Discrete Discretion - Improving Service in a Sexual Rights Promotion NGO

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Abstract

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This thesis discusses a service design process implemented at the Sexpo Foundation during its organizational re-structuring in 2014-2015. Its central focus is on the question how to do customer insight based design in a situation where the designer is unable to talk to actual customers, due to the anonymity required for sex therapy and counseling.

Using expert interviews and ethnographic observation, the work examines especially two parts of Sexpo's work: therapy and counseling, and communications and branding. In general, it is discovered that the organization as a whole functions well already and is not in need of any radical innovation or improvement measures. Several points for mending are nevertheless discovered and the necessary changes in processes implemented. Simultaneously, it is observed that service design and design thinking literature is often unsuitable for such a task, as it concentrates strongly on the radical innovation side.

A key methodological finding is that in a therapy and counseling environment, expert interviewees can be also used as providers of second-hand customer insight, because they have during their professional client relationships learned the customers' wants and needs to a particularly deep degree. On the side of theory the thesis shows that a service organization may be able to utilize several business logics simultaneously in different parts of its service, without suffering harm from that multiplicity.

Business logics, non-government organizations, organization design, participation, sexuality, therapy service.

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Tiivistelmä

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Tämä opinnäyte käsittelee palvelumuotoiluprosessia joka toteutettiin Sexpo-säätiön organisaatiouudistuksen yhteydessä 2014-2015. Sen keskeinen fokus on kysymyksessä siitä, miten tehdä asiakaslähtöistä suunnittelua tilanteessa, jossa palvelumuotoilijalla ei ole mahdollisuutta seksuaalineuvonnan ja –terapian intimiteettisuojan takia keskustella itse asiakkaiden kanssa.

Hyödyntämällä asiantuntijahaastatteluita ja etnografista havainnontia opinnäyte tutkii erityisesti kahta Sexpon toiminnan aluetta: terapia- ja neuvontapalveluja sekä viestintää ja brändäystä. Yleisellä tasolla havaitaan, että kohdeorganisaatio toimii tällä hetkellä jo hyvin eikä radikaaleille innovaatioille tai parannuksille ole tarvetta. Pieniä parannusmahdollisuuksia kuitenkin todetaan ja niille kehitetään ratkaisut. Samalla todetaan, ettei nykyisin tarjolla oleva palvelumuotoilun kirjallisuus juurikaan tue pienimuotoista parantamista vaan keskittyy yleensä voimakkaasti radikaaleihin innovaatioihin.

Keskeinen metodologinen tulos on, että terapia-ja neuvontaympäristöissä asiantuntijahaastateltavia voidaan hyödyntää myös hyvinä toisen käden lähteinä asiakaskokemustietoon, koska he ovat pitkien hoitosuhteiden aikana syvällisesti perehtyneet asiakkaidensa toiveisiin ja tarpeisiin. Teorian alueella osoitetaan, että palveluorganisaatio voi ilman ongelmia yhtäaikaisesti hyödyntää useita bisnelogiikkoja omassa toiminnassaan.

Kansalaisjärjestöt, liiketoimintalogiikat, organisaatiomuotoilu, osallistaminen, seksuaalisuus, terapiapalvelut.

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1 Introduction

"When it comes to organizations, constant change is inevitable and everything is a prototype." -Tim Brown, *Change by Design* (2009)

Figure 1: Sexpo Foundation's logo

This thesis is about customer insight gained and utilized for service innovation and improvement while protecting the anonymity and right to privacy of those very customers. It is about issues relating to sex therapy, sexual counseling and sexual rights advocacy in a third sector context. In order to innovate and improve service, one has to understand what customers and potential customers need, not just want. Therefore, the question is: how do we gain such insight if the customers are dealing with very intimate issues, issues to which they are seeking outside professional help.

I have chosen as my thesis subject the organizational and service improvement of the Sexpo Foundation (www.sexpo.fi) during the time frame of October, 2014, to November, 2015. Sexpo is a non-government organization that provides sexual counseling, therapy and sexological training. It also influences local and national policies dealing with sexual rights, promoting especially the issue of the rights and responsibilities of individuals. It was originally founded in 1969 as Seksuaalipoliittinen yhdistys, and later turned into a foundation in 1997 (Sundell, 2014). The central reason for this shift was the fact that it had become an expert organization instead of the volunteer network as which it started. The change also brought the organization stability and enabled it to include board members from other organizations without risk that its goals could be changed by their presence. Sexpo's focus is especially on the sexual and bodily rights and responsibilities of the individual, while many other sexual rights organizations in Finland (e.g., Väestöliitto) are more family-oriented. A large part of its funding comes from Raha-automaattiyhdistys, one of Finland's gambling monopolies.

At the time of this thesis the foundation has one full-time Executive Director, four other regular employees (two of whom share the same post at 50/50%), two short-term contract employees and a network of volunteers. Additionally, it often employs other experts for purposes such as teaching on the educational courses that the foundation provides. Sexpo is governed by a board that oversees its actions and finances, defines strategies and policies (normally but not always together with the staff members) and functions as a group of additional specialists on various facets of sexology, consulted by the staff when needed. I am Sexpo's current Chair of the Board, so I have a vested interest in the success of this project.

The organizational structure is important for the sake of this thesis and the service design processes it describes, because it is sometimes difficult to find collective commitment (as per Doz & Kosonen, 2008) in such a two-divide structure, where one group is in charge of almost all practicalities while the other not only makes almost all strategy and policy decisions, but also ultimately approves most of the decisions made by the staff. This very much reflects the varied expertise situation described by Jones & Samalionis (2009): for a service design process to produce truly radical improvements, it has to involve all the central stakeholders, because each group is blind to some aspects of the service that others may know. Furthermore, while care service customers in general are discouraged from asserting agency (Jones, 2013), in Sexpo the customers are strongly encouraged to assert agency, either as self-aware subjects on the way to improving their sex lives, or (in the cases of trainees attending Sexpo's educational courses) as professional sex counselors, educators and other experts. Thus, they form one (or actually several) very important stakeholder group in the foundation's service design.

Due to recent changes in the Finnish law on foundations, particularly those related to taxation, we – the staff and the board – have together recently turned certain of the foundation's functions into a subsidiary company. Central to these is therapy, but due to the funding principles of certain government agencies, the foundation may have to also consider later moving e.g., some or all of the training to the subsidiary at some point in the future as well. The subsidiary, Sexpo-Palvelut Oy, currently has only one contracted therapist, whose schedule filled up so fast that the company may soon need to find more. These sex and relationship therapists are entrepreneurs who pay a commission from their fees to the company in exchange for using its brand, spaces and administrative service. The subsidiary in turn pays the foundation for support service, as it has no staff of its own, just a board of directors.

I saw this transformation period as an excellent opportunity for looking more closely at the forms of service that Sexpo provides, as well as its organizational structure, and chose this as my thesis project. During the first stages of my research, our ideation workshop revealed both shared key values and very different perspectives on accomplishing them. This points towards the need of a strategic alignment task, which we have already organized, and which is currently underway in the form of a shared value statement book (discussed below). Likewise, interviews and storytelling with the therapist, Head of Training, and Executive Director, as well as discussions with he two Heads of Sex Counseling, revealed parts of the therapy service path that remain black boxes to us. These were particularly about the reasons why potential customers choose Sexpo as their therapy provider — and why some do not.

To study these issues I conducted more interviews, the staff organized one more ideation workshop, and we had several less formal group discussions. I also noted the need for much better customer insight, which I intended to collect via surveys – a process to which our current trainees and therapy customers agreed. In the end, however, the staff decided to organize a survey by themselves, and share the data with me. I am aware of the fact that this is a less than optimal method, but given the intimacy of the topic, I believe that protecting customer identity is more important here than the gaining of a maximal amount of data. The implementation of that survey was later postponed beyond the time frame of this thesis, however, but it is still on line to be implemented. It is furthermore a known fact that when it comes to sex, people respond differently when in direct contact with someone, as opposed to when they are filling surveys that they can leave in a box. The latter method has in general proven to provide more accurate information (Fisher, 2013). This makes survey work challenging but possible, when it will be put into use in 2016.

This thesis, at the core, speaks more about the ways of finding and using insight in a situation that protects customer anonymity rather than about any radical changes done in the organization or with its service. In fact, one of its central findings was that a professional organization like Sexpo, when aware of its customers, strengths and challenges, may not need any radical improvement, just incremental improvements. In service design terms, it requires more "mending" than "innovations" (as per Hämäläinen & Lammi, 2009).

This is one of the two key contributions I intend to make for service design research with my thesis: I want to discover and show methods for improving and re-designing forms of sensitive service in a manner that relies on accurate customer information, yet protects those customers' anonymity at the same time. Additionally, I hope to present new research methods for organizational insight in general and non-governmental organization (NGO) research in particular.

This thesis answers the research question:

How can we use deep customer insight as a basis for service design in a situation where we cannot directly ask the customers themselves?

To answer these, I use a triangulated combination of methods. Central among them are structured observation, an ethnographic analysis of the organization and its environment and ecology, expert interviews, ideation workshops, and organizational storytelling. Through a metatheoretical combination of these, I reveal the interlinkage of organizational processes and customer service in this particular expert organization that seeks first and foremost to do public good.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the peculiarities of service designing in a therapy provider that also engages in policy and education issues. Typically, (health) care design is reliant on the fact that patients know their needs but are often not the stakeholders who pay, that the stakeholders who do pay (e.g., in public health care or public sector outsourced purchases of prescribed therapy) are not aware of the needs, and information is increasing accessed also outside of treatment sessions proper, through e.g., internet searches (Jones, 2013). Sexpo's therapy is always an empathy-based, interactive process and thus not reliant on authority. At the same time, the foundation's political message relies on expert authority, as does much of its educational work. In essence, the foundation functions as a *cognitive authority* (as per Wilson, 1983) for its customers and partners – being someone know to be "in the know", but not in a position where it would dictate policies. Therefore, the standard systems of service design in the healthcare field do not really apply to Sexpo, but their ethics do.

Additionally, this work seeks to contribute to the study of service logics, a field which is still undergoing much theory forming and debate (as are service design and service thinking, for that matter. It is still not well known or documented how those logics (and business models based on them) are actually applied in use, and with what kinds of results (Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2015). Business logics are mindsets and mental models, and therefore they affect the practices which they foster, and are in turn influenced by the actual practices of an organization (Heinonen et al., 2010). At the core of the concept is the idea that once we know customers' needs and understand their value creation processes, we can then generate value propositions (in the sense of "invitations from actors to one another to engage in service"; Chandler & Lusch, 2015) that provide them with maximal potential value ("density"; Normann, 2001).

Service is about the involved parties applying their special competencies in an exchange, through a reliable proposition (see Lusch, Vargo & O'Brien, 2007). The question therefore remaining is where exactly should the focus be placed, if all value is created in interaction between customers in interconnected networks (Lusch, Vargo & Tanniru, 2010), and when it cannot be known until the offering is put into use in a customer experience (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Should it be on the service, preparing the value proposition, or on the customer? This question focus leads to several possible options, manifested in e.g., customer-dominant logic (e.g., Heinonen et al. 2010), service-dominant logic (e.g., Lusch & Vargo, 2014) and service logic (e.g., Grönroos 2006; 2008), which share the same common ideas but place emphasis on different phases of value-in-use creation. Customer not only determine the value of a service, but they also co-create it, and control the way in which it is created (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Heinonen et al., 2010). According to the theories, an organization cannot efficiently mix business logics and still function efficiently, especially not if it combines any of these customer-oriented logics and the older production-consumption and value chain based goods-dominant logic (e.g., Lusch & Vargo, 2014). As this thesis shows, some organizations seem to manage that nevertheless quite well. Because it primarily follows the service-dominant logic framework as its business logic default, this thesis uses “service” and forms/types/facets of service (or sometimes processes), instead of the plural but divisive and goods-dominant “services”.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: After this introduction, I will describe the subject community, Sexpo. For this thesis, it is important to understand not just the service provided by the foundation, but also its ideology, organizational structure, political influence and public image. Then, I will turn to the research and analysis methods I have been using in the change process and the ways in which they have been applied. Following that, I report the key findings, which in the chapter after that will then be analyzed. Finally, after a discussion on how to approach a subject like this and a short road map for improving service in NGOs like Sexpo, I present some conclusions on this project, both practical and theoretical. Through this structure, I seek to present a cohesive picture of what the change process was like, why it was important, and why it is likely to continue in also the future.

2 Subject Community: Structure & Functions

As already stated Sexpo is a non-government organization that provides sexual counseling, therapy and sexological training. It also influences local and national policies dealing with sexual rights, promoting especially the issue of the rights and responsibilities of individuals. This research project sought to improve some of its functions through service design and design thinking. In order to understand the particularities of the change process, it is necessary to understand not just what the foundation does, but why it does it, and how decisions are made within its structures. This chapter offers short expansions first on the organizational side, and then on the brand and media image of Sexpo. Both facets are important for comprehending the limits of the change process, the value of its results, and the implications this has for other similar NGOs.

2.1 Organizational Structure

In its organizational structure, Sexpo at a glance most resembles what Mintzberg (e.g., 1983) calls the Simple Structure: A small, organizationally nonsophisticated system that works through mutual adjustment between its members and exists in a dynamic environment. Due to its small size and the overlapping skills of its workers, all of whom can be considered expert-professionals, however, it often exhibits the characteristics of an Operational Adhocracy (ibid.). It is organic and capable of re-organizing its members into task groups able to very quickly react to environmental needs, such as public discourse on subjects that the foundation wants to influence. Adhocracies, too, rely largely on mutual adjustment, and they are particularly suited for dealing with dynamic, complex environments through it, particularly on a project basis (ibid, 256). Furthermore, in Sexpo, as in many adhocracies, the operative management consists of professionals who are more likely to work alongside the project staff in an expert capacity, and to liaison between teams, than they are to act in a more remote, supervisory position.

As discussed by Mintzberg (1983, 285), the structural templates of organizations can be best seen as pulls towards certain formations, in certain situations. For example, a standardization of employee skills leads towards the likelihood of becoming a Professional Bureaucracy, where worker autonomy is high, but their abilities and tasks highly alike, and innovation limited. Sexpo clearly exhibits the pull between Simple Structure and Adhocracy, depending on tasks and environmental pressure. It furthermore displays characteristics of the Missionary configuration (Mintzberg, 1983, 295), in that while structured and hierarchical, one of the key characteristics of Sexpo is a set of shared values, practically norms. This was during the change process further emphasized, because the organization simultaneously also started (re)codifying its core values into a formal statement. The reason why the structure has so much influence on organizational policy is that the staff meets each other on a daily basis and is able to communicate ideas and react to challenges very quickly and usually flexibly. Its work is highly agile and based on expertise. That flexibility, however, comes at the cost of occasionally challenging the organization's strategy, which is set by the board. As that board meets only once per roughly six weeks, this has lead on occasion to an asymmetric policy making situation.

This challenge has to a large extent been solved by two key factors. The first of these is the establishment of an internal (yet when needed also stakeholder-shareable) online information sharing system. The second one is an organizational culture that promotes sharing and working together, also between staff and board members, in small task-based teams. In all organizations with formal information systems, however, informal channels and practices also arise (Land, 1992). Combined with the turbulence of the current media and political environment, this means that in many cases the informal structure takes over (leading to a value chain type of approach in preparing especially communications), while the formal system is left more as a creativity supporting liaison. During the change process more focus has been placed on streamlining this, with the intent of focusing more on the brand of the organization while keeping everyone in the loop on what is being prepared.

2.2 Brand, Politics and Media Image

Sexpo's brand consists of three central metaphors (see Oswald, 2015) that are intrinsically intertwined. The first of these is its position as an expert knowledge organization, both in the public eye as well as internally. This is emphasized by the way in which also its board consists of not just steering stakeholders, but rather of cherrypicked specialists who involve themselves in the foundation's projects. Secondly, it is a therapy, counseling, health care and education provider, known for its high standards of excellence. Third, it is a controversial organization, an actor willing to take a stand on also unpopular issues whenever those fit its ideology of liberalist ethics combined with individual-level responsibilities. This can occasionally lead into internal conflicts of interest, as acting to further one facet of the brand may weaken another facet, in the eyes of external observers. For example, recommending pre-emptive therapy for pedophiles (following the highly successful BEDIT model; see Charité, 2013), instead of supporting harsher sentences on sex crimes, is an unpopular viewpoint for certain potential network partners. Likewise, opposing the circumcision of male infants on the grounds of genital autonomy is something that for purely racist reasons appeals to certain political groups, which in other circumstances (e.g., on HLBTIQ rights) are totally hostile to Sexpo's agenda. To handle these brand risks and network negotiations, the organization has developed several documents and tacit conventions that enable it to strategize its public discourses and to provide a controlled media image as an expert organization that has clear values.

Sexpo's approach to values and information can be roughly summarized as representing what is known as "libertarian paternalism" (as per Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). It is an approach to governance in which the state and its subsidiaries should not make decisions for the individual, but it may set useful default options and choice architecture to influence them. As noted by Paalanen (2015; building upon Feinberg, 1986), so called soft paternalism (in which society may intrude on individual rights in cases where it appears the decisions were made under duress or without the competence to make an informed choice, and does so only in those cases) is basically compatible with a libertarian ethic of self-governance. This mixture makes Sexpo stand for individuals' sexual rights, but at the same time intensely protect the rights of all to privacy and consent, especially the right to stay unharmed for all those who cannot give their consent (e.g., children). In this, Sexpo follows the Declaration of Sexual Rights made by the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS, 2014).

While the core of Sexpo's values is in the rights and the responsibilities of the individual, it holds as an organization that accurate, scientifically tested information should be provided as well as possible to all, so that people can make informed decisions regarding the sexual well-being of themselves and others. This is an "ultra softly paternalist" part of its agenda. To support this goal, Sexpo actively engages in societal and political discourses relating to sex. In this sense, its client and customer is society itself (as per Simon, 1981), because the organization seeks not only to predict what is going to happen in the field of sexuality in society, but also affect that development. In many cases, as will be discussed later in his thesis, the process of influencing policy is reactive, but the foundation has increasingly sought throughout its history to also proactively promote its values in society.

In its primary information provision and political influencing, the foundation to a large extent still follows a goods-dominant logic (see e.g., Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2015). Works are produced in a value chain (typically as shared work done together between staff and board), until the texts, messages or other documents are ready. This is in alignment with the libertarian paternalism idea of providing informed "default" options through good, condensed information. At the same time, Sexpo is also fully aware of the fact that it is in truth making value propositions, not creating value. The information's value on the market, or its appreciation, is far from guaranteed. The organization, even when primarily preparing things in-house, is also aware of its existence in a network society. It therefore actively engages other stakeholders in the processes, either during preparation, as shared users of the documents (e.g., in joint declarations), or both. It can therefore be argued that the communication is actually highly cognizant of its service-dominant goals, but prefers to handle early stages of processes in a value chain like manner. In essence, it has embraced the marketing roots of the service dominant logic framework (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008), but wants to preserve certain goods-dominant traits in its media production structure. Given the reactive network nature of much of Sexpo's key political communication, this seems to be a rather optimal strategy.

Sexpo appears highly aware of the fact that information needs tend to be situational and do not necessarily translate from one context to another (Savolainen, 2012). Therefore, in order to provide accurate information for individuals and the society at large at an optimal time when it is actually relevant the organization has to share commitment and values. It also has to react fast but utterly professionally on both the level of individual members as well as in task groups, or with a single, formal voice. This is what in addition to the shared values ties the foundation fundamentally together: an adaptive view of working towards the same goals, just manifested differently in therapy, education, counseling and communications.

3 Methodology: Intimate insight

The basis of all service design is in insight to the customers' needs, not just wants (e.g., Portigal, 2013). This means that it is necessary to dive into their practices, behaviors and experiences, through both observation and interviews. This is not as easy as it sounds, as people can be unreliable in order to protect themselves from stigma (Goffman, 1963) or other harm, or simply unaware of the underlying reasons for their needs or actions (Van Maanen, 1979). At the core of this thesis is the conflict between the need for deeply understanding customers' needs, often called "deep customer insight" in service design literature, and the necessary anonymity of Sexpo's customers and a previously recognized need of theirs - the need for respectful privacy. In an organization like Sexpo, due to the nature of the therapy work it provides, typical healthcare measures for design such as "outcome measures" (see e.g., Jones, 2013, p. 139) cannot be used.

In the next sub-chapters, I discuss this dilemma. The discussion is begun with a review of more "classical" viewpoints on gaining customer insight through e.g., interviewing and ethnography, and then moves to the issues of acquiring reliable customer data without any direct contact with the customers themselves. At the same time, some snippets of the findings of this thesis are already reported. This is unconventional, but I believe that since the data itself is tied to the chosen methodology, this increases both logical procession and the general readability of this work.

Early in the research, I divided the key stages that I was examining in Sexpo using Fraser's (2009) three gear model of business design, which eventually proved inadequate for the task at hand, but was a useful roadmap nevertheless. While for Fraser the process is that of steps, in an established organization with a long history like Sexpo the stages also exist in parallel. Indeed, Jones and Samalionis (2009) even recommend that organizations gather insight about their customers, their business and existing technologies all at the same time. The processes undertaken at the foundation reflect Hämäläinen and Lammi's (2009, pp. 193-195) five methods for using service design as a tool for innovation leadership, a format I came to rely on later. These are 1) Understanding, 2) Mending, 3) Branding, 4) Innovating and 5) Reforming. During the process described in this thesis, relationships to all five arose naturally from the organization, and they will be further discussed in detail in the context of data reliability, in subchapter 4.5.

3.1 Deep customer insight: the basics

Service design starts with the recognition of customers' needs. This can take place either due to a start with research and the identification of needs, or with an organization recognizing that it is not providing its customers all that it could. Given all the variance within the fields of service design, co-design, design thinking, service management and so forth, each insight gathering process is somewhat unique in structure - otherwise it would not lead to radical, innovation-driving knowledge, after all. Some general principles can nevertheless be laid out.

Fraser (2009) describes the work as a three-gear process. The first gear is what she calls "deep user understanding", which is needed to align the service with its actual end users. The understanding must be both broad and deep. Interestingly, however, much of service design interviewing is done on quite small numbers of people (e.g., Portigal, 2013) and gains its presumed saturation points quite quickly. Therefore, while the aspect of "deep" is undeniably present, researchers from many other fields would be hard pressed to recognize anything "broad" in service design interviewing work (see e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, on sample sizes). Strangely, however, those small samples seem to be broad enough for producing positive results.

The second gear is concept visualization (Fraser, 2009). Its purpose is to illustrate the findings, often in a somewhat ambiguous manner that enables multiple interpretations and thus fosters innovation. In the end, however, the only central visualizations utilized were during the early brainwriting process. These were a display of the diverse emphases people had for defining what was important in the organization, and a later clustering of those to create a common vision. In most cases, the typically visually-handled things were done using verbal descriptions instead. The central reason for this is that the verbal approach seemed to suit these professional informants better – and it appeals to me as a form of communication as well. This issue will be discussed further in section 3.3 below.

The third gear, in turn, is strategic business design, which is the alignment of organizational goals and practices with future realities (Fraser, 2009). This includes also the business plan, the model's viability calculations, and so forth. In a professionally run organization that for the greatest part functions efficiently and well, drafting new business plans was not an option. This was therefore, in the end, where Fraser's model proved most inefficient. The additional new value proposed by the improvements created throughout the change process were long-term and on top of existing service processes, so estimating their impact beyond that fact that it would exist would have been somewhere between conjecture and pure guesswork. In the end, I abandoned my initial roadmap and proceeded with a more data-emergent way of design thinking.

3.2 Customer insight without customers?

Since I could not directly access the most important end customers – those who utilized the therapy service – I chose to combine approaches that would nevertheless grant me sufficient insight to facilitate service improvements. Leaving out that stage, I nevertheless decided to default to using ethnographic methodologies in combination with interview gathering. This is a method I have successfully applied in earlier research (e.g., Harviainen, 2015), which made the adaptation of it into a new context with more operational limitations if not easy, at least feasible.

The research process sought to include data from all three levels of organizations: management, front line staff, and customers (as per Jones & Samalionis, 2009). This proved rather tricky, not just because of a lack of direct access to customers, but also because the service designer in charge of the research (i.e., me) also represented the organization's management. In this case, however, management could also be perceived in another manner: I chose to focus mostly on operational management, not strategic policy-making, and thus used discussions with the foundation's full-time Executive Director, Tommi Paalanen, as source material for the top level. As Dr. Paalanen has also been the Chair of the Board of Sexpo prior to his post as Executive Director, his viewpoints were able to illuminate many high-level processes in the organization, both now and earlier. I chose not to formally depth interview Paalanen, and instead utilized several informal discussions between us as data, following the discourse-as-interview principles laid out by Kvale &and Brinkmann (2009). Excluding two formal interviews, this was the approach also used with other members of the organization. Given my close relationship with Sexpo, I found this to be a more comfortable approach in the long run, as I was able to intertwine strategic management and operational discussions with data-gathering this way.

Because Sexpo is first and foremost a professional organization, the "hungry and empty" interview approach suggested by e.g., Portigal (2013) was simply not possible in either the formal interviews or the discourse-based freer ones. Instead, one had to demonstrate an understanding of the organization, its subjects, networks and clientele, in order to be seen as a meaningful partner for engagement. In this, the work comes close to what Jackson (1989) calls "radical empiricism" in ethnography - the learning *of* a subject community's skills, practices and ways of communication, instead of just learning *about* them. This does not take this particular work to the level of pure autoethnography (studying one's own community; Van Maanen, 2011), as my status as a member of the board, not one of the staff or customers, kept me isolated from the daily tasks and especially routine-building. My analysis therefore matches more closely that of an informed outsider who knows the culture and practices well, rather than that of an insider.

The professional status of the key informants is also a potential problem. For one thing, experts in organizations are good at noticing the weaknesses in a service they are providing, and pay attention to those as pain points in their work. However, they also tend to be adaptive, so that instead of fixing problems that are outside of their immediate area of direct influence, they work around them. Like Parantainen (2007) suggests, they may easily come to even forget that the problems exist, considering them inevitable. As a result, they may not reveal such problems when interviewed.

Also, as described by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 176), the more 'sophisticated' interviewees are, the more likely they are to analyze instead of just describing. Should they go into heavy theory or terminology, the data is likely to be corrupted, no matter how interesting the results. In an organization like Sexpo, this is in many ways a key issue, because many in the staff are experienced therapists and/or counselors, who on one hand are careful about drawing conclusions for their clients (and thus unlikely to do so for a researcher, either), but who on the other may instinctively, without even noticing it, guide discourses into topics they themselves feel are relevant. In essence, their expert status makes them potentially less reliable as sources than laymen would be.

In turn this, however, counters yet another problem. Several studies have noted that while a researcher in general should trust his or her informants (Van Maanen, 1979, being a key exception), people can in especially cases of sexual information be rather unreliable, even to themselves. For example, Chivers et al. (2010) have documented how many people had trouble recognizing their own arousal, let alone admitting to experiencing it. Furthermore, Fisher's (e.g., 2013) experiments showed people reporting less extensive sexual experience, if they had to hand their anonymized survey responses to an assistant, instead of just depositing them. The expert status of the staff informants, I believe, counters this tendency, also because they are at no time reporting on their own experiences, and because they protected customer privacy at all times. In my assessment, the advantages of expertise in this case far outweighed the potential disadvantages, and the Sexpo staff interviews, volunteer interviews and workshop results can be considered extremely reliable as data sources. Another advantage, that of the experts being also co-researchers in an environment like Sexpo, will be discussed later.

Van Maanen (1979) notes that in ethnography one gathers two types of data. The first of these is operational data, which describes the activities and conversations that take place in the observed community or location. Presentational data, in turn, is about the appearances and social images the members of the community seek to maintain to outside eyes and often also to each other. It tends to be idealized and is usually ideological, normative and abstract. It is the researcher's duty to combine these in an analytical manner and produce insight into what is taking place behind the routines and facades. The staff interviews and storytelling assisted in this, providing an interpretative framework with which the observations could be aligned or contrasted.

Despite what e.g., Portigal (2013, 117) suggests, some of the staff interviews were not recorded. Instead, most of the interview research, as noted above, was conducted using the discourse-as-interview method (as per Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), with notes taken after each free-form, yet on-topic discussion. This was done so as to create a rapport between the interviewer and the staff and volunteers (as per Portigal, 2013, 20-24), which is particularly significant in the case of re-designing a service that deals with an area as intimate and contested as human sexuality. When necessary, thematic interview elements were also applied (as per e.g., Stewart & Cash, 2014), in a semi-formal follow up to the discourse-type questions.

The reason for using these particular methods was on one hand the structure of the organization in question and the particulars of its work, but also on the other hand the fostering of stories instead of answers. As observed by Portigal (2013, 24), the efficiency of an interview is much higher when one is able to record relevant stories in addition to direct answers. In the case of Sexpo and the sensitive topics with which it deals, this was particularly important, as such statements well illustrated the practices required from its employees and volunteers.

The co-design, collaborative nature of the interviews and workshops solved also one typical challenge of ethnography: as the research was conducted together with the informants, with the intent of providing new designs for the informants, their organization, and its customers, it was possible to sidestep the problem of reporting. Instead of having to choose whether to write a confessional, realist or impressionist (as per Van Maanen, 2011) account of the research, I was able to focus on its design implications. This thesis, in turn, documents that process, and is thus written in the “realist” style of ethnography (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 201-203).

The research was, after acquiring permission from all key stakeholders at Sexpo, begun with a brainwriting session. In it, six staff members wrote down things that they considered important in Sexpo’s types of provided service, on identical post-it notes. The duration of the writing was ten minutes, after a short introduction by the author. The notes were then formed into a canvas, which was analyzed by all present, and discussed to some extent. The original idea of using a bullet point was abandoned at this stage, as the staff members had produced such a prolific number of notes they considered important.

Through a discussion, the interviewees then selected six notes that for them represented key issues on the topic of Sexpo and service (Fig. 2, below). These and others represented both specific types of service that they considered important to organizational identity (education, counseling, political influence), as well as adjectives about quality, and so forth. Based on the whole sample, both the author and the staff agreed that whatever was to be developed further would be done based on first and foremost organizational values, rather than existing forms of service.

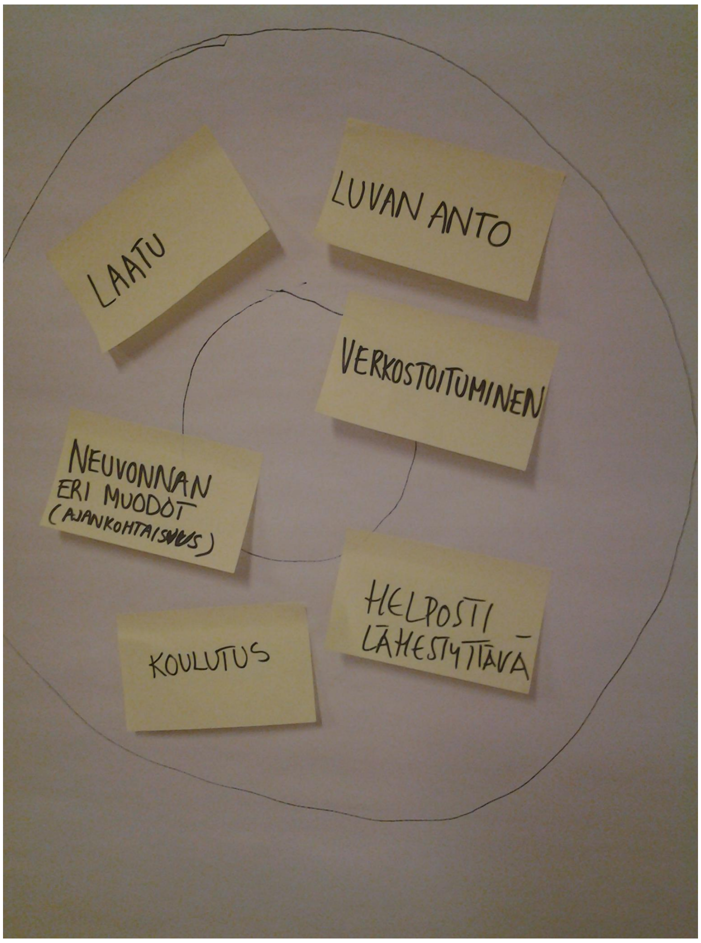

Figure 2: The staff-selected six key aspects of Sexpo: Quality, Permission-giving, Networking, Different forms of counseling, Education, Easy to approach.

Of particular interest in the first step's results was the fact that while sex education and sexual counseling were considered expressions of organizational identity and values, the provision of therapy - the service currently being externalized into the subsidiary - was not. This can be partially explained by the fact that it had recently been subsidiarized, but can also reflect a staff viewpoint that as a more individualized and less result-visible form of service, it was part of the ideological whole but not a part of the communicative-political whole.

The second step was a recorded customer journey / interview discussion with Sexpo's Head of Training, Karoliina Vuohtoniemi, who like several other organization members also does some therapy work for the foundation. Using a stop/justify system, the journey description allowed us to find several touchpoints about which the organization knows too little. These will be discussed in "Findings" later on in this thesis. The interview data was furthermore complemented by a customer journey story provided by Antti Ervasti, a therapist working for Sexpo Palvelut, the therapy subsidiary. I have not included any of interviews as direct texts in this thesis, as they also contained discussions on Sexpo's internal processes and are thus not intended for publication in a public document such as this.

As the journey by necessity, in order to protect customer anonymity drew data primarily from staff rather than actual customers, triangulation was needed. I therefore interviewed also the organization's Communications Manager, Tiina Vilponen, who in addition to her marketing and communications work also has some therapy clients. I also made notes of several group meetings, for extra data and later triangulation purposes.

As noted by Van Maanen (1979), analysis and reliability assessment of data is something that comes from the field. It cannot be done later, once all of the data is collected, as that removes it from the context. Naturally, not all of it is understood at that stage, but the essence of the insight has to start at the actual situation or interview, not only later on, when further facts or similar cases can no longer be checked. Therefore, in essence, I have followed the ideas of grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Clarke, 2005): after discovering potential hidden pain points and inefficiencies in the organization and its service, I sought a saturation point and then analyzed which theoretical frameworks this revealed. The primary framework, however, proved difficult to find. As will be discussed below, the findings did not match service design or design thinking in an optimal, or even nearly optimal, manner. Instead, they pointed more toward organizational design, in the sense of Mintzberg (e.g., 1983) and Simon (1981). With some more digging, particularly toward variations in design thinking, I was able to construct a kind of hybrid framework that seemed to explain the results rather well, as partially organizational, partially design thinking related issues. These were then used as the basis for design, with improvement of detected gaps or dark areas in service, i.e. mending, as the primary design driver.

3.3 Visualization - or verbalization?

Service design strongly emphasizes visualization, visual methodologies and visual thinking (e.g., Brown, 2009). Parts of this stem from the fact that pictures encourage discussion and interpretation, they can be absorbed to a large extent with a short glance, and they fit the tradition of a visual field like design extremely well (e.g., Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011). The same way, the tangibility of prototypes is likewise a fit with both the field's intended goals and the thinking patterns of the discipline. The prototypes help customers and designers alike to understand the concepts being developed, and to envision new options and affordances (Luojus & Harviainen, in press).

Figure 3: Ideation workshop results (part), Spring of 2015

I however also firmly believe that a big part of why service design uses first and foremost visual methods is that its central creators were themselves visual thinkers, and not so much verbally oriented academics. Verbalization and visualization are of course not mutually exclusive, and in fact the kind of presentation of e.g., written documents in a visual form that the brainwriting produced is a kind of visual tool in itself (see Fig. 3 above for an example).

4 Findings

4.1 On the general process

Applying design thinking or service design into the task proved surprisingly difficult. First and foremost, the process early on revealed that for the most part, Sexpo's forms of service were running very efficiently and were expertly handled. They were able to offer considerable value to customers and clients, in all aspects of the organization's work. Service design, however, more often than not seeks to invent something new or to provide radical innovation (e.g., Jones & Samalionis, 2009). Sexpo, however, seemed not to require any of that, just incremental improvement.

Design thinking, in turn, also needed adaptation in order to produce results in such an environment. While many formulations of service design processes exist, they are fundamentally all about the same approach and mindset (Tschimmel, 2012). I did not, however, find them to be a perfect fit for the task at hand. For example, Stickdorn and Schneider (eds., 2011) define five core principles of service design thinking as user-centered, co-creative, sequencing, evidencing, and holistic. All but one of these were challenging to actually interpret while preserving customer anonymity and due to the nature of the service itself. For example, evidencing is hard to perform non-intrusively in the short term, as sex therapy processes take a lot of time and counseling provides answers to which the customers rarely provide any later feedback, so all that is left as evidence from them is the original answer. Options for evidencing do exist, such as diaries kept by customers between therapy sessions, but those are nothing new and could not thus be altered as a result of the design. To directly do so would be highly intrusive and run against the anonymity principle.

It was simply not possible to involve the actual users of the service in the design, at least not consistently so and in sufficiently large numbers. With individuals' needs in counseling and therapy also being highly diverse, a small sample would have been risky for all stakeholders. The process was likewise not co-creative in the traditional SD sense, as described by e.g., Mattelmäki and Sleeswijk Visser (2011). Instead, we might better address it as "co-adjustive". The staff and involved stakeholders identified throughout the process small opportunities for incremental improvement – and began acting upon them.

Sequencing, however, turned out to be an important facet, and in many ways a key to understanding the options for improvement. As we utilized some visualization techniques during both the brainwriting session and the interviews, those revealed that we as an organization did not know certain key sequences in the way Sexpo organized its service forms. In particular, some potential touchpoints were simply missing, while other elements could be located as being in the dark, such as the customer experiences in between certain well-document touchpoints. These will be discussed in especially 4.2 below.

Finally, the “holistic” aspect shows first and foremost in Sexpo’s values and its approach to acceptance of the individuals with their own needs, desires and limitations. This is something that carries over into each facet of its service. Measuring that is however extremely hard, and therefore it is difficult to hold that as a basis for improvement design. On the other hand, the very presence of that holistic point functioned as the anchor for all improvements. During the brainwriting, about half of the notes were about values, not forms of service, and this carried over to the design as well. Likewise, Stickdorn and Schneider’s (2011) point that design is typically presented as linear but in truth rarely is, and should rather always be iterative and a bit fuzzy, functioned as another solid guideline.

In the next sub-chapters, I examine findings particularly relevant to the key forms of service present in Sexpo’s portfolio, as well as the ways in which those were uncovered and discussed during the research process.

4.2 On therapy and counseling

Data gathering on counseling (which Sexpo during 2015 will have provided in 3500-4000 instances) and therapy was primarily conducted through interviewing and storytelling. Following Geertz’ (1983) suggestions, I focused on the ordinary and not the exceptional, despite the latter’s appeal for both impressive reporting and for possible radical improvements through service design. o establish a baseline of sorts, I asked sex and psychotherapist Antti Ervasti to supply me with a storified “typical” customer visit to Sexpo’s therapy service:

“The customers, ”Katja” (27) and her spouse ”Jari” (28) came of their own initiative to use Sexpo’s services [sic] in 2014. Their reasons for coming to therapy were a low level of sexual desire, fears and anxieties related to intimate proximity, and a relationship that had become strained due to these factors.

First meetings ascertained the viewpoint that neither of the individuals was the center point of these problems. Instead, focus had to be placed on the couple’s relationship dynamic in addition to individual level work. Both of them had in their personal histories depression and unspecified anxieties. Because of this, they had both gone through intensive state-supported recovery psychotherapy. With Katja, the individual level therapy process was still underway. Synergy advantages and the avoiding of unnecessary overlaps between a couples therapy process and individual therapy were discussed with both clients. During the first meeting, *there was also discussion on the number of therapy meetings, as well as how often those would take place. In addition, the therapy's goals and methods were discussed.*

In co-operation and shared understanding with the clients, we wanted from the beginning to focus on the couple's relationship, to things that made it work well as wells as potential hindrances (i.e., a systemic approach). I felt that this would support both Katja and Jari in comprehending their own roles and responsibilities in the relationship. During the start of the therapy process, charting the level of permission-giving strengthening the expression of one's individual wishes and needs was also a very important factor were also very essential. A certain kind of care dynamic had been formed in the relationship due to partners' depression backgrounds. In the current state of the relationship the care dynamic was no longer necessary, but the clients needed external support to make the changes possible.

The six months of working with Katja and Jari have been very motivating and during the process, they have both advanced in their abilities to solve challenging situations and become empowered on several levels. Basic sense of safety in the relationship has strengthened and the happening of intimate proximity has become much easier compared to the starting point. According to Katja in particular, the couples therapy has supported her personal, individual therapy process as well.

We are currently at the step where it is possible to start looking at both partners' personal histories' trauma points. These trauma points have been revealed by e.g., genealogical tree working. The trauma histories have a clear impact on both partners' abilities to re-form and maintain a safe attachment relationship to each other. The customer relationship and formal process has not yet been ended. Instead, we are currently assessing and focusing the goals of the therapy. We currently have meetings 3-4 times each month." (Written by Ervasti, 2014; translation by Harviainen.)

Together with Vuohtoniemi, we formed a verbal template (turned later into a blueprint) on what happens from the point when a typical client realizes the need for some help within Sexpo's areas of expertise, to the point when they leave the service, hopefully better off. According to Vuohtoniemi, most new therapy clients initiate contact via email. How they locate that email, Sexpo does not know, nor how they come to choose Sexpo from among several possible service providers. Therapists do ask when they remember to do so, bit it is not always done. Importantly, it is not known why some people choose to go elsewhere, either. Many clients have had some therapy before, but been disappointed with the fact that there the discussion on sex-related difficulties was not possible. Some, but not all, approach the organization somewhat warily, particularly if they are not very familiar with Sexpo's reputation. No matter how and in what tone they initiate contact, though, the great majority of those who come for one session stay for the whole multi-session therapy.

Then, after choosing, they usually send an email or call by phone, explaining the basics of their situation (even as they would also be permitted to just book an appointment without saying why before). At the time of Vuohtoniemi's interview, reservations were still made by email, but since then a shared calendar system has been implemented. It may take up to two weeks to find the time for a first appointment, a span which Sexpo seeks to shorten. Likewise, there would be demand for evening appointments, but finding therapists for those is difficult. This means that schedule reasons may cause some potential customers to not come to therapy at all.

On the first visit, the customer's problem is often found to be different than described in the initial contact, usually because they have not been able to yet formulate their situation into accurate words, because they have not identified a real root cause, or because it is something which they do not want to explain on the phone or put into writing someone might see. This means that at early stages, the therapy service has to be adaptive, empathic and insight-gleaning, as well as supportive. It is very rare that a client has to be refused for one reason or another, but that happens on occasion. When the right therapist is found, a set of sessions follows. According to Vuohtoniemi, some have maybe five appointments, some ten, some stay in therapy well over a year, meaning over 30 sessions. In the beginning, appointments are usually every two weeks, and as progress takes place, extend to about once in a month. Once therapy ends, the clients are recommended to take contact after a while and tell how they are doing, but according to for example Vuohtoniemi, so far none of hers have.

As this shows, despite the fact that in general the therapy process is well-functioning and able to help its clients well, Sexpo is currently unaware of what takes place at certain touchpoints. Most central of these is that there is no systematic knowledge on why they come to Sexpo. Paalanen said that for at least some, the key reasons are Sexpo's reputation as a non-judgmental organization where anyone can seek help, its brand as an expert organization, and its active media presence. Word of mouth was mentioned by Vuohtoniemi as an important factor, as not just face to face talk but also social media allows people who have attended therapy to easily but still somewhat privately share recommendations with friends and acquaintances. "Recommended by friends" or "Guided to Sexpo by a professional" have been frequent answers among those who have been asked why Sexpo. For some therapists, their own media image and/or area of expertise may affect decisions as well, but Vuohtoniemi noted that it appears that people first choose Sexpo, and then pre-select which therapists they want.

Likewise, no system for tracking the well-being of former therapy clients currently exists. Decisions have been made to address these issues from now on, although search for the best ways to do so still continues. One suggested option has been an entry survey filled out before or right after the first visit, to gauge entrance and selection reasons, and the implementation of a later aftercare session some time after therapy ends, to see how they now are and if the therapy truly was successful.

Finally, it bears noting that due to the personalized nature of the service, notation on the sessions is confidential and done in each therapist's own notes. Therefore, the system is vulnerable in the sense that if one therapist for example falls ill, none of the others could take up her clients even for a short while. Some confidential work note-keeping has been taken into use as a result of the service design process, and Sexpo's therapists hold meetings together, so the risk has now been alleviated to at least some extent.

SEXPO PALVELUT OY – TYPICAL CUSTOMER JOURNEY BLUEPRINT

Customer	Recognition of need	First Contact, by call or net	Pre-therapy meeting	Therapy session 1	Between-therapy assessment of process: "Is this good for me?"	Therapy sessions 2-n	Last session, customer feeling well
Front Office		Answering questions, booking meeting time	Meeting potential customer, emphasizing confidentiality	Gauging situation, explaining procedure and options	Answers to questions the customer may have	Regular meetings with customers)	Polite, supporting exit facilitation
Back Office	Provision of accurate information for passive searches	Background work on the problems described by potential customer		Assessment of possibility to help	Between-therapy assessment of process: "Can we help them?"	Keeping track of therapy progress	Bookkeeping to order
Support	Free online counseling	Web service functionality; call response times	Visibility of Sexpo's values	External funding options information availability		Calendar and notebook software	
Challenges	No idea how and why customers choose (or choose not) Sexpo Palvelut	Need to create entrance survey	Unclear customer needs at this point; usually change during therapy				No post-therapy checkout, no feedback survey

Figure 4: Blueprint of a typical therapy process at Sexpo Palvelut, the subsidiary.

In a service design meeting organized in June 2015 (on staff initiative, as they wanted to present their own ideas for further mending!), several of these points were brought forward again. For example, marketing, organizational ethics and therapy logistics were discussed. Particular focus was on the borderline between counseling and therapy. For example, as long as Sexpo stated on its web pages that it provided free counseling up to three times per client, people felt entitled to all three. This was later changed in service re-design into "1-5 depending on counselor assessment". Another key thing needing re-assessment was whether some people should be directed towards therapy during counseling, if they clearly needed it. In general, this was considered by staff and board members to be a good move, but it also had several ethical ramifications. Centrally, whether it would be ethical to use a free service to effectively advertise a paid one that was provided by the same organization (an issue which the subsidiarization may have technically, but not ethically, solved). According to

Sexpo's two primary sex counselors, probably one out of ten to fifteen counseling customers move to therapy service, while one out of three would in truth have significant use or even need for it.

This is a significant issue for a care and advice provider like Sexpo. With half of online counseling questions coming through the Internet and the other half directly via email, the work takes a lot of time. Numbers of needed replies are annually in the thousands. With another 90 visits as well, plus the phone, the organization's counseling capabilities are currently running at near the maximum. Properly answering even a single client's questions in counseling can be so exhaustive that staff, who have also other work, rarely have the possibility of answering more than one person per day. Sexpo's volunteer and trainee network helps with the workload, but it is still a significant factor in the organization's everyday life.

The key challenge, however, is not the workload. It is that without starting therapy partially already during counseling (which would probably then lead to a change in provider later, despite the fact that both primary counselors also do some therapy work), there is not enough continuity for those who need it. In essence, it feels wrong to Sexpo staff and volunteers not to be able to provide the needed help. For most customers, the reason for not seeking therapy after counseling comes down to finances. If they do not have state or municipality funding for the therapy, it is an expensive process. Those who can themselves (or in the case of youths, through parents) afford sex therapy usually enter it directly, without asking counseling questions first. Marketing of the therapy service has to be therefore mostly aimed at the people and organizations who decide on the public funding contracts for individuals, not to the people who need the help. As there are effectively two customers of the service in these cases (the one who gets therapy and the one who pays for it), the value proposition has to reach both. The current marketing strategy, inspired by the service design process, will seek to guide people to directly seek the type of service they need, it will direct them to instructions on how to seek funding for therapy, and a list of ready counseling answers will be optimized so that people may more easily find what they are looking for without having to personally ask anyone.

In business terms, while the political processes of Sexpo can be considered a hybrid of an internal goods-dominant value chain that is meant to provide a service-dominant type value proposition, the value processes of sex counseling and especially therapy are quite different. In my view, they exemplify the ideas of customer-dominant logic as being embedded in the customers' experiences, contexts and activities (e.g., Heinonen et al., 2010; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). As a part of their work, the therapists seek to understand the everyday life contexts of their customers, so as to be able to help them and to track whether progress is made. Counselors, even as their background information and number of touchpoints is more limited, also try and utilize this way of thinking. In such circumstances, the value very clearly emerges from the customer’s cognitive and emotional experiences, facilitated by the therapist, rather than as a value chain. Customer-dominant logic emphasizes that the value has to emerge from processes that are embedded in the customers’ own contexts (Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2015). Likewise, service-dominant logic points out that value-in-use is not created, if the person’s life situation does not sufficiently match the delivery of the value proposition (Vargo, Maglio & Akaka, 2008). The persona-oriented approach, reciprocity and empathy required for effective, client-respecting sex therapy and counseling makes that area a particularly natural fit for customer-oriented logics. (In contrast, a goods-dominant sex therapist would try to impose his or her values on the customer. This can in my opinion still be observed in e.g., organizations seeking to “cure” homosexuality through conversion “therapy”).

4.3 On influence and branding

On the political and media influencing issues, I drew on especially the expertise of the Sexpo’s Communications Manager, Tiina Vilponen. According to her, the greatest communication challenge for the organization was lack of time available from its stakeholders. As long as things proceeded on a passive scanning mode, there was not enough initiative for all members of the organization to look for signals in the field. This is a serious problem for many NGOs: as volunteers, people involved with them rarely have the possibility to commit to environmental scanning. Likewise, full-time staff have their hands full with their primary work and thus rarely have the time needed to follow multiple information channels. Due to the specializations and linguistic skills of its staff and board members, Sexpo potentially has access to a large set of information channels, both formal and informal, but in non-radical cases where e.g., forecasting is needed instead of fast reactions, the threshold to start in advance may often be somewhat too high.

The central tools to address this problem were the drafting of a formal media strategy (later created and implemented, primarily by Vilponen herself together with Sexpo’s contract researcher, Anni Ahtola), the decision to increase the utilization of Sexpo’s wide networks as sources of important information and the appraisal of what might be important information, and the creation of the ethical principles document (edited by Ahtola, with contributions by all stakeholders and several network partner organizations as well), which would act as a guideline for fast reactions in the future.

To see if further actions would also be needed, or just be beneficial for the organization, we also drafted a verbal blueprint of how typical media cases are processed in Sexpo. In 2014-2015, the foundation reacted to media reports about 4-5 times per year. This goal was immediately increased to an average of once per month whenever important topics are found. The purpose of this increase was not in just maintaining a stronger media presence and to fight perceived injustices in society, but also to make stakeholders (e.g., board members) commit more strongly to the shared task of organizational communication and the strengthening of Sexpo's public image as first and foremost an expert organization. Formal requests for official expert statements, from e.g., the Finnish parliament, arrived in turn about 2-3 times per year. These had always been a high priority for the foundation and will continue to be so.

The typical media process in Sexpo is normally quite efficient and fluid. It starts by someone, usually a member of the staff, noticing a media case that falls within Sexpo's areas of expertise and interest. Very often, despite the lack of time by many, it tends to be such a high profile, or at least medium-highly notable, case that several people in the organization pick it up, or have at least pondered whether Sexpo should react to it. That finding is then discussed by the staff over morning smoothies and taken into an internal social media group. The discussion centers on whether Sexpo might want to react and whether reacting would be the wisest course of action. The staff discussion is also used as a measure of the prominence of the media item: the more people in-house have noticed it, the more likely it is to be picked up also by others and thus more likely to also require action by Sexpo. In many cases, the necessary action is in the form of expertise-based critique, but can in some cases (e.g., an Amnesty statement demanding a revision of the currently biased transgender legislation) instead be a public statement of support.

If the staff decision is in favor of a reaction, some team consisting of Vilponen and a couple of other staff members (usually including at least the Executive Director as well) starts drafting a media statement. When close to ready, that first draft is then shared to all within the organization, for further commentary, using the internal information system. It usually stays in commentary for just 1-2 days, due to the speed at which media events tend to either snowball or die down. In cases where reaction has to be very fast, the Executive Director personally calls the Chair of the Board, plus any board members whose expertise (e.g., legal, medical) is crucial for quality checking the statement. The board, in the end, decides after a discussion with the staff whether to publish a statement or not.

This expertise-based value chain is in most cases extremely efficient and able to create high quality expert responses at short notice. It is, nevertheless, quite vulnerable, something which the service design process addressed. First and foremost, fast reaction means not everyone necessarily gets to have a say, so decisions on sending something to the public eye may not in truth be totally unanimous. To address this, a new step was included into the preparation during the SD process: a thread would already be added to the internal forum, announcing for all organization members and topically key stakeholders that something on the subject was being prepared. This way, board members could already set off time in advance to properly read and comment once the drafting process was ready, and in certain cases also volunteer to physically come to the office and join in on the writing. (In a work such as drafting precise, expert political statements on contested issues, online co-writing tools have been found slow, inaccurate and thus largely inefficient.)

As a general statement, it can be said that the measures have together created two important things. On one hand, stakeholders pay more attention to what is being processed in the organization and when, and those who do the central preparation work are more willing to share and report. On the other, simultaneously, the political and media influencing projects have in my observation brought the whole organization much closer together. The internally more critique-open system has become a venue for loyal opposition, which on occasion may decide to wait for a more optimal time or the chance to re-assess a hostile statement so as to later address it in a more fruitful manner. Furthermore, the newly implemented system empowers those who do not find themselves in agreement with a statement to discuss the issue. Given the fact that not even experts always agree on issues when it comes to e.g., ethics concerning sexually active minors or the rights of disabled people, the preparation-making announcements allow for reflection and a balanced discourse. This is a very important factor for any such NGO’s future: while the staff and the board may share all of Sexpo’s central values now, things may change later even with just one recruitment decision. This is precisely the reason why the Sexpo society was turned into a foundation, to prevent it from changing course away from its core values. In sharing a common message, the organization also shares precisely the kind of common commitment Doz and Kosonen (2008) recommend.

One final challenge to the Sexpo expertise brand still exists: media confusion. In any organization dealing with a sensitive subject the message of the whole may get confused with the messages of its individual members. This can be an advantage or a hindrance. According to Sexpo staff, the situation is particularly challenging in the current political ecosystem, which in its neo-conservatism no longer tolerates bringing up controversial subjects for ethical discussion. As a result, mentioning one controversial topic in a magazine interview may create a strong stigma (as per Goffman, 1963) upon both that individual as well as the whole organization. This creates a strong incentive to conform to the “party line”, but ideological NGOs are by nature collectives of strongly opinionated people who want to make the world a better place (according to their own vision, of course). Therefore, the organization has to at all times maintain boundary control on what is an individual member’s personal and what is the foundation’s message. Sexpo now and then also has to point out its own nature as an expert organization, because it on occasion gets confused with other organizations or events in the media. For example, one communique was brushed aside by some readers because they confused the foundation with Sexhibition, a commercial sex-related annual fair taking place in Helsinki.

In the area of anything connected to sexuality, the personal continues to be political in Finland (see e.g., Juvonen, 2015). An organization like Sexpo therefore has to walk a fine line in which it intentionally recruits vocal proponents of individuals' rights and responsibilities, i.e., those who will have the drive and ethics to carry its torch, yet still consistently signals a clear, controlled message that follows its own ideology and not that of any members'. Occasionally, this leads to having to initiate the media reaction process described above, to deal with the fallout. So far, though, that fallout has been due to misinterpretations of individuals' statements as individuals in the media, and not lacks of judgement or personal agendas. Similarly, the organizational message needs adjustment on occasion, as it may slide too much toward one important subject (e.g., sexual health) at the expense of others.

Improving the brand of a radical organization that does not want to shy away from critical, important and ethically appropriate, but also controversial, topics is very difficult. Organizational pride on tackling challenges, a sense of duty to defend those who needed, and a kind of grace under pressure keep Sexpo positively aggressive in its public image, which naturally also affects its brand. Nevertheless, external forces – particularly the currently socially prevalent de-valuing of scientific information and professional expertise as basis for solid arguments – are what in truth make the brand control hard. Therefore, the policy of the organization has evolved: since Sexpo cannot truly control its brand, it takes advantage of the brand it has, by playing on strengths, expertise and, increasingly, its expertise networks. For example, the foundation has observed that even negative publicity brings many readers to its home and Facebook pages, so whenever media exposure takes place, Sexpo boosts its primary messages and expertise branding in these fields where it does have complete control of the content. As a media strategy, it is proving to be extremely efficient, and adaptive enough for even the current political climate.

4.4 Scale and potential for further scaling

As it may have been obvious, I have left almost completely out one facet of Sexpo's work: that of an expert-education provider. Sexpo trains many of the best sexology professionals within Finland. Initially, I sought to refine this part of its functions as well. However, as it turned out during my initial research, there were two things that prevented such work. First of all, a large part of the training of sex counselors, educators and therapists at Sexpo is done by outsourcing experts in the area. As outside contractors, they have their own presentation and teaching styles, which I cannot affect. Some discussions on the policies of education were nevertheless had with in-house teachers, particularly Vuohtoniemi.

Jones (2013, 176-177) argues that in care work education, learners are not customers, and this presents challenges to service design. He furthermore claims that the value-seeking goals of service design are at odds with the academic values of education. My findings from Sexpo do not support these viewpoints. On the contrary, as Sexpo’s educational service is attended by paying customers who want the highest quality research-based information, and precisely due to this reason appear to choose Sexpo as their training organization, there is in theory nothing that would prevent the application of design thinking on the educational service as well.

The second reason, however, prevented it nevertheless. During the early research process, it was revealed that Sexpo’s educational service is currently functioning so well that there is no point in interfering with it. On the contrary, any attempt at mending, let alone radical innovation, would have been more likely to do harm than good. Sexpo has furthermore been able to scale its educational service according to need, and been able to match demand with supply without giving up anything in quality. This is made possible through the combination of in-house expertise and excellent networks from which to draft temporary teaching assets whenever needed.

This successful scaling, when analyzed, pointed out that in other areas of Sexpo’s operation, scaling is quite difficult. Counseling and therapy service is by nature so tailored that creating anything resembling a “basic sales item” beyond some standard templates (e.g., suggested therapy session lengths and frequencies) would go contrary to the goals of what the service seeks to accomplish.

4.5 Reliability analysis

In making this thesis, I have utilized a core triangulation for all of my data. It consisted of a comparison of the interview results, my own observations and experiences as a part of the subject organization, talks with staff, and existing research into the topic of providing sex counseling and therapy related service. According to that triangulation, the results of this thesis are reliable and when implemented in small, mostly incremental improvements rather than as radical innovation, will prove to be of value to the organization.

I have identified two risk points. The first of these is that by interviewing therapists, I have sought out cherrypicked experts whose viewpoint is skewered toward their own customers’ interests. I find this first risk to be very low. On the contrary, the professionalism of the expert interviewees made them a mediating element rather than opinionated commentators. Therefore, their presence in the interview chains in my opinion increased the reliability of the data, not diminished it. Furthermore, the triangulation showed that interview responses and the interviewees' other words and actions were in alignment (in contrast to the environments of some organizations that seek to uphold a public façade but do not enforce it; see Van Maanen, 1979).

The larger and more significant risk is that since my initiation of this process and the early steps in it, including interview questions, were based on my own ethnographical observations, and I am a former board member and the current Chair of the foundation, the entire research process might have been tainted. For example, that key questions asked have been subconscious lead-ons. Following Van Maanen (2011) I, however, consider this to be unlikely. For this particular assessment, the staff/board division actually helps: since I, despite my Chair of the Board status, do not know all of the details of the practical work, it would have been very difficult for me to accidentally or subconsciously create a set of questions that would lead the staff professionals astray. This is a fine line, but as Geertz (1974) noted, one has to go amongst "natives" to understand their culture, and those can be organizational natives just as well as indigenous ones (Van Maanen, 2011). In my level of participation in staff activities, I sought what Fine (2003, 53) calls the "expected participant in social life" status – that of being socially a member of the group, but not one of the task handlers Therefore, I find this point sufficiently moot as well – as far as ethnographic research can be trusted beyond being essentially just "I say so" in the first place.

Finally, it bears noting that with the sex therapists' (both the one full time and those other staff members who did I part time) schedules practically full, the influx of new customers could not be used as a reference point for impact measuring. Neither could yet the political process changes effect be gauged, as the political climate is currently undergoing a rather hostile stage concerning the kind of scientific information Sexpo wants to promote on e.g., trans*rights. An honest assessment is therefore that while we can trust the findings to be very reliable, we will need long-term tracking to see whether the courses of action based on them have been as accurate.

Having found the gears (Fraser, 2009) eventually not really useful, and then going through other frameworks, I for a long time had to wonder whether what I was doing in Sexpo actually fit the templates of either service design, design thinking, or especially both. Locating Hämäläinen & Lammi's framework (2009) however solved the issue. In their list of five different methods of using service design, they make a clear distinction between different applications of the art and mindset. While most of service design's techniques appear to deal with creation, radical innovation, and changes in entire organizations' working logics (see e.g., Luojus & Harviainen, in press, for a summary), there is more to design thinking.

At the core of it all is *understanding*. In this project, it was achieved through second-hand customer insight, ethnography, and an examination of the organization's processes, viewpoints and work flows. Based on that, we then started *mending* – creating touchpoints and support processes to parts of the service that were missing such and in need of them. For example, an entry survey to find out why people choose Sexpo as a therapy or education provider. At the same time, both these parts of service as well as especially the political and media sides were focused with extra *branding* ideas, with which Sexpo makes its message better heard and its expertise-based nature better known.

Two techniques were addressed less, due to important reasons. Sexpo is currently already seeking external funding for results of its earlier *innovating*, for example the implementation of the pre-emptive child-protection BEDIT model in Finland. Therefore, there was no point in trying to come up with more potential projects at the moment. And *reforming*, in turn, was not necessary either. Regardless of small hiccups in some situations, Sexpo is already a multi-perspective organization that is able to position itself on the market according to need, in strategic alignment within itself, and therefore requires no paradigm shifts in order to take full advantage of the results of this service design process and move those into become parts of its value propositions.

I do, however, think that in fact reforming did take place. This happened in the fact that design thinking and the constant search for potential improvements in service was adopted into the organizational culture of Sexpo. This, more than anything, in my opinion validates the findings. In the next chapter, we turn to analyzing the findings and putting them into the context of what in fact was accomplished with the design process.

5 Analysis

Many of the service forms provided by Sexpo are very much types of *relational service*. They are not only collaborative and require active co-operation from the customers, but also need a positive attitude and customer willingness to form a personal relationship (Cipolla, 2012; Cipolla & Manzini, 2009). This creates challenges for refining or mending any service processes, as their relational nature makes them easily rely on tailoring. Due to this, the research and design project was conducted over a period of one year, so as to prevent insight loss (as per Jones & Samalionis, 2009), and to give time for data to emerge naturally from the relational processes. This way, patterns could also be reported by staff members, who by being included in the service design process early on could then pay attention to potential patterns throughout the way. In fact, this still now continues in the organization, and low-key mending has now effectively become a tacit policy inside Sexpo.

Central to the ongoing success of the process was therefore not at all my presence – neither as the Chair of the Board nor as the service designer. In this, the often facilitator-oriented service design literature proved inaccurate. On the contrary, it all depended on the staff taking the change processes as their own, analyzing them, and improving them. This is in line with the observation by Smart et al. (2011) that the challenge of a service design process is so large that it cannot be done by a leader alone. In the end, I believe that the whole design process, from the first brainwriting process to the completion of this thesis, simply required two things to work:

1) the presence of a service design process, which provided some initial insight and later on, inspiration, and which furthermore worked as a framework and scaffold for the staff members' own improvement ideas.

2) the insight-gathering abilities already possessed by the Sexpo staff and the therapists working at Sexpo Palvelut Oy.

The first of these features came, in my opinion, from the fact that the service design initiative functioned as not just a catalyst, but also as an ideological scaffold that enabled knowledge co-creation within the organization. While commonly researched and discussed in organizational contexts, it is a topic that largely been ignored in service studies. Tsoukas (2009) describes it as dialogues that create new distinctions which can be integrated into organizational service and practices. The distinctions can be of many types. For example, they can be new words or key concepts, ones that enable the definition of new approaches, perspectives or even novel forms of service.

As Tsoukas (2009) however notes, not all discourse is able to enable knowledge creation as efficiently as certain other types of discourse. What is required is a positive form of engagement, so that the participants can relate to each other, find strategic alignment and separate themselves from existing practices so that they can reflect on those. In Sexpo, this was achieved due to inspiration created by the presence of the service design process. In essence, my facilitation functioned as a scaffold for the design creativity of others (as per Sanders, 2006).

The second achievement was created by a turn in perspective. In addition to seeing the staff as expert informants, I began to understand them as also customer researchers. Having long-term professional relationships with their clients, the therapists and counselors all have access to a particularly impressive set of customer insight. Therefore, we can consider them not only informants, but also co-researchers. This is especially true since the sex therapists share information between each other (while of course preserving individual confidentiality and anonymity) and are thus able to “compare notes” on best practice. They are effectively performing the same function as e.g., sub-contracted interviewers would in a service design or user experience research project (see e.g., Portigal, 2013). The one key difference is that they are probably much better at it, and have access to the kind of insight few field researchers would be able to get. For example, people tend to reject unwelcome health-related information and thus act against their own interests (Baker, 1996), but a skilled therapist will be able to pass such a barrier. Therapy sessions likewise exemplify, if indirectly, Sanders’ (2002) observation that a user experience is formed partially by design, partially from what the user (in this case therapy service customer) brings into the situation. This combination also allows for better tailoring of service sessions, if properly understood.

In my observation, however, the extra deep insight was not a pure panacea. Due to client confidentiality, most likely, the insight had to be facilitated into new use outside of the therapy session. Service design largely relies on extrapolation made on the basis of thoroughly documented customer insight (Luojus & Harviainen, in press). For some accustomed to confidential, intimate work, that extrapolation may feel inappropriate, and thus has to be coaxed by a design manager. In contrast, for counselors, used to creating FAQs out of oft-repeated questions, the extrapolation seemed to be natural. It is furthermore notable that since my interviewees and storytellers engaged (or had engaged) in both types of work, facilitating the “design mode” of thinking appeared to be more about a mental switch into using therapy-based insight but in a counseling kind of manner. The fact that all of the interviewees managed such a shift easily, once introduced to the idea, and were able to draw on deep insight, to keep it totally confidential, and yet apply the lessons from it into new practice speaks very highly of their skill and professionalism. A key recommendation of this thesis is therefore that if doing service design in an organization with professional helpers in it, be sure to treat them as not only expert interviewees, but also as expert interviewers of their own customers, able to report a lot of deep customer insight.

5.1 Roadmap

As results of the design process, we together created a three-tool model to mend central issues in planning, branding and operations. The tools were Documentation, Codification and Storification. All of them had already seen use in the organization, so this was more or less just a way of formalizing existing practices, for improved use.

In Documentation, Sexpo now seeks to create detailed descriptions of its existing processes, ways of handling those processes, and the practices has regarding them. Likewise, new projects will be detailed down, and those descriptions later used as a basis for the end reporting. In addition to continuity assurance and internal information sharing, such documentation is also extremely useful for communications and branding purposes.

While Documentation is about projects and practices, Codification focuses on values. In writing down its ethical viewpoints and values into a stakeholder-commented book, Sexpo gains three things. First of all, it has something that is accepted by all current members of the foundation’s staff and board. That means any future members will have a sounding board for their own values, and will be able to check whether they really do share the foundation’s desires, goals and ethical expectations. Secondly, the book will help Sexpo’s counselors and volunteers to answer questions more easily and quickly, as they will not have to ask others whether an answer is in line with the foundation’s principles. (Since Sexpo is known as a non-judgmental responder, many of the questions the counselors have to answer may be ethically rather complicated.) And third, a book of values is an important tool for Sexpo’s brand, as media exposure sometimes leads to public questions about what the foundation’s official stand on some topic is.

Storification is something that was found to an important addition to the toolkit. Originally brought up during the interview by Vilponen, the idea to turn Sexpo’s successes, its long history as a therapy provider, and its central goals for furthering sexual rights into tellable stories has been gaining a lot of momentum in the foundation. This is important for many reasons. First and foremost, a good story influences an organization’s brand very positively, helps it find more customers, helps it find the right kinds of customers who will appreciate its value propositions, and so forth (Rauhala & Vikström, 2014). Secondly, stories help the organization’s own members to strategically align with its goals. Sexpo’s own history book (Sundell, 2014) has been one important step to this direction already, but use of the technique will be increased significantly in the near future. Stories furthermore also help members, stakeholders and other interested parties more easily discuss the organization's works and image, because they are “sticky”, i.e., have characteristics that make them easier to remember (as per Heath & Heath, 2007).

As these points show, the three tools are highly synergetic and provide strength to each other. Such a synergy is at the core of all the mending and innovations described in this thesis. Because of this, multi-faceted organizations like Sexpo require systemic vision (as per Senge, 2006), in their design, function and branding. With strategic alignment in place, they have it. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications the findings and changes (both implemented and forthcoming) have for the foundation, as well as to design research.

6 Discussion: on approaching intimate insight

It appears that it is indeed possible to do customer-based service design even through second order processes. The key to this is the ability of the designer to select the mediating informants correctly. In the case of Sexpo, the fact that those who are in contact with the actual customers are trained therapy professional was crucial to success. For such expert informants, central service design tools such as story-forming and storytelling, customer empathy and depth interviews (see e.g., Curedale, 2013) come naturally, as does the desire to understand the customers' wants and needs. They exemplify Schön's (1991) ideal of reflective practitioners, in both how they approach their work and how they analyze it.

At the same time, using service design methods and design thinking to create just incremental improvements proved harder than expected, despite the fact that e.g., Hämäläinen and Lammi (2009) consider it an integral part of the design portfolio. This is in many ways natural, and in my opinion actually validates the method further as very useful. As noted by Brown (2009), service design uses three overlapping criteria as its goals: what is designed should be feasible, viable and desirable. In the case of Sexpo, the two first criteria were easy to reach in all of the envisioned improvements. They proved functional and fit the service portfolio of the organization, both fiscally and ideologically. Desirability, in turn, meant in this case "non-radical", "organization-fitting" and "supportive of current, already existing successes". The end result may not therefore have been something so impressive that it would be presented at ServDes or a similar event as a massive triumph. Sexpo did not seek or need Liedtka & Ogilvie's (2011) "What wows?", just "What works?". Instead, it was simply something that worked – and something that the customers needed. Furthermore, in this case the benefiting customer is twofold: Sexpo gained tools for further customer insight, improved service capabilities and stronger value propositions. Its customers, in turn, also received those stronger value propositions, in the form of more efficient, more insightful service. In my own words (Harviainen, 2014), new service multipliers were discovered and then implemented in order to increase the value propositions. In both therapy and communications, new forays were made. While of different character, both were facets of the same, larger process.

As for that process, as discussed earlier, the role of the service designer was more that of a catalyst than a change manager. My position as the Chair of the Board would have enabled me to probably force my own opinions through in many cases, but that is not the way in which service design works. (Nor is it the way I work, for that matter.) What happened was that initial inspiration spread and design thinking, in a non-formalized mode, caught wind in also the ideas of the staff and many board members. As experts in their own domains, they took the ideas further than any designer-driven stakeholder co-design methods could have. I have seen this before as well, in other units (e.g., Harviainen & Viskari-Perttu, 2014; Harviainen & Pikka, 2015). Successful service design processes, particularly incrementally improving ones, are therefore often also organizational knowledge construction processes (as per Tsoukas, 2009), organizational learning (as per e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978) and the creation of also tacit organizational knowledge that will grant the organization in question a competitive advantage (as per Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). All these are reflections of the fact that when implemented successfully, service design is something that allows for not just the discovery and implementation of ideas, but also the sharing of them (Mattelmäki, 2006).

Finally, on the ethnographic side, the work reflected many of the points raised by Margaret LeCompte (e.g., 2002) regarding the shifting practice of ethnographic research. Sexpo, while largely based around a single office, does not count as a “site”. It meets many of the criteria for a “culture” studied by ethnographers, but the task division is so directed by organizational structure that the lines of culture, strategy and values blur into each other. The fact that the ecosystem and networks within which Sexpo exists and operates are in a constant flux further forces the operational culture to adapt, even as central values stay stable. Given furthermore the presence of the experts as partial “co-researchers”, the project was methodologically multi-layered, multi-sited and multi-perspective, a position typical of recent (non-customer) ethnographical research. Following Eisenhart and Finkel (2000) and Levinson et al. (1996), LeCompte (2002) suggests that ethnography should look more into what people produce. This includes not just products and service, but also hopes, goals, identities and potential futures. In applying ethnography as one of my research methods to Sexpo, I believe I have uncovered all those. Some of them are reported in this thesis, while others remain in the hands of the staff and the board, as tools for building more.

7 Conclusions

In this thesis project, I have studied the service improvement processes of the Sexpo Foundation, a Finnish non-government organization that provides human-centric help and guidance in the field of sexuality. With it, I had two central goals. The first of these was to benefit the organization and its customers. The second was to answer my central research question.

The study and design work was done as a target of opportunity: as the foundation was already undergoing organizational re-structuring, it presented a good opportunity to see whether service improvement might be needed and if so, where and in what form. The research, however, showed that the organization was in most cases very healthy and efficient, which meant no large-scale changes, nor any radical innovations to the service, were needed. Mending was nevertheless performed, in areas where interviews and observations detected requirements or possibilities for it.

For the primary research question, “How can we use deep customer insight as a basis for service design in a situation where we cannot directly ask the customers themselves?”, I found a solution in a triangulated combination of organizational observation and expert interviews that provided a reliable second-hand access to customers’ wants and needs. This process was significantly helped by my own knowledge of the foundation, its structure and values, which although quite extensive beforehand already, vastly expanded during the study.

By using this combinatory approach and its members’ own expertise, Sexpo was able to mend several gaps in its service, particularly on the level of support processes. Only some of the discovered solutions have so far been implemented, but a roadmap now exists for handing the rest as well. Likewise, so does the organizational spirit needed for that.

This thesis has also made some small forays towards contributing to the fields of service design and design thinking, both practical and theoretical. These will be described in the final two sub-chapters.

7.1 Practical implications

The first practical implication of this thesis is that care professionals are not only expert interviewees for a service designer. They are also co-researchers and should be interviewed in a manner that enables the second-hand data to be turned into customer insight. This is something that design in such fields should encompass whole-heartedly. This can be done for either triangulation purposes (in cases where first-hand customer insight is also available) or to have access to customer data in cases like here, where it is not possible to interview the customers themselves.

The second practical implication is that even incremental improvements and “mending” can provide significant potential additions to an organization’s service and value propositions. Given that it builds on familiar grounds instead of seeking radical changes, it is probably also easier for members of expert organizations to accept as an approach than a (probably consultant-driven) radical innovation process would be. This familiarity is also why it functions as a solid bridge through which to imprint design thinking into organizational structures and make it a standard part of policy and operations.

The third practical implication is simply “don’t fix that which is not broken”. It is always tempting for a consultant to sell something extra or to try an enact changes for the sake of making changes, no matter how those are marketed. In this service design process, it was important to leave some parts of the organization’s structure and service untouched. “Radical” should not be a value in itself in design, despite our innate desire to seek a “wow!” out of everything we design.

Fourth, as Ojasalo and Ojasalo (2015), building upon Heinonen et al. (2010) argue, the application of customer-dominant logic in practice is still an understudied area. This thesis has shown that certain therapy service types and service providers, in this case sex therapists and counselors with an individual-respecting approach, appear to be innately customer-dominant in their operational logic. As they however offer their service on a highly personalized level, it remains open whether their methods of being customer-dominant can be applied to other contexts.

7.2 Theoretical implications

On the side of theory, this work revealed a gap in service design and design thinking theory. The field is so enamored of innovation and radical change that it is very difficult to find useful guides and roadmaps for mending and incremental improvement. Analyzed from this perspective, it is as if the field itself is overly focused on branding itself through the exceptional and extravagant rather than the small and efficient. For it to prosper, a more balanced corpus should be created in the long run. In a sense, it should indeed itself be “mending” and not just “innovating”.

Likewise, this work has shown how interlinked forms of service, organizational brands and operational decisions are. It calls for a more holistic perspective on understanding systemicity in organizations. The interconnection of these facets is a compelling argument toward seeing a holistic service even behind different types of activities that an organization can be performing.

On the topic of business logics, this thesis has illustrated that multi-faceted service organizations, at least those that work in the third sector, can actually be using several business logics at once, even in a single process. While this finding goes against the grain of current business logic theory, it can be explained at least partially by the compartmentalization of the service types in question. It does, however, still raise the question whether more than one logic can be applied on a single form of service, or on a single delivery of a service. Would it for example be beneficial to approach some types of service in the way Sexpo handles its communications: first, to seek maximal potantial value from the provider's side by utilizing a goods-dominant value chain, and then shift to a service-dominant approach when thinking about how to foster the co-creation of as much value-in-use as possible, in the customers' own contexts? I believe this is a topic that merits further, very comprehensive and thorough, study.

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