'temporary project organisation', 'interdivisional staff involvement' and 'personnel capacity' correspond to topics discussed under project management and resourcing, which are considered key areas of service development in the framework.

Besides the implementation model itself, another parallel to the Weisser et al. (2018) study was the finding regarding early involvement of stakeholders. This study supports their finding that early involvement commits stakeholders in the service development process and finding a mutually beneficial solution, making them more receptive to change.

What the KUER model (Weisser et al., 2018) proposes, but did not come up in the research, is the use of various tools and methodology to evaluate service concepts, prototypes and transformation. Embedding tools into the proposed framework could present an interesting topic for further research.

A finding of the research that was not covered by the KUER model (ibid.) is what happens after implementation. While the model includes transformation management, it does not discuss the role of after-care or the importance of continuous development. These are the responsibility of the organisation implementing the service, so perhaps it's something that consulting designers do not consider or have visibility on, and it did therefore not come up in the Weisser et al. (2018) study.

The parallels to Christiansen's (2014) study were found in the importance of planning service implementation early on in the project, and the utilisation of service design tools, such as mapping and prototyping, to support the implementation.

The main parallels to Yu's (2021) study were the importance of discovering and addressing the potentially conflicting stakeholder interests, preparing for change resistance, and service designers needing to acquire business competencies to succeed in service implementation.

Next, in the final chapter of this study, I will discuss the research, the results, and reflect on my work with the study.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study advances the understanding of the research on service implementation, and contributes to service design research by providing a glimpse into this under-researched area. It offers insights into the challenges and best practices related to service implementation through qualitative research. The study proposes a framework for service implementation, and explores the role of a service designer in the context of service implementation.

Through a modified grounded theory approach the study concludes that qualitative research is an effective way to explore service implementation, and build a practical framework for practitioners to use.

The research increases awareness around the factors influencing the success of service implementation, and the framework offers a practice oriented tool for planning and executing service development projects. The framework helps mitigate potential negative outcomes of service implementation, supports agency, and allows the project organisation and service business to set realistic targets for the implementation and change.

The study followed the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity principles (TENK, 2023, p. 12). The research methodology was chosen to ensure the quality of the study, the anonymity of the research participants is safeguarded, the results were analysed in an unbiased way, and accountability was maintained throughout the entire research process.

Reflecting on the research process I hold the view that a modified grounded theory approach was the right choice for this research topic as it allowed the researcher to keep an open mind letting the research data inform the creation of the framework. This resulted in rich, detailed, and contextually relevant findings on the research topic.

The modified grounded theory approach was also suitable in the context of the study as in a young discipline, service design, and a little researched topic, service implementation, research literature and prior theory is scarce, and a practical, data driven, viewpoint offers a solid starting point for the research.

Of the research methods, in-depth theme interviews were found to be very suitable for this study. They offered the conversation freedom to explore and uncover underlying trends without limiting the scope or nature of the research findings. The inclusion of service business practitioners in the data set was pivotal for this study as it expanded the viewpoint of the research, and brought aspects to the framework that had not been addressed by prior research.

Had it been possible, I would have liked to include more representatives of service business in the research to gain an even richer understanding of the research topic. Additionally, I would have liked to validate the framework by a case study, but that is out

of the scope of this master's thesis as it would require a significant, months or years, time investment.

One aspect that presented challenges, and also led to the choice of a modified grounded theory approach, was the limited amount of theory and research on the topic of service implementation. The amount and quality of prior research and theory referred to in this study poses some limits into how far I can compare and generalise the research findings. Much of the prior research is based on conference papers or articles that have not been peer-reviewed. The data behind the prior research is often limited; including only one case study, a homogenous data set, or focusing on a single industry.

As the interview material is situational its generalisation should not be overstated (Puusa ja Juuti, 2020, 104). While the data set in this study covers several industries, and includes both service designers and service business practitioners, the small size and the geographical restriction of the data set also limits the ability to generalise the results.

From my professional experience and personal standpoint I agree with the results in that a thorough business case is the right starting point for any service development project that wishes to succeed. It is crucial for all business partners and stakeholders to be aligned on what is being developed and why, and to understand what the change it brings means to the organisation, the employees and the customers.

Dedicated project team, strong leadership and change agents have been incremental in the successful cases I have worked with. People are immensely creative, capable and adaptable, and their full potential should be realised when designing and implementing services. Change leadership is of utmost importance when implementing services, and requires commitment from all management levels.

My background in both business and service design presented an opportunity to cover a multitude of topics in the interviews, take the conversation deeper, but also reflect on the discussions internally. Throughout the research process I conducted autoethnography to organise my thoughts and analyse the discussions.

I observed the service business practitioners taking a much more practical approach to service implementation than the service designers. I presume this is the result of the practitioners being involved in the entire service development process and experiencing the impacts of service implementation firsthand, compared to the designers being involved only in the early stages of the development project. This highlights the importance of including actors, other than designers, in the data set to achieve practice based results.

This also implies that if service designers possessed deeper business understanding, their approach to service implementation might be more holistic and practical. Deeper understanding on business operations might also facilitate their involvement in later stages of the service development project, should they so desire.

In the interviews it became apparent that the interviewees with broader experience from different roles and organisations had a more holistic view on services and implementing them. The interviewees who had only design, no business, experience seemed to have quite a simplified view of implementation. This would imply that versatile professional experience is a strength in understanding the complexity of service implementation.

The role of a service designer in the implementation phase is something I pondered a lot while working on this study. The research found that the designers saw service implementation as something tedious and laborious, but it also found that the designers didn't have a role to play in implementation. I wondered the causality of this - do the designers have negative views on implementation because of their assumptions, not actual experience, or do the designers base their views on experience, and exclude themselves from the implementation phase because of their negative experiences?

I gather it's the former - designers view implementation negatively because of their preconceived notions on it. Most service designers expressed interest in being involved in the implementation phase, and the late stage involvement was seen as a way to ensure customer centricity and insights prevailed until implementation.

Perhaps the service designer doesn't have to be involved in implementation, if customer centricity and the integrity of the service concept can be maintained by other means. As discussed in some studies (e.g. Almqvist, 2018; Bækkelie, 2016) service designers possess methods to create tangible service evidence, such as service prototypes or visual handover documentation, that support the transition from development to production. If these were standardised and well collated, the designed service concept could be implemented as such.

In conclusion the findings of the research support service design theory and existing models for service implementation. The research confirms the view of many researchers (e.g. Lønvik et al., 2016; Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009) that service design should explore the theory of change management in order to expand the view on service implementation, and broaden service design research.

Other interesting areas for further research would be to test and amend the proposed framework in practice, introduce aspects of change leadership, and embed service design tools into the framework. I'll leave you with this:

What shape should service design take in order for a service concept to implement as successfully as possible? Can we design service implementation?

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