# "The Life Has Not Been the Same since the Pandemic Started". Insights to the International Bachelor Level Degree Students' Study-Related Well-Being in Laurea University of Applied Sciences during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Service Innovation and Design

Master's Thesis

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**Laurea University of Applied Sciences**           Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to assist the OMA OTE-project of Laurea University of Applied Sciences to develop study-related well-being services. The OMA OTE-project is aiming at supporting the well-being of students and the progress of their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The student segment that this research focuses on, is the international bachelor level students who are completing their degree at Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

The thesis is qualitative, empirical case study. The theoretical framework is based on service design, service-dominant logic, Value Proposition Canvas as well as logical framework for value creation. Additionally, concepts such as social isolation, safe space, personal boundaries as well as physical and digital worlds are included. Several methods were used during the research, such as desk research, semi-structured questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and participant observation. The material was analyzed using the grounded theory.

The key finding was that the pandemic has been a disruption for the students on many levels. Social distancing has changed the boundaries between the people, as well as on how the boundaries regarding the physical and digital worlds have shifted. The changes have been unexpected, and it has not been possible to control them. The discrepancy between the reality and the expectations has decreased students' study-related well-being.

The framework that was developed is called a Framework of Developing the Services amid the Changing Boundaries.  It is based on the theoretical framework as well as the empirical part of the thesis. With the help of this framework, the OMA OTE-project as well as other actors working for the study-related well-being can bring the students in the core of service development in the times of many changes.

Keywords: Service design, study-related well-being, OMA OTE, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, COVID-19 pandemic

Contents

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 COVID-19 as a global pandemic

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus. In early 2020, it became a global pandemic influencing everybody and everything. Washing hands, not touching face, taking vaccinations, keeping distance to other people, and using facemasks are the main means protecting yourself of being infected. Disease can cause several symptoms that most commonly are associated with flu. However, the severity of symptoms varies from person to person, and this has led many people to be hospitalized due to falling ill. COVID-19 can in some cases also be the cause of death. The disease is more serious with those with high age as well as for people having underlying medical conditions. Since the beginning of the pandemic, various virus alterations have been discovered that have changed the situation with the virus. (WHO 2021.)

As stopping the disease from spreading through the social contacts, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged everybody to find new ways of living our everyday lives, such as studying, working, and connecting with other people. Digital devices and platforms have become a new normality replacing the physical connections while protecting ourselves from the virus. (Alzueta, Perrin, Baker, Caffara, Ramos-Usuga, Yuksel & Arango-Lasprilla 2021, 566.)

Pandemic should be viewed as a disruptive incident as nobody can really rely on the processes that were conducted on pre-pandemic. There are no previous examples or guidelines how to proceed in this type of situation. Nobody can for sure predict what could be the best solutions, actions and the possible consequences on the decisions made during the crises. Unpredictability and uncertainty are everywhere, especially in the school world. Crises and change management have become crucial skills amid the pandemic. To get through all of this, support and collaboration between people are needed. (Harris & Jones 2020, 243-246.)

## 1.2 The COVID-19 pandemic in Finland

The virus has also majorly influenced to Finland since the spring of 2020. On 16 March 2020, the Government of Finland decided on measures to address the coronavirus outbreak. The aim of the operation was to protect the population from the disease as well as to make sure that society and the economy would continue working. The Government declared, in cooperation with the President of the Republic, a state of emergency because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Finland`s borders were closed and passenger transport to Finland was

suspended. Public gatherings were strictly limited and spending time in public places was to be avoided. This had also major impact on the lives of students', since contact teaching in campuses was suspended, and educational institutions were closed. Distance and self-learning with digital tools and platforms became the new normality for different age groups. (Finnish Government 2020.) Since then, several vaccinations have been invented to tackle the virus; first vaccinations were introduced in December 2020. The vaccinations were started in Finland in December 2020 bringing ease to the situation. (THL 2021a.) The situation has been made more complicated by the many virus variants, latest one of them is called Omicron. (THL 2021b.)

## 1.3    Pandemic influencing to the study-related well-being

COVID-19 pandemic has influenced globally on study-related well-being, which is vital for the university students when they try to achieve their goals at the higher educational institutes. The pandemic has caused restriction on movement, changed routines, diminishing social contacts as well as loss of traditional learning methods in school contexts. This have led to stress, feelings of insecurity and anxiety for many. (UNESCO 2020, 1-2.)

Since the beginning of the pandemic, many studies have been conducted in the context of higher educational institutes, focusing on the study-related well-being of students. The results have been somewhat similar in different countries. For instance, a research made with the US college students in the largest universities in the country, indicates that the roughly 48 % of the 2030 students who answered to the research, have had issues with the study-related well-being. These students have serious concerns related to their studies and health that are directly caused by the pandemic. (Wang, Hedge, Son, Keller, Smith & Sasangohar 2020, 8-9.)

In Finland, the situation with the students studying in higher educational institutes has been similar. There have been numerous surveys conducted during 2020-2021 regarding the study-related well-being in different universities and the universities of applied sciences. For instance, a central organization of University of Applied Sciences Students in Finland (SAMOK) conducted a survey in spring 2020 together with 16 student unions situated in different universities of applied sciences in Finland. They received over 6900 answers. The key finding was that 51% of the respondents felt that their motivation towards studying has decreased while stress has increased due to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote teaching, lack of routines and structure, social distancing and general uncertainty have brought substantial decrease in their study-related well-being. It seems that there is a division between the students. There are those students who have felt that due to remote teaching it is easier to combine studies with other spheres in their lives, such as family and

work. On the other hand, there are those students who are barely managing their studies and have experienced substantial difficulties. (SAMOK 2020, 1-4.)

## 1.4 Laurea University of Applied Sciences and the study-related well-being

The context of this research is focused on Laurea University of Applied Sciences that is a higher education institution operating in Uusimaa region at six different campuses. The higher education institute has about 7800 students, 600 staff members and 30000 graduates within the community. It offers in total 18 degree programs which of six programs are taught in English. Laurea has defined that people and interactions are in the core of all actions. At Laurea, studies, RDI activities (research, innovation, and development) as well as regional development are intertwined and carried out in cooperation with different participants, such as social actors, sectors, and international partners. The pedagogical model of Laurea is based on Learning by Developing (LbD) meaning that learning and practical work go hand in hand in the form of conducting real-world assignments such as projects and development works. (Laurea 2021a; Laurea 2021b.)

The Laurea community and its students have been largely influenced by the pandemic. All Laurea campuses were closed in mid-March 2020 and teaching has since then been conducted in remote, until the August 2021, as the COVID-19 situation was temporarily better. Thus, in autumn semester 2021 some student groups were allowed to participate in contact teaching on the campuses. To understand the needs of the students in the middle of uncertainty, Laurea has examined the students' experiences studying in emergency conditions with several surveys, such as Mitä Kuuluu? -survey (in English: How Are You?). (Ojasalo 2021, 6.) So far Laurea has conducted in total three Mitä Kuuluu? -surveys for its students in autumn 2020, spring 2021 and autumn 2021. This has been made to gather up insights on the progression of their studies, study-related well-being, study motivation and needs for support. The surveys have discovered that there has been lack of peer support and there has been technological challenges while studying online. Additionally, Laurea students feel there have not been enough breaks during the online sessions and the schedules of the study units constantly been changing. These issues among other things have decreased their study performance and their study-related well-being. (OMA OTE 2021a.)

1.5    Framework of the thesis

Consequently, OMA OTE-project was started at Laurea in the beginning of 2021 to respond the needs of the students and to enhance the study-related well-being of the Laurea students. The project aims at supporting the students of Laurea in their study-related well-being and progression of the studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project has been granted funding by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The project will continue until the end of February 2022. (Laurea 2021c.)

In general, the Ministry of Education and Culture has funded the schools of higher education as well as students' unions with the special aid of 6 million euros. All together 38 projects have been granted funding. Money is meant to support the measures reinforcing and developing study counselling as well as well-being of the students' during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2021.)

This thesis and the development work around it has been conducted as a part of OMA OTE-project by providing insights and framework for the use of the employees working for the project as well as in general for Laurea employees working for the study-related well-being.

The student segment focused on this research is the international bachelor level degree students of Laurea. Students who participated in this research are from Philippines, Kenya, Finland, Cameroon, Ghana, Somalia, Nepal, and Nigeria. International master level students, as well as exchange students have been ruled out from this study. International bachelor's degree students are interesting group for this study since not much is not known from their exact needs during the pandemic. With this study Laurea can get valuable information on the needs and problems of this group and provide them services matching their actual needs.

This research can be labeled as qualitative, empirical case study. The thesis project started in April 2021 with desk research, ideation, benchmarking and making an affinity wall. It was followed with the data gathering phase during August-October 2021 including semi-structured questionnaire, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Empirical part of the study was conducted through an elective bachelor level study unit "Improving Your Study Skills and Finding Your Strengths" at Laurea Tikkurila campus in autumn semester 2021 with students having an international background. The research was conducted under the research permit that has been granted for OMA OTE-project by Laurea.

First, a semi-structured questionnaire was completed with 11 students of the study unit in August. Additionally, participant observation was performed during the study unit. From those students, five students were interviewed during September-October 2021 using semi-structured interview as a method.

During the data gathering, the Value Proposition Canvas was utilized as a tool to gather up insights from the students' experiences in the form of asking their customer jobs, pains, and gains on studying during the pandemic. The Value Proposition Canvas was also used to understand and test how they are viewing the value proposition of Laurea ("We are here for you at Laurea"). Also, well-being related services of Laurea, gain creators and pain relievers were examined. By understanding the students and their pain points, it would be easier for Laurea to improve the existing services and develop new ones. This also helps allocating the resources.

Eventually, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed together with the data collected from the questionnaire. The analysis was conducted utilizing grounded theory as well as the Value Proposition Canvas. This phase was done during October-December 2021. The thesis was finalized during December 2021-February 2022. The whole process as well as the different phases of the pandemic is presented at Figure 1.
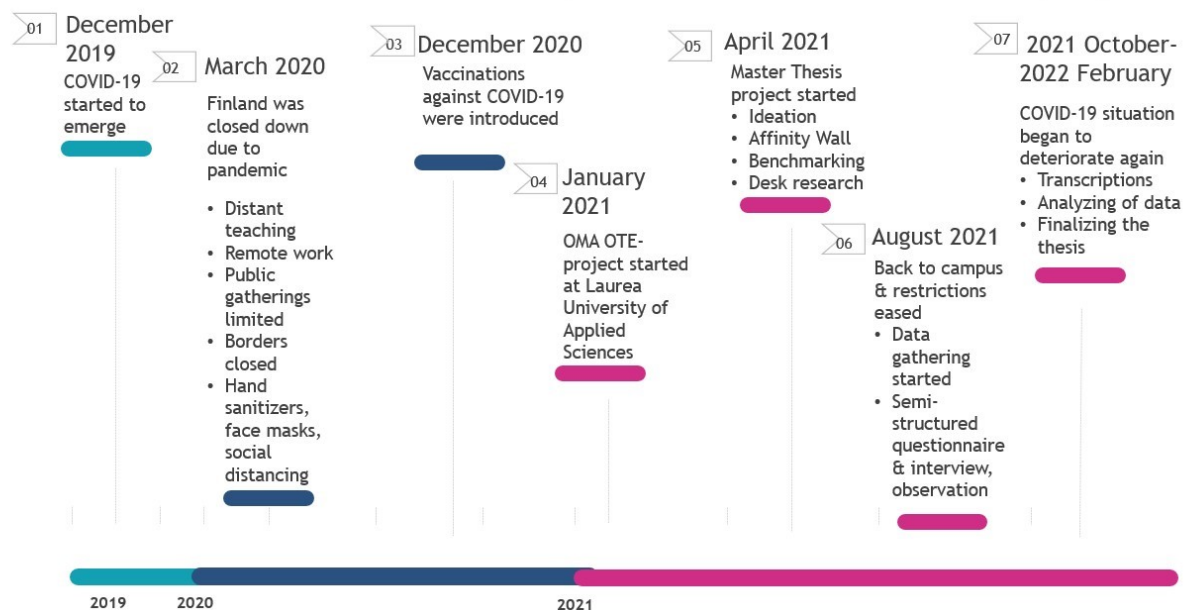


Figure 1: The timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic and the thesis project

1.6    Aim and objective of the thesis

This thesis has research-oriented development approach. Aim of this approach is to solve practical problems or produce new practices as well as produce new information about workplace practices. The development activity is based both on theory and systematic data gathering utilizing several methods. According to Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti (2014, 18, 23) research-oriented development approach means that the work should identify and solve problems and guide change while exploring new opportunities. The goal of the project where this approach is used may be to develop a new model, framework, product, or a service as well as improving the existing ones.

This research is important since the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. Thus, discovering the relationship between change and well-being is crucial when developing existing services as well as creating new ones. The aim of this research is to understand the experiences of the chosen student segment and to develop a framework based on these experiences and the theory. Hence, the thesis is based on theoretical framework as well as empirical part that are used together when developing the new framework of Developing the Services amid the Changing Boundaries, presented in Chapter 7. The objective is to create a framework that the employees of the OMA OTE-project as well as other Laurea staff members working for the study-related well-being could utilize to help students in their journey of learning, while feeling good amid the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The developed framework has three levels: the Value Proposition Canvas can be used to gather up insights from the students and helping to empathize with the students by placing them in the core of all doing. Logical framework for value creation offers perspectives on how the service infrastructure and interactions could be formed for this segment. As COVID-19 has brought shift in boundaries in respect of social distancing and between the physical and digital worlds, the third level can be used to review on how the changed boundaries are influencing on the services.

1.7    Research Questions

The research questions for this research are the following:

RQ1 How the international bachelor level degree students of Laurea have been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2 What type of pain points and worries students have related to study-related well-being?

RQ3 As the value proposition of Laurea is "We are here for you at Laurea". What does it mean for these students during the COVID-19 era?

RQ4 In students' opinion, what do they want or need from Laurea to perform well on studies during the change situation with many uncertainties?

1.8    The structure of this thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 describes the background, framework, aim, objective, research questions and the central concepts of the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 discusses about the Laurea University of Applied Sciences and the OMA OTE-project as well as generally about the study-related well-being. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 concentrates on research approach and presenting the methods. Chapter 5 introduces how the data analysis was done utilizing the grounded theory. The results are presented in Chapter 6. The new framework can be found from Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is concluding the thesis with a summary and answers to the research questions. In addition, assessment of the thesis with further development ideas and reflections are presented in that chapter.

1.9    Central concepts

The following concepts are essential for this research:

**A service** is something that helps someone to do something. "Something" could be short and straightforward, or it can also be long and in many parts. Common for all services is that they help us to achieve a goal, big or small. Some parts of a service could be provided by several different organizations. For a user, a service is one continuous set of actions aiming to reach a goal, regardless of who provides it. Service can be broken down into smaller parts that can help the person active the overall goal. It is the user who decides what the service is, as they have their own goal they need to achieve. It is the job of the service provider to orchestrate all the pieces of this service together as seamless journey as possible. (Downe 2020, 20, 27.)

**Service design** can be defined as applying the processes and methods borrowed from design as the services are being developed. From the customer`s perspective, aim of the service design is to create easy to use, useful and desirable service experiences. From the perspective of a service organization, the service concepts should be effective, profitable, and unique. In service design, the customers are always in the core of all doing and development. Service design brings agility to the organization that is needed to keep up with the changing environment and it also helps discovering new innovations. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 38, 73.)

**Value** can be defined as a benefit, an increase in the well-being of a particular actor. People are usually challenged by problems they have not met previously, services they do not know or procedures they do not understand. Creating value means solving those problems, entering the services, or activating new processes. Hence, the value in this case is created with some type of support such as helpful employees, mobile applications or instructions activating or stimulating customers` capabilities. (Moretti 2021, 33.)

**Service-dominant logic** suggests that the value is always actor specific, and each instance of its creation is contextually distinct, leading that every value creation occurrence is unique. Value creation is holistic and phenomenologically determined. Actors (such as students) are integrating resources from multiple sources. Value is also being co-created and cannot be provided by one actor (such as Laurea) to another (such as student), it can only be proposed in the form of **value proposition** that is a representation made by one actor that proposes positively participating in the value creation with another actor. (Lusch & Vargo 2014, 57.)

**Value Proposition Design** is a method to gather and organize information what the customers want in rather simple way making the patterns of value creation more tangible. It is composed from two canvases: the Business Model Canvas and the Value Proposition Canvas. Value Proposition Design can be used to understand customers` value creation patterns, making it easier to design effective value propositions and successful business models directly targeting the customers` jobs, pains, and gains. (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, Smith, Papadakos 2014, viii, xxi.)

**Logical framework for value creation** consists of three elements that are service as interaction, service as infrastructure and service as a systemic institution. They combine an ecosystem that is related to the production of value. As services are designed, all these three levels should be taken into consideration as they are influencing each other. (Morelli, de Götzen & Simeone 2021, 12.)

**Study-related well-being** is referring to an area in well-being specifically supporting studying and in generally being a student. It includes sufficient level of competence, being in control, feeling good while studying, flexibility and have realistic ideas of one's possibilities and prospects on being a student. (Laurea 2021d.)

**Change:** Already prior the pandemic there were rapid changes in digitization and in the networked global environment, creating many new types of challenges and opportunities businesses and other organizations. As the speed of change is growing, it gets harder to anticipate the future. Organizations should be agile, adapt to the changes and explore new opportunities to survive. Constant development work for is needed to innovate new services. Within this it is crucial to understand the changes in customer preferences and their actions. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 3,12.)

**Customer insights** are important to understand the conscious and unconscious needs of the customer as well as to know what things are valuable for the customer. Customer insights are in the very core of designing successful products and services. In addition, they are the basis of a customer-centric organization. (Miettinen 2011, 11, 25, 61.)

**Safe space, personal boundaries, social distancing** are intertwined together in many ways. Safe space (such as home) is used to contrast the spaces that are not safe. These are for instance public spaces where one can catch a virus. Personal boundary is regarded as a psychic distance between people, it is a way to avoid risks related to COVID-19. Additionally, social distancing is having a physical space between different people. (Furedi 2020, 393-396.)

Living in **hybrid world** means that the boundaries between the **digital and physical worlds** have started to disappear integrating elements from both worlds (Jordan 2009,181-182).

## 2 Introduction to Laurea University of Applied Sciences and the study-related well-being services

### 2.1 The strategy of Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Laurea has defined in its strategy that its strategic choices are aiming at redeeming the service promise made to students and applying service design methods and co-creation in all its operations. Furthermore, the strategy specifies that Laurea has a student-centric approach meaning that the individual goals of the students' and their competences, their work and educational background, are taken into consideration when their study paths are planned and carried out. The values guiding Laurea`s work and operations are openness, effectiveness, and responsibility. For instance, openness means transparent operations creating mutual trust that is a precondition for successful co-creation and operation. (Laurea 2021e.)

The service promise "We are here for you at Laurea" is an assurance of a good learning environment of the Laurea students and of partnership as well as joint development of Laurea partners. Service promise means that the students can study flexibly, getting personal guidance and feedback. They also get high-quality services supporting the studies to ensure smooth progression in their daily studies. (Laurea 2021f.)

## 2.2 Student journey and the study-related well-being services

The objective to provide student services is to is to help the students to progress in their studies and to offer support services that they can easily utilize. Their path from applying until graduating and becoming an alumni can be illustrated by the student`s study process map (Figure 2) that is portrayed from the viewpoint of the student services. (Kasurinen 2019, 10-11; Laurea 2019,11.)
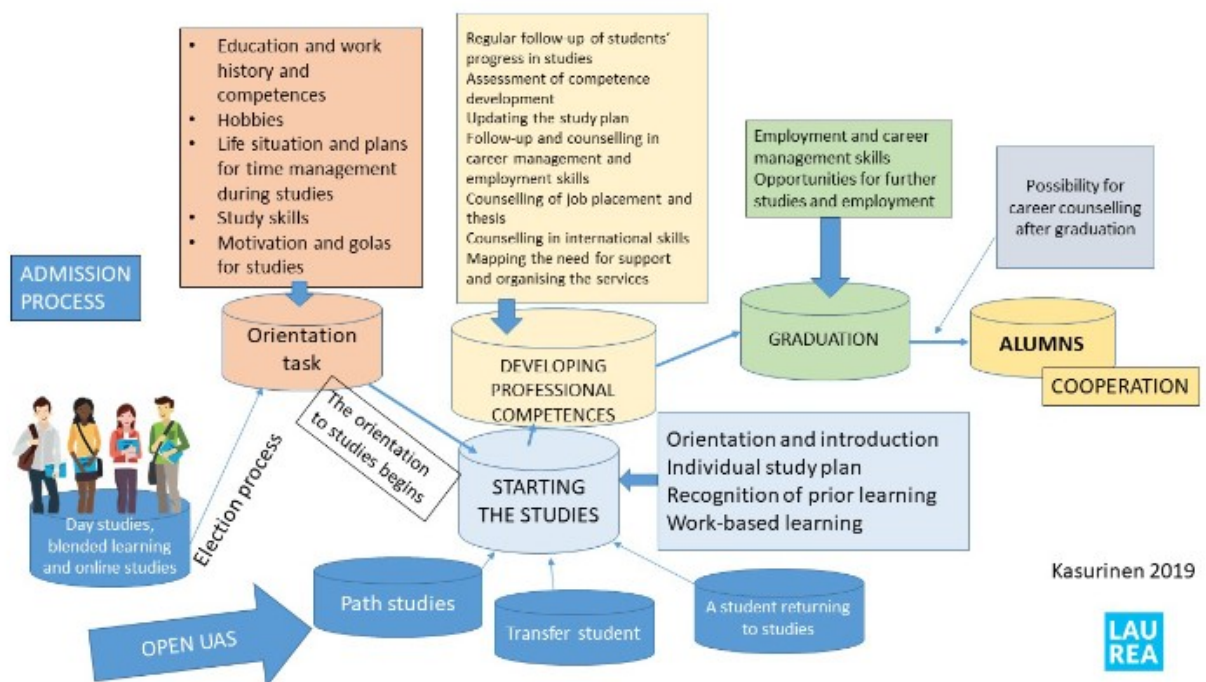


Figure 2: Student`s study process in the student services framework (Kasurinen 2019,11; Laurea 2019, 11)

Student well-being is a prerequisite of the ability to study and being able to progress on their student journey. Ability to study-model (Figure 3) concludes the most essential issues influencing to the study-related well-being. Ability to study is formed from the students' resources, study skills, study environment and teaching. Those factors are also partly overlapping and influencing to each other in many ways. (Kunttu & Huttunen 2009, 10-11; Kasurinen 2019, 21; Laurea 2019, 20)
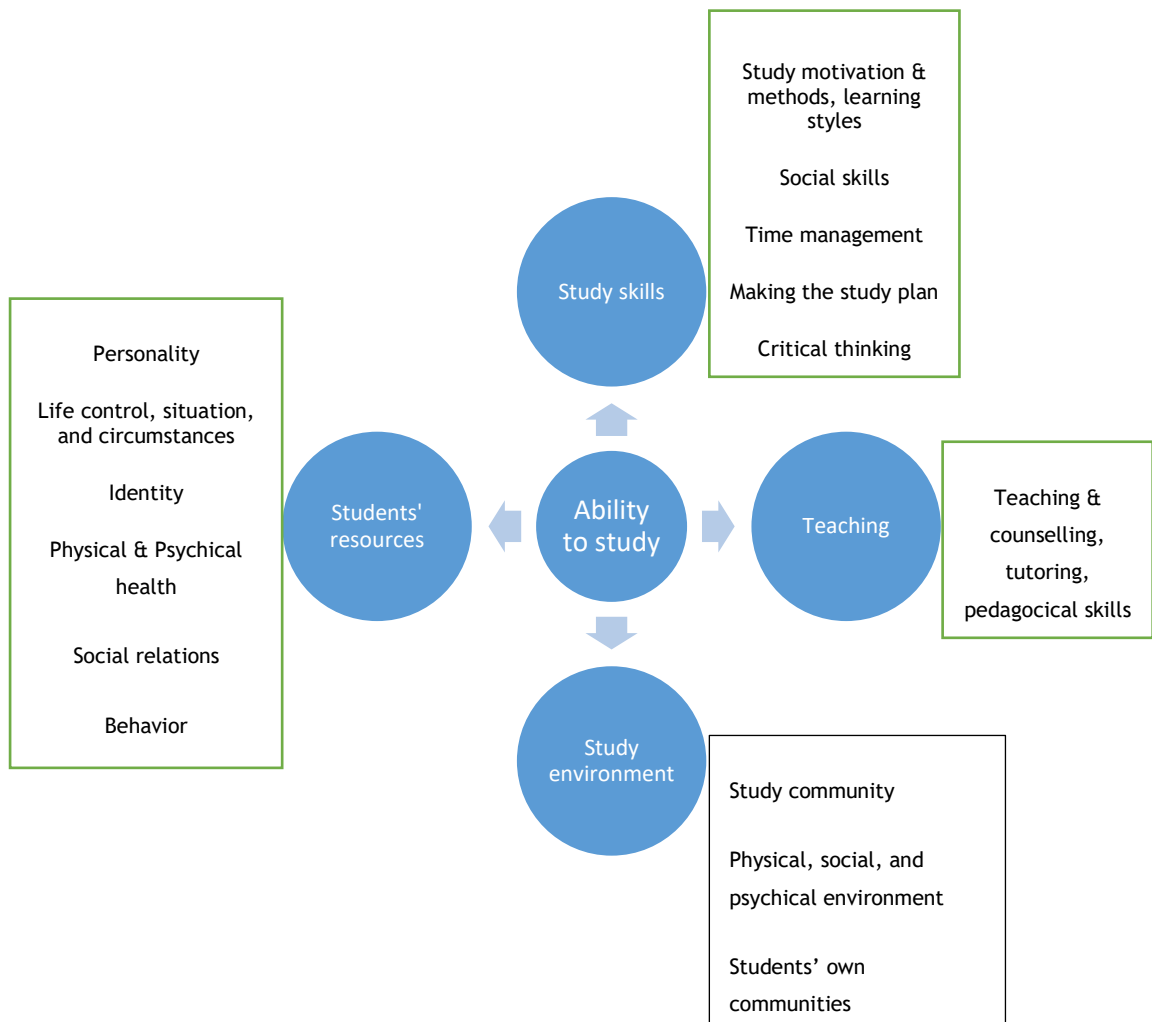
Figure 3: Factors affecting to ability to study (Kunttu & Huttunen 2009, 10-11; Laurea 2019, 20). Drawing by Kasurinen (2019, 22)

At Laurea, supporting the study-related well-being has been defined as a collective effort for everyone. Teachers and other staff members are aiming at that in their everyday work they acknowledge and support the well-being of students'. Every Laurea unit has a student well-being group whose goal is to promote studies and well-being of students'. In general, student well-being refers to an area in well-being that specifically supports studying and being a student. It includes an adequate level of competence, being in control and feeling good about studying. It also includes being flexible and having realistic impressions of the possibilities and prospects as a student. If there are difficulties, the student has an ability to cope with their problems within a reasonable amount of time without losing the sense of well-being. (Laurea 2021d.)

Laurea has an extensive service offering that is aiming at supporting study-related well-being, removing the barriers and blocks during the student journey. Service map for Laurea student (Figure 4) is a concrete tool that clearly visualizes service system enabling students seeking the right type of service according to their needs.

From the perspective of student, the student services should form seamless experience regardless on the fact who is providing the service or what is their educational background or

organization. It should be noted that the student is always the active party what it comes to their life and situation. Hence, the student is always included in the process of finding and planning different support measures. (Kasurinen 2019, 17-18; Laurea 2019, 17)

## Service Map for Laurea Student

**What kind of support do you need based on the CREAR survey?**
**You can always contact your tutor teacher or Pop-up Guidance**

### Studying

**Individual guidance and support**

- Special needs Teacher
- Student Social Councellor
- The Head of Students Affairs
- Study support teachers
- Library Personal guidance in searching for information

**Group support**

- Workshops for students writing their thesis
- Peer support groups

**Courses**

- Tools for Self-management 2 cr (TO00BR99)
- Improving Your Study Skills and Finding Your Strengths 5 cr (V1552)

### Time management & Planning

**Individual guidance and support**

- Special Needs Teacher
- Student Social Councellor
- Councelling psychologist

**Group support**

- Workshops in Event calendar
- Peer support in groups

**Courses**

- Tools for Self-management 2 cr (TO00BR99)

### Wellbeing

**Individual guidance and support**

- Councelling Psychologist
- Student Priest
- The Head of Students Affairs
- Student Healthcare FSHS

**Group support**

- Workshops in Event Calendar
- Laureamko Student Union and Campus Teams
- Laurea's other student unions are listed in Tuudo

**Courses**

- Stress Tolerance 5 cr (R0223)
- Tools for Self-management 2 cr (TO00BR99)

**Self-study materials and websites**

- Tools for Wellbeing
- Nyyti ry - Mental Wellbeing for Students
- FSHS Health Information

### Career management & Employment

**Individual guidance and support**

- Career counseling
- The Head of Students Affairs
- The International Services for those who are interested in studying abroad

**Group support**

- Career Services workshops and guides

Figure 4: Service Map for Laurea Student (Laurea 2021g; OMA OTE 2021b)

## 2.3 Introduction to OMA OTE-project

The OMA OTE-project of Laurea focuses on supporting the well-being of students' and the progress of their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the project is to strengthen students' experiences of life management and their own well-being. Additionally, the aim is to support the students in planning their studies. The project is implemented as a multi-stakeholder and multi-professional collaboration. (Laurea 2021h.)

The project is implementing the themes mentioned at the strategy of Laurea, such as utilizing service design and co-creation in its activities. Project has offered an opportunity also for the students to join and take part in the development work. OMA OTE has a project portfolio where anybody can view the progress and actions taken during the project. (OMA OTE 2021c.) As is said at the strategy of Laurea, openness creates mutual trust needed for successful co-creation and operation. OMA OTE-project is a good example on communicating openly about the project through the project portfolio, thus also engaging the members of the Laurea community to join creating new services in the form of co-creation.

The actions of the project are divided between different work packages on the basic, complementary, and strengthened levels (Figure 5). Additionally, there are also themes such as strengthening students' well-being and their agency, strengthening the communality, as well as considering the individuality and heterogeneity are joint themes for all the work packages. The project utilizes the existing study-related well-being services of Laurea, and the project has also launched several new services in 2021. (Laurea 2021h; OMA OTE 2021d.)

**Basic guidance, TP1**
- Develop new study contents as part of the studies related to career planning.
- Workshops on how to study remotely
- Making the wellbeing services more visible
- Personalized guidance needs, mapping those needs.

**Complementary guidance TP2**
- Online workshops and discussions
- Supporting the study wellbeing and progression of the studies.
- Sense of belonging is being strengthened

**Strengthened guidance, TP3**
- Tracking the students whose studies are not progressing
- Support and develop methods to help those students

**Coordinating the project, TP4**
- Communicating about the results of the project
- Following the effectiveness of the project.

Figure 5: The work packages of the OMA OTE-project (OMA OTE 2021d)

## 3    Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework by explaining the theories and the key concepts more thoroughly. At the end of the chapter, a synthesis created for the use of this research is being presented.

### 3.1    Service design

Service design is a concrete approach bringing deep understanding on customers, when businesses, or other organizations, are developing their services. One important aim of the service design is to make the organization more customer-centric. It can also be used on developing the processes of the organization as well as developing the physical and digital service environments. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 71-73.)

Service design can be viewed as having six core principles

1. Service design is human-centered. It is crucial to make sure that the needs and perspectives of the customers are in the very core, as new products, services, or processes are developed. There is a strong emphasizes on qualitative and ethnographic methods such as interviews and observing.
2. Participation and co-design are highlighted. People are partners engaged to dialogues through workshops, meetings, and conversations. By promoting creative freedom, insights and meaningful ideas will come into being.
3. Service design is communicated through service narratives. Service design is not just about understanding things, it is also about imagining preferred futures and means to get there.
4. Service design is iterative, exploratory and adaptative. Service design process has many iterative rounds including experiments of different kinds and tendency to adapt to different situations.
5. Service design is also including the material side of services. Services usually have material evidence, artifacts or touchpoints enabling certain experiences on a service journey.
6. Service design is holistic, complex, and multidimensional.

(Penin 2018, 150-154; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence & Schneider 2018, 26.)

Service design process often starts by understanding the needs of the users` or customers`. By understanding the needs and not just jumping into the solution, true innovations can be discovered. The general aim is to provide the customers the best possible solution which gives them the most value. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 14-15, 31.)

## 3.2 Service-dominant logic view on value creation

In the past, production and exchange of goods have been viewed as being the main components of business and economics. According to goods-dominant logic, company`s role is to create value in the market through a process of production and selling goods. Customer is separated from this process, only consuming whatever the company has produced. According to goods-dominant logic, company (producer) is the central economic actor that produces goods with having an intrinsic value. (Lusch et al. 2014, 7-8, 39-40.)

Service-dominant logic contradicts goods-dominant logic, as it argues that goods are not the basis of exchange. They are only acting as vehicles of a service provision. Service should be viewed as an application of competences, such as knowledge and skills (operant resources) by

one actor for the benefit of other. That is the underlying the basis of the exchange. This theory emphasizes actor to actor-approach (A2A) where businesses, organizations, stakeholders, and customers are defined as actors connected through a complex network called a service ecosystem. Actors are creating value mutually though the service exchanges. Service-dominant logic suggests that customer is always a co-creator of the value together with other actors. Value is not something one actor (such as business) can create and deliver to another actor (customer). Value is not something as such, it is always contextual, and is determined by the beneficiary. Company can only offer value propositions resulting co-creation of services and customer value. Service-dominant logic is a theory composed from different layers called axioms that are subdivided into further categories of foundational premises. They together explain the elements of service-dominant logic. (Lusch et al. 2014, 12, 15-16, 54, 161, 167-168.)

Service-dominant logic is composed from **four axioms (A)** that are further categorized in **ten foundational premises (FP)**. This is presented at Table 1.

| A1 | FP1 | Service is the fundamental basis of exchange |
|----|-----|-----------------------------------------------|
|    | FP2 | Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange |
|    | FP3 | Goods are a distribution mechanism for service provision |
|    | FP4 | Operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage |
|    | FP5 | All economies are service economies |
| A2 | FP6 | The customer is always a co-creator of value |
|    | FP7 | The enterprise can only make value propositions |
|    | FP8 | A service-oriented view is customer oriented and relational |
| A3 | FP9 | All economic and social actors are resource integrators |
| A4 | FP10 | Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary |

Table 1: Axioms and foundational premises of service-dominant logic (Lusch et al. 2014, 54)

Next, the foundational premises are explained briefly:

1. According to **foundational premises 1 (FP1)** all actors should be aware that the primary nature of their offering is exchange with other actors.
2. **Foundational premises 2 (FP2)** highlights that actors exchange their services for other services while money, goods and organizations are considered only to be as exchange vehicles or intermediates masking the fundamental basis of exchange.
3. **Foundational premises 3 (FP3)** argues that goods are service appliances that other actors have used their knowledge and skills to create.
4. **Foundational premises 4 (FP4)** states that competitive or strategic advantage is dependent on operant resources (knowledge and skills) of the appropriate type.
5. **Foundational premises 5 (FP5)** suggests that service and the operant resources they represent have always been the core of the economic activity.
6. **Foundational premises 6 (FP6)** emphasizes that value is always created in the use and integration of resources, value is not something that can be added.
7. **Foundational premises 7 (FP7)** portrays that actor (such as businesses) can offer potential value through value propositions. They cannot create value for other actors (such as customers) but only co-create it.
8. **Foundational premises 8 (FP8**) states that customers and other stakeholders should be engaged into a dialogue where their voice is becoming more clearly heard and understood.
9. **Foundational premises 9 (FP9)** suggests that resource integrators are actors that are creating resources by combining other resources. This means that for instance markets are unbounded since the extent of resource integration by human actors is unlimited and ever-expanding.
10. **Foundational premises 10 (FP10)** presents that every event of service exchange creates a distinct experience that is unique instance and assessment of value as each instance occurs in a different context and involving different combination of resources and actors. (Lusch et al. 2014, 58, 62-64, 68, 72, 74-75, 78.)

Service-dominant logic with its axioms can be viewed as a perfect match for service design since it provides a holistic approach on understanding service as a broad concept. Furthermore, service-dominant logic also discusses on value that is always uniquely determined by the beneficiary. Hence, both service design and service-dominant logic are placing the users or customers in the core of all activities. In this respect, understanding and empathizing the people using the services becomes the very essence in service development. (Manhaes 2018, 28-31.)

In the context of this research, education as well as study-related well-being services are seen as a service. Students are using the resources of Laurea (such as study units or well-

being services) for their own purposes. In its own part, Laurea can only make value propositions for student, it cannot create value for the student as such, as value is not something that can be produced and delivered. Laurea can invite the students engaging with it in the form of co-creation and utilizing its resources. It could be concluded that the students hire the higher educational institute to make progress towards their individual goals, that is for instance gaining knowledge, social connections, getting profession and utilizing well-being services while doing these tasks. Laurea can provide operant resources (such as staff members with certain type of knowledge) to help them in this process.

## 3.3    The changing nature of defining services

For many years services and products were categorized using the IHIP paradigm as services thought to be different from products and they were described by "that which is not a product". According to this paradigm, services they were used to be described as immaterial, heterogeneous, inseparable, and perishable (IHIP). Services are thought to be different from products as they are heterogeneous; service always changes according to the input the customer putting to the service. No actor can fully control the interaction between service provider and customers, since interpersonal relations between service personnel and customers are influencing on how the service is being experienced. Furthermore, service requires customer to be present as value is being created. Also, services cannot be stored or purchased; services need to be available whenever the customer needs them, and they also need to be able to adapt to the variation in the demand. (Morelli et al. 2021, 16-18.)

Morelli et al. contradicts this idea and proposes that services is a result of the combination of several factors such as humans, their knowledge and how humans experience the services. In addition, services are depending also on material components, such as objects, technologies, and physical locations. Services also have a material component. For instance, the core value provided by the school is immaterial, not material. Despite of that school is also a material place with buildings, tables and teaching materials, including also the people participating to knowledge production process. Additionally, Morelli et al. argues that the IHIP paradigm does not emphasize enough the nature of service as interactions between different actors. Value cannot be seen something as being passed from a producer to a consumer, but it is co-created in interactions. (Morelli et al. 2021, 16-18.)

3.4    Logical framework for value creation

Morelli et al. also introduces logical framework for value creation theory that builds highly upon the ideas presented in service-dominant logic. It is also expanding the IHIP paradigm. It is composed from three levels, and they together are defining an ecosystem related to the production of value. As services are being designed, all these three levels should be taken into consideration. (Morelli et al. 2021, 12.)

1) **Service as interaction:** Value is being co-created together by the service beneficiaries, such as customers, as well as other actors interacting with them. Value is produced when customer aggregates several resources that can be material or immaterial in their nature (objects, technology, services, people, spaces).  Service providers cannot deliver value but only offer value propositions to be aggregated by the customer in the moment and place of value creation. At this level, physical, technological, logical, and organizational structures (cards, phones, websites, procedures) are interaction devices supporting value creation. They mediate between actors and facilitate the development of value in specific time and context. It means that the designers of services and service providers are not actually designing services (value creation processes), but several interaction devises composed from physical, technological, logical, and organizational micro-structures facilitating the process of value creation. (Morelli et al. 2021, 19-20, 32, 35.)

2) **Service as infrastructure:** Services are organized as an open-ended supporter for the value creation processes. Service provider (or service designer) has only the role of creating the infrastructure for the value creation processes of the customer. This can be done by proposing a place, context, or time sequence for value creation. Duration of the process depends on how the customers are aggregating the resources at their disposal. Hence, the process duration is open-ended, it does not have a clear start and finish that could be described concluding the results in an easy format. As the value creation is defined by the customer, service provider does not have full control over the value provided. The customer controls the results gained by the service. (Morelli et al. 2021, 21-22, 23.)

3) **Service as systemic institution**: Previous levels do not happen in vacuum as they are always tied to the context of cultures, technical or social knowledge, regulations as well as physical and technical constraints. There are always systemic institutions shaping our society. This level is shaping innovations and changes in other levels. Broad changes in culture and society occurring in the service as a systemic institution level, are reflected to the value co-creation processes at the levels of service as interaction and infrastructure. (Morelli et al. 23-24).

Service design could play role in generating elements of change while having the potential to trigger larger systemic changes. It can be used to explore possible futures, generating visions, creating scenarios and strategies as promising initiatives. (Morelli et al. 23-24). Designers can contribute to large institutional changes by aggregating different components of a complex reality into consistent, credible, as well as desirable scenarios. Furthermore, service design can be used to understand how these changes will influence to the value creation processes. When defining future directions for the institutional change, it is necessary to have a clear view on the present. This is not always easy. As institutional systems are complex, designer should be able to map, interpret and highlight those critical issues that could be used as a handle to grab and modify such as a complex reality. (Morelli et al. 2021, 61-62.)

COVID-19 pandemic is a complex and possibly revolutionary change that is going to leave a deep footprint on the way society is being organized. It causes a change in relationships between people and how services are organized. It is also changing future technological, economic, and environmental policies. It is not possible to predict this change, however we could prepare ourselves to observe and interpret the change. When the services were designed at the pre-pandemic era, the focus was directed on the changes occurring at the levels of service as interaction and service as infrastructure. Furthermore, service innovation processes were based on the assumption that cultural, social, economic, and political landscape are changing at quite slowly and they follow certain evolutionary logic. Thus, designers have relatively low control on these. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has contradicted this way of thinking, as there has been profound and rapid change on cultures, societies, economics, and politics. When designing services at the pandemic era, also the level of services as systemic institutions needs to be taken into consideration to understand how the changes in that level are influencing on other levels. (Morelli et al. 2021, 88-89.)

To understand the change, it would be advisable to prepare multifocal lenses that are enabling us to gain a closer look on the changes nearby as well as looking further to observe how the world is being reorganized. The structure of the multifocal lenses enables us to focus on different scales and distances. All in all, logical framework for value creation can be used as an observation tool allowing interpretation and mapping different levels of reality amid the change. (Morelli et al. 2021, 88-89.)

As the theory of logical framework for value creation is applied to the context of Laurea (Figure 6), it is understood that students are aggregating the resources provided by Laurea for their own use. At the service as interaction level, they can use resources provided by Laurea to create value for themselves. This is done by interacting for instance with other students and using them as a source of information. They can also use knowledge of the Laurea employees. There can be several interaction devices such as the websites, intranet, or campus areas that are used in this process.

This all requires also that the level of service as infrastructure is included, since interaction needs a structure that it is acting upon. For instance, by organizing courses Laurea is offering a learning service where it creates and gathers up an infrastructure, where people are creating value for themselves. Certain place (study platform), context (course content) and time (certain timing) are elements at the infrastructure within the value is being created by the students to meet their own goals. Also, the study-related well-being services could be defined as being a service infrastructure that contains interactions with the employees while utilizing their immaterial resources, such as knowledge. This knowledge can be accessed communicating directly with the employees. Another option is that the employees store their knowledge to a digital platform that is utilized by the students on their own time (such as self-study materials or online courses done independently).
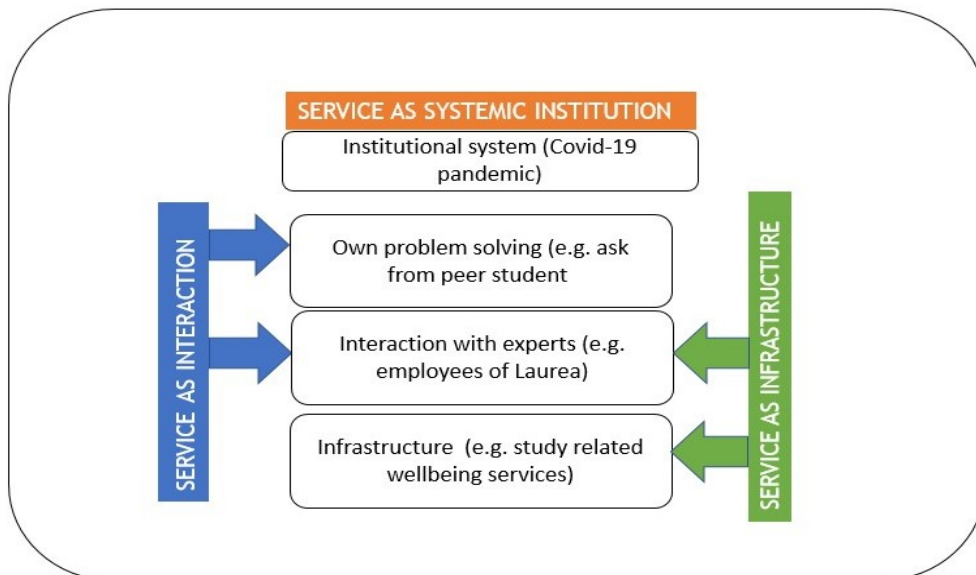


Figure 6: The value creation ecosystem around the study-related well-being services of Laurea (after Morelli et al. 2021, 12)

As was already mentioned, the pandemic is a complex systemic change that has changed cultures, societies, economics, and politics in unpredictable way. For instance, the way people are behaving at social situations has changed in a short period of time, as people are trying to keep distance and think about their personal boundaries to feel safe. During the pre-pandemic era services and studying were relied on being on a same physical space with other people while following certain cultural and social structures. However, this has changed since the pandemic started. As there has been changes on the service as systemic change level, those changes impact on how the levels of service as interaction and service as infrastructure are reorganized.

3.5    Value Proposition Design

Value Proposition Design can be used to organize information about what the customers want in a simple way. This makes the patterns of their value creation easily visible. Hence, it is easier to design value propositions and successful business models targeting directly to the customers` most important jobs, pains, and gains. It can be also used to avert wasting time with ideas that do not work. Thus, by applying Value Proposition Design, organization can avoid developing services that do not create any value for the customers. This saves resources and reduces risks. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, viii, ix, 6.)

Value Proposition Design can be used to invent new value propositions as well as improving existing ones. As existing value proposition is being improved, it can be done without radically changing or affecting the underlying business model. Improving can be motivated for instance to ensure or maintain fit between the Value Map and Customer Map. It can also be used to renewing outdates products and services.  Value propositions should be constantly kept under radar to keep the offerings relevant for the customers in changing situations. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, xxi, xx, 161.)

There are two intertwined tools included to Value Proposition Design. The Value Proposition Canvas (Figure 8) is part of the Business Model Canvas (Figure 7). The Business Model Canvas is a tool to describe on how organization creates, delivers, and captures value. The Value Proposition Canvas zooms into the details of two building blocks of the Business Model Canvas; value propositions and customer segments. The difference between the two are that the Business Model Canvas helps to create value for the business whereas the Value Proposition Canvas helps to create value for the customers. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, xv, xiii, xiv, xvi.)

Figure 7: The Business Model Canvas (Strategyzer 2021; Osterwalder et al. 2014, xvii)

In this research we focus on testing the existing value proposition of Laurea. Thus, the usage of Business Model Canvas is ruled out, since we want to understand the specific customer segment, their customer jobs as well as their pains and gains.

Understanding the customer`s perspectives is highly essential when designing great value propositions. It can be done on building on existing work with desk research, such as previous research reports and customer data. Another way is to talk to the customers in the form of interview. Third way is to observe the customers in the real situations to gain insights on how they behave. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 106.)

## 3.6    The Value Proposition Canvas

The Value Proposition Canvas has four separate parts. **Value Proposition** on the top left-hand corner describing the benefits the customers can expect from the service. **Customer Segment** on the top right-hand corner is a group of people a business is aiming at reaching and helping with a certain value proposition. **The Customer Profile** on the right-hand side can be used to clarify the customer understanding. **The Value Map** on the left-hand side can be used to describe how the organization intends to create value for that customer. Aim is to achieve fit

between the Customer Profile and the Value Map. Fit is achieved when the customers get excited about the value proposition. This usually happens when the organization addresses important jobs, alleviating extreme pains while creating essential gains that the customers care about. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 3, 42.)
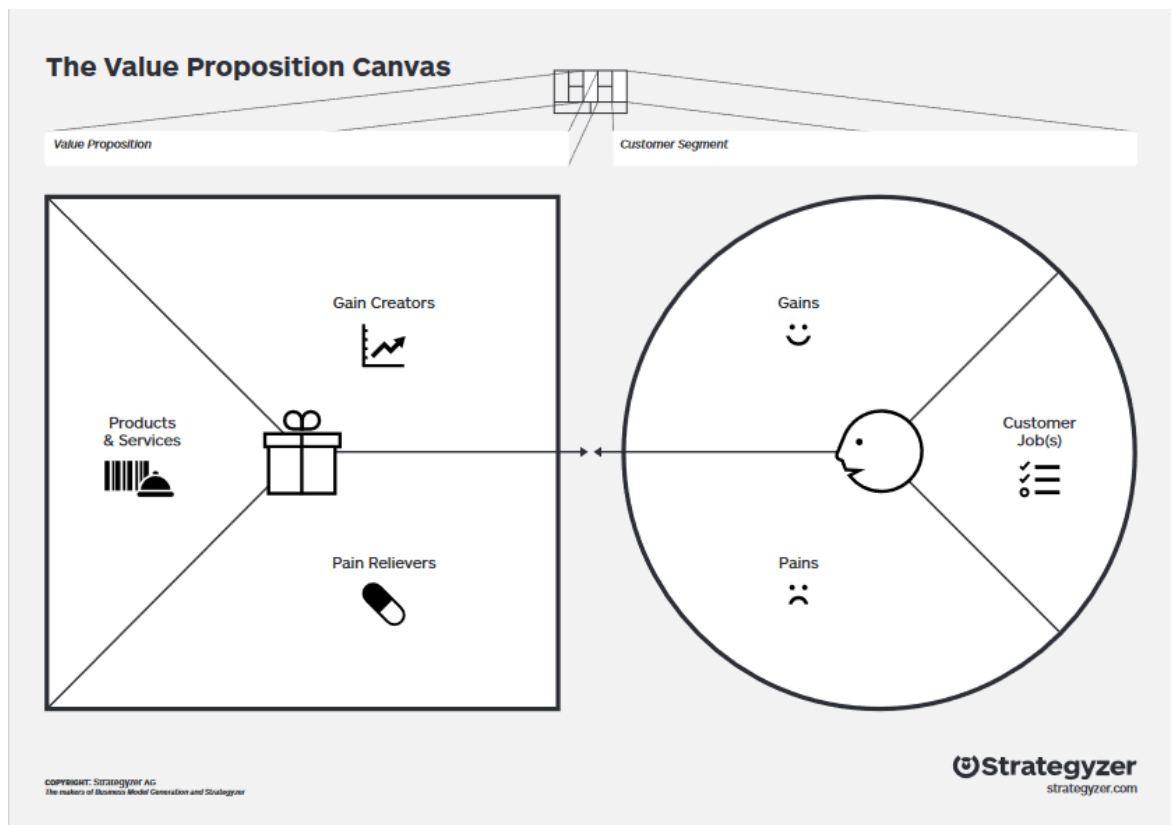


Figure 8: The Value Proposition Canvas (Strategyzer 2021; Osterwalder et al. 2014, 8-9)

**The Value Map** portrays the attributes of a certain value proposition in a business model on a structured manner. The Value Map can be broken further down into products and services organization offers, pain relievers, and gain creators. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 8.)

1) **Products and services** are listing everything organization has to offer. It is a list of all the products and services value proposition builds on. They help the customers complete their jobs or satisfy their needs. Products or services may be for instance tangible, intangible, digital or financial. It should be noticed that products and services create value only in relationship to a certain customer segment. They do not create value in absolute terms as they are always relative to the customers` jobs, pains, and gains. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 29, 38-39.)

2) **Pain relievers** are describing how products and services are relieving customer pains. They explicitly highlight how the organization intends to eliminate or reduce issues

annoying customer before, during or after they try to complete a job or preventing them from doing so. Pain reliever can be categorized being more or less valuable for the customers, thus it is important to differentiate between essential pain relievers and those ones that are nice to have, but not so necessary. Essential pain relievers are usually creating a lot of value for the customers. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 31.)

3) **Gain creators** are describing how products and services create customer gains. Also, they explicitly outline how the organization can produce outcomes and benefits that the customer expects or desires. This includes things such as functional utility, social gains, or positive emotions. The organization should be focusing on those that are relevant for the customers. Sometimes the division between pain relievers and gain creators is not the obvious and they may overlap. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 33.)

**The Customer Profile** part on the right can be utilized to understand and describe specific customer segment.

1) **Customer jobs** are something the customers are trying to get done in their lives. Not all jobs are equal or have the same importance. These jobs can be functional, such as performing or completing a specific task or solving a specific problem. The jobs can also be social jobs, such as gaining certain status. There are also personal or emotional jobs, such as feeling good or secure.

2) **Pains** are bad outcomes, risks, and obstacles when the customers are trying to accomplish their jobs. Pain can annoy customer before, during and after as they are trying to get a job done. Pains can be functional, social, emotional, or auxiliary (something is annoying). Pain severity can range from extreme to moderate.

3) **Gains** are outcomes the customers wish to achieve, or they can also be concrete benefits the customers are seeking from the service or product. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 7-9, 14-17.)

Aim of the model is to achieve a fit between the Value Map and the Customer Profile. This is accomplished when the products and services produce pain relievers and gain creators matching one or more of the jobs, pains and gains that are important to the customer. The general aim is to choose the best value propositions that address those mattering most to the customers and do so extremely well. (Osterwalder et al. 2014, 9, 38.)

In this research, the Value Proposition Canvas is used as a tool to gain customer insights on a particular customer segment of Laurea, that is international bachelor level degree students. It is used to elaborate what they are trying to achieve while they are at Laurea, as well as what are the pains and gains of their journey that have either hindered or made their journey smoother during the pandemic. The Value Map is used to analyze what type of well-being

related services these students have used, gains they have had from those services and how those services have eased their pains.

## 3.7    The importance of collecting the customer insights

At this complex situation brought by the pandemic, it is important engage with the customers and users of the services to receive customer insights. Their value creation processes may have changed compared to the pre-pandemic era. By conducting user research, the service provider can reduce risks and allocate resources on this changed situation. Research and gained data on user needs that have been conducted during the pre-pandemic era may be outdated and are not valid anymore. There can be behavioral and psychological shifts as well as changes in the user groups (Figure 9). Additionally, there may be regional effects and temporal effects caused by the pandemic. By understanding these layers, the businesses can keep up with the change and start building capabilities on being flexible and agile while making new innovations. (Moran 2020.)

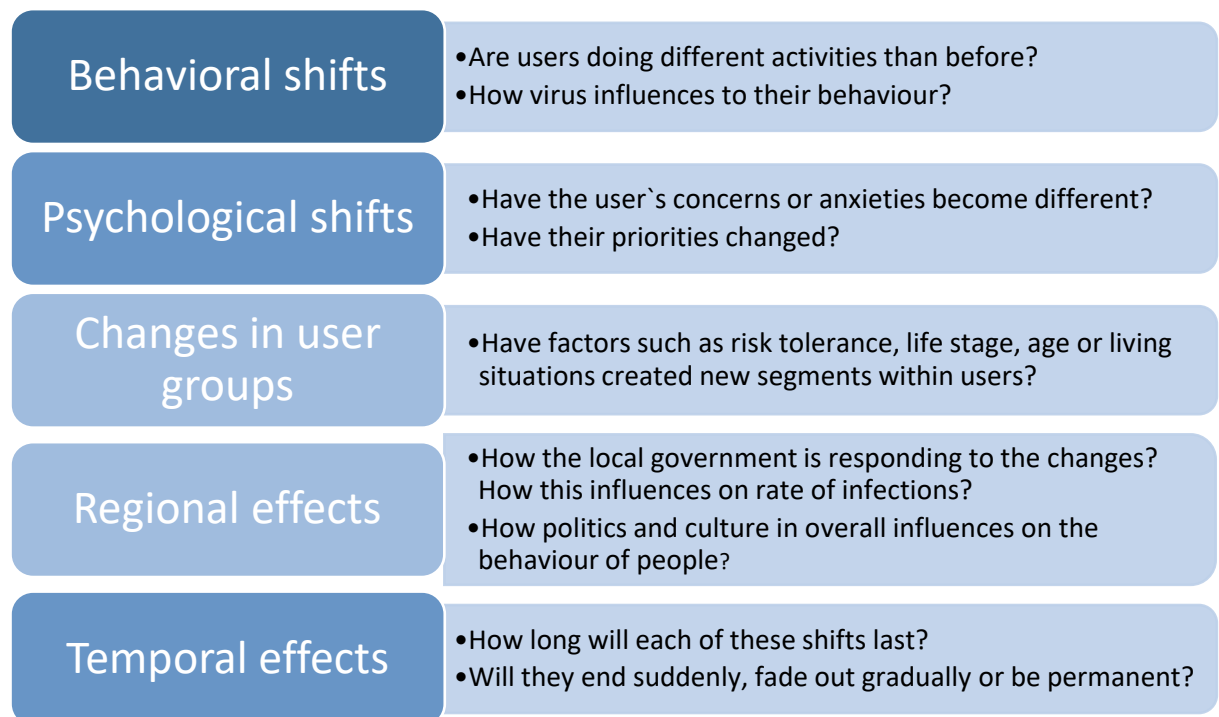| Behavioral shifts | •Are users doing different activities than before?<br>•How virus influences to their behaviour? |
| --- | --- |
| Psychological shifts | •Have the user`s concerns or anxieties become different?<br>•Have their priorities changed? |
| Changes in user groups | •Have factors such as risk tolerance, life stage, age or living situations created new segments within users? |
| Regional effects | •How the local government is responding to the changes? How this influences on rate of infections?<br>•How politics and culture in overall influences on the behaviour of people? |
| Temporal effects | •How long will each of these shifts last?<br>•Will they end suddenly, fade out gradually or be permanent? |

Figure 9: Reviewing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the users (Moran 2020)

Aim of this research is to gather insights from the chosen student segment and understand their problems and needs during the pandemic. This is to provide them meaningful resources that are going to support their study-related well-being.

3.8    Safe space, social distancing, and personal boundaries

The pandemic has also redefined our thinking about boundaries in many ways. Prior the pandemic, social distancing meant the distance between different groups. After the pandemic started, it social distancing was associated with the space between the individuals. Emphasis on safe space and personal boundaries are indicating that social distancing has become increasingly individuated and privatized form and it is not so much concerned on the space between different groups. (Furedi 2020, 392-393.)

Szasz developed concept inverted quarantine in 2007, which contrasts the notion of a traditional quarantine that seeks to isolate disease and a sick person while reducing the likelihood that others will be infected. Inverted quarantine means that people are isolating themselves from the harms threatening them. The assumption is that the environment is toxic, whereas the individuals are healthy. Healthy people isolate themselves and are installing barriers or fences while withdrawing behind or inside the fences or barriers. In inverted quarantine, meaning of safe space is emphasized. The purpose of it is to protect people from things coming out of the boundary. (Szasz 2007, 4-5.)

During the COVID-19 pandemic the terms social distancing, safe space and setting up personal boundaries have become a normal vocabulary for us all. There is an implication that certain spaces are safe (such as home) while others outside are regarded as being unsafe where there is a risk of become contracted with the virus (such as public spaces). Inverted quarantine can be thus seen to have a safe space and have security against the world with dangers. (Furedi 2020, 393-394.) Social distancing is about setting spatial limits and boundaries. Setting up personal boundaries is a way to avoid risks and handle uncertainty. It is also having psychic distance between oneself and others. Social distancing due to the pandemic have changed our ways of thinking about safe spaces and personal boundaries in many ways. (Furedi 2020, 395-396.)

3.9    The digital and physical worlds becoming more intertwined

The pandemic has also changed our way of thinking about the boundary between the digital and physical world. Already prior the pandemic, there have been a growing number of people who had been living in a hybrid world where the boundaries between physical (actual) and digital (electronic) had been fading. Internet and digital tools are allowing collaboration and communication despite the distance and time. At this hybrid world, identity, experiences, and life possibilities have begun to integrate physical and virtual aspects of existence. Things that were sometimes categorized as "virtual" are now considered to be real and what once used to be categorized as "part of the real life" are now integrated with characteristics we

thought once belonged to virtual world. Hence, the dualism between "virtual" and "real life" is becoming obsolete. For instance, virtually occurring things in social media are also part of our physical life influencing to our social relationships. Virtual worlds are real in the sense that they are actual, electronic places that continue to exist and operate in dynamic way when participants leave. (Jordan 2009, 181-182.)

## 3.10   Synthesis created for this research

In this research, Laurea is being seen as a service provider whereas the students are customers of Laurea.  We focus on SDL axiom 2 and its foundational premises in the sense that the students of Laurea are creating value for themselves. Laurea cannot provide value as such but can support the value creation processes by offering resources (services as interaction and services as infrastructure where knowledge and skills of the employees are being embedded). Students are integrating the resources of Laurea for their own purposes. Knowledge and skills of Laurea staff can be viewed as being an operant and immaterial resource that are being materialized in the services, that are used by the students. Value gained by the services cannot be defined by Laurea, as it can only offer value proposition that the students may use when they are creating value for themselves.  By using the study-related well-being services the students are removing the blocks on their student journey as they are aiming to learn, becoming a professional in their chosen field and eventually graduate. To be able progress on this journey, they need to feel good about themselves.

As the encounters between people have been restricted due to the pandemic, the notions of social distancing, safe space and personal boundaries have shifted, as it is important to keep certain physical and psychical distance to other people. Also, the divisions between the physical and virtual world have changed due to restrictions, as the students have used a lot more digital tools and platforms during their studies.

Amid the change occurred by the pandemic, it is important for Laurea to get access to the world of the students' by collecting customer insights on them to be able to offer services that are useful for them while avoid providing services that the students do not see any value. In this research, the Value Proposition Canvas is used as a tool to gather insights by understanding the pains, gains, and customer jobs of the chosen student segment. It is also used as a tool to discover what study-related well-being services they have utilized as well as how these services have relieved their pains and created gains. Additionally, value proposition of Laurea is being tested to understand if Laurea has really been there for them during the pandemic.

Therefore, it is argued at this thesis that service design framework while utilizing its methods and tools in the context of Laurea, could be used to understand changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult to understand and interpret the changes since the pandemic does not follow any routes or patterns that can be anticipated. As service design is iterative, multi-dimensional, exploratory and adaptative, it is intriguiging how service design could be used to help observe and interpret the change. Furthermore, service design offers an opportunity to bring the students in the core of the development work, as customer-centricity is highly emphasized by the service design framework.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Service Design | Service-dominant logic | Value Proposition Canvas |
| Logical framework for value creation | Social distancing, safe space | Virtual and physical worlds |
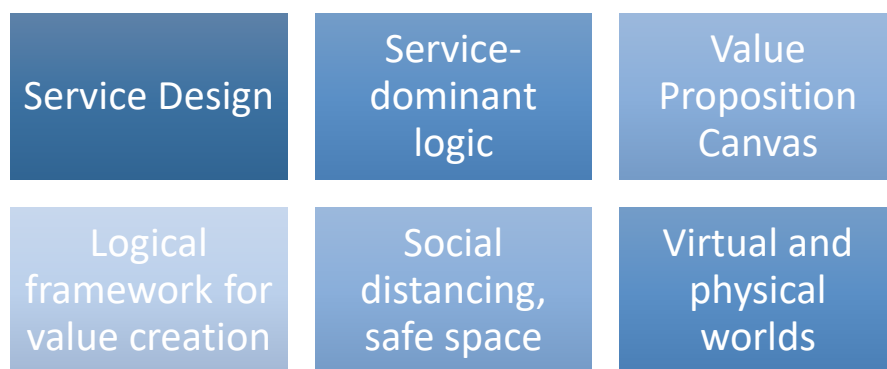
Figure 10: Theoretical framework

## 4 Research approach and methods

### 4.1 Overall description of the research

This research is qualitative in its nature and the aim to understand the experiences of the students amid the pandemic. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, 10) are defining qualitative research as analyzing experiences of individuals or groups. Qualitative research examines certain context and specific case, not aiming at generalizations. Majority of the research is based on text and writing. The route usually takes from transcripts to descriptions, interpretations and finally to present the findings.

Within the qualitative research, this research is defined more closely to be as an empirical case study. Aim of the case study is to produce new information from the topic supporting the research-oriented development process. Case study can be used when there is a need to understand deeply about the situation within the organization and the aim is for instance to solve a problem or produce development ideas through the research. Different methods can

be utilized to receive holistic and profound understanding of the situation. (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 37, 51-52.)

According to Järvensivu & Törnroos (2010, 102-102), to moderate constructionism approach can be utilized when conducting a case study. Moderate constructionism argues that there are multiple angles to knowledge and truth, as universal truth does not exist. Truth is always seen as local and community-bounded, that is created and validated through dialogue in different communities. The community in this case can be understood as being informants and the researcher who investigates them. These are separate, yet intertwined communities and one can approach reality through either or both. Aim of the research is to create new and usable knowledge through multiple viewpoints of truth. Active interviewing treats the interview as a social encounter where knowledge is collectively constructed by the interviewer and the informant. In moderate constructionism, research logic is based on abduction that is an approach to knowledge production situated in the middle between induction and deduction. Abduction accepts existing theory that might be improving the theoretical strength of case analysis. It also allows a less theory-driven research process compared to deduction, enabling data-driven theory generation.

This research is relying on modern constructionism since it is understood that there is not one truth or reality that can be gained or accessed through the data gathering. Knowledge has been constructed during questionnaire and interview that are social encounters. Aim of the research has been to create new and useful knowledge that can be utilized by the actors working with the study-related well-being. This research is abductive in the sense that the research is based on theoretical framework, however that has not actively influenced on the research process itself.

Furthermore, triangulation has been taken into consideration when conducting this research. Triangulation (or a multi-method approach) is referring to the situation that different research methods are being combined. Aim at triangulation is to increase credibility and scope of the research. There are different types of triangulation categories. For instance, theory triangulation means that different theories or approaches are combined when interpreting the results. Material triangulation means that different types of research materials are combined. This can be done for instance observing, conducting interviews or questionnaires. (Vilkka 2021, 58.)

This research aims at applying a multi-method approach in the form of theory and material triangulation to increase credibility of the research. Theoretical framework is being composed from several elements. Additionally, different types of research materials were gathered utilizing desk research, semi-structured questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and participant observation (Figure 11). The questions asked at the semi-structured questionnaire

as well as semi-structured interview can be viewed from the Appendix 1, where they are presented on a joint table together with the research questions.
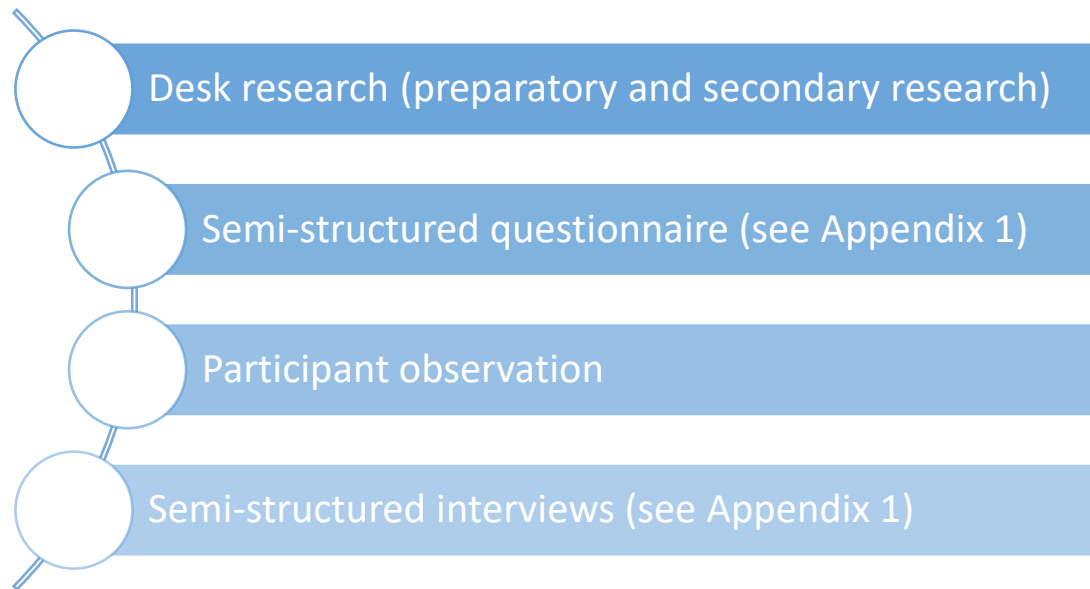
Desk research (preparatory and secondary research)

Semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1)

Participant observation

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1)

Figure 11: Research methods

## 4.2 Desk research

The thesis project was started in mid-April 2021 as the cooperation with the OMA OTE-project was agreed upon. Several ideation sessions were organized on Teams with the thesis writer and OMA OTE staff, as well as other Laurea staff members to discuss about the topic and the scope of the research. Furthermore, the thesis writer participated several meetings that were organized by OMA OTE-project to discuss the measures and activities that should be taken within the OMA OTE-project. The role of the thesis writer was more to observe and not to participate in active discussion. At the same time, desk research phase was started to understand the topic better. This phase lasted from April 2021 until July 2021 (Figure 1).

Desk research is one research method that is used to collect data. Desk research can be categorized into preparatory research and secondary research. Preparatory research is about digging deeper into an organization, industry, or similar products. Also, it can also include doing online searches, browsing through certain keywords as well as discovering academic research on a certain topic. Preparatory research concentrates on finding the right questions to ask during the research. As a result of using this method can be for instance a summary of text, collection of photos, screenshots, and videos. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 117, 118.) Secondary research means that existing secondary data is utilized. This can be information

collected for other projects or purposes. All in all, desk research should always be the starting point of a research process to avoid reinventing the wheel again. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 118.)

This research was started in April 2021 with both preparatory as well as secondary research. At preparatory research it was important to understand my client. What is Laurea and OMA OTE about? It was important to understand Laurea from the organizational point of view. This was done by reading the strategy of Laurea, browsing the Laurea website, and carefully read the project portfolio of OMA OTE. Also, it was crucial to discuss with the employees of Laurea to get insights on how the study-related well-being theme and the services organized around it look like from their point of view.

Furthermore, secondary research was conducted during April-August 2021. Extensive amount of time was used to get an understanding what does study-related well-being mean and what are the theories and concepts connected with the topic. Finnish as well as foreign academic research done about study-related well-being was read. A lot has been written about the topic prior the pandemic, and number of scientific articles were found that were written also during the pandemic. Additionally, there have been many questionnaires and surveys conducted in Finland about the study-related well-being during the pandemic, as was mentioned in Chapter 1. These results were read carefully. Those results were utilized to narrow down the topic and to get ideas what type of themes should be concentrated during the research.

4.3 Semi-structured questionnaire

The project manager of OMA OTE proposed in the beginning of June 2021 that the project would be interested knowing more about the international bachelor level degree students of Laurea and how Laurea could improve and develop the study-related well-being services for this student segment. It was decided that the exchange students as well as master students were not to be focused on in this research. The chosen segment is interesting since their background is highly versatile.

At this point, also the student social counsellor of Laurea was engaged to the process in the form of ideating around the topic and providing useful information about the study-related well-being in general. It was agreed that the data gathering could be conducted during the study unit of "Improving Your Study Skills and Finding Your Strengths" that was organized at Laurea Tikkurila campus during autumn semester 2021. This is an elective study unit for the bachelor level students of Laurea aiming at minimizing barriers in the study success,

improving study motivation, time management and studying skills, among other things. The study unit is hosted by the student social counsellor and the special needs teacher of Laurea.

It was long unclear what the safety guidelines would be for the semester, hence it was challenging to plan how the material could be collected. As it was decided that bachelor level students will gradually return the campus and have contact teaching, it became clear that the data gathering could be conducted during the course unit. As the material collection started, the students had not been at campus participating in contact teaching for 1.5 years as contact teaching was cancelled in mid-March 2020. The other option to conduct the research would have been to do everything online, as the study unit would have been held online.

All in all, the empirical part of the research was divided in two parts. First part of the empirical part was conducted at the study unit at the end of August 2021 as the thesis writer visited the study unit and class at Tikkurila campus. The research started with a small scale presentation that was given during a lesson of the study unit. The thesis writer introduced OMA OTE- project for the students as well as the themes related to study-related well-being and service design principles. Also, research and ethical guidelines such as anonymity, confidentiality and that the participating in the research would be completely voluntary, were introduced.

After the presentation the students answered to the semi-structured questionnaire about the study-related well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. They wrote their answers to the questions on pen and paper using their own expressions and words. The questions that were asked from the informants can be read from the Appendix 1.

According to Hague, Hague & Morgan (2013, 107-108) there are three different types of questionnaires: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured is meant for managing large amount of data in quantitative research, whereas the other types of questionnaires are used for qualitative research. Unstructured questionnaire is allowing respondents to answer in their own way, there is much flexibility on the structure and in the order of questions. Semi-structured questionnaire is a mixture of closed and open-format questions. Open questions aim at gathering responses that have usually been collected exactly as phrased by the respondents. In closed questions respondents can for instance choose an answer from a list.

Semi-structured questionnaire used in this research included both open and closed-format questions. Most part of the questionnaire was composed asking open questions where the respondents could freely write their experiences, opinions, and feelings in their own words. In addition, part of the questionnaire included closed questions in the form of a list which presented study-related well-being services of Laurea. It was requested that the students

would choose which services they had used during the pandemic and what services they would be interested using in the next 6 months.

Semi-structured questionnaire was drafted using the Value Proposition Canvas as a tool to gather up insights from their customer jobs, pains, and gains during the pandemic. The value proposition of Laurea was also tested with the questions. Getting customer insights directly from the students that were written on paper by themselves in full sentences was good idea because it was easier to analyze and code the answers. One aim of semi-structured questionnaire was also to offer further ideas on how the semi-structured interviews could be framed and what would be the themes that should be understood better.

It was important to follow the health safety precautions of Laurea in the classroom while performing data gathering. It was mandatory to wear facemasks at campus and conduct social distancing. This also influenced also on the manner the data gathering was conducted. If the research would have been conducted in different circumstances, it would have taken different format. This would have included applying more co-creational elements such as moving around the classroom using for instance post-it notes. However, in this case everybody had their own paper and pen, and they were seated on their own seats.

Table 2 presents background information of the students participating to the semi-structured questionnaire to get an understanding about their profiles.

| Participant ID | Gender | Age | Study branch | Started studies |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | F | - | Nursing | 2020 |
| A2 | F | 23 | Nursing | 8/2020 |
| A3 | F | - | Nursing | 2020 |
| A4 | M | 34 | Social Studies | 2019 |
| A5 | F | 30 | Nursing | 1/2021 |
| A6 | F | 37 | Nursing | 1/2021 |
| A7 | F | - | Nursing | 1/2021 |
| A8 | F | 40 | Nursing | 2021 |
| A9 | F | 35 | Nursing | 8/2020 |
| A10 | M | 25 | Nursing | 2020 |
| A11 | F | 34 | Nursing | 1/2021 |
| A12 | F | 33 | Nursing | 2020 |

Table 2: The profiles of the students' participating to semi-structured questionnaire

4.4    Participant observation

In addition, participant observation was conducted during the lesson where the semi-structured questionnaire was conducted.  Participant observation is a method where people that are being observed are aware that the researcher is present and that they are currently being under observation. During the participant observation it is essential to observe not only what people are doing, by interpreting their body language and gestures, but also what they are not doing. This includes for instance ignoring instructions. (Stickdorn, Lawrence, Hormess, & Schneider 2018, 26-27.)

Participating to the lesson at campus and seeing the students in person, provided many interesting insights about the experiences of the students' during COVID-19. As the teachers of the study unit gave a small lecture prior the semi-structured questionnaire, there were interesting signals to be noticed.  As it was first week of the semester, there was a pre-assumption that the students would have been more excited about returning to campus, seeing other students and that there would have been more social interactions. However, it became soon obvious that the students could not concentrate to the lesson due to their mobile phones. It was observed that when they tried to listen to teachers as well as when they took part in the questionnaire, they had constant tempt to grab their mobile phones. This was notified also by the teachers as they said that the students should be mentally present during the classroom situation and try not to multitask.

It was remarkable that there was clear contradiction on how they behaved and the way they answered to the questionnaire as well as the interview questions. Almost all the students said that they are really tired of studying online and being in remote teaching. This had caused them many issues related to study-related well-being. However, as contact teaching began and they were able to enter the campus, they were not mentally present at the classroom due to divided attention caused by the mobile phones. This sparked an idea that there is disconnection between the physical and digital worlds that is causing tension of some kind. When analyzing the materials, it was noticeable that many of the students had also problems in concentrating and time management. Therefore, being online and using digital devices was one theme that was further explored during the semi-structured interviews to understand how they have influenced to the study-related well-being of the informants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 4.5    Semi-structured interview

Interviews within the qualitative research are aiming at understanding the world from the subjects` viewpoint and unfolding the meanings the people are experiencing. Interview can be defined as being a specific type of conversation where knowledge is being produced through the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. It does not aim at quantification as understanding is done with words, not numbers. The interviews should be recorded since recordings are way to capture all verbal interactions between the researcher and the participants. (Kvale et al. 2009, 14, 28,108.)  In semi-structured interview the questions are similar for all the interviewees, and they can answer the questions in their own words. There are no certain predefined alternatives on how to answer. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 47.)

After semi-structured questionnaire, the research continued with semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted during September-October 2021 with the same students who participated the questionnaire. There were supposed to be all together 11 interviews, however six of the students cancelled their participation on a last minute. Hence, the remaining five interviews were conducted either online on Teams or at Tikkurila campus of Laurea. Interviews conducted at campus were recorded on a portable recorder and online interviews were recorded on Teams.

Table 3 presents background information of the students participating to semi-structured interviews to get an understanding about their profiles. The questions that were asked during the interviews are presented in Appendix 1.

| Participant ID | Gender | Age | Study branch | Moved to Finland due studies | Started studies | Interview conducted |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B1 | F | - | Nursing | No | 2020 | At campus |
| B2 | F | - | Nursing | No | 2020 | On Teams |
| B3 | F | 35 | Nursing | No | 8/2020 | On Teams |
| B4 | F | 33 | Nursing | No | 2020 | On Teams |
| B5 | M | 34 | Social Studies | No | 2019 | At campus |

Table 3: The profiles of the students' participating to semi-structured interview

The interviews lasted approximately 20-40 minutes, depending how much the interviewee wanted to share their thoughts. The questions were asked at the same order in all the interviews. The questions were sent for them one week prior the interview by e-mail that they would have an opportunity to read them through before the interview.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research has four research questions. These research questions have directed and defined the direction of the research along the way. According to Kvale et al. (2009, 72) when planning the interview, research questions should be broken down to interview questions. It would be important to notice that the research questions

cannot be presented as such during the interview. They should be made to more concrete. Answers for each research question can be found by presenting multiple similar questions during the interview. It is preferrable to build up a table including the research questions as well as the questions that are asked from the participants during the interview.

As is suggested by Kvale et al., research questions, as well as questions presented during the semi-structured questionnaire and the semi-structured interview are presented in a joint table in Appendix 1. Aim of doing so was to provide credibility and accuracy to the research material as well as providing versatile viewpoints for the research questions.

By the end of the data gathering, there were three types of data sets that were to be analyzed: the semi-structured questionnaire where the students had written on paper using their own expressions and words. The interviews were carefully listened and transcribed into text. Additionally, the semi-structured questionnaire included closed-format questions where the respondents could choose the appropriate answers from the selection of choices related to the study-related well-being services of Laurea. This was handled as another data set. Furthermore, notes about the participant observation were also combined with these data sets.

## 4.6   Ethical considerations

There are seven research stages that each have their own ethical viewpoints to be considered (Kvale et al. 2009, 41-42).

1) **Thematizing stage:** The purpose of an interview study should be improving the human situation that are being studied.
2) **Designing stage**: Securing confidentiality and obtain the subjects` informed consent participating at the study.
3) **Interviewing stage:** Taking account the consequences for the participants as they are taking part on the interaction during the interview, for instance being under stress due to the interview.
4) **Transcription stage:** The confidentiality of the interviewees should be secured and made sure that transcribed text is loyal to their words and expressions.
5) **Analysis stage:** How thoroughly the interviews can and should be analyzed while staying true to the informants.
6) **Verification stage:** It is in the responsibility of the researcher to report knowledge that is as secured and verified as possible.

7) **Reporting stage:** During the reporting about the research, it is essential to make sure that the confidentiality is being kept and think the consequences of the published report causing to the informants.

In this research, these steps were meticulously followed. This research started with the thematizing stage. The starting point for the whole research was that the research is aiming at developing the study-related well-being services of Laurea and particularly understand how Laurea could better offer services for this student segment. At the designing stage, it was carefully considered that the research would be conducted in a manner that would secure confidentiality. As the research material was collected, the respondents were informed that participating at this research would be completely voluntary, anonymous and they have right to cancel their participation any time. It was aimed that the research situation would have a calming and friendly atmosphere where the respondents would feel good about participating. At the transcription stage it was carefully considered how the analyzing with the grounded theory could be done that the transcripts would stay trueful for the students' own words and expressions. At the verification stage, when writing the thesis, it was made sure that the reporting is based on theoretical framework as well as data gathered during the process. At reporting stage, it was emphasized that the research is based on data that is rightfully reported without revealing identity of the respondents.

5    Data analysis with the grounded theory

Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013, 17-18) are presenting that the grounded theory that can be utilized as the materials gathered by qualitative research are analyzed. It portrays the connections between data, emerging concepts, and the grounded theory in the end. Their approach is on the inductive concept development. There are two underlying thoughts in the theory. Firstly, Gioia et al. argue that the organizational world is socially constructed. Secondly, people functioning in organizations are aware what they are trying to accomplish, and they can explain their thinking, intentions, and activities. When research is conducted, it is important to understand informants` experiences on the subject. It should be noticed that at grounded theory there are no predetermined constructs or theories that are used to understand or explain the experiences. The voice of informants` is to be emphasized in data gathering as well as in analysis and reporting phase. Hence, by following this approach there is an opportunity to discover new concepts, not just to follow the existing ones. Consequently, this approach links together data, and the new concepts with high-quality qualitative research. (Gioia et al. 2013, 17-18.)

According to Gioia et al. there are three phases that are to be conducted when analyzing the collected data. The phases are called **1st order, 2nd order analysis and 2nd order aggregate dimension.**

1)  **On 1st order analysis:** The material is understood by reading it through several times. This phase is being conducted as the analyzing starts. Informant terms, codes and categories are emerging as the researcher becomes more familiar with the material. This phase may be confusing since there is high number of elements and details that are to be discovered. At this phase, abstraction level is usually quite low.

2)  **On 2nd order analysis:** At this phase, similarities and differences between the categories are slowly emerging. The number of different categories is reduced. The categories are given labels or phrasal descriptors, while discovering the patterns and structures from them. It is essential to pay attention if there are themes and concepts helping to describe and explain the phenomena that is researched. At this phase, the abstraction level starts to be higher as researcher-centric themes, concepts and dimensions are utilized.

3)  **On 2nd order aggregate dimension**: The number of categories and concepts are to be reduced at this stage as theoretical saturation point is reached. This phase includes abstract theoretical insights needed for the academical research. (Gioia et al. 2013, 18-20.)

The advantage using the grounded theory is that it provides a structured manner analyzing and presenting the data, terms and themes when doing qualitative research. This increases transparency and credibility towards the research. The informants` experiences are not forced into some categories that would have been decided before hands as the aim is to form concepts and theory utilizing the informants' way of seeing the world. It is essential to capture the informants` experiences in theoretical terms, resulting in grounded theory model and showing the relationship between occurring concepts describing the phenomena. Additionally, using the grounded theory makes it clear how significant data-to-theory connections are formed. Goal of the grounded theory is not to have a static data structure but to build a vivacious and inductive model grounded on data. (Gioia et al. 2013, 20, 22.)

In this research, the phases belonging to grounded theory were followed when analyzing the material collected from the semi-structured questionnaire as well as semi-structured interviews. The research material that was in textual format was collected to the affinity wall of Miro as the aim was to get a holistic understanding on the gathered material (Appendices 2 and 3). According to Martin & Hannington, affinity diagrams are useful when capturing research-backed insights, concerns, and observations. This can be done by placing insights, concerns, and observations on individual sticky notes on affinity diagram (such as Miro). This helps clustering units of analysis to derive and name those categories by themes.

Hence, design implication of each can be fully considered on its own. Notes can be clustered based on affinity, forming research-based themes. (Martin & Hanington 2019, 12-13.) It was convenient to analyze the material by Miro as the entire material could be visually seen at once. Miro and grounded theory work well together since the platform enables the usage of sticky notes in a structured manner, making it easier to analyze the material and to discover concepts, categories, and patterns.

As the analysis started in Miro, the material from the semi-structured questionnaire and interviews were placed on separate tables (Appendices 2 and 3). Questions asked at the questionnaire and interviews were placed on one section on each table.

At this point, it was decided that the material should be coded (Appendix 4). Coding was used since it was easy to conduct coding by utilizing different colored sticky notes found from Miro while at the same time gaining visual understanding on the material. According to Ojasalo et al. (2014, 141-143) coding the interview can be used after it has been transcribed.  Aim of the coding is to make clarity on the text material and what is being dealt at the text. When considering the form of coding, abbreviations found from the text could be utilized. It would be essential to code the same text several times to make sure the coding is reliable. After the text material is coded, the material can be grouped and eventually analyzed. Coding can be viewed as a step towards making the data more abstract.

On the 1st order analysis, the answers were carefully read multiple times to make coding system using abbreviations from the text. For example, answers containing material about having more knowledge about COVID-19 were coded as KnowCovPlus. Answers where the students said that they have received support from their social groups and peers were coded as SocPeer. During the 1st order analysis there were 16 of these abbreviations that were used to find similarities and patterns throughout the material. Prior the coding phase, the material from the questionnaire and interview were still on different tables. However, at the end of the coding and 1st order analysis, the answers were placed to a joint table under each abbreviation (Appendix 4).

On the 2nd order analysis, it was time to move on to a more abstract level. Aim was to understand what type of connections different categories have, is there some patterns and structures to be discovered. The number of categories were reduced to 10 at this point. After this it was time to move on to the 2nd order aggregate dimension. At this point, more abstract categories were formed. As a result, seven categories were formed and placed on the Value Proposition Canvas. The process of building a data structure is portrayed at Figure 12.
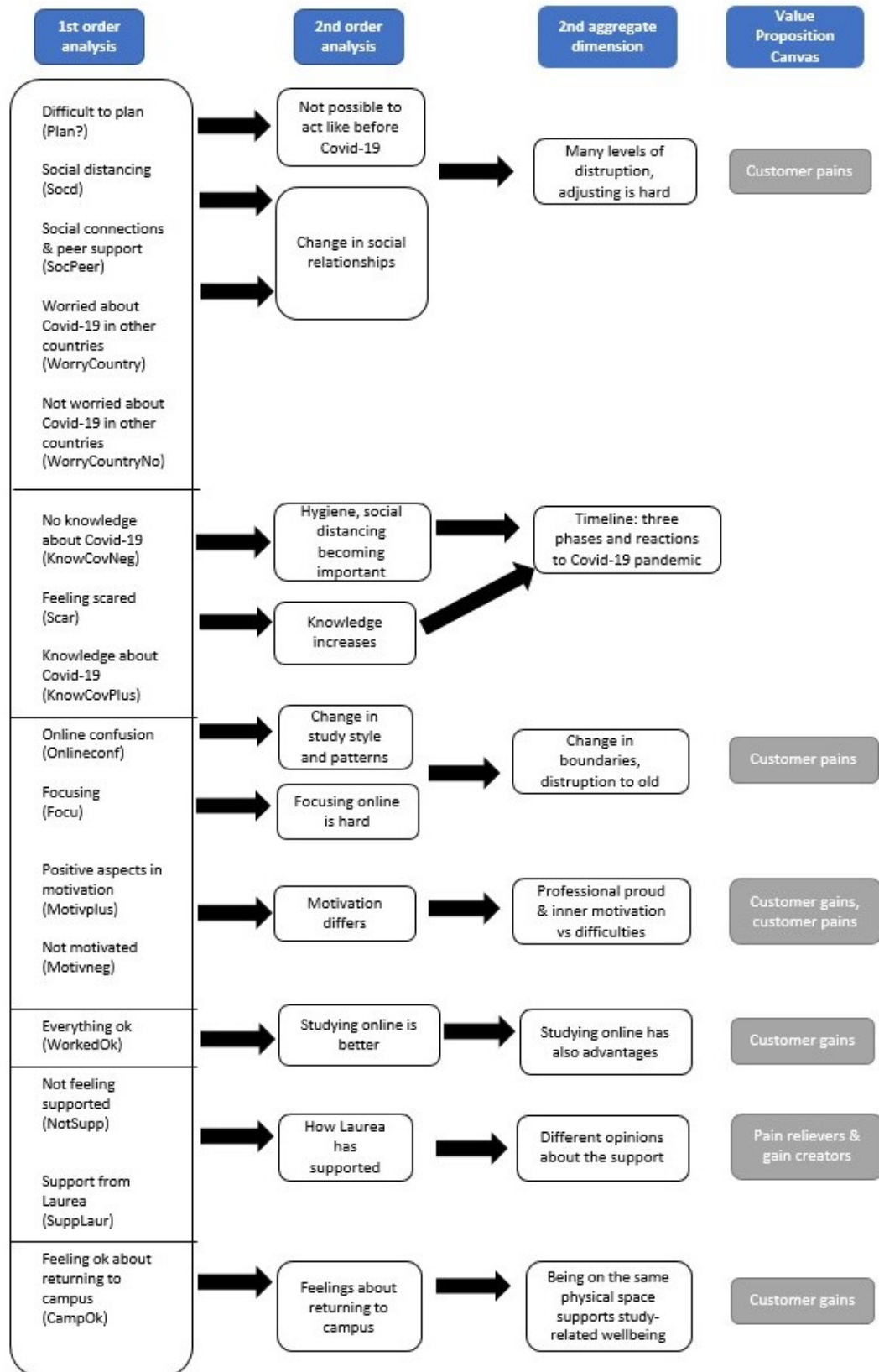
Figure 12: Basis for building a data structure (after Gioia et al. 2013, 21)

## 6    Results and analysis

### 6.1    The three phases of the pandemic

It was apparent that there is a common way of viewing on how the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved (Figure 13). Firstly, there has been the life prior the pandemic which relied on seeing other people and being physically at the campus. This was changed as the pandemic started as social distancing was introduced. There was a shock and disbelief when the pandemic started in March 2020. This is emphasized especially at the customer pains of the Value Proposition Canvas where the students describe several difficulties related to their study-related well-being during the pandemic. As the pandemic continued, the students described on how they are coping with the situation. Eventually they have accepted the situation and adjusted living with the pandemic. This was described that everybody has taken responsibility and accepted the situation, as one student said:

> I am more relaxed now. I am aware how to handle situation, in beginning person having Covid was a big thing, now you know what to do and steps to take, this is the life to live with right now.

Although they had got used to living with the pandemic, they had aspiration to go back to the life they had prior the pandemic. Almost all of them were motivated to be back at campus since they did not enjoy online studies. They felt that seeing other students as well as teachers is motivating and encouraging. They felt that it is easier to concentrate on studies while at campus. By being on the same physical space with other students, it is easier for them to understand what they should study prior the exams. One of the students described:

> I am happy leaving house and seeing other people, it is good.
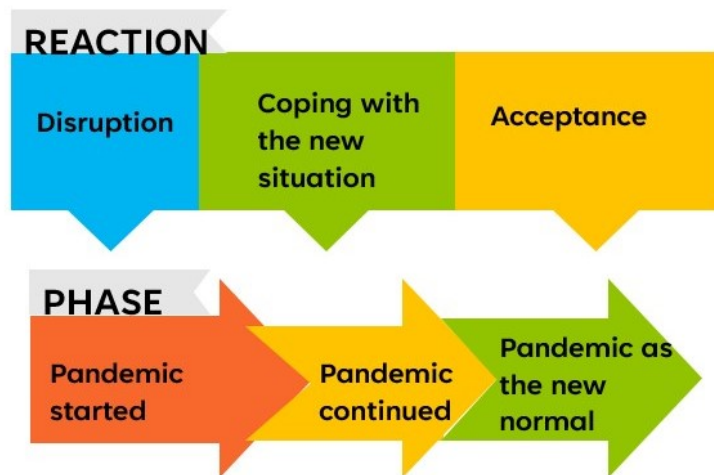
Figure 13: The three phases and reactions on the COVID-19 pandemic

## 6.2    Customer Jobs

### 6.2.1    Professional proud and inner motivation

These students said that they have many things that they are trying to accomplish while studying at Laurea. They emphasized that they want to become a true professional in their own field and learn as much as possible during their studies. It was also apparent that studying was important for their social identity, since many of them emphasized that they want to make their family members proud. Since most of them were studying to become a nurse, they also mentioned that studying is something they have long wanted to do. This was part of their long-term plan and not something that was chosen due to the pandemic. In addition, they wish to implement knowledge gained at Laurea in working life. One important reason to become a nurse is stable work situation with plenty of opportunities. Thus, the decision to study this field is a combination of passion for nursing as well as rational choice with stable work situation. Many of them also had done a lot of sacrifices and arrangements in their life to study at Laurea.

It was also noticeable that they chose studying at Laurea since the school has a good reputation and excellent campus facilities. Furthermore, they knew students studying at Laurea who had recommended the school and the degree programs. For these students professional proud and inner motivation can be defined as a motivating factor helping them on their journey towards graduation and becoming a Laurea alumni. It seemed that studying creates structure amid the change and changing situations. On the other hand, the studies also cause a lot of stress.

## 6.3 Customer pains during the pandemic

### 6.3.1 The pandemic as a disruption at many levels

As they had started their studies in 2019-2021, most of their studies had been conducted online due to pandemic. Thus, they do not have much experience studying at Laurea campus. They had faced many obstacles due to uncertainty and changed plans on their student journey. These obstacles have caused frustrations and headache influencing on their study-related well-being.

It was clear that they had faced substantial difficulties making any type of plans regarding work and studies. This was the situation especially in the beginning of the pandemic. They described that studying during the pandemic has been hard, stressful, and confusing. There has been a sense of uncertainty and fear of unknown. Many of the respondents pondered how long living in isolation would eventually last.

As mentioned before, the pandemic seems to be a disruption to the life that had led before the pandemic. As they had applied to study at Laurea, they had thought that the teaching would take place at campus with other students. They had not imagined that studying would mean studying alone online. The conflict between the reality and their ideal state of studying had influenced to their study-related well-being mostly in negative way.

Perhaps the biggest disruption the pandemic has caused is the disruption in social relationships and the way people are encountering with each other. Being socially isolated and not seeing other students, teachers and friends was influencing negatively to their study-related well-being. As one student said:

> Not able to do many things planned. Not going on holidays, travelling, going out, shopping without the kids. I am forced to do things different kind of way. Studying online is really hard.

However, not everybody was significantly impacted as teaching was moved online. It is also matter of a personality on how the changes have been experienced, as one student identified being an extreme introvert, not needing to socialize much. Furthermore, since students in this research are aged mostly over 30, they also have their own family and work community around them all along the pandemic. Belonging to these groups have supported them.

Nevertheless, it was important for them to be able to identify as a student and being part of the Laurea community. They described that being part of a community improves their learning outcomes. It was clear that being a student means that they are connected to the material and physical surroundings of Laurea, such as campus, classrooms, and library. When they are studying at home, it was difficult to consider oneself being a student as those structures are missing.  One student emphasized:

> It has been hard to get into student mindset at home as there are other life spheres involved, such as family members and household chores. By student mindset I mean that I have so many other distractions that do not involve sitting down and studying a book or anything like that. When you have all the other distractions like your spouse, animals, pets, need to clean this floor, do laundry, there is everything else. So, it is hard to concentrate to actual school work.

It was apparent that as the pandemic started there was a disruption from the Laurea side on how communication towards students was organized and conducted. This had influenced to their study-related well-being and how their studies had progressed. In the beginning of the pandemic, getting information from Laurea was seen as difficult since it was not clear what was going on.  One student mentioned that the pandemic was a crisis that Laurea was not prepared for:

> It felt like Laurea doesn't have clear plan for students during the pandemic times. At least for our class it seems so. Everything felt rush and out of place.

There was also disruption how the teaching was organized when remote teaching started. Teachers were given mixed reviews. Some students mentioned that the teachers of Laurea have been very communicative and helpful. However, many also said that it has been difficult to get in touch with the teacher tutor, since they are receiving a lot of requests and it takes rather long time to get an answer by email. Also, tutoring discussions were seen as being too short to get a holistic understanding on how to choose the right courses. Many of the respondents felt that there was lack on guidance on how to proceed in demanding assignments. It was also mentioned that retrieving information related to assignments was difficult as everything was done alone. This was clearly an extra burden demanding a lot of resources. There were also several mentions that the timetables and teachers in different study units were constantly changing, and course units were cancelled. Hence, it has been difficult to plan the studies.

Clear pains studying during the pandemic have been that there has been substantial number of assignments to be completed within a tight timeframe. This caused fear of failing and not being able to graduate on time. All throughout the material it becomes evident that they have experienced difficulties in time management and finding the required motivation while studying at home. There has also been tendency concentrate only on deadlines and reading for an exam while not getting to the roots of the definitions and deeply understanding the themes that are studied. Thus, studying online by oneself seemed to be shallow. This was clearly a fact decreasing their well-being.

It seems that seeing the peer students face-to-face, and some form of peer pressure makes these students to be more motivated to progress with the studies. Their ability to study has decreased since the study community has been shifted to internet while they think that learning at the physical environment on campus is the normal and optimal way of engaging with other people. This causes a conflict that is causing problems in their study-related well-being.

### 6.3.2    Boundaries have shifted in uncontrollable ways

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a pain for the informants since the boundaries have been shifted in manners that have been difficult to anticipate, accept and understand. They have been experiencing lack of control in this sense. However, all of them said that they understand that the pandemic is something that needs to be controlled and there are certain measures that needs to be taken that the pandemic will be over one day.

The boundaries have changed in many ways. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the pandemic has changed the way people are defining safe space and their relation to other people. In this research, boundaries were apparent in the sense that staying at home and conducting studies while social distancing was considered crucial thing for the feeling of being safe. There were many mentions that especially in the beginning of the pandemic, they had been afraid of touching things. For instance, grocery stores and other public places were considered not to be safe. As the informants were nursing students and many of them had worked within the health care industry during the pandemic, they were still worried about getting sick from COVID-19. One student said during the interview that she wanted to participate in the interview to highlight that not everybody is concerned about the virus. She mentioned that COVID-19 is not that big deal as she is accustomed working with sick people.

Another boundary change was in the relationship between the physical and digital worlds. Most of them mentioned that studying online has been challenging as you need to stare screen all day long. It causes dizziness and stress. It was also mentioned that not all teachers do always understand the importance of having breaks. When studying alone online it is difficult to find enough discipline to study. One respondent said:

> I was not able to study online at first. Then I realized I need to set rules and boundaries for myself when studying in Zoom. I understood that I should think it similarly as being in contact class. What should I do there? I should be able to sit, listen and concentrate, and not to multi-task doing other things at the same time.

For them it has been difficult to concentrate on online lectures since there is a constant urge to multitask with other things or engage with other digital devices such as mobile phones and especially on social media and news. Most of them recognized that mobile phone was a huge disruptor causing divided attention between studying and other spheres in their life. Many of them said that they have tried to limit their usage of mobile phone, however it has been rather difficult.

According to the material, mobile phone is a means to control and reduce stress as well as a tool to keep contact with family members and friends in the times of social isolation. You can also detach yourself from the situation you are currently involved in, whether it is occurring in physical or digital realm. Dividing resources to multiple things seems to cause tensions for them and decrease on their well-being in the form of stress.

Majority confessed that they have started to use a lot more computer and mobile phone during the pandemic. They are also using phone extensively as they are back at campus. They also said that they try to not use phone at the classes conducted on campus and have recalled that teachers have told them to keep the phones away while participating to classes. Although, they understand this, it was still difficult to be away from the phone during the classroom situations. Thus, the students seem to live in the hybrid world while combining elements from the virtual world to the physical world.

However, using computer and mobile phones also have many perks, such as keeping in touch with family members and friends and reading news about the pandemic.  It has become important source of peer support during the pandemic as one can connect with other students in WhatsApp and Facebook, for instance. There were also mentions that their digital skills have been improved during COVID-19 as they have utilized different kinds of platforms and tools while studying online.

Changing boundaries has also been present when travelling and contacting their family, relatives and friends situated abroad. As the informants are globally networked, they have family, relatives, and friends in different parts of the world, such as in Africa, Asia, and South America, where the situation with COVID-19 may be more complicated than in Finland. Almost all mentioned that prior the pandemic they regularly travelled abroad to see their closed ones. However, due to the pandemic, they have been forced to stay separated for a long time, since travelling to many countries have become rather difficult, if not impossible. Hence, the pandemic is also creating a boundary in this respect. There were concerns when they can meet again with their family members, relatives or friends located abroad as travelling to many countries is constantly difficult owing to virus alterations and the difference in progress of COVID-19 vaccinations between different countries. It seems that they are somewhat worried about their closed ones abroad, however this worry does not actively influence on their study-related well-being. Thanks to digital devices and platforms, they can contact them daily.

## 6.4    Customer gains during the pandemic

### 6.4.1    Ideas further supporting the study-related well-being

The informants were clearly happy to return to campus, as they emphasized that it is easier to find information as you can see other students, as well as teachers, and other staff members in person.  Asking questions is easier as you get answers instantly. Also forming study groups is more convenient when being on the same physical space. It was also mentioned that the teachers are very helpful, as they can always suggest some other staff member to talk with the student, if they are not able to find the solution.

They were extremely pleased what Laurea had done with the health safety precautions as Laurea offers free-of-charge facemasks and hand sanitizing opportunities. Furthermore, there are reminders about the health safety precautions. Consequently, entering the campus and being on contact teaching does not worry these students. One student mentioned:

> I don't think they can do much that they haven't already done. They have tried their best to make us safe environment for the students to back into. That is all we can actually ask.

Although the informants have had difficulties studying remotely, they still have managed to make a progress on their student journey. Part of the respondents were extremely happy with the study-related well-being services provided by Laurea, as one student said:

> So far so good, all the services I have used at Laurea has really helped me and guide me during my studies and I hope they will still help me more in the future.

There was part of the respondents who did not feel supported during the pandemic. One student said that:

> In my opinion, I didn't really got much support from Laurea for my well-being. Instead, more stress due to lots of assignments.

Another student said:

> I have no positive feelings. I just achieve

What comes to desired gains, the students had quite different ideas on what would make their life easier at Laurea. They had many suggestions when asked how study-related well-being services could be improved and how their student journey could be made smoother. They thought that there should be more campus teaching, less assignments, more practical work, as well as providing more materials needed for the course (such as more books to be found from the library).

They also had many other ideas that included offering free coffee, more variety at lunch, warmer classrooms, and free parking places. It seemed that these themes would create them a good study experience in the form of Laurea caring for them. Informal get-togethers around coffee were also proposed. Furthermore, making arts and crafts in a relaxed atmosphere to spark up creativity was proposed.

Additionally, many respondents thought that Laurea should provide more opportunities to be in contact with the employers and working life. They mentioned that it is difficult to find internships and work practice opportunities. This had been the case since the pandemic started. Especially in the health care industry there has apparently been major difficulties getting internships due to restrictions. One student said:

> Work placement for example in hospitals don't take students. Next month we have placement and most of my friends don't have placement. Because of the pandemic they don't want to take many students. That is a major worry. Maybe next year it will be normal again.

For nursing students, it is mandatory to perform work practice. Not finding suitable place may cause problems in progression on their studies. One student said that she feels that the students are left alone to face this issue, as there is not much help provided by the school. Some students mentioned that the level of language requirement on Finnish language is too high, hence finding internship is rather difficult.

6.4.2   Positivity, not all is bad

There were also many aspects that had worked well for them. As one student said:

> Although it has been chaotic at times, I have still managed to stay balanced and get things done. Sometimes it has taken longer than it should, but it got done anyway.

Also, several students said that they have not had any concerns as their studies have been progressing smoothly and they have received all the services in no time. They were happy to study and could not wait to graduate.

Peer students from their study group has been clearly one factor that have supported their study-related well-being. Nursing students' WhatsApp group was mentioned several times being a platform where they can ask questions and connect with each other. This way of informal communication channel seems to be highly crucial during the pandemic to keep in contact and creating a virtual community.

The students also mentioned that getting support from their family and friends has been important regarding their study-related well-being. Although organizing studies with family and children has been a real juggle for many, children were also seen as a source of joy, reason to wake up and providing structure in a situation of many changes.

One respondent mentioned that studying online is more comfortable since it is easier to combine studying with work and family life as there is no need to waste time on travelling back and forth between campus, home, and work. That student felt that as an adult student one has so many other engagements anyways that there is no need for a group coming from a study-related context. Hence, for this type of students' studying online would work well also in the future.

## 6.5   Pain relievers and gain creators

It seems that the students have been quite self-initiative, since they had utilized the study-related well-being services provided by Laurea to promote their study-related well-being. The informants had used quite many well-being services and it was clear that they did not have difficulties finding them. Especially utilizing the YTHS (Finnish Student Health Services), tutor teachers, special education teacher and psychologist were mentioned. One student said that:

> There is a good network of services that students can get help from. For example, the healthcare YTHS is efficient. Tutor teachers are supportive and so is the special education teacher. Just knowing that help is available when one needs is a big relieve.

Consequently, it could be argued that the well-being services act like a safety net that can be trusted and utilized when help is needed.

They praised the digital services of the YTHS, and they had good experiences using them. Those services had improved their quality of life since it has been easy to talk with the staff through the digital platform. However, they presented critique concerning the fact that previously there used to be health care services provided at Laurea campus. Due to reform, they were transferred to the YTHS and removed from the campus. They mentioned that it is difficult for them to understand why the health care services were moved away from campus. Quite many of them said that since the YTHS is in Helsinki in district of Töölö, it takes time, money, and effort to go there. Hence, it is causing a barrier for them to seek help, as having too much physical distance makes it more difficult to utilize the health care services.  Many

of them suggested that there could be a pop-up clinic at the campus providing solutions to easy health-related problems.

As mentioned before, the biggest pain reliever for these students would be having more contacts to working life and providing more internships. Worrying about doing the work practice was one consistent issue for these students. Having more contacts to working life would help the study-related well-being of these students.  It would also make it more motivating to study as they would know that they could easily practice their newly acquired skills at real working environments.

When considered the pain relievers more closely, semi-structured questionnaire included a section where the students were asked to answer on what study-related well-being services they had used during the pandemic (Appendix 1). The results are portrayed at Figure 14. They were also asked which of those services they would be interested using in the next six months. Those results are portrayed at Figure 15.

Teacher tutor (9)

Student affairs office (8)

YTHS (Finnish Student Health Services) (7)

Student tutor (5)

Special education teacher (2)

Councelling psychologist ( 2)

LaureAmko (2)

Student social councelor (1)
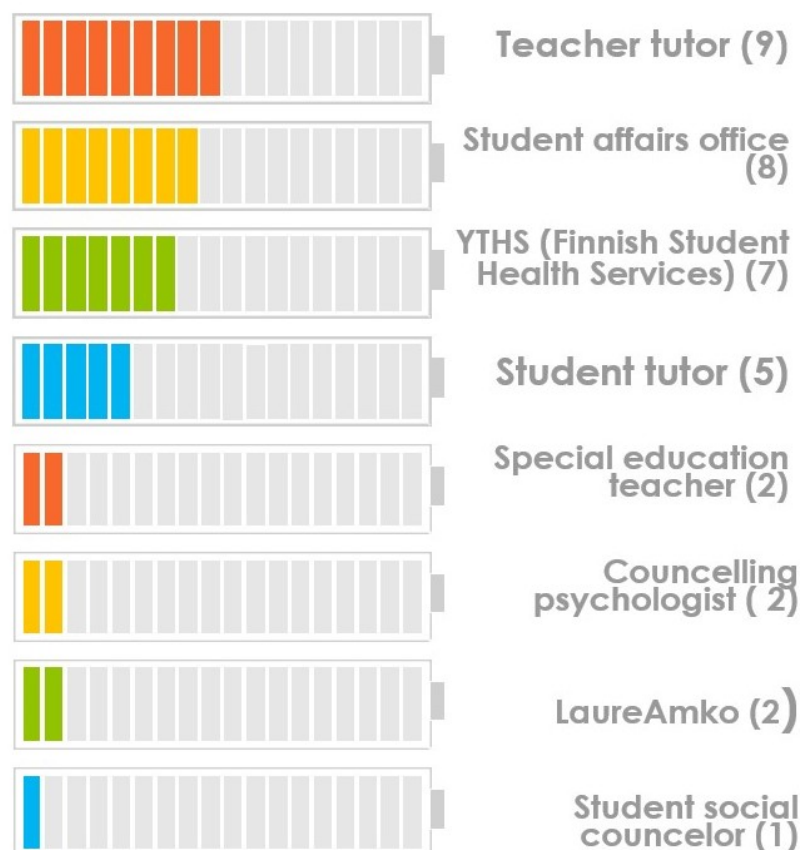
Figure 14: Study-related well-being services used during the COVID-19 pandemic
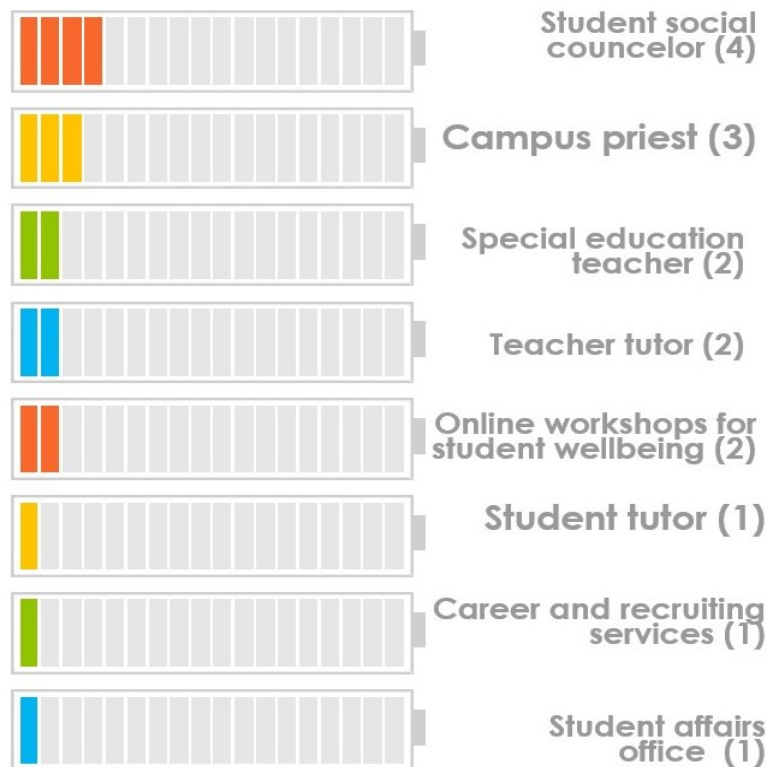
Figure 15: Study-related well-being services going to use in the next six months

6.6    Fit between the value proposition and the findings

According to the findings, this customer segment feels that the value proposition of Laurea ("We are here for you at Laurea"), has been partly valid for them during the pandemic. Laurea has been able to address the customer jobs, alleviating pains while creating essential gains that are important for the students. These students have been able to make progress on their student journey during the pandemic, although studying remotely has also caused many problems. Utilizing study-related well-being services have eased out their pains and offered an opportunity to remove barriers and blocks they have encountered. The services have created much value for them while coping with the changes occurred during the pandemic. They also feel that Laurea has done well with the health safety precautions at campus and Laurea supports them while they are participating to contact teaching. The value proposition seems to be true for these respondents also in this sense.

However, what it comes to remote teaching, it seems that the value proposition is not that much valid as they feel that there have been many changes in courses, teachers, too many assignments, tight deadlines as well as lack of breaks during the online classes. It seems that while studying online, Laurea has not been able to provide entirely good learning environment for these informants.

It can be concluded that due to lack of contact teaching, the "We" part of the value proposition does not resonate with these students. They do not feel that they have been part of the Laurea community since they have not been able to see other people. These students saw that being part of the community requires being at the campus. Online settings and virtual community are regarded as a substituent to the activities performed in face-to-face settings. They feel that it is difficult to identify being a student while the material structure of school, books and other students are not physically to be observed.

## 7    A Framework of Developing the Services amid the Changing Boundaries

Based on the theoretical framework as well as the empirical research, a Framework of Developing the Services amid the Changing Boundaries was created. The goal of the framework is to help OMA OTE as well as other actors at Laurea to develop the study-related well-being services by placing the students in the core of service development as well as creating understanding on how the elements of change are influencing on the services as interaction and infrastructure.

The framework consists of three layers. The first step is to start with the Value Proposition Canvas and then on the second step logical framework of value creation is to be applied. The third step would be to review how for instance the social distancing or being on hybrid mode influences on the service provision.

To begin with, the Value Proposition Canvas can be used as a concrete tool to gather insights from the students belonging to certain customer segment. This is to understand their gains, pains, and customer jobs. Filling the Customer Profile could be done for instance interviewing the students or giving them an opportunity to participate in co-creational workshop where the Value Proposition Canvas template could be utilized. This could be done both in physical as well as in virtual settings, for instance at campus or utilizing Miro. ´

After gathering the data, it would be time to move on to the Value Map to review if the services are creating gains and relieving pains for this student segment. The assessment should always be based on the insights gathered from the students to escape the trap in designing services they do not actually want or need. By the end of this step, the fit between the Value Map and the Customer Profile should be reviewed and considered if the study-

related well-being services are alleviating extreme pains, for instance. Value proposition and its validity for the student segment could be checked and reviewed at this point. This process is presented at Figure 16.
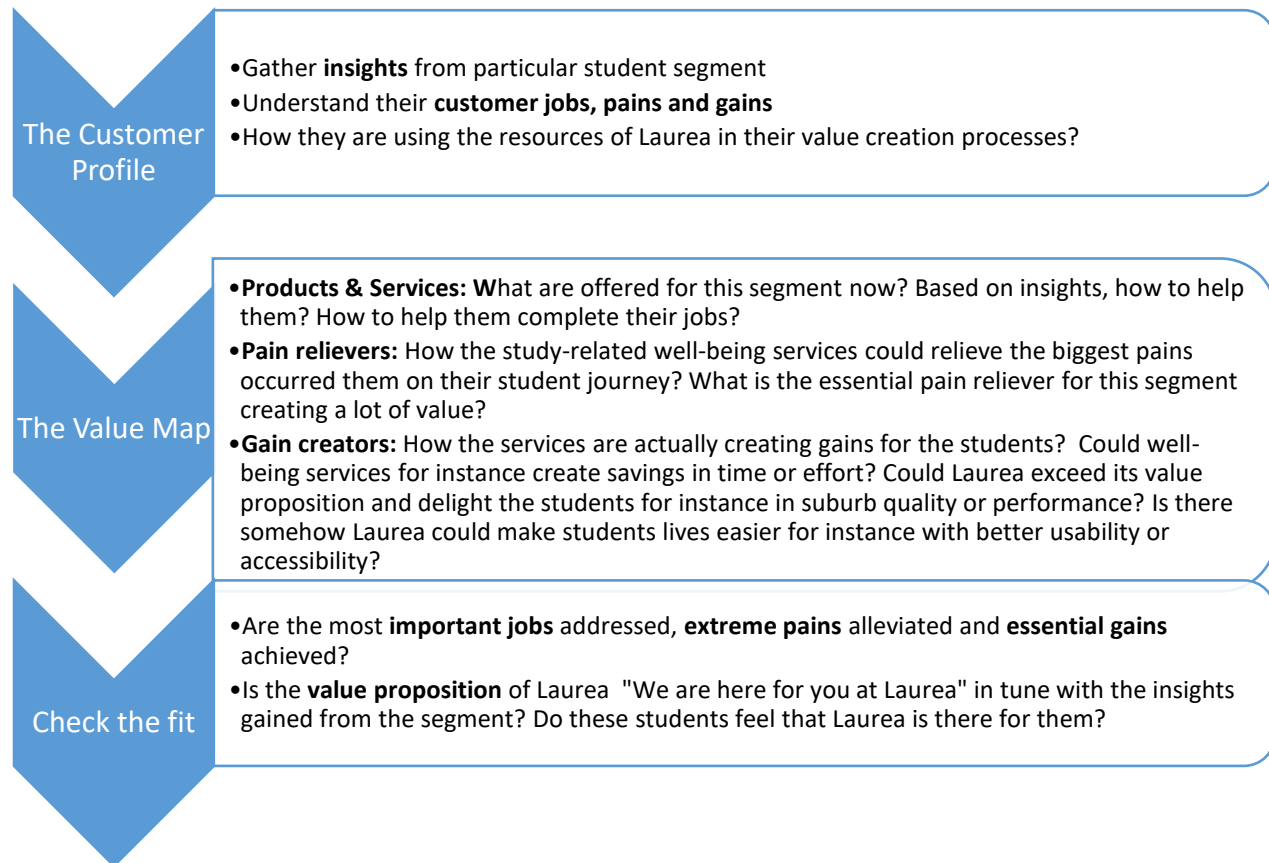
**The Customer Profile**
- Gather **insights** from particular student segment
- Understand their **customer jobs, pains and gains**
- How they are using the resources of Laurea in their value creation processes?

**The Value Map**
- **Products & Services: W**hat are offered for this segment now? Based on insights, how to help them? How to help them complete their jobs?
- **Pain relievers:** How the study-related well-being services could relieve the biggest pains occurred them on their student journey? What is the essential pain reliever for this segment creating a lot of value?
- **Gain creators:** How the services are actually creating gains for the students? Could well-being services for instance create savings in time or effort? Could Laurea exceed its value proposition and delight the students for instance in suburb quality or performance? Is there somehow Laurea could make students lives easier for instance with better usability or accessibility?

**Check the fit**
- Are the most **important jobs** addressed, **extreme pains** alleviated and **essential gains** achieved?
- Is the **value proposition** of Laurea "We are here for you at Laurea" in tune with the insights gained from the segment? Do these students feel that Laurea is there for them?

Figure 16: The Value Proposition Canvas as a tool to understand certain student segment

As the Value Proposition Canvas has been concluded, then the next step would be to move on to logical framework for value creation. As the Value Proposition Canvas is a tool to help understand the students, logical framework for value creation is more of an abstract tool that is applied to more strategical level when services are designed. As is argued by Morelli et al. (2021, 88-89), the pandemic has influenced largely to the service as a systemic institution, thus would be crucial to think how the changes on that level influence on service as interaction and service as infrastructure. According to the research conducted by this thesis, the boundaries between physical and digital realms have shifted as well as the boundaries between the people have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is portrayed at Figure 17.
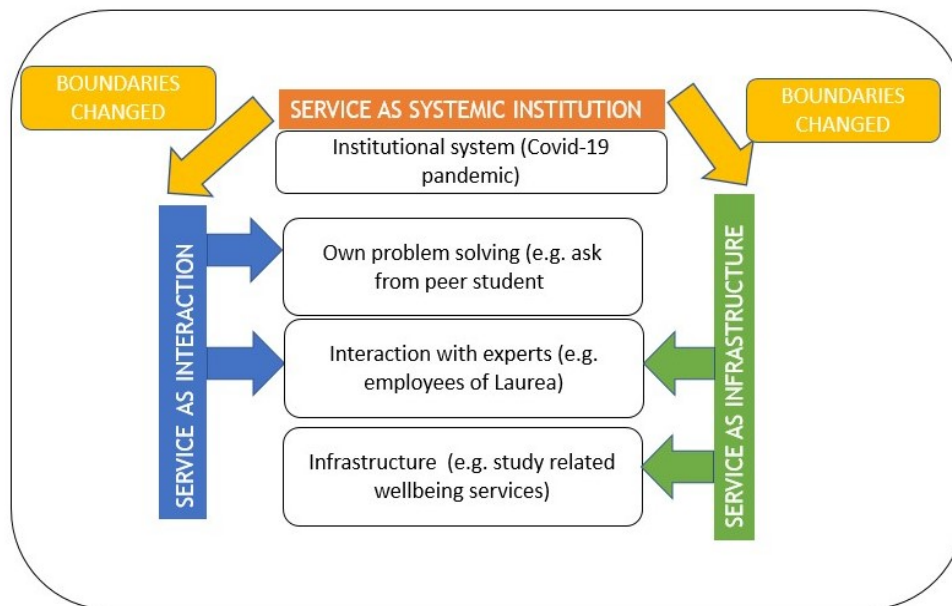
Figure 17: The value creation ecosystem around the study-related well-being services with the changed boundaries (after Morelli et al. 2021, 12)

During the pre-pandemic era, service as interaction used to be based on physical encounters and was placed around material surroundings such as school buildings and classrooms. As COVID-19 has changed the institutional system, also the services have been experiencing changes. The pandemic has brought change in boundaries to protect the health. Hence, service as interaction has moved into digital platforms. This has also changed the service as infrastructure, since new types of ways of communicating have been created that are not based on physical encounters.

It can be argued that services have been moving towards utilizing the operant resources (knowledge and skills) that are tied to digital platforms and they are not connected to the physical surroundings. It should be considered on how the boundary changes influence on the way services as interaction and services as infrastructure level are designed and offered.

In this respect, the insights gained by the customers using the Value Proposition Canvas helps to understand what would be the appropriate resources that would really help the students during the pandemic. It would be important on not relying on assumptions and the ways of thinking that are based on the pre-pandemic era that may lead into biased decisions.

Assuming that the students are aggregating the resources of Laurea for their own value creation, then the relevant question would be that how could Laurea facilitate the process of value creation when the boundaries are changing and being redefined? How to build up services as interaction, infrastructure, and systemic institution to best serve the value creation amid the boundaries that are changing?

The value creation ecosystem could be used to understand what type of services as interaction the student segment would prefer, as they are searching the resources to support their study-related well-being? For instance, do they prefer acting individually on the digital platforms or would they like to interact with the Laurea staff? Furthermore, what type of infrastructure these types of actions would require? There are several things from the organizational point of view to be considered as the value creation ecosystem would be applied, as is portrayed at Figure 18.

**Service as interaction**
- How to enhance interactions between different actors that are not based on physical presence?
- What resources students are aggregating to support their study-related well-being amid the change?
- What type of interaction devices should be used to facilitate the process of value creation of the students?
- How to further support and create meaningful peer-to-peer communities in students' value creation?
- How knowledge and skills of the Laurea employees could be optimally put in use for the benefit of students value creation?
- How the teaching practices online could be reformulated to support the study-related well-being?

**Service as infrastructure**
- What type of service infrastructure should be formed to best facilitate students value creation, regardless of the context?
- How to take account timing of the elements, usability and accessibility?
- What could be the value proposition in the context of virtual world? How Laurea can be there for students in virtually? How to build student-centric community in virtual format?
- How to provide well-being services for those Laurea degree students located outside Finland? How to facilitate their value creation?

**Service as systemic institution**
- How the pandemic has influenced to Laurea and its ecosystem? Are there some new actors or old ones being removed?
- What are new cultural norms or rules in digital context that are still in the process of making? How this influences to the study-related well-being?
- How could Laurea further develop online teaching practices (such as taking breaks) to support the well-being of students?

Figure 18: Considerations on the value creation ecosystem of the Laurea well-being services

The developed framework helps understanding the students and how to be part of their value creation processes. As the strategy of Laurea emphasizes openness, student-centric approach, applying service design and co-creation, the Value Proposition Canvas could be utilized in this respect as the services together with the students would be developed. Creating with the students could be utilized to emphasize the value proposition of Laurea as well as creating a

feeling of belonging into the Laurea community. Additionally, as the strategy emphasizes effectiveness, the framework could help saving resources in the form of avoiding spending on services that the students do not see any value. As the framework also emphasizes the role of the changed boundaries, it is useful to consider what is the nature of boundaries. How the boundaries continue changing and how they are influencing to the services as well as the needs of the students? To summarize, the framework is portrayed at Figure 19.
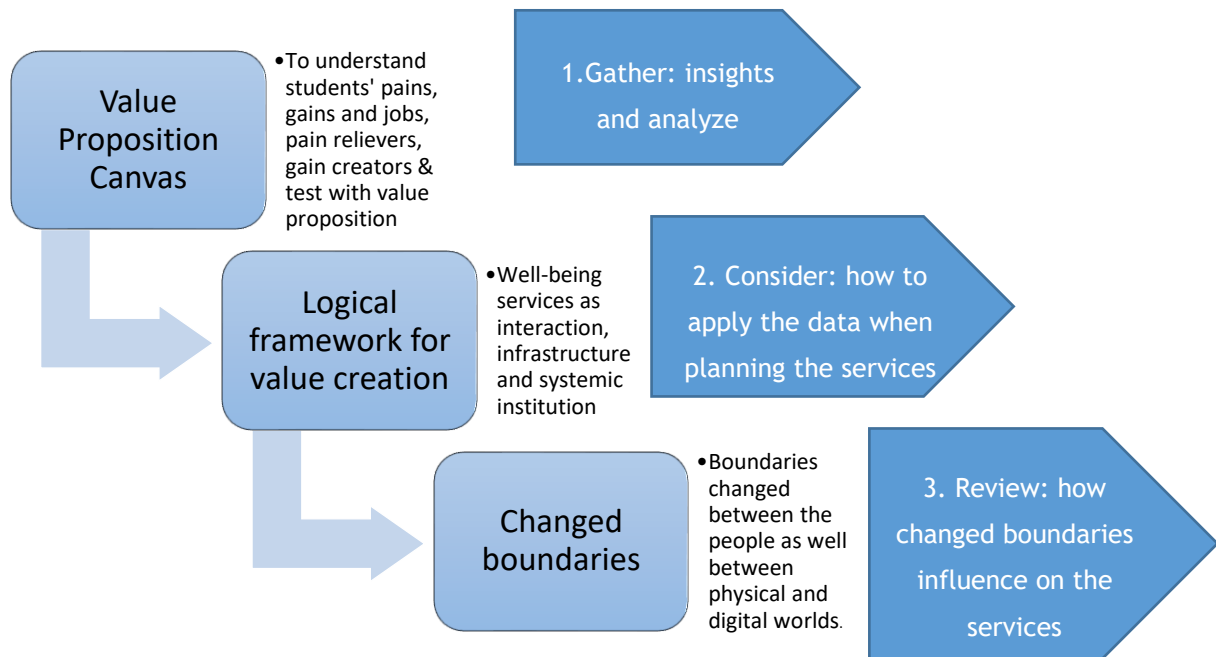


Figure 19: A Framework of Developing the Services amid the Changing Boundaries

## 8 Conclusions

### 8.1 Summary

Aim of this thesis was to understand how the international bachelor level degree students at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences have been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The framework of this thesis was provided by OMA OTE-project of Laurea that aims to support the students of Laurea in their study-related well-being as well as progression of their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis is qualitative and empirical case study that is using theoretical framework based on service design, service-dominant logic, value proposition design and logical framework for value creation. Also, concepts of physical and virtual worlds as well as safe space, personal boundaries and social isolation are included. Methods that were utilized were desk research, semi-structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews,

and participant observation. The gathered material was analyzed using the grounded theory. The results of this research are introduced in Chapter 6.

Eventually, a new framework called a Framework of Developing the Services amid the Changing Boundaries were developed. The framework has three levels: First, the insights based on a certain student segment are gathered using the Customer Profile of the Value Proposition Canvas to understand their world. Additionally, the Value Map is to be filled to review current study-related well-being services while considering the pain relievers and gain creators. Consequently, a fit between the Customer Profile and the Value Map should be checked to understand if these services are useful for the chosen student segment and if the value proposition is valid for them.

Second level would be to add the insights gained through the Value Proposition Canvas to logical framework for value creation. At this level, the service as infrastructure and service as interaction should be reviewed and considered on how they could be utilized to facilitate the value creation of this segment. This research identified that there has been changes on how the boundaries between people as well as digital and physical worlds have been shifted. These boundary changes should be understood and taken into consideration when planning services on the level of service as infrastructure and service as interaction.

## 8.2    Answers to the research questions

**RQ1 How the international bachelor level degree students have been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

This group of students have managed quite well during the pandemic. They have had many challenges due to changed contexts of teaching and they also have had challenges on adapting to new social forms of not being at campus. They had found study-related well-being services of Laurea that had been relevant for them, hence this group of students had been active on that sense. The age group participating this research were mainly 30+, consequently most of them have been working besides studying. They also have families and children. These factors were seen supporting their study-related well-being during the pandemic.

Although these students had international background, they did not emphasize this during the data gathering. Their social identity was more based on being a student of Laurea and belonging to a certain student group (such as being a nursing student) than being a student with an international background. They have regular contacts to their family members, relatives and friends living abroad; however, they were not worried about them, nor they miss them every day. These students said that they can connect with their family members,

relatives, and friends daily through digital platforms and devices, if they wish to do so. As most of these students had already been in Finland for quite some time, gaining prior education in Finland and studied in Finnish, most of them did not have problems with the language. However, there were students wishing to practice and learn Finnish during their studies.

**RQ2 What type of pain points and worries have they had related to study-related well-being?**

Their main pain point was concerned studying online. Studying alone without the group support was seen as difficult and challenging as the students must do everything by themselves. Also, studying online instruction were not optimal as there have been many assignments with strict deadlines, changes in course schedules as well as with the teachers. Following classes online causes fatigue and headaches. There is also divided attention as the students tend to multitask. Studying at home causes problems combining different spheres of life with studying (such as interruptions by the family members or temptation to do household chores).

**RQ3 As the value proposition of Laurea is "We are here for you at Laurea". What does it mean for these students during the COVID-19 era?**

It seems that these students feel that Laurea has been there for them also during the pandemic. However, this is only partly true. This group of students were relatively pleased with the study-related well-being services provided by Laurea. They said that utilizing these services had helped them to progress with their studies. However, they were not so optimistic on what it comes arranging the teaching online as they thought that the student-centric approach of Laurea has not always been fulfilled. They mentioned that there had been problems gaining an internship and work practice and they felt that there has not been much support from Laurea side. Furthermore, they have not experienced that they would be part of the Laurea community due to social distancing. While studying at the campus, they were pleased on how Laurea had taken care of the health safety precautions by providing hand sanitizers, free-of-charge facemasks, as well as reminders on the safety precautions.

**RQ4 In students' opinion, what do they want or need from Laurea to perform well on studies during the change situation with many uncertainties?**

There were some suggestions what could be done that they could better progress on their studies. They saw that the contact teaching at campus is the preferred mode of studying. They suggested different ideas what Laurea could do for them, such as offering pop-up health services that could solve easy health-related problems as well as having more informal gatherings.

8.3    Assessment of the thesis

As Bratianu (2020, 321) has written, while predicting the future has become quite difficult owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be important to be agile while adapting to changes and being open to new opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic should be viewed as a complex crisis that is a learning opportunity. The lessons learned during the crises should be identified, formulated, and utilized when directing the eyes to the future.

As this thesis has a research-oriented development approach, the process also included producing new practices and information. As the COVID-19 pandemic is somewhat new and ever-changing phenomenon with many twists and consequences, utilizing research-oriented development approach helps us to break away from the practices and mindsets of the pre-pandemic era and helping to elaborate on how to live with the pandemic, not expecting it to end anytime soon. This situation should be embraced as an opportunity, not a threat. If we cannot influence on change, maybe we could make use of the situation that we have.

Hence, the value of this research is to give multi-dimensional perspective on how Laurea could further develop its study-related well-being services when there are many changes. The framework developed helps bringing the voices of the students in the core of service development. As OMA OTE-project ends by the end of February 2022, the research also serves other actors helping to understand different elements at the study-related well-being during the pandemic.

Consequently, the framework developed through this research is useful in reviewing if the services are relevant for the chosen student segment. The Value Proposition Canvas can be used as a tool to reduce risks and allocate resources in a sensible manner while escaping the trap in designing organization-centered services. Framework can be used for different segments when considered what kind of study-related well-being services they would be interested using when creating value for themselves. Also, value propositions could be changed and tested to know if they are still valid. This framework also helps to understand students and their value creation processes at the service as interaction as well as service as infrastructure level.

8.4    Further development ideas and reflections

There are many further development ideas that could be done after this research. Although COVID-19 has been a challenge, it could also be understood as an opportunity to learn something new and make use of the change. As Laurea is offering online degree programs (such as Master`s Degree Program in Leading Transformational Change), there are students that are not using the services that are offered at campus even if rest of the students would return the campus. If online study programs would become more common, then it would be important to think on how Laurea could facilitate the value creation for those students who would only be using the digital services of Laurea?

This research had international elements as the international bachelor level degree students was the student segment that was under review. One option for further research would be to test the value proposition with the students studying online degree programs. How could the study-related well-being services of Laurea help them as they may locate out of the Finnish context?

It would also be important to think on how studying online could be arranged in more student-centric way. Study-related well-being should be understood as being holistic theme that should be incorporated into teaching practices. Elements of well-being should be integrated into the actual study units and the way how teaching is being conducted and organized. This could be done during the online teaching for instance emphasizing the importance of having breaks and stepping away from the computer.

Also, one option could be to ideate around service as interaction and services as infrastructure to understand what type of elements could be included to value creation ecosystem enhancing the study-related well-being. Using this approach could possibly bring new ideas and approaches that have not been discovered previously.

One idea worth considering would be to utilize Figure 2 (Student's study process in the student services framework) to illustrate the student journey in more visual format. By using more visuals, it would be easier for the students to understand what steps they need to take on their student journey and what services Laurea is offering to help them to make a progress on the journey. Perhaps this type of visual format could be utilized instead of presenting things on a textual format.

The pandemic has already been around for two years when writing this and has offered many surprises and twists on the way. This means there are many students who have not studied at campus. Thus, they have no reference to what does studying at Laurea means at campus and what it means to be part of the Laurea community without social distancing. This fact should be taken into consideration when study-related well-being services are developed. For these

students, there is no such thing as going back to campus because they have never experienced being at the campus. Hence, they do not know how the services and the structures created around them look like at physical environment.

Furthermore, there should not be assumptions that we would go back to the situation where we were prior the pandemic since the pandemic has been a major change. Hence, it would be useful to further review how the pandemic has influenced to the levels of service as interaction and service as infrastructure. Perhaps schools should not be understood any more as a material place with physical buildings and classrooms but rather an immaterial service facilitating knowledge and skills through different digital platforms.

As the end of the pandemic cannot be seen, maybe we should prepare ourselves for more hybrid type of thinking where physical encountering is not anymore seen as "more real" or "normal way" of interacting. Possibly the pandemic could change our way of thinking that encountering in digital surroundings could also be seen real and not as a substitute of something else. It would be worth considering how these changes influence on the study-related well-being and the services.

Doing this research, while there have been so many phases with the pandemic, has been rather challenging. For instance, it was a struggle to plan the empirical part of this research since it was long unclear if the students would be allowed to return to campus in autumn semester 2021. Furthermore, doing research about the pandemic in the middle of the pandemic has been tricky since it has not been clear into which direction the pandemic is going. Luckily there have been more and more scientific articles and theoretical frameworks that have been written about the COVID-19 pandemic, as researchers around the globe have been trying to understand the changes brought by the pandemic.

As service design provides variety of methods and tools that can be utilized in face-to-face contexts, it was difficult to plan how to conduct research using methods that would be taking account the health safety precautions. Hence, the best option turned out to be conducting a semi-structured questionnaire where everybody would have their own seat and semi-structured interviews on emphasizing the option to participate the interview on Teams. If times were different, different forms of co-creational methods could have been applied such as organizing a workshop with applying variety of other types of service design methods and tools.

Another issue that was faced, was the difficulty of getting students engaged with the research and make them to understand the value of developing the services. As six of the interviewees cancelled their participation at the last minute, thus data set was not large as it was planned. As the studies have been conducted online for a long period of time, the students could be tired of meeting other people through computer. Consequently, it would be important to

consider how to engage people to participate online data collection and what is the exact value for them as they are using their time to participate for the activity?

It is also worth noticing, that the students examined in this research were mainly nursing students. For them, the profession provides a strong identity they are clearly proud of. It was inspiring to hear how utterly motivated they are becoming a nurse and helping other people through their work. Quite many of them had applied to Laurea several times before being accepted. None of them said that the pandemic would have influenced their decision on becoming nurse, this was something they had intended to do for a longer time. Many of them said that as they have been conducting their studies during the pandemic, it had become crystal clear that they are on a right path and chosen the right profession for them. Thus, it can be concluded that strong inner motivation for studying enhances study-related well-being also during the pandemic, as the situations are changing rapidly and to unexpected directions.  Maybe the element of inner motivation should be explored during the further studies.

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Figures

Tables

Appendices

Appendix 1: Research questions, questions asked at the semi-structured questionnaire and questions asked at the semi-structured interview (after Kvale et al. 2009, 72)

| Research questions | Questions asked at the semi-structured questionnaire at Laurea Tikkurila campus in August 2021 | Questions asked at the semi-structured interview on Teams/at Laurea Tikkurila campus during September-October 2021 |
|---|---|---|
| RQ1 How the international bachelor level students of Laurea have been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic? | • How have you been feeling during the pandemic? | • Could you briefly describe how Covid has influenced on your studies and your well-being? How your life has changed due to Covid? <br> • How have you experienced returning to campus? If you could describe your feelings in three words, what they could be? <br> • Do you feel safe at campus? Do you have some concerns or worries about something while being at campus? <br> • Could you describe how being at campus have influenced to your motivation to study compared studying in distance? |
| RQ2 What type of pain points and worries | • What type of Laurea related barriers/frustrations/ challenges you had during the pandemic | • How would you describe your ability to concentrate on studies? Do you feel that there are some disruptions that |

| they have had that are connected to study-related well-being? | that have influenced to your well-being? What worries you? What keeps you up at night? | make it hard to concentrate on studying?<br>A) Disruptions when in distance learning<br>B) Disruptions when studying at campus<br><br>• In Finland the pandemic situation is being stabilized with the restrictions and vaccinations. The pandemic still evolving in many countries globally. How do you feel about this? Are you worried about the situation in your home country or in some other countries where you have family, relatives or friends?<br>• Does this worry somehow influence to your studies and well-being?<br><br>• How would you describe your relationship with your mobile phone/computer? Has your relationship with mobile phone/computer/tablet changed during the pandemic? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • In overall, how do you feel about using mobile phone/computer/tablet? Have you had any concerns about how they may influence on your study- related well-being? <br><br> • How do you feel during amid all this uncertainty that the pandemic has caused, as we have virus alterations, we do not know how the vaccines are influencing and how will the situation evolve? <br> • Do you find it more difficult (compared to the pre-pandemic era) to make plans regarding your studies and future? |
| RQ3 <br><br> As Laurea`s value proposition is: "We are here for you at Laurea". What does it mean for them during the pandemic? | • Why are you studying at Laurea? What do you want to achieve/do while you are at Laurea? What are the goals of your studies? <br><br> • How Laurea has supported your well-being during the pandemic? What are the things creating your positive feelings that you can keep on studying? | • Has the pandemic changed your perspectives on your career and future somehow? Is there something Laurea could do to support you in this situation? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Think about autumn semester 2021. How could Laurea help you that you would feel happy while studying? What would make your life easier at Laurea? | |
| RQ4<br><br>In students' opinion, what do they want or need from Laurea to perform well on studies during the change situation with many uncertainties? | • Mark with x services you have used to support your well-being. Mark with Z services you would see yourself using within the next 6 months.<br><br>Options:<br>-YTHS,<br>-Counseling psychologist,<br>-Student social counsellor,<br>-Campus priest,<br>-Special needs teacher,<br>-Teacher tutor,<br>-Student tutor,<br>-Student affairs office,<br>-Career & recruiting services,<br>-LaureAmko (student union), | • How do you feel about meeting teachers, staff, and other students at campus? Do you have some concerns/worries about meeting other people?<br><br>• Do you feel that you belong to some group? What type of groups do you see yourself belonging to?<br>A) When studying in distance<br>B) B) When studying at campus?<br><br>• Are there some kind of groups you would like to belong, but you have had troubles finding them? What types of groups Laurea could form/establish that would improve your study-related well-being? Ideas? |

| | -Zone sport services,<br>-Facebook group of Laurea students,<br>-Online support groups in Zoom,<br>-Online workshops on well-being,<br>-Tools for Self-Management (virtual study unit),<br>-Other well-being related courses.<br><br>• How the service you used improved your well-being? Was there something you were not happy with? Do you have suggestions how the service could be improved by Laurea? | • Is there something that Laurea and well-being services can do to support your returning to campus that would help you to feel better while studying?<br><br>• Is there something that Laurea and well-being services could help you to recover from the experiences occurred during the pandemic?<br><br>• Are there some well-being related service that you would like to use but it does not exist? You are welcome to propose things that would make you feel better. |

Appendix 2: Example on collecting the answers from the semi-structured questionnaire on Miro for an analysis

| 1. Participant Information | 2 Describe overall feeling during pandemic with emoji sticker.Explain choice with couple of sentences | 3 Why are you studying in Laurea? What do you want to achieve/do while you are in Laurea? What are the goals of your studies? |
|---|---|---|
| **A1** Age? Female 2020/Jan Nursing | Difficult to travel / I avent seen my family in my home country / Wear mask most of the time / Social distancing | I have heard good things about Laurea and nearest to my home / To graduate and learn new things about nursing / To become a nurse / To learn new skills and meet new people |
| **A2** 29 Female 2023/Autumn nursing Philippines | A lot of missed opportunities during this pandemic time / Mental health are getting worse | It is near my home and also good school with good reputation / I want to do better and improve my skills / So I can do more in the future. Studying in Laurea have a lot of good opportunities and advatages |

Appendix 3: Example on collecting the answers from the semi-structured interview on Miro for an analysis

Appendix 4: Example on conducting the analysis on Miro with the grounded theory