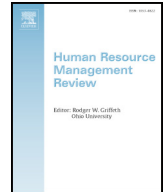
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The changing role of employees in service theory and practice: An interdisciplinary view☆

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ABSTRACT

The changing role of employees in service theory and practice over the last few decades is overviewed from the perspectives of the management and marketing disciplines. The criticality of employees, particularly front-line employees, in driving customer service outcomes was emphasized in both fields in the 1980s and 1990s. The rise of services marketing highlighted the role of employees in dyadic service encounters with customers. In management, the implications of the customer interface for employee and organization were developed. In the 2000s, the status of the employee's role appeared to diminish as service marketing theory shifted from a provider to a consumer perspective on customer value creation, and as technology substituting for employees grew in practice. In management, new theory and research directions on service employees essentially plateaued. Going forward in evolving service contexts, employees will fill roles as "Innovators"; "Differentiators"; "Enablers" and "Coordinators". Suggestions are offered for what management can learn from services marketing in the pursuit of interdisciplinary research.

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Service employees act as a "service trinity": they help run the service operation; market the service; and are equated by customers with the service itself.

[Lovelock (1981)]

"...the enterprise can only offer value propositions; the consumer must determine value and participate in creating it... The orientation has shifted from the producer to the consumer".

[Vargo and Lusch (2004: p. 19)]

"...it is service plus IT that transforms service".

[Rust and Huang (2014: p. 3)]

"What remains to create a differentiating strategy is that is must be elevated to a 'uniquely human approach'".

[Bolton, Gustafsson, McColl-Kennedy, Sirianni, and Tse (2014: p. 264)]

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“...services as a focal area within management can be considered to be still in its infancy in contrast to the field of services marketing...”

[Subramony and Pugh (2015: p. 350)]

The growth of services posed challenges to researchers in both management and marketing whose theories had emerged largely from the study of manufacturing organizations and the marketing of goods. Services were a whole new “Game”, to borrow from Bell’s (1973) metaphors to describe the transformation in the nature of work over the years. First, there was the “game against nature”, man working in farming and fishing, in which competencies such as brawn and endurance were necessary to perform the role. Then, a “game against fabricated nature”, which was man against machine in the form of goods manufacturing, which required competencies associated with scientific management. Then around the 1970s there evolved a post-industrial, services-dominant “game between persons” played by professional and client, and front line employee and customer. This required, for example, interpersonal competencies. Both scholars and managers began to examine how the attitudes and behaviors of employees, particularly those on the front line with customer contact, could dramatically affect customer perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction.

The role of employees in service as a “game between persons”, itself, has been dramatically changing in theory and practice over the last few decades. For example, marketing shifted theoretical focus from a provider to a customer perspective in customer value creation (e.g. Heinonen et al., 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and technology supplemented or supplanted the employees as the service provider (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2011; Rust & Huang, 2014). Also, the context in which the game was played evolved from dyadic service encounters to include increasingly complex service systems (e.g. Lusch, 2011) and service delivery networks (Tax, McCutcheon & Wilkinson, 2013). Further, the customer service outcomes of research interest broadened in scope in the marketing literature from perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction to an overall, holistic, extended customer experience (Klaus, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2009) and customer journey (Patricio, Fisk, e Cunha, & Constantine, 2011).

It is appropriate to pause and interpret the changing roles employees have played, and will play in the future, in the evolving service game. Thirty years ago, Solomon, Suprenant, Czepiel, and Gutman (1985) published “A Role Theory Perspective on Dyadic Interactions: The Service Encounter” in the *Journal of Marketing* noting, then, that service encounters are dyadic and are human interactions, and specifying the role expectations of employees in interdependence with customers in that context.

As to now, I will overview changes in the role of the employee from a rise in status during the 1980s and 1990s, well-expressed by Lovelock’s (1981) “service trinity”, to a seeming decline in role status thereafter, that could be inferred from Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Rust and Huang (2014), in both theory and practice. Looking to the now and beyond, more complex service contexts require employees to fill roles as “Innovators”; “Differentiators”; “Enablers”; and “Coordinators”; whose role expectations and interdependencies with other actors, human and virtual, will be described. There will always be value-adding role contributions from the nonsubstitutable and “uniquely human approach” (Bolton et al., 2014) employees have the potential to offer.

This overview focuses on both the fields of management and marketing. It is interdisciplinary, somewhat, but multidisciplinary, largely. Both management (e.g. Bowen, 1990) and marketing (e.g. Gronroos, 1990) have long emphasized the need for an interdisciplinary approach but the services marketing and management literatures appear to have developed more “in parallel” than in combination (Subramony & Pugh, 2015). This article attempts further modest integration of the two fields, including closing thoughts on what management can learn and synthesize from the field of services marketing.

1. An ascent in status of the role of employees in service theory and practice

Scholars in both the fields of management and marketing began to articulate the implications of services for the role of employees in the late 1970s and 1980s. What follows are key, illustrative moments and examples, not an exhaustive, detailed review of thirty-five years of prior theory and research on service in two fields.

2. Perspectives from marketing: the growth of services marketing

With the growth of the service sector, Lynn Shostack, a banking executive, published “Breaking Free from Product Marketing” in the *Journal of Retailing* (Shostack, 1977), an article many credit for helping to establish the field of services marketing. She emphasized that the principles and language of marketing were derived from the manufacture of physical goods, and were inadequate for services, given how these differ from goods. An underlying paradigm of services marketing emerged in the 1980s under the acronym IHIP—intangibility (services are more intangible), heterogeneity (service offerings are less uniform), inseparability (services are exchanged in real-time with simultaneity of production and consumption, and customers help co-produce services) and perishability (services cannot be inventoried) (Fisk, Brown, & Bitner, 1993; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985). The critical role of employees, for example, arose from simultaneity, since employees had frequent contact with customers in consuming service; co-production between employees and customers, unlike the clear division of labor in manufacturing; and with intangibility, employees helped to “tangibilize” the service in the eyes of the customer, unlike in goods with tangible product attributes.

Booms and Bitner (1981) proposed a modification of the traditional 4Ps of the marketing mix (product, price, place/distribution, and promotion) to 7Ps for services marketing by adding physical evidence, e.g. a store environment, process—and people. They underscored how in many services the service provider is the service.

2.1. A growing emphasis on the role of employees as marketers

The closeness of the provider–customer interface underscored that economic exchange is truly also social exchange (Czepiel, 1990). Consequently, Berry (1983), building on thoughts from others such as Gummesson (1987), introduced the concept of relationship marketing with a focus on building and maintaining close, long term relationships between customers and service providers. Employees were even labeled “part time marketers” (Gronroos, 1990; Gummesson, 1987).

The rise of internal marketing followed: “Management should create, continuously encourage, and enhance an understanding of and an appreciation for the roles of employees in the organization” (Gronroos, 1990: p. 8). Berry (1981) advocated that management should treat the employee as a customer. In sum, marketing was highlighting the role of employees in the “service trinity” (Lovell, 1981)–help run the service operation, market the service, and be equated by customers with the service itself.

3. Perspectives from management: a growth in focus on the customer/employee interface

Pre-1980s, management theory was characterized by a lack of attention to the customer. As Danet (1981) noted, organization theorists viewed organizations from the top looking down (management’s perspective) and the inside looking around (employees’ perspective) but rarely from the outside looking in (the customer’s perspective). Peters and Waterman (1982) opined that the role of the customer in organizational excellence had largely been ignored. Thus, there was limited explicit theory and research in OB/HRM on how employee performance of their roles affected customer perceptions of them and their organization’s offerings and practices.

In the 1980s, coincidental with the growth of services and services marketing, numerous contributions appeared in the field of management specifying the implications of the unique attributes of service for management theory and practice. As a few illustrative examples (see Mills, 1986; Schneider & Bowen, 1995; and Subramony & Pugh, 2015 for far more), Bowen and Schneider (1988) developed the implications of IHIP attributes such as customer co-production and how service employees needed to manage both the satisfaction and performance of customers (Bowen, 1986; Mills, Chase, and Marguiles, 1983); also, for intangibility, the need to recruit, select, and train employees on customer service orientation so that employees, themselves, helped to “tangibilize” the service in the eyes of the customer. In organizational theory, Mills (1986) richly developed the implications of the firm/client interface for types of technology, organizational structure, and control systems in services.

Exploring the question, “Where does the customer fit in a service operation?” Chase (1978) asserted that high customer contact, i.e. physical presence in the system and in the work process that creates the service, strained Thompson’s (1967) proposition that under norms of rationality, organizations seek to seal off their core technologies from environmental influences. Chase offered that high customer contact decreases operational efficiency. Further elaboration of this customer-contact model included specification of the key human resource requirements of high versus low customer contact service operations (Chase & Bowen, 1989). The necessity of developing an internal human resource strategy in order to leverage the unique role of employees as a means of differentiation in services was articulated by Heskett, Sasser, and Hart (1990).

3.1. Validating HRM practices against customer outcomes

Although in an early study, Pickle and Friedlander (1967) had shown a significant correlation between employee and customer satisfaction, research on employee attitudes and perceptions had traditionally been validated only against internal criteria. However, spurred by the growth of services and other factors such as TQM, HRM evolved from its Industrial Revolution original focus on internal standards such as employee attendance and number of products and services “produced” to a growing reliance on customer outcomes such as their perceptions of quality and satisfaction as criteria for HRM and overall organizational effectiveness (Bowen & Pugh, 2009; Schneider, 1994).

The 1980s forward included numerous studies of the linkages between service employee perceptions of their organizational practices such as HRM and customer outcomes such as perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction (Bowen & Pugh, 2009; Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Hong, Liao, Hu, & Jiang, 2013; Pugh, Dietz, Wiley & Brooks, 2002). Linkage research revealed that (a) employees were valid sources of information about customers’ perceptions of service quality and the organizational features that most influence it; (b) that organizational climate, greatly shaped by organizational practices such as HRM, “shows” to both employees and customers; and which HRM practices were most strongly associated with which customer service outcomes (Schneider & Bowen, 1993); and (c) that employee perceptions of service climate are linked to measures of financial performance (Schneider, Macey, Lee, & Young, 2009), a relationship that had gained wide exposure through Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger (1997) and the “service profit chain”. The employee–customer interface, and the relationship between employee and customer satisfaction, was linked together theoretically, directly through emotional contagion (Grandey, Goldberg, & Pugh, 2011) and emotional displays (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990) and indirectly through service climate as a mediator between employee and customer variables.

In sum, the critical role of the employee in driving customer outcomes was highlighted in both marketing and management during this period. Also, the interdependence between employee and customer roles in co-producing service was developed. An overarching insight about this period was that marketing (with typically more of an external focus on the customer) advanced its attention on the role of front-line employees, and management (with often an internal focus on employees) began to more fully include customers in theory and research.

4. An apparent decline in status of the role of employees in service theory and practice

In the early 2000s, marketing scholars were increasingly voicing the need for a new paradigm for services marketing to move beyond IHIP. Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) contended that the claim that services are uniquely different from goods on the four IHIP characteristics was not supported by empirical evidence and that it was only true for certain types of services and for certain types of goods. Also, changes in the services sector were weakening the validity of IHIP generalizability. For example, advances in IT and telecommunications had made it possible to separate producers and consumers in both time and space, thus eliminating claims of inseparability and perishability of services. Lovelock and Gummesson acknowledged that the IHIP paradigm had contributed much to launch the field of services marketing and to stimulate research and managerial insights, but it was time to move on to a new service paradigm. Schneider (2000) in management agreed that IHIP's usefulness was declining in theory and practice.

4.1. Services marketing theory's shift from a provider to customer perspective on value creation

Vargo and Lusch (2004) proposed the Service-Dominant Logic (S-DL), which now is the primary paradigm for the services marketing field. S-DL is still a relatively new paradigm which continues to be refined and debated amongst service scholars. Here are three central tenets of S-DL. One, services are defined as “the application of specialized competence (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004: p. 2). Rather than defining service with an output orientation, i.e. a service has attributes such as intangibility or perishability, S-DL adopts a process orientation (Edvardsson, Tronvoll & Gruber, 2011).

Two, S-DL shifted focus from a producer perspective to a customer perspective in the process of value creation. The process often involves the customer in a role as co-producer and always in a role as a co-creator of value (value is essentially the utility perceived and determined by the customer; or, as Zeithaml (1988) defined it, the customer's overall assessment of the utility of an offering based on what is received and given). The focus turned to value-in-use; there is no value embedded in the output, per se, it is always co-created and is uniquely, experientially, and phenomenologically determined by the customer.

Three, the value co-creation process is one of integration of two types of resources: operand and operant. Operand resources tend to be tangible and nonhuman, e.g. money, physical facilities, and goods. Operant resources are more intangible and human (both employee and customer) knowledge and physical and mental skills. Operant resources act upon operand resources to produce effects customers use in forming their experience of value. The process then is one of resource integration by customers and employees in value co-creation. For example, student learning in a university requires both the professor and students to use their resources in the co-creation of learning, also utilizing other resources in their network such as other students, professors, librarians, books, and IT system (Edvardsson et al., 2011).

Finally, Vargo and Lusch (2004) described the “role of the customer” and the “firm–customer interaction” in the integration of resources but did not include a specific statement about the role of the employee. In the firm–interaction description, only the role of the customer is described. The firm can only offer a value proposition.

The shift from a provider to a customer perspective was even more forcefully put in the proposed “Customer Dominant Logic” (Heinonen, Stranvik, Mickelsson, Edvardsson, Sundstrom & Andersson, 2010) that claimed S-DL was still provider dominant, given terms such as “coproduction” and “cocreation” indicate a service provider oriented view, in which both the service itself, and, more fundamentally, value creation, depend on interaction with the service provider. Alternatively they asserted that the service provider/company's role should be conceptualized only as how companies can support customers' ongoing activity and experience-making structures.

In sum, the advancement of S-DL and the further step attempted in CDL led Heinonen et al. (2010) to conclude that there is increasing acceptance amongst academics and practitioners that value is created by customers for customers.

4.2. A move away from dyadic service encounters to multi-actor ecosystems and networks

Marketing theory and research has increasingly expanded its focus beyond the dyadic service encounter between a firm and a customer, only, to contexts of a series of customer experiences with multiple, complementary providers (e.g. Ostrom et al., 2010; Tax, McCutcheon & Wilkinson, 2013). For example, “The service ecosystem concept views actors as making value propositions to each other vs delivering or adding value. It also puts emphasis on the co-production and co-creation that occurs between actors in the service ecosystem and hence has a strong focus on collaborative processes” (Lusch, 2011: p. 14).

Additionally, Tax et al. (2013) describe the service delivery network (SDN) as an alternative to a service encounter-dominant view of the provision of the customer experience. “...SDN is defined as two or more organizations that, in the eyes of the customer, are responsible for the provision of a connected, overall service.” (p. 455). Any one organization must be prepared to coordinate their service provision activities with other complimentary providers, particularly given the growing specialization and fragmentation of service delivery. Also, customers view, themselves, as doing much of the work to integrate the resources necessary for their service outcomes, and employees are but one of the resources in the overall service system.

4.3. The emergence of service science

“Service Science is the study of service systems, which are dynamic value co-creation configurations of resources (people, technology, organizations and shared information)” (Maglio & Spohrer, 2008: p. 18). S-DL is viewed as “the philosophical foundation of service

science” (Maglio & Spohrer, 2008: p. 19). One goal of service science is to help develop service professionals well-versed in (STEM), science, technology, engineering, and math. Service science advocated a more rigorous, interdisciplinary science and systems approach to the complexity of service, particularly B2B, and for the pursuit of innovation, with a strong emphasis on technical sophistication, and has contributed to the growth of the field of service.

Service science has contributed less, though, to underscoring the role of the individual employee. This may be due in part to it emerging mainly in the B2B business context where economies of scale may divert attention away from studying the influence of individual differences. Service science does explicitly speak of employee skills and labor, but largely as one class of assets to be integrated with other asset classes such as information technology, an organization’s proprietary data or processes; service parts and materials, etc. It has had less to say about employee motivations, attitudes, and, at the next level of analysis, the psycho-social climate and culture in which they interact (Schneider & Bowen, 2010).

4.4. *The rising role of technology in driving customer outcomes*

The literature in this area is voluminous; two sources will be mentioned to highlight how technology has contributed to a reduced role for employees—“Race Against the Machine” (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2011) and “The Service Revolution and the Transformation of Marketing Science” (Rust & Huang, 2014).

Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2011) observe that digital labor supplementing, even substituting for, employees in service delivery has, as we have seen, raced far beyond ATMs and self-scanning checkout in grocery stores. IT-enabled innovations are transforming law, medicine, research, media—almost every economic sector and business function. As one example, a computer’s pattern recognition abilities can now allow one lawyer to do the work of 500 in the discovery process reviewing of documents. The question becomes whether there are any human skills that cannot be replaced (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2011),

Rust and Huang’s (2014) “Marketing Science” richly describes how IT has altered the very nature of the firm’s connection to the customer. They describe a “service revolution” —“service plus IT”—which yields better, more personalized service, deeper customer relationships, more profitable customers, and an expansion of service in the economy.

Yet Rust and Huang (2014) “service revolution” reinforced the appearance of a diminished role for employees. IT, big data, and the firm, not employees, are explicitly presented as the drivers of more personalization and deeper customer relationships. “Employees” appear in the discussion of productivity and its tradeoffs as to how service technology can substitute fully or partially for “employee labor”.

4.5. *An overall “plateauing” of OB/HRM’s new theory and research directions on the role of employees in service*

Ford and Bowen (2008) urged the management discipline to incorporate the growth of services and even a service-dominant logic much more into its teaching and research. Their analysis showed that keywords such as service and customer were scarce in management research article titles and management textbooks. In contrast, the field of marketing was reorienting itself to a services world leading to a new paradigm, services marketing textbooks, new service journals, and new interest groups within the American Marketing Association. Subramony and Pugh (2015: p. 350) concluded that whereas services had grown into a focal area in marketing, within management services is “...still in its infancy...”. There were contributions such as how HRM systems, or bundles, affect service climate and customers (e.g. Chuang & Liao, 2010 on high performance systems) and on developing human capital resources in services (Ployhart, Van Iddekinge & McKenzie, 2011). Yet, the field’s interest in services, even service employees, seemingly plateaued.

In sum, if responsibility for value creation is a measure of role status of service employees, then that status appeared to decline in theory starting in the 2000s. And, if technology can substitute for the role of the service employee, again, this indicates an apparent decline in status. Finally, the discipline strongly associated with research on employees, i.e. management and certainly HRM, appeared only modestly interested in the role of employees in driving customer service outcomes.

5. The role of employees in service theory and practice: now and beyond

Given the evolution in the context of the “service game”, the question now becomes, “Where does the employee fit in a service operation?” to borrow from Chase (1978) earlier curiosity about customers. The following describes four key roles service employees must fill (“Innovator”; “Differentiator”; “Enabler”; and “Coordinator”), beyond possibly still acting as a “service trinity” (Lovelock, 1981), in varying degrees depending on the context. These four roles make clear the critical contributions of employees in how service is delivered and experienced. Then, some directions for future interdisciplinary theory-building and research are shared.

5.1. *The role of innovator*

“... for all their power and speed, today’s digital machines have shown little creative ability. They can’t compose very good songs, write great novels, or generate good ideas for new business” (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2011: p. 26). Human capital remains a nonsubstitutable source of innovation and creativity. Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2011 emphasize how “machines”, together with human talent, can drive innovation and entrepreneurship in ways that combine both scale and customization. One example they offer is how eBay and Amazon Marketplace spurred over 600,000 people to earn their livings by coming up with new or improved products for a worldwide customer base—a win for both employees and customers, the latter being provided more choice on product

attributes and price. Yet, the authors say technology can only lift “employees” if there is action taken to invest in the complementary human capital, e.g. education and skills, required to get the most out of this “racing” technology.

The more contact employees are involved in the service innovation process, the greater innovation volume and innovation radicalness as found in work by [Ordanini and Parasuraman \(2011\)](#). Innovation volume was the number of service innovations in a given year; innovation radicalness was the extent to which a firm’s new services differ dramatically from current offerings and require substantial changes in the utilization of competencies. The authors attributed this strong effect of contact employees upon innovation to their frequent and close interactions with customers and their knowledge about what should be done differently to improve service.

[Lages and Piercy's \(2012\)](#) study of key drivers of front line service employee generation of ideas for customer service improvement found that employees’ ability to read customer needs was the major driver of idea generation. Indeed, linkage research (e.g. [Schneider & Bowen, 1985](#)) had also previously established that front line employees were valid sources of such customer ideas. Consequently, service companies should invest in selecting and recruiting employees with the ability to read customer needs, and should create work conditions that encourage and reward the offering of ideas to improve service. Overall, specification of how to hire and train for competency for performing the role of “innovator” may be essential for employees at all levels in order for firms to compete for the future, not just deliver service in the present.

5.2. The role of differentiator

An under-emphasis on employees as drivers of customer service outcomes can lead to the commoditization of service. In “Small Details that Make Big Differences” to customers, [Bolton et al. \(2014\)](#) encourage companies to examine all the customer–firm touch points during the service process that influence the overall customer experience. Small things—including authentic, human touches—can help differentiate offerings in marketplaces where offerings are becoming too similar, with price becoming the only competitive edge. A “uniquely human” approach that is heartfelt and genuinely empathetic, the authors note, can transform the commercial contract into a one-to-one human relationship ([Siranni & Bitner, 2011](#)) that is also emotionally engaging. This can be responsive to [Schneider and Bowen's \(1999\)](#) reminder that customers are people first, and consumers second.

Interesting work on human touches has recently been done by [Yagil and Medler-Liraz \(2013\)](#) on employee authenticity in Moments of Truth encounters with service customers. They specify how the behavior-based expression of authenticity is reflected in “uncalculated honesty” and conveys a unique and differentiating interpersonal closeness to customers. Moreover, research has demonstrated the role played by “intimacy” and “passion” and “customer–firm affection” in strengthening customer loyalty ([Yim, Tse, & Chan, 2008](#)).

The losses to the firm from not retaining front line employees who provide these nonsubstitutable points of differentiation is indicated in [Subramony and Holton's \(2012\)](#) research on the long-term influence of service employee attrition on customer outcomes and profits. They found that attrition via voluntary turnover or downsizing disrupts the stock of relationships between customer-facing employees and their customers, ultimately negatively affecting customers’ perceptions of the service brand and the future profitability of the unit.

The employees’ brand-building behaviors ([Miles & Mangold, 2004](#)) as “brand champions” ([Lohndorf & Diamantios, 2014](#)) can be an indicator of employees performing the role of differentiator well given “the people make the brand” in services ([Hurrell & Scholarios, 2014](#)). A key driver of employees behaving as “brand champions” is their having a strong sense of “organizational identity”, along with feeling supported by the organization ([Lohndorf & Diamantios, 2014](#)). This also yields voluntary citizenship behaviors, which one could readily assume might include adding authentic human touches in service encounters. [Lohndorf and Diamantios \(2014\)](#) encourage firms to preview core values and what the brand stands for in hiring, coupled with subsequent training, and use of symbols and rituals that continually reinforce internal branding with employees. Future linkage research could explore which employee driven small differences and internal branding practices most influence the customer experience, perhaps all the moreso in large, complex service systems.

5.3. The role of enabler

Employees must help enable both customers and technology to perform their own roles well in the way service is delivered and experienced. As the customer’s role in co-production and value creation has expanded, employees must increasingly influence and support customers viewed as “partial” employees ([Mills et al., 1983](#)) or even “human resources” ([Bowen, 1986](#)) of service organizations. That is, for example, to select, socialize, train, and incent customers to co-produce effectively (see also [Guo, Arnould, Gruen & Tang, 2013](#); [Kelly, Skinner & Donnelly, 1990](#)).

The increasing role of technology does substitute for employees at times, but when used, employees must still fill a role of enabling technology—in its role. [Parasuraman \(2000\)](#) is one who has addressed the “technology readiness” of both customers and employees as factors in technology’s role in marketing to and serving customers. If customers are low in technology readiness, employees must assist customers experiencing problems with technology-based systems.

The role of Enabler, in this context, also requires revision of the traditional front-line, customer contact, front-office versus back office employee role descriptions ([Lariviere, 2014](#)). In services that are heavily technology-driven, the back office employees enabling the technology may also function as the “front-line” for customer contact. Employees can only perform that role effectively if they possess competencies of both technology readiness and interpersonal skills. In practice, it seems to many consumers that organizations have yet to solve how to hire and train employees for these roles as enablers.

Research on how employees contribute to customers' acceptance of technology-based, smart interactive services (Wunderlich, Wangenheim, & Bitner, 2013) reported, "Contrary to conventional wisdom that focuses on features of the technology itself to gain user acceptance, this research encourages providers to emphasize the interpersonal elements of the service by providing control cues, raising social presence, and enhancing human trust mechanisms" (p. 3). They recommend that firms train and provide additional guidance to these employees, even though they are not frontline employees per se, to improve their social interaction skills. Interestingly, whereas in earlier days of technology in service, there was a focus on how technology can add to employee–customer service exchange, now the focus is turning to how employee–customer interaction can add to technology–customer exchange.

At the same time, recent research also reveals an interaction between "touch" and "tech" such that the benefits of technology-infused service encounters (point-of-sale terminals, tablets, and kiosks) depend on whether the service encounter includes high or low rapport-building behavior from the employee (Geibelhausen, Robinson, Sirianni & Brady, 2014). When employee rapport-building behavior is present, the use of technology makes it difficult for customers to reciprocate, thereby decreasing their service encounter evaluations. However, during service encounters in which employees are not engaging in rapport-building, technology actually makes it easier for customers to avoid this unpleasant interpersonal side of the encounter, thereby increasing service encounter evaluations. For managers, the results demonstrate the inherent tensions of initiatives designed to encourage employee–customer rapport with, at the same time, those that introduce technology into frontline service exchanges (Geibelhausen et al., 2014). For employees, they must balance the roles of differentiator and enabler.

5.4. The role of coordinator

In the recent "Service Research Priorities" article (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patricio, & Voss, 2015), the topic in the Priority, "Understanding Organization and Employee Issues Relevant to Successful Service", rated most important by survey respondents was, "Coordinating the interdependent roles of employees and customers in co-creation". The increasing attention to co-creation by service scholars made it important to specify how to manage the interdependencies involved. Also, in the parlance of S-DL, there is an array of operand and operant resources needing to be integrated in the co-creation of value.

Theory and research on coordination in service is underway, but more is needed. Ostrom et al. (2015) revealed a substantial gap between the high rating of "Importance" of this topic and the lower rating of "Knowledge" about it. An early modest beginning can be found in Larsson and Bowen (1989) who theorized what "portfolio of coordination mechanisms" were needed for different patterns of interdependence amongst customers, front office, and back office employees. A principal determinant of interdependence patterns was the degree of customer input uncertainty faced by the organization. More recently, Gittel and Douglass (2012) described three processes of reciprocal interrelating—between workers and customers, between workers, and between workers and managers. They describe the formal structures of hiring and training, performance measurement, rewards, and job designs that can embed these processes.

Work from marketing scholars on coordination, some, and specific forms of resource integration, considerable, includes value co-creation practice styles (McColl-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger, Sweeney & van Kasteren, 2012) and collaborative value creation patterns (Moeller, Ciuchita, Mahr, Odekerken-Schroder, & Fassnacht, 2013) that describe the interdependent roles of both employees and customers.

Additional work is then needed to specify the competencies both customers and employees must possess to fill roles in coordination. Customers must possess the skills to be effective resource integrators in order to integrate their own resources with those of the organization and other network actors (Hibbert, Winkholfer & Temerak, 2012) and the firm and its employees must possess collaboration competencies (Tsou, 2012) to integrate their resources and customers.

Finally, HRM researchers could explore how to create the "T-shaped" service professionals that Service Science deserves much credit for spotlighting. T-shaped professionals are those who possess both a strong, core functional/disciplinary competency, but also a capacity to collaborate and synthesize with professionals outside their area. Research on how best to develop T shaped professionals would be useful for service employees coordinating across functions both within and beyond their own organization.

6. The pursuit of interdisciplinary service theory and research: what management can learn and integrate from services marketing

At the outset, to be clear on terms, multidisciplinary research involves two or more disciplines which approach a topic each using its own framings, without actual integrative collaboration. Interdisciplinary research is when disciplinary perspectives are combined to yield synthesized and collective outcomes, but the original disciplines remain separate (Siedlock & Hibbert, 2013). There are interdisciplinary examples such as service climate research, where there has been an integration of OB/HRM's focus on the internal organization and marketing's focus on the external world of the customer (e.g. Bowen & Schneider, 2014), but management and marketing have contributed to service theory and research mainly in a multidisciplinary way.

This section suggests several areas of service marketing in which management can strive for synthesis. The directional focus of this is due to the predominant readership of HRMR and the reality that marketing has accumulated more service theory and research than management, at least to date.

Service marketing has been shifting from customer satisfaction and service quality as the customer service outcomes of interest to the customer experience (e.g. Verhoef et al., 2009; Klaus, 2015). The customer experience is comprised of all the physical and intangible cognitive, social, affective, and physical attributes, including the customers themselves (Verhoef et al. 2009). This experience is also shaped by interactions over time with multiple organizations and offerings as part of the overall "customer value

constellation” in the customer journey (Patricio et al., 2011). Verhoef et al. (2009) pose the question of how do firm and employee capabilities influence the customer experiences or moderate the effects of other factors on the customer experience? Certainly linkage research using customer experience as the outcome, rather than the typical more narrow customer satisfaction and/or perceptions of service quality, might reveal interesting new employee behavior and organizational drivers of customer outcomes.

Service marketing has expanded the context for service exchange from only dyadic service encounters to service systems and networks comprised of many organizational and individual actors. In contrast in management, a significant proportion of studies to date have focused on short-term service encounters (Subramony & Pugh, 2015). These studies often include only one firm, often with multiple branches, with the focus on the service encounter between an employee/or average of employees and a customer/or average of customers. Management research that has explored differences in service context, e.g. the work of Ryan and Ployhart (2003), has focused on differences in the service output, e.g. degree of intangibility, or type of interaction in the employee–customer dyad, not larger contextual differences such as multi-actor and organization service systems versus a focal organization employee and customer service encounter. Management could benefit from a richer treatment of service context in its theory-building and research.

Service marketing often displays more of a service theory approach to research on service. An integrative theory of services management does not yet exist which weaves together service constructs and the causal mechanisms that tie them together (Subramony & Pugh, 2015) and then is used to frame research on service. There is climate theory applied to service and thus climate for service, for example. Yet, marketing has with IHIP and S-DL, in particular, tried to build service theory and even paradigms to guide research. The following are two points of theory-building and research opportunity for integration between marketing and management.

6.1. Integrating service-dominant logic and specification of service employee roles

In the case of S-DL, ironically, although it drove a shift from the provider to the customer perspective on value creation, it actually also could have been a platform for management research on a high-status role for employees. Vargo and Lusch (2004) emphasized that operant resources (people) are the basis of competitive advantage, and services are inherently intangible. Operant resources like employees are necessary to enable operand resources such as technology. And employees can help differentiate inherently intangible, relational service: “What precedes and follows the transaction as the firm engages in a relationship (short- or long term) with customers is more important than the transaction itself” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004: p. 20). Yet, the OB/HRM field has not worked within the S-DL paradigm the same way it appears to have done in developing the organizational behavior and human resource management implications of the IHIP attributes.

6.2. Developing an interdisciplinary, strategic human resource management perspective on service employee roles

The S-D Logic emphasis on value creation and value in-use can now be found in the “consumer benefit experienced” perspective on strategy in the management literature (Priem & Butler, 2001—Academy of Management Review “Decade Award Winner, 2011”; Priem, 2007; Priem, Butler, & Li, 2013). Priem and his colleagues have argued that the widely-shared resource-based view (RBV) of strategy (e.g. Barney, 1991), is overly-focused on the supply side and the value of resources internal to the organization. Priem, Butler, and Li (2013) argue for an expanded boundary model of strategy that integrates the demand-side and “...that brings value creation for consumers to a more central position in the field.” (p. 471). Value is determined by consumers during their consumption experience; “...the strategist’s art is helping consumers to perceive and experience use value, in a competitive milieu in which other companies are also struggling to aid consumers” (Priem, 2007: p. 233).

This interdisciplinary, shared strategic perspective implies that strategic human resource management (SHRM) should include a compelling focus on specifying the employee roles and competencies essential to customer value creation and, in turn, organizational success. Heretofore, SHRM in the management literature focused largely on matching HRM practices to the firm’s generic strategies in competitive positioning in an industry (Porter, 1985) or developing organizational resources, e.g. employees, that are rare, difficult to copy, valuable, and nonsubstitutable (Barney, 1991) as a basis of competitive advantage.

As a final takeaway, service marketing has made a strong and inspiring case that there must be research and action on how service systems (organizations and employees) can drive customer outcomes that truly matter—tending to the impoverished majority of the world who are underserved. In Ostrom et al. (2015), the number one Priority of the twelve identified by survey respondents, a majority from marketing, was, “improving well-being through transformative service”. An interdisciplinary approach to this targets the underdeveloped Base of the Pyramid in a forthcoming article “Billions of Impoverished Deserve to Be Better Served: A Call to Action for the Service Research Community” (Fisk, Anderson, Bowen, Gruber, Ostrom, Patricio, Reynoso & Sebastiani, in press). If both service researchers and employees, together, can help transform the lives of those underserved in the world, both their roles will be elevated in relevance.

7. Closing thoughts

Service, once just a “game between persons”, has continually evolved with changes in players (human and non-human), roles, context, and score-keeping on customer outcomes of interest. Service employees are increasingly filling roles of Innovator, Differentiator, Enabler, and Coordinator that are ripe for better understanding in both theory and practice. Ideally, the field of management can contribute more in the area of service to move itself beyond infancy to maturity, and do so in interdisciplinary fashion with the more established field of services marketing.

Note 1. Our application of SDL, here, is couched primarily in its original formulation in 2004 that truly made visible and accelerated this shift. Much refinement and debate has followed; see also Vargo and Lusch (2008) and Lusch and Vargo (2014) as well as works that offer alternative views of SDL such as a different logic and model of co-creation (Gronroos, 2012) and moving SDL from customer centricity to balanced centricity (Gummesson, 2008).

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