Mystery Shopping in Improving Salesperson Performance – Case Group and Conference Business

Pehkonen, Taija

2014 Leppävaara

Laurea University of Applied Sciences
Laurea Leppävaara

Mystery Shopping in Improving Salesperson Performance - Case Group and Conference Business

Taija Pehkonen
Master's Degree Programme in
Hospitality Management
Master's Thesis
November, 2014

Laurea University of Applied Sciences **Abstract**
Laurea Leppävaara
Master’s Degree Programme in Hospitality Management

Pehkonen, Taija

Mystery Shopping in Improving Salesperson Performance - Case Group and Conference Business

Year 2014 Pages 66

Managers in the service industry are interested in using cost-effective ways for evaluating and observing the customer experience, and the overall quality of the service. Mystery shopping has become a popular tool in evaluating the quality of service. Yet, only little research has been conducted to ensure that a true measure of service performance is obtained.

This master’s thesis explores the sales agents’ perceptions of the functionality of mystery shopping as a tool in improving salesperson performance in group and conference sales in a business-to-business context. The thesis aims at providing a wide view on mystery shopping as a tool for improving service.

The theoretical framework presents research about service-dominant logic (SDL), business-to-business (B2B) marketing, and salesperson performance. The focus of the theoretical framework is on the service-dominant logic based salesperson performance. According to the service-centered view, the customer is a co-producer of the service. Marketing is a service-based value co-creation process where the salesperson is a full-time marketer.

In the empirical research, narrative inquiry was chosen as the primary data collection method due to the nature of the research question, and limitations as a result of the geographical location of the sales agents. Narrative inquiry allowed the sales agents to privately articulate their perceptions in a written format and without any interference from the researcher. The narratives were analyzed through content analysis. Secondary data collection methods were participant observation, service blueprinting workshop and email survey.

The research process made it possible to identify challenges in using mystery shopping as a tool in improving salesperson performance. The thesis concludes with an overview of development ideas and recommendations on how mystery shopping could be improved and if there should be alternatives for mystery shopping.

The results of the research reveal that the opinions of the sales agents are quite critical on mystery shopping. Sales agents have learned to recognize the mystery shoppers and therefore the mystery shopping tool should be used only short-term and without prior notice to the sales agents. Mystery shopping has mainly temporary impact on the performance of the sales agents. The mystery shopping results should be integrated with other measures of service quality or service delivery process.

Key words: Business-to-Business marketing, mystery shopping, salesperson performance, Service-Dominant logic

Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu **Tiivistelmä**
Laurea Leppävaara
Palveluliiketoiminnan koulutusohjelma (ylempi AMK)

Pehkonen, Taija

Mystery shopping myyntihenkilön palvelusuorituksen kehittämisessä: esimerkkinä ryhmä- ja kokousliiketoiminta

Vuosi 2014 Sivumäärä 66

Palvelualan yritysten johtajat ovat kiinnostuneita käyttämään taloudellisia ja tehokkaita keinoja asiakaskokemuksen ja kokonaisvaltaisen palvelun laadun arvioimisessa ja tarkkailemisessa. Mystery shopping -työkalusta on tullut suosittu palvelun laadun mittaamisessa. Siitä huolimatta vain vähän tutkimuksia on tehty jotta varmistuttaisiin, että sen avulla saadaan oikeita mittaustuloksia palvelusuorituksesta.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on selvittää ryhmä- ja kokousmyynnissä työskentelevien myyntivirkailijoiden näkemyksiä mystery shopping –työkalun merkityksestä business-to-business -kontekstissa. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on koota laaja katsaus mystery shopping –työkalun käyttämisestä palvelujen kehittämisessä.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä on tarkasteltu palvelukeskeistä liiketoimintalogiikkaa, business-to-business (B2B) markkinointia sekä myyntihenkilön palvelusuoritusta. Teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä keskitytään palvelukeskeiseen liiketoimintalogiikkaan perustuvaan myyntihenkilön palvelusuoritukseen. Palvelukeskeisessä ajattelussa asiakas tuottaa arvoa yhdessä palvelun tarjoajan kanssa. Markkinointi on palvelulähtöinen prosessi, jossa arvoa luodaan yhdessä asiakkaan kanssa. Myyntihenkilö toimii prosessissa kokoaikaisena markkinoijana.

Empiirisen tutkimuksen päämenetelmänä toimi narratiivinen tutkimus johtuen tutkimusongelman luonteesta ja myyntivirkailijoiden maantieteellisestä sijainnista. Narratiivinen tutkimus mahdollisti sen, että myyntivirkailijat saivat yksityisesti kirjata näkemyksensä ilman tutkijan läsnäolon aiheuttamaa häiriötä. Kertomukset analysoitiin sisällönanalyysin metodein. Toissijaisia aineistonkeruumenetelmiä olivat havainnointi, blueprint-työpaja ja sähköpostikysely.

Tutkimusprosessin avulla oli mahdollista tunnistaa haasteita, joita liittyy mystery shopping -työkalun käyttämiseen myyntihenkilöiden palvelusuorituksen kehittämisessä. Opinnäytetyön johtopäätöksissä annetaan kehitysideoita ja suosituksia siitä, miten mystery shopping -työkalua voisi kehittää ja tulisiko sille olla vaihtoehtoisia menetelmiä.

Tutkimustulokset paljastavat, että myyntivirkailijat ovat melko kriittisiä mystery shopping -työkalua kohtaan. Myyntivirkailijat ovat oppineet tunnistamaan mystery shopperit, eli haamuostajat, joten haamuostamista tulisi käyttää vain lyhytkestoisesti ja varoittamatta ennalta myyntivirkailijoita. Myyntivirkailijoiden palvelusuoritukseen mystery shopping -työkalulla on pääosin väliaikainen vaikutus. Mystery shopping –työkalun avulla saadut tulokset tulisi integroida muihin laadun mittareiden tuloksiin.

Asiasanat: business-to-business markkinointi, mystery shopping, myyntihenkilön palvelusuoritus, palvelukeskeinen liiketoimintalogiikka

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 6
1.1 Purpose and research questions 6
1.2 Review of previous studies 7
1.3 Definition of the key concepts 10
1.4 Structure of the thesis report 11
2 Mystery Shopping at Scandic Hotels 11
2.1 Mystery shopping in service organizations 12
2.1.1 The concept of mystery shopping 12
2.1.2 Ethicalness and reliability of mystery shopping 14
2.2 Group and conference business at Scandic Hotels 15
2.2.1 The group and conference sales cycle 16
2.2.2 Mystery shopping criteria 19
3 Service-dominant logic based salesperson performance 20
3.1 Service versus goods 21
3.2 Service-dominant logic 22
3.3 Customer understanding in business-to-business marketing 24
3.4 Supporting customer's value creation during service process 24
3.5 Service quality improvement process in service logic 25
3.6 Relationship marketing amongst part-time and full-time marketers 28
3.7 Motivating salesperson for better performance 30
4 Research methodology 33
4.1 Research strategy 33
4.2 Narrative inquiry 34
4.3 Qualitative content analysis 35
4.4 Participant observation 40
4.5 Blueprinting workshop 40
4.6 Email survey 42
5 Research findings 43
5.1 Findings and analysis of narrative inquiry 43
5.2 Findings and analysis of participant observation 47
5.3 Findings and analysis of blueprinting workshop 49
5.4 Findings and analysis of email survey 51
6 Conclusion 52
References 56
Figures 62
Tables 63
Appendixes 64

1 Introduction

Several of the Nordic countries are still struggling to recover after the financial crisis in 2008 (Economic Outlook in the Nordic Countries 2014, 9 – 10). Unpredictable events, such as Crimean crisis in 2014, have also influenced the economy. The challenging economic climate has put a major strain on the companies in the service industry. The resources are downsized, but the results and the quality of the service must remain excellent.

Result-based and customer-focused companies are looking for new and efficient ways for measuring and observing the customer experience, and the overall quality of the service. According to Wilson (2001, 723), various researchers believe that mystery shopping should play an essential role in the service-quality loop. Nevertheless, little has been written on how mystery shopping providers and users guarantee that a true measure of service performance is obtained. To this author's knowledge only little research effort has been dedicated to mystery shopping in a business-to-business context.

This study is important because mystery shopping requires considerable amount of resources. It is imperative to learn if spending resources on mystery shopping is worth it. Is it functional, does it improve salesperson performance? This thesis aims at filling this knowledge gap.

This research process was entered with pre-understanding of the research phenomenon from the author's own experience. The author has been working as a sales agent in group and conference business for several years, and has become familiar with mystery shopping through her work. Yet, there were too many open questions with at least as many obscure answers that drew the author's attention. In July 2013, the author decided to concentrate on mystery shopping in her Master's thesis in order to explore the pros and cons of it.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

Qualitative research, as a term, is like an umbrella that has various kinds of qualitative researches under it (Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2009, 9). Qualitative research is about collecting data in the form of naturalistic verbal reports. The analysis that is conducted on the reports is textual. The challenge is with interpreting what the text stands for rather than finding the numerical attributes of it. In qualitative research, the interpretation is conducted through elaborate narrative reports of participants' understandings, accounts or perceptions of a phenomenon. (Smith 2006, 2.) A qualitative approach was chosen in order to better fulfill the purpose of this thesis.

This thesis explores the sales agents' perceptions of the functionality of mystery shopping as a tool in improving salesperson performance in group and conference sales in business-to-business context. The thesis aims at providing a wide view on mystery shopping as a tool for improving service. This thesis is limited to business-to-business (B2B) marketing, and group and conference business in one hotel chain.

According to Kiviniemi (2007) the different phases of qualitative research, may not always be predetermined. The choices concerning the research method may be made gradually during the process. The research question may not be clearly indicated in the beginning, but it gets clearer during the research process. Even the main focus may move to some more interesting topics. The risk is that the research becomes too scattered. Therefore it is necessary to narrow down the research questions. (Kiviniemi 2007, 70 – 73.)

The research questions of this thesis are:
What are the sales agents' perceptions of the functionality of mystery shopping?
How does mystery shopping function in practice?
How can mystery shopping be improved?
Should there be alternative tools for mystery shopping?

The results of this study will be presented to the case company in order to assist the management in choosing the future tools for improving salesperson performance. This thesis is beneficial in internal conversations between the supervisors and the sales agents, because it deepens the understanding of the challenges with mystery shopping.

1.2 Review of previous studies

The author of this thesis used various channels to collect theory for the thesis. One of the main sources of information for this thesis report was Nelli search portal (Nelli Information Portal 2014). It offers access to Laurea Library's electronic resources. From Nelli the author was able to find interesting studies related to the challenges in group and conference business.

Kokkomäki, Laukkanen and Komppula (2010, 21) have studied the factors that determine a business organization's use of an intermediary when buying meeting services and convention packages. Based on the research, they suggest that there are three distinct factors as determinants. The factors are "attractive convention package", "know-how of the personnel", and "ease of buying convention package". This research didn't evaluate the importance of mystery shopping in conference business, but the research gave interesting background information on conference business management.

After studying general background information on group and conference business and mystery shopping, the author of this thesis looked for previous studies on similar subject. Mystery shopping is a quite popular tool in collecting data for thesis reports, but mystery shopping as a tool hasn´t been studied largely. There are only a few thesis reports that question the functionality of the method. One can find numerous thesis reports and other research reports that are written based on mystery shopping results. Table 1 presents a collection from www.theseus.fi. The collection presents a list of the studies of mystery shopping.

Author / year	Name of the thesis	Key words	Research methods
Pihlaja, K. 2013	Mystery shopping as a Method to Improve Kela's Customer Service Quality	Customer orientation, customer experience management, Kela, mystery shopper, mystery shopping, service model, quality of service, workplace communication	Qualitative method (questionnaire)
Kärpänen, T. 2011	Understanding Customer Experience through Methodological Triangulation - Case: Repair Services in Finland	Services, customer experience, methodological triangulation, Mystery Shopping, repair services	Qualitative and quantitative methods (methodological triangulation)
Mäkinen, U. 2011	Service Challenges: Sales Personnels` Perspective Case: Alko Inc	Customer service, service quality, personal service, customer service process, Mystery Shopping	Qualitative and quantitative methods (questionnaire)
Heikkonen, A. 2010	Staff Opinions about Mystery Shopping	Work motivation, mystery shopping, customer service, feedback	Qualitative method (questionnaire)
Laaksonen, T. & Pelttari, T. 2009	Suitability of the Mystery Shopping and the Customer Satisfaction Inquiry for the Determination of Customer Satisfaction in the Retail Business	Mystery shopping, customer satisfaction inquiry, retail business, customer satisfaction research, customer service	Qualitative and quantitative methods (customer satisfaction inquiries, mystery shopping)
Vakkuri, J. 2009	What kind of effects does the employee´s motivation have to the quality of service	Motivation, job motivation, quality of service	Qualitative method (theme interviews)

Table 1: Examples of previous thesis reports on the functionality of mystery shopping

Pihlaja (2003) has studied and analyzed the usefulness, development, and management of mystery shopping in her Master’s thesis. The purpose of the thesis was to find out customer servants’ and their immediate supervisors’ experiences in mystery shopping as a qualitative method for improving Kela’s face-to-face customer service. According to Pihlaja’s study, mystery shopping is perceived to improve the quality of customer service under certain conditions. Mystery shopping method has to be used properly in order to give truthful account. The mystery shopper has to be well prepared and objective in the situation.

The purpose of Kärpänen’s study (2011) was to describe and analyze a good mixed method package, and to understand the customer experience through methodological triangulation in a certain business environment. Mystery shopping was one of the methods that was used in the research process of the Master’s thesis. As an outcome of the study, recommendations were given for good methods that could be used in a repair business environment to understand the customer experience better. Mystery shopping was found to be the most useful qualitative method in the company in question. The method was time-consuming but an effective way to reinforce service standards and to observe quality.

Mäkinen (2011) examined Alko Inc. organization’s customer service process from the perspective of the sales personnel. The Bachelor’s thesis aimed at comparing the results from the mystery shopping test to the answers received from the sales personnel, in relation to the quality of service. Based on the study results, the answers from both sales personnel and mystery shoppers were quite similar. They had listed almost the same difficulties in the service process.

Heikkonen (2010) studied the opinions of the staff of two restaurants about mystery shopping. The purpose of the Bachelor’s thesis was to let the staff members tell their opinions about mystery shopping. Based on the research, mystery shopping doesn’t have a great influence on the staff member’s work motivation. It only makes them improve the customer service temporarily.

The purpose of the Bachelor’s thesis of Laaksonen and Pelttari (2009) was to examine how mystery shopping and customer satisfaction inquiry are suitable for customer satisfaction researching in retail business. Based on their research, mystery shopping requires more resources than a regular customer satisfaction inquiry and the sample sizes are small. Yet, mystery shopping gave more information and it was more practical than customer satisfaction inquiry. Mystery shopping was also found to be more valid and reliable.

Vakkuri (2009) conducted research on employee’s motivation in Alko Oy. One of the aims was to find out if mystery shopping research method improves the employees’ quality of service.

Based on the research, mystery shopping was found to be a good way to research the quality of service. Mystery shopping encouraged the employees to better achievements, but it also was getting too much attention.

Interesting detail is that two of the studies mentioned above have been made for Alko Inc. organization. Alko Inc. has been using mystery shopping since 2006 to evaluate the quality of service and also to control the service. For the last seven years, Alko Inc. has been using the results from mystery shopping for the purpose of internal training of the employees and for creating mutual practices. In 2013 the management realized that the service process was handled very well and that mystery shopping was not improving the process anymore. Therefore, a new strategic goal is to teach the employees to understand the whole customer experience and to be part of developing the customer experience, the feeling. Alko Inc. chose Exit interview survey to be the next tool to measure the customer experience. (Stude 2014.)

1.3 Definition of the key concepts

The key concepts of the thesis are briefly defined and introduced in this subchapter. It is important to understand the central themes related to the research topic in order to find the relations between the concepts.

Business-to-business marketing (B2B)
Business-to-business marketing is a two-way decision process, which has limited and active buyers, as well as large and complex orders. In B2B world, there are two important aspects: relationships and value creation. Therefore the concept of business-to-business marketing has connections between value-based marketing and relationship marketing. (Albadvi & Hosseini 2011, 503.)

Mystery shopping
Mystery shopping is a form of participant observation, which is often used in service organizations to measure performance against pre-set quality standards. The researchers act as customers or potential customers to observe the quality of procedures and processes used in the service delivery. (Wilson 1998, 414.)

Salesperson performance
Sales performance is widely considered as a significant index of organizational and individual performance. Salespeople require access to personal resources as well as job and organizational resources in order to work effectively. (Medhurst & Albreicht 2011, 398.)

Service-dominant logic (SDL)

Service-dominant logic is a service-centered model of exchange, which is focused on relationships, co-creating value and intangible resources. Service provision is fundamental to economic exchange in this logic for marketing. In a service-centered view of exchange, the goal is to strive to maximize consumer involvement in the customization of the service, and to recognize that the consumer is a co-producer. (Vargo, S.L. & Lusch, R.F. 2004, 1 - 12.)

1.4 Structure of the thesis report

The background of the thesis and the research questions are introduced in the first chapter of this thesis report. Furthermore some previous thesis reports on similar subject are listed on the first chapter. The second chapter introduces the case company and discusses the current situation of mystery shopping in the case company. The third chapter provides the reader with the theoretical framework of the thesis. The focus of the chapter four is on the empirical research methodology and on the process for carrying out the research. Chapter five summarizes the findings of each research method. Chapter six draws conclusions based on the collected data.

The thesis contains two main sections, the theory and the empirical study. The theoretical framework presents research about service-dominant logic in business-to-business marketing. In the empirical section data is gathered from stories written by sales agents, participant observation, blueprinting workshop, and email survey. The findings of each research method are presented and original citations are used to give credibility and to emphasize the results. The conclusions are drawn based on the data.

2 Mystery Shopping at Scandic Hotels

Scandic Hotels launched a project in March 2010 for developing brand and concept. The objective was to improve, maintain and fine tune products for operations in short and long term. The project also aimed to maintain, develop and improve quality assurance tools in short term and long term, and to increase the level of customer satisfaction. Scandic Hotels wants to be perceived as conscious, easy to do business with, an innovator, and as the market leader. The standards in service quality were pointed out specifically. (Concept & Quality 2010, 3.)

Five quality assurance tools were launched for further improvement. The tools were Scandic guest survey, self-audit, training and hotel support, team member travel, and mystery calls. The objective of these tools was to increase revenue and profit, to ensure that the customers would repeatedly choose Scandic Hotels, and to ensure that brand promises would be delivered. The objective was also to identify strengths and weaknesses, define areas of improvement and to ensure that service, concepts, and policies would meet expectation of the customers. (Concept & Quality 2010, 16.)

Scandic Hotels has chosen mystery shopping as one of the tools for quality assurance. The goal of mystery shopping program is to assist in training the sales agents on enquiry handling and to monitor and ensure that the brand standards are maintained within the business continuously. The overall target is to reach a mystery shopping score of minimum 75 %. (Fiumana 2014, 3.) This thesis concentrates on mystery shopping as a tool in improving salesperson performance in group and conference business.

2.1 Mystery shopping in service organizations

There has been a constant growth in the consumer demand for better service for some years. Increasing competition, shrinking profit margins, and high employee turnover make it more challenging to meet the consumers' demands. An author who writes under pseudonym "PamInCa" (2009) is very optimistic when it comes to the effects of mystery shopping. PamInCa claims that mystery shopping is one of the most powerful tools to improve the service quality. The data provided by mystery shopping allows company owners and managers to identify the areas that need improvement and to reward employees in a consistent manner. (PamInCa 2009, 3 – 4.)

Traditional ways of evaluating the employee performance are measuring sales or customer loyalty, monitoring customer complaints, and customer-satisfaction surveys. These manners of approach generally fail to provide sufficient detail on whether predetermined standards of service are being provided. According to Wilson (2001), only mystery shopping has the potential to directly measure the service performance, covering the full range of preset quality standards, and including behavioral aspects of performance. Mystery shopping is used to measuring the process, emphasizing the service experience as it unfolds, and focusing on procedures and activities that occur or don't occur. Mystery shopping aims to collect facts rather than opinions. (Wilson 2001, 723 - 724.)

2.1.1 The concept of mystery shopping

The concept behind mystery shopping takes place in time when kings disguised themselves as commoners and mingled with common people. That way they were trying to learn what people were truly thinking of them and their kingdom. The actual mystery shopping, as it is known nowadays, seems to have started in the 1940s. (PaminCa 2009, 3.)

According to Wilson (2001), mystery shopping is a form of participant observation that has its origins in the field of cultural anthropology. The anthropologists would participate in a tribe's daily life to have better understanding in behaviors, norms, and attitudes that were not communicable or documented via language. This observation technique allowed the researchers to overcome some of the weaknesses the interviewing and survey research techniques are often confronted with. Mystery shopping today differs from the original anthropological approach in terms of systematic and structured format. (Wilson 2001, 722.)

Surprisingly the downward trend of the economy has had a positive effect on the demand of mystery shopping. Increased competition for the consumers' money has caused an increased necessity of mystery shopping. According to Tutt Woods (2010), mystery shopping provides important information for businesses. (Tutt Woods 2010, 6.)

Due to the downward economy of today, businesses can't afford to lose any customers. The consumer's growing demand for high-quality service and more intense competition in businesses increase the demand for mystery shopping. PamInCa (2009) claims that practically every company uses some kind of mystery shopping program. Some of them are done internally, but the anonymity that the mystery shoppers offer is preferred. PamInCa states that mystery shopping does and will proceed with changing the way businesses train their employees to serve the customers more satisfactorily. (PamInCa 2009, 4.)

According to Tutt Woods (2010, 10), mystery shopping offers unbiased reports of typical consumers. The information provided by the mystery shoppers is used for improving the services and products to get more customers. Mystery shoppers use structured approach of codes and checklists to collect information and to measure service performance (Wilson 2001, 722).

Mystery shopping is used for various reasons. In most of the cases the goal is to measure the quality of the service delivery to the customer. The advantage of mystery shopping is in its' quality of the measurement. The mystery shoppers should be well trained and familiar with the process. If they are familiar with it, they are also able to measure the failure points. (Hesselink, van Iwaarden & van der Wiele 2004, 10.) Mystery shopping can be used to observe an existing service or a service that is nearly completed. The customer experience is compared to the planned experience and concept. Based on this comparison one can determine if the service concept is functional. (Arantola & Simonen 2009, 23.)

Companies use the feedback and comments they get from the mystery shoppers to determine the effectiveness of training, to understand how customers view their business, to gauge employee morale and knowledge, to measure organization performance, and to review business policies and procedures (Newhouse 2004, xx).

According to Tutt Woods, mystery shopping is market research and mystery shopping providers are market research companies. Independent contractors are hired by the market research companies to do the shopping for their client companies. These client companies can be very diverse: from small family businesses to big international corporations, but they all desire to have information on the ways that their services and products are perceived. (Tutt Woods 2010, 10.)

2.1.2 Ethicalness and reliability of mystery shopping

According to Hesselink et al. (2004) mystery shopping is a useful instrument that adds value to customer satisfaction survey data. It can be used in creating an in-depth insight in perceptions of potential customers in hotels and in other service environments. The information that is gathered can be qualitative as well as quantitative. The managers in the organization have an important role in forwarding information, coordinating the actions, and showing role modeling behavior in taking the desired actions. (Hesselink et al. 2004, 11 - 14.)

Mystery shopping is a concealed way of participant observation in a public setting. It is seen as a form of participant observation that uses researchers to make the personnel in customer service to believe that they are serving potential or real customers. This technique is aimed at observing the consistency of procedures and processes in the delivery of a service. (Wilson 2001, 721 - 722.)

The ethicalness of the use of deception and observation of people can be questioned. Does it violate their rights to privacy? Jorgensen (1989) didn't see more of an ethical obligation to the service provider in a concealed observation than in normal circumstances. Nevertheless, to avoid this ethical dilemma, the service providers have to be made aware that they will be observed from time to time in a concealed manner (Wilson 2001, 722).

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and The European Society for Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR) have published a joint code that is intended to demonstrate practitioners' awareness of their professional and ethical responsibilities in carrying out market research. ICC/ESOMAR recommends the worldwide use of the code for self-regulation purpose. The code sets out ethical rules that the market researchers and clients should follow. According to the code "market researchers shall ensure that projects and activities are designed, carried out, reported and documented accurately, transparently and objectively". (ICC/ESOMAR 2008, 3 – 6.)

It is critical to win the acceptance of the employees in order get useful results. Considerable amount of effort is to be put into positioning the mystery shopping research prior to the upcoming research. (Wilson 2001, 726.) The use of mystery shoppers should be done in an open and transparent way. By giving information on the use of mystery shoppers throughout the organization, it gives stimulus to pay greater attention to observing customers. Well-communicated results can also create a positive drive for improvements in the organization. (Hesselink et al. 2004, 11 - 14.)

Traditionally the reliability of a research approach is mostly judged on the basis of sample size. However, the service organizations justify limited numbers of samples. In mystery shopping the samples are collected during visits to the service encounter. Every service counter and customer is critical and this is why the quality of service delivery should always be identical. The service companies aim to standardize the quality of all service encounters. (Wilson 2001, 725 - 726.)

To completely fool the service personnel, the mystery shoppers must fit to the customer profile that is appropriate for the scenario that they are supposed to perform in. This is more difficult and important in a more complex encounter. To have a credible encounter, it may require mystery shoppers to be real and existing customers of the organization. (Wilson 2001, 725.)

Ultimately the three main purposes, the mystery shopping results are used for, are to identify weak points and failures in an organization's service delivery, to motivate, develop and encourage service personnel and to assess the competitiveness of an organization's service provision by benchmarking (Wilson 2001, 725).

2.2 Group and conference business at Scandic Hotels

According to Oxford Dictionary, the definition of a group is "a number of people or things that are located, gathered, or classed together". A conference is defined as "a formal meeting of people with a shared interest, typically one that takes place over several days". (Oxford University Press 2014.)

In travel industry, each organization has its own definitions and requirements for the terms "group" and "conference". The definition of a group is usually based on the number of people that it consists of. It requires a certain number of people to get a group pricing and to have the terms of a group booking. Conference, meetings and events are included in the same business field, since they all include renting a meeting room and buying catering and technical service. Scandic Hotels has a sales department in its every operating country that handles all the group and conference business.

This research is limited to the sales agents who work in the group and conference business at Scandic Hotels. In the chosen company, the sales agents in the group and conference business handle the reservations that involve meetings with or without accommodation and with or without catering. Besides meetings and events, the sales agents handle the group reservations that include 10 or more hotel rooms and 15 or more guests. All the enquiries that include one of the previous things are forwarded to the sales agents in the group and conference sales department. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 3.)

2.2.1 The group and conference sales cycle

The project named Meeting 1.5 was launched in January 2012. The purpose of the project was to provide the commercial and operational functions with all the necessary pre-requisites in order to improve commercial results, process efficiency and customer satisfaction within meeting segment. Large potential in improving e.g. sales processes was found during a former study in spring 2011. (Stahl 2012, 5 - 6.)

One of the objectives of Meeting 1.5 was to set new standardized processes and procedures in motion to raise overall effectiveness, and to assure increased quality and commercialism across the company (Stahl 2012, 8). To achieve the objectives, Scandic Hotels created a detailed manual that explains the processes and procedures of the group and conference business.

The purpose of the manual was to ensure that all the sales agents work in a professional and standardized manor. By making sure that brand standards are followed during the sales cycle, the identical working means and methods would be secured to achieve increased efficiency, high quality customer service and finally increased revenue and conversion. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 3.)

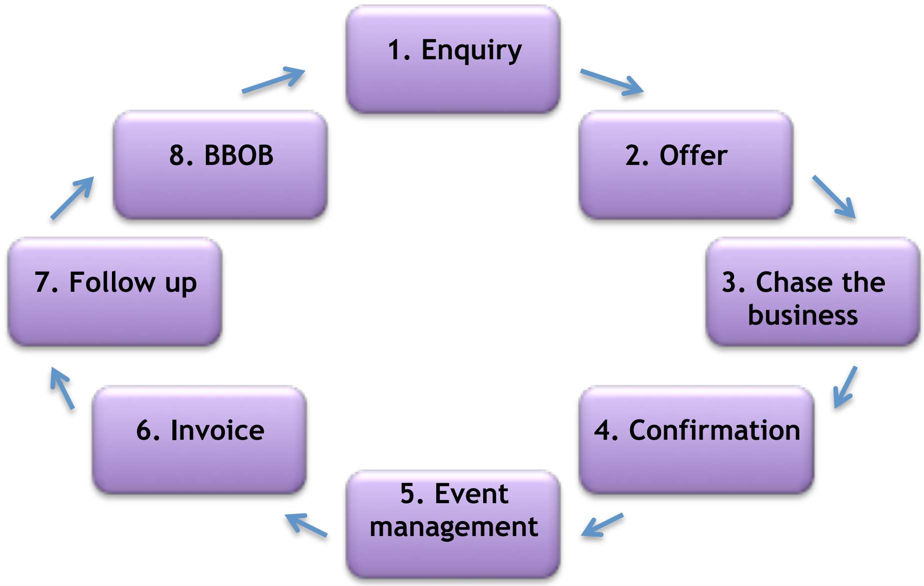

Figure 1: The Group & Conference sales cycle (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 5)

In Figure 1, one can see the different stages of the sales cycle and the overall steps that the sales agents are involved in. The Scandic's manual has instructions for every stage of the cycle. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 8.) The steps are described in more detail below.

1. Enquiry

The enquiry handling is the starting point of the sales cycle. The sales agents should handle the inquiries in a way that will provide the best opportunity to convert the business. The customers should get a feeling of being looked after as a customer, and to realize that their needs are understood. The brand standards include the following: telephone calls must be answered within three rings in a friendly and prompt manor, emails must be reacted to within four hours, all enquiries must be inserted to the booking system, and a specific enquiry handling checklist must be used during all enquiries. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 8.)

2. Offer

After handling the enquiry, the sales agent has to confirm the discussion with the client in a written format. Professional offer or a response must be sent as soon as possible to the customer. The customers usually make decisions based on seeing maximum two venues and therefore a quick response is imperative. The brand standards include the following: a written offer must be sent from all optional bookings, an offer template from the booking system has to be used, and written offers must be sent within 24 hours from receiving the enquiry. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 35.)

3. Chase the business

Every offer has to be followed up by contacting the customer. The sales agents should not expect for the customer to contact first. The sales agents have the responsibility to call the customer and to ensure that the customer chooses Scandic Hotels. By following up the offer, the sales agent will have the opportunity to make possible changes on the offer, to make the offer look more tempting, and to win the business. The brand standards include the following: chase the business activities have to be performed on all optional bookings and the activities need to be performed three days after receiving the enquiry, a second activity will be performed seven days after receiving the enquiry. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 42.)

4. Confirmation

When the customer wants to confirm the booking, the procedures to be followed depend on the size of the booking. There are two ways of contracting with the customers. The brand standards include the procedures and steps that need to be taken to follow the Scandic policy. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 48.)

5. Event management

After the booking has been confirmed, the sales agent starts coordinating all the details of the booking for the operating teams of the hotel. This is to ensure that each operating team has all the relevant information to accommodate a group or to run an event as smoothly as possible. Providing excellent event management will ensure that the customer receives a high quality of service. Brand standards include the steps that need to be taken in order to receive all the necessary information from the customer. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 52.)

6. Invoice

At Scandic Hotels, invoicing is not one of sales agents responsibilities. However, the members of the operating teams invoice the customer based on the details that the sales agents have written down. It is important to invoice the customer promptly to ensure a fast payment and to secure a better service. The brand standards include the following: invoice has to be sent three days after the event, all receipts have to be enclosed when required, and the charges should match the order the sales agent has made. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 61.)

7. Follow up

It is important to follow up with the customer after every event. This is to make sure the customer had a successful experience and to thank the customer for choosing Scandic Hotels. The brand standards include the following: the follow up activity has to be done for all actual bookings and it has to be performed seven days after the event. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 63.)

8. Bring back old business (BBOB)

The final step of the sales cycle is to ensure that the sales agents try to bring back old business leads when possible. It should not be expected to generate concrete business leads every time, but to show the customer that Scandic Hotels cares about the customer. The brand standards include the following: bring back old business activity has to be performed for all bookings six months after the event. At its best, the eighth step of the cycle will begin a new sales cycle with the same customer. (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 65.)

The purpose of the mystery shopping at Scandic Hotels is to monitor and ensure the maintenance of the brand standards on a continuous basis and to assist in training the sales people on enquiry handling. (Scandic Meeting Mystery Shopping 2013, 2.) Scandic Hotels uses mystery shopping only on the three first steps of the sales cycle. Therefore, enquiry handling, sending an offer, and chasing the business are the three steps that are monitored the most.

2.2.2 Mystery shopping criteria

Scandic Hotels has bought the mystery shopping service from BDRC Continental, which is an independent research consultancy in the United Kingdom. One of the service that BDRC Continental offers is Meetings Benchmark Tracker service. The Meetings Benchmark Tracker is a program that can measure performance in several enquiry types. Scandic Hotels has made an agreement with BDRC to make certain number of phone call and email enquiries per calendar quarter per participating venue. (BDRC Continental 2013, 2.)

There are four sections in the assessment criteria. The first one is Connection Section. The objective of this section is to get the caller through to a relevant person as quickly and as smoothly as possible. The mystery caller assesses eight questions in this section. Two questions are mentioned here as examples “from the moment the phone was first answered, how long did you wait in the queuing system before you received a response to your call” and “how many calls were required to complete the whole enquiry”. (BDRC Continental 2013, 4 – 6.)

The second section in the assessment criteria is Needs Assessment. This is an important section because it is crucial to gather customer details and to aid follow up. The mystery caller assesses 18 questions in this section. Two questions to mention as examples are “did the call handler ask for the purpose of the event" and "did the call handler outline unique advantages, features and benefits of the venue". (BDRC Continental 2013, 7 - 9.)

The third section in the assessment criteria is Manner & Approach. This section is assessed throughout the phone call and the entire enquiry is taken into account. The mystery caller assesses ten questions in this section and two examples of them are "friendliness / warmth / politeness" and "product knowledge". (BDRC Continental 2013, 10 - 12.)

The fourth section in the assessment criteria is Follow up. The mystery caller assesses five questions in this section. The sales agent should contact the caller by telephone within three working days of the initial enquiry. Follow up section includes themes like "reference to your special request within the follow up material" and "were there any spelling mistakes, typing error or significant grammatical inaccuracies". (BDRC Continental 2013, 13 - 15.)

The fifth section in the assessment criteria is Selling Skills. The selling skills are assessed in different sections of the criteria, but are pulled out to provide an additional performance measure. There are 11 questions in this section. Two examples from this section are "did the call handler ask if you had any other enquiries / future business requirements they could help with" and "interest in enquiry / getting the business throughout the call". (BDRC Continental 2013, 16.)

Mystery shopping provider contacts a specific hotel or Destination Desk several times per quarter. It has been predetermined how many contacts there are per quarter. For example the sales agents at Helsinki Destination Desk are aware that they receive six voice calls, three emails, and three web enquiries per quarter. (Scandic Meeting Mystery Shopping 2013, 3 - 8.)

Once the mystery shopping and marking has been completed, an email notification is sent to the managers and brand users. Call criteria and voice recording are available and can be reviewed straight away. The manager sets a one-to-one meeting with the sales agent who has participated in mystery shopping. The phone call and criteria are reviewed and evaluated. If the sales agent agrees, the voice recording may be shared with other sales agents for learning purposes. (Scandic Meeting Mystery Shopping 2013, 4 – 6.)

3 Service-dominant logic based salesperson performance

An internal debate on the content of marketing in general in service marketing is in progress, particularly fuelled by the service-dominant logic presented by Vargo and Lusch. Service-dominant logic is a synthesis of ideas and knowledge that have been brewing for decades. (Gummesson 2007, 114.)

Vargo and Lusch made the transition to form the plural “services” to a singular “service”. Service reflects more clearly “a process of using one’s resources for the benefit of another entity”. (Vargo & Lusch 2008, 7.)

3.1 Service versus goods

Service can be described in various ways. One way to characterize service is to compare it to goods. Scholars have come up with many different theories about marketing goods and service. The scholars seem to be relatively unanimous about one thing: the differences between goods and service should be taken into account in the marketing.

During the last 40 years, service marketing has grown into an important sub discipline of marketing. The debate over the content of the service marketing and marketing theory in general is still in progress. Marketing in general and service marketing precisely are in turbulent flux. (Gummesson 2007, 114.)

The evolution of the service marketing literature has been strongly affected by three different factors: considerable interaction between academics and practitioners, strong interdisciplinary orientation especially between operations and human resources management, and internationality of the literature. Bitner, Brown and Fisk (1993) have used an evolutionary metaphor as a framework. They describe the service marketing literature in three stages: Crawling Out, Scurrying About and Walking Erect. (Bitner et al. 1993, 61 – 63.)

The first period of the evolution is called Crawling Out stage (pre-1980). This period started with the first service marketing scholars struggling to publish their work and the period culminated with the debate over questioning the very existence of the service marketing as its own field within the discipline. The marketing discipline focused on selling physical goods and especially agricultural products in the early history. The transition from an industrial economy to a service economy received little notice in the marketing discipline in the United States of America. The early scholars who wrote about the new topic of service marketing were real risk takers. They were in the position of developing new knowledge without a research model. (Bitner et al. 1993, 61 - 67.)

Most of the service marketing studying was done through dissertation research. Johnson’s dissertation in 1969 launched the goods versus service debate by asking “Are goods and services different”. Another noteworthy example is Donnelly’s examination of distribution channels for service in 1976. Donnelly demonstrated that the channels for marketing service are very different from the channels for marketing physical goods. (Bitner et al. 1993, 66 - 67.)

An important outcome of the Crawling Out stage is the literature's characterization of service. Intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability are features that provided the underpinnings to separate service marketing to its' own marketing field. But during the latter years of the period, the debate of the legitimacy of the service marketing emerged. (Bitner et al. 1993, 68 - 70.)

During the period of Scurrying About (1980 – 1985) the debate over service versus goods began to wane. The new period represented a time of high interest and enthusiasm in service marketing and this was also shown in the increasing amount of literature. Some of the literature that was published during the Scurrying About period continued to defend service substantially different from goods. And some of the literature targeted new areas of inquiry, such as service encounters and service design and mapping. (Bitner et al. 1993, 70 - 74.)

Walking Erect stage (1986 – present) in the service marketing literature has been a period of explosive growth in numbers of publication and also increasing empirical and theoretical rigor in the content of the literature. Since 1986 there has been hardly any discussion of whether service are different from goods. The literature has focused more on specific marketing problems of service businesses. The researchers have begun to focus more on substantive business issues of service marketing. Such topics are service quality, service encounters, service design, customer retention and relationship marketing and internal marketing. (Bitner et al. 1993, 74 - 82.)

Bitner et al. (1993) were expecting a continued broadening, deepening and sharpening of the service marketing research. The authors believed that service design and delivery, service encounters and service experiences, and service quality and customer satisfaction would be the three main areas for future research. (Bitner et al. 1993, 87 - 89.)

3.2 Service-dominant logic

In 2004, Vargo and Lusch published an article on what has become known as service-dominant logic (SDL or S-D logic). SDL has raised strong discussion and interest about theory development in marketing in a short period of time. The focus is on marketing as service-based value co-creation process. (Maclaran, Saren, Stern & Tadajewski 2010, 10 – 11.) According to Vargo and Lusch, the SDL is a generalizable mindset from which general theory of marketing can be developed (Vargo & Lusch 2008, 3).

Whereas according to goods-dominant logic (GDL), both tangible and intangible units are seen as the bases of exchange. The goods-dominant logic concepts are traditionally used for understanding business. (Maclaran et al. 2010, 219.) But customers don't just buy goods or service.

They buy something that they understand to be of value for them. According to the service-dominant logic customers are not buying goods or service but value propositions to be of service to them. (Gummesson 2007, 114 - 117.)

In SDL, service is seen as the process of doing something for and with another party. It is defined as the application of competences such as knowledge and skills for the benefit of another party. According to SDL service is always dynamic and collaborative. In SDL economic exchange is about providing service in order to receive mutual service. In short, service is exchanged for service. (Maclaran et al. 2010, 221.)

Vargo and Lusch point out that SDL is not a paradigm because it doesn't represent a worldview. But it is a change in mindset and requires a major transition in thinking. Placing service at the center of exchange moves the focus of value creation, exchange and marketing from tangible resources to intangible resources. Marketing seems to have transitioned to thinking in terms of marketing with customers, rather than marketing to customers. (Maclaran et al. 2010, 227 - 228.)

Arantola-Hattab (2013) has examined three various perspectives on service in her dissertation. The study discussed service-dominant logic (SDL), service logic (SL), and the most recent one customer-dominant logic (CDL). According to SL and SDL, the customer defines value simultaneously when using service or goods in a certain context. Both logics have a service-centered view of customer orientation. The difference in these two logics is in their views regarding who is the co-creator of value in the interaction between customer and company. (Arantola-Hattab 2013, 1 – 13.)

In SDL, the customer takes part and engages in the co-creation process, and is always a co-creator of value (Vargo & Lusch 2004, 2008). Whereas according to SL, the customer is the value-creator and not always a co-creator (Grönroos 2007). The center of SDL has been mainly in the service systems in a business-to-business context. According to CDL one should not concentrate on who is the co-creator. CDL presents that value can also be formed in a passive process and value is also based on customer's life experiences before and after an interaction. (Arantola-Hattab 2013, 13.)

According to Vargo (2009), it is openly recognized that the foundations of relationship marketing are grounded in business-to-business marketing and service marketing. Whereas relationship marketing and business-to-business marketing are foundational to service-dominant logic and in the process of reciprocal and collaborative value creation. (Vargo 2009, 373.)

3.3 Customer understanding in business-to-business marketing

Selling to business buyers is likely to involve more complex and lengthy decision processes, more rational buying criteria, and more and better trained buying-decision participants, than selling to consumers (Verbeke, Dietz & Wewaal 2011, 417). According to Albadvi and Hosseini (2011), in business-to-business world, there are two important aspects: relationships and value creation. Therefore the concept of business-to-business marketing has connections between value-based marketing and relationship marketing. (Albadvi & Hosseini 2011, 503.)

Value for the customers is created when the customers consume service. Therefore the service provider's role is to support the customers' processes with a set of resources, service processes, and with interactions that have a contribution in the processes. (Grönroos 2005, 11.) The service provider and the customer need to work together in order to create value for the product or the service. Value is created during a joint process. For a service company this means that the customer is involved in both creating and analyzing the value. The service provider needs to understand the customer's process and the connection between one's own process and the process of the customer. Developing a customer-oriented business requires customer understanding and ability to develop the business based on this understanding. (Arantola & Simonen 2009, 2 - 4.)

Companies that offer process service, approach the market with the help of special know-how. It can be for example know-how in the field of information technology or marketing processes. The total service offering may cover partially the process of the customer or the process may be entirely outsourced. Especially, when it comes to outsourcing, it is the final result of the process, not the work that the results are gained with. The customers don't want to buy hours, pieces or tons. They want to buy financial savings, extra sales or process efficiency. The customers also want the financial and functional benefits of the service to be verified. (Arantola & Simonen 2009, 11.)

3.4 Supporting customer's value creation during service process

Companies and most of their business processes and functions have undergone a remarkable change during the past 30 years. Process re-engineering, operations, manufacturing, warehousing, deliveries and total quality management, and just-in-time logistics have been developed through automation. Administrative processes and routines and management have also changed in a substantial way through information technology, extranets and intranets and re-engineering and outsourcing efforts. (Grönroos 2007, 12 – 13.)

Grönroos (2005) has stated “services can be defined as processes where a bundle of resources are integrated to support customers’ processes in order to enable value creation in those processes”. Supporting customers’ processes is the logic of service. (Grönroos 2005, 11.)

According to Grönroos (2005), customers are involved in company’s activities in two separate processes. The processes are called a distinct communication process and an interaction process. Touch points between a company and a customer are included in the distinct communication processes and activities are aimed at giving promises about the company’s value proposition. The interaction process includes episodes such as service processes, call centers, service recovery procedures, etc. and the episodes should fulfill the promises that have been given. (Grönroos 2005, 4 – 5.)

The goal of the episodes of the interaction process is to offer value-supporting solutions for the customer. The value-supporting solutions, for example service, goods, call center advice, etc., are solutions that support the processes of the customer in a value-supporting way. (Grönroos 2005, 5.)

The customer is present in the service process to a certain degree. The process includes producing and delivering the service to the customer. The customer takes part in the process and observes how the process operates simultaneously as the process develops. Grönroos (2007) has identified three basic characteristics for service in general: they are processes, that consist of activities or series of activities, they are produced and consumed simultaneously at least to some extent, and customer participates as a co-producer in the service production process at least to some extent. (Grönroos 2007, 53.)

The key characteristic of service is their process nature. Service is a process that consists of series of activities where numerous different types of resources are used frequently in direct contact with the customer to find the solution to the customer’s problem. Since the customer is participating in the process, the process becomes part of the solution. (Grönroos 2007, 54.)

3.5 Service quality improvement process in service logic

One way of defining service is by comparing it to goods. Service can be described by a set of four characteristics: intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable and perishable. But there is dependency between goods and service; they are destined to live together. You can take any service to find that there are goods elements and you can take any goods to find that there are service elements. (Gummesson 2007, 116 - 120.)

In service marketing the focus is not on a product but on interactions in service encounters (Grönroos 2004,1). The service encounter is often mentioned in the mainstream literature as the core of service marketing. However there are also service marketing cases that include no encounter. Besides marketing, the service encounter is also about production, delivery, innovation, complaints, administration, and about whatever one can think of. (Gummesson 2007, 121 – 122.)

Managers often believe that 100 % quality is impossible to reach in developing and offering service. This way the organization allows failures and accepts mistakes. Psychologically thinking, the organization gives up the battle for excellent service performance, before the battle has even begun. (Grönroos 2007, 111.)

Quality development has to be an ongoing process. Grönroos (2007) claimed that quality development can not be considered as a campaign, program or a project. It has to mean continuous appreciation of the importance of quality. It also requires that every individual in the organization understands how to influence good service quality, and this needs a constant reinforcement by management. (Grönroos 2007, 112.)

According to Gummesson and Lovelock (2004), the problem of variability in the performance of the service workers has attracted attention from service researchers. The interest is mainly in the relation to the difficulty of achieving similar output in labor-intensive service. (Gummesson & Lovelock 2004, 27.)

Service failures are mostly an outcome of inadequate service management. Heskett and Schlesinger argued in the early 90s that service failures have been designed into the system. New standards of service can't be designed by following old routines. The needs and expectations of customers are the heart of this approach, not the operating systems and constraints. Putting the customer first requires focusing on where and how they interact with the company. This means concentrating on the employees who deliver and create the service the customer values. According to Heskett and Schlesinger, in companies that are genuinely customer oriented, the business has been designed to maximize the value the frontline employees create and to support their efforts. (Heskett & Schlesinger 1991, 73 - 77.)

Quality is considered as one of the key factors when it comes to achieving success. The competitive advantage of the company depends on the quality and value of the service and products. Most of the time one concentrates too much on technical aspects of quality. The strategy of technical quality is successful only if a company is able to come up with a solution that the competitors have not. Nowadays it happens rarely and therefore many companies have the same level of technical quality. Even if the company is able to develop a brilliant solution from the technical aspect, the success may not be achieved if the quality of the active processes is poor, or the interactions poorly taken care of, and poorly managed. (Grönroos 2009a, 104.)

Johnson, Leonard and Walker (2006) argue that there are at least two perspectives from which the quality and the value of the service offering can be evaluated and defined: from the service provider's perspective and from the customer's perspective. Service provider should reflect an understanding, and sufficient response to the customer's expectations and needs in order to make the two perspectives similar. (Johnson et al. 2006, 29.)

However, they also argue that the value and quality ultimately assessed and experienced by the customer originate from the decisions taken by a service provider concerning the standard or quality of what to provide. That is to say, the basis of the customer's assessment of value and quality reside essentially and intrinsically in decisions taken about the design of where, what and how it is offered. The presence of third party peer review and professional accreditation process gives credence to the concept of intrinsic value and quality. They are more interested in intrinsic standards than in what is observable to the customer. (Johnson et al. 2006, 29.)

According to Grönroos (2007), it requires four steps to manage a service offering. The first step is to develop the service concept, second step is to develop a basic service package, third is to develop an augmented service offering, and the fourth to manage image and communication. (Grönroos 2007, 185.)

The intentions of the organization are determined by the service concept, and the development of the basic service package can be done based on the service concept. The basic service package includes the bundle of service that is required to fulfill the customer needs in target markets. In a well-developed basic package the necessary outcome-related features are included and the technical quality of the outcome is good. Nevertheless, if the service process does not function well, then even an excellent service package can be destroyed, and the perceived service will not be good. (Grönroos 2007, 185.)

The service production and delivery process are an integral part of the service. Therefore a basic service package has to be increased into an augmented service offering. The augmented service offering model includes the service process and the interactions between the customers and the organization. Also the customer's co-production efforts are included in the model. This way the model is aimed at reaching the total customer perceived quality of service. In the fourth step, an organization has to manage its' image and marketing communication to enhance the perception of the augmented service offering. (Grönroos 2007, 185.)

Besides the service concept, an augmented service offering is formed by three factors: accessibility of the service, interactions, and customer participation. The first factor, the accessibility of the service, depends for example on office hours, the number and skills of the personnel, location of the service outlets, and information technology. Depending on the factors mentioned earlier, customers might find it difficult or easy to get access to the service. Internet sites, call centers and help desks are becoming more and more an accessibility issue for service providers. (Grönroos 2007, 188.)

The second factor, interactions with the service, can be divided as follows: interactive communication between customers and employees, interactions with various technical and physical resources, interactions with systems and interactions with other customers who are involved in the process at the same time. All the interactions are part of the service perception. The perceived quality of an excellent basic service package may be low if the interactions are considered to be unfriendly or unnecessarily complicated. (Grönroos 2007, 189.)

The third factor of the augmented service offering is customer participation. It means that a customer has an effect on the service he perceives. The customer becomes a co-producer of the service and he also co-creates value for himself. Usually the customer is expected to give information, use websites, to fill in documents and so on. The customer is able to have an impact on improving the service if he is prepared and willing to do so. Developing a service offering is very pervasive process. The accessibility, interactions and customer participation aspects have to be taken into account when adding a new enhancing service to the market. (Grönroos 2007, 191.)

Service is a process consisting of series of activities that are produced and consumed simultaneously. It is challenging to manage quality control and to practice marketing in traditional way because there is no pre-produced quality to control before selling and consuming the service. Only part of the service process of delivering goods is experienced and at the same time consumed by the customer. (Grönroos 2007, 54.)

3.6 Relationship marketing amongst part-time and full-time marketers

Consumption of a service means process consumption rather than outcome consumption. The customer observes the service process as part of the service consumption, not only as the outcome of that process. Observing the whole process is important for the observing the total quality of the service. Besides, in customer’s mind it is the visible part of the service process that counts, although most of the process is invisible. Therefore marketing and quality control have to take place at the same time with service production and consumption. The essence of marketing service is in the way service process and service consumption process match each other, so that customers perceive good value creation and good service quality. (Grönroos 2007, 54 - 59.)

Grönroos (2005) has listed three steps that should be achieved by marketing. The first one is to get customers buy the company's service or goods for the first time. The second one is to make these customers so satisfied that they will consider buying the same service or goods again from the same service provider or supplier. The third achievement is to establish an emotional or attitudinal connection with the customer. Relationship marketing demands that the goal of the company is to achieve the third step. Nevertheless, mostly it is not enough with repeat buying behavior for a manifested relationship to exist. It requires also an attitudinal component. Relationship marketing can be practiced without achieving the third step, but relationship marketing as a company's strategy means that the company aims at reaching the third step. (Grönroos 2005, 3.)

Gummesson has introduced the concept of part-time marketeers (PTMs) in 1991. Gummesson's article explored the notion of the PTM and presented concepts that renewed the approach to marketing-orientation. PTMs and full-time marketeers (FTMs) both influence customer satisfaction, customer relations, customer perceived quality, and revenue, but only FTMs belong to the marketing or sales department that are designed to work solely with sales activities and marketing. Gummesson pointed out that all employees carry out the marketing activities. Marketing and sales departments are able to handle only a limited portion of the marketing, because its employees cannot be at the right place at the right time with the right customer. This is the reason why companies need both PTMs and FTMs. (Gummesson 1991, 60 - 73.)

"The goal for marketing is to engage the firm with the customers' processes with an aim to support value creation in those processes, in a mutually beneficial way." (Grönroos 2009b, 353.) Relationship marketing is considered as a new paradigm in marketing. According to relations marketing, the efforts of the company are oriented towards creating profitable, long-term relationships with the customers. FTMs have an important role in creating long-term relationships with customers. But also the actions of PTMs can develop and strengthen the relationships between the customer and the company (Harker 2004, 669).

Relationship marketing theory has had an affect on the understanding of marketing. It can't be considered as a final theory and it doesn't unify all marketing aspects. Marketing, as every science, is understood in a specific way and it possesses a theoretical frame through which one is able to explain it. (Cătoiu & Ţichindelean 2012, 656.)

Cătoiu and Ţichindelean have written a paper that proposes a set of research perspective for the relationship marketing theory. The paper includes a review of three different understandings of relationship marketing. First one is that relationship marketing is seen as a marketing strategy within the connecting theory of the service dominant logic. The second understanding is that relationship marketing is expressed as the new paradigm of marketing. The third understanding is that marketing theory is described and correlated in the context of post-modernism thought. (Cătoiu & Ţichindelean 2012, 655.) The first understanding will be described here more closely.

The service-dominant logic sets marketing as a center for the company's strategy. When it comes to marketing strategies, relationship marketing is regarded one of four normative theories, along with market segmentation, market orientation, and brand value. According to Madhavaram and Hunt (2008, 78 - 79), relationship marketing represents a strategic level of marketing, if marketing is understood through service-dominant logic. This guides the company to the development and maintenance of a relationship portfolio. The object of the relationship marketing strategy is to begin, develop, and to maintain a profitable relationship portfolio for the company, because it can be a source of competitive advantage to the company. (Cătoiu & Ţichindelean 2012, 658.)

According to Holmlund (2008), there is a large collection of research that is devoted to the relationship quality in different business-to-business settings. Those studies provide relevant managerial and theoretical implications as well as useful insights. However, Holmlund found out that there was not a formal established definition for relationship quality as such. It is the quality of relationship that determines how the relationship develops, and what will be the cost, revenue, and profitability. (Holmlund 2008, 33 – 34.)

3.7 Motivating salesperson for better performance

It is essential for the managers and researchers in sales and marketing to understand the factors that drive salesperson performance. The goal of Verbeke, Dietz & Verwaal (2011) was to come up with a meta-analytical exploration of variables that predict sales performance. Based on their study, here below are the implications of the findings for managers. Five antecedents from the concept model of the meta-analysis (Figure 2) are described in more detail. (Verbeke et al. 2011, 407- 421.)

Selling-related knowledge reflects the knowledge of both customers and products that is needed to present and co-create solutions for customers. Selling-related knowledge can be trained and it can be organized in the selling firm. A salesperson's *degree of adaptiveness* is a significant driver of sales performance. Salesperson who is capable of sharing analogies (for example explaining know-why to spark the imagination of the customer), and sharing know-how from cases (for example explaining how other customers use service) will most likely thrive. Adaptive selling requires the ability to imagine and read the customer's needs and intentions. (Verbeke et al. 2011, 422 - 423.)

Work engagement is important because a dedicated salesperson is most likely motivated to take responsibility for her work, and to have a proactive attitude. Also *role ambiguity* is an important driver of sales performance. The salesperson performs better, when the role expectations are clear. The managers need to select, recruit, develop, and retain salespeople who qualified to cope with role ambiguity embedded in the selling job, and who have the motivation and ability to sculpt their job and the roles that come with it. *Cognitive aptitude* is a new sub-category in the meta-analysis. Intelligent salesperson shapes the way customers conceptualize their needs and how the service of the selling company relates to this view. Salespeople with sufficient cognitive abilities will excel. (Verbeke et al. 2011, 423 - 424.)

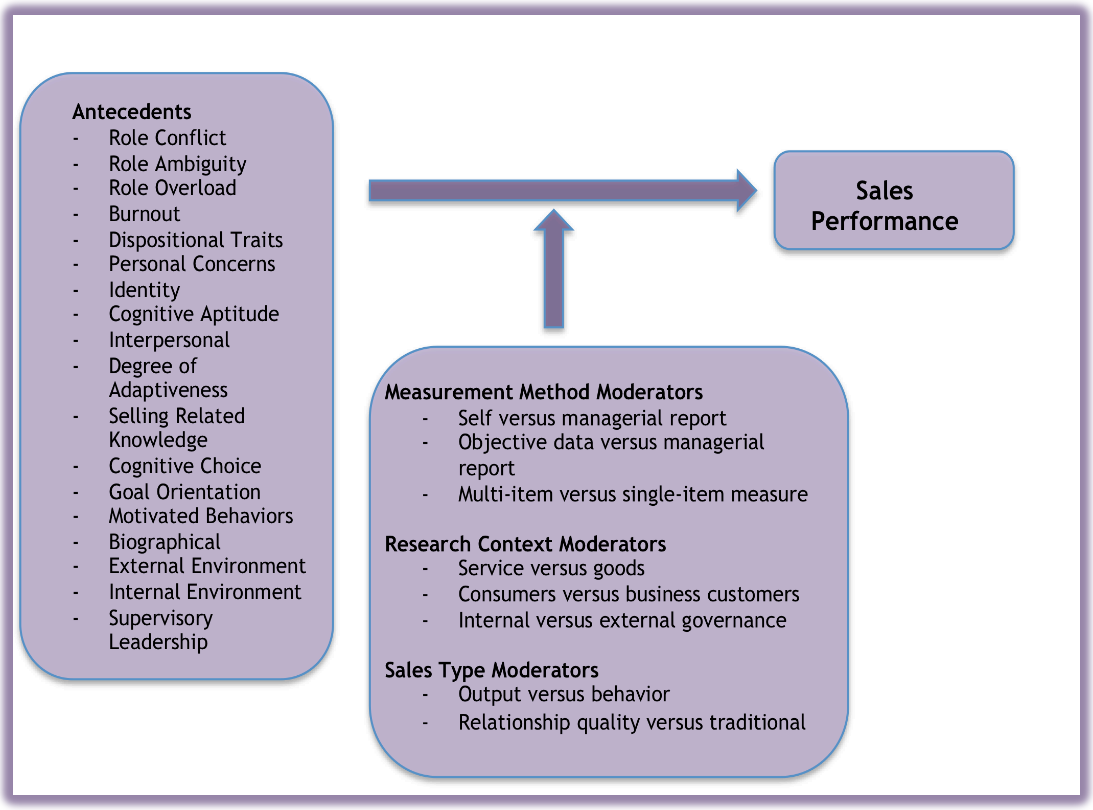

Figure 2: Concept model of a meta-analysis (Verbeke et al. 2011, 410)

Heskett and Schlesinger have studied motivating employees already in 1990s. They came to the conclusion that training sessions educate and motivate employees and typically training sessions also provide the context in which employees engage themselves in the company and in the company's service expectations. (Heskett & Schlesinger 1991, 80.)

Mesch, Paarlberg and Perry (2006) summarized more previous science research made of motivating human performance in private, public, and nonprofit organizations. Four elements of the traditional performance paradigm were examined: job design, employee participation, goal setting, and employee incentives. Mesch et al. created a figure (Figure 3) to summarize the conceptual model underlying their review. First, there are the motivational factors and programs that lead to specific behavioral outcomes. Then there are mediating factors that may intervene the effect on the impact of motivational tools on behavior. Below the mediating variables, there are moderating components of the model that may have an effect on the impact of the mediating. (Mesch et al. 2006, 505.)

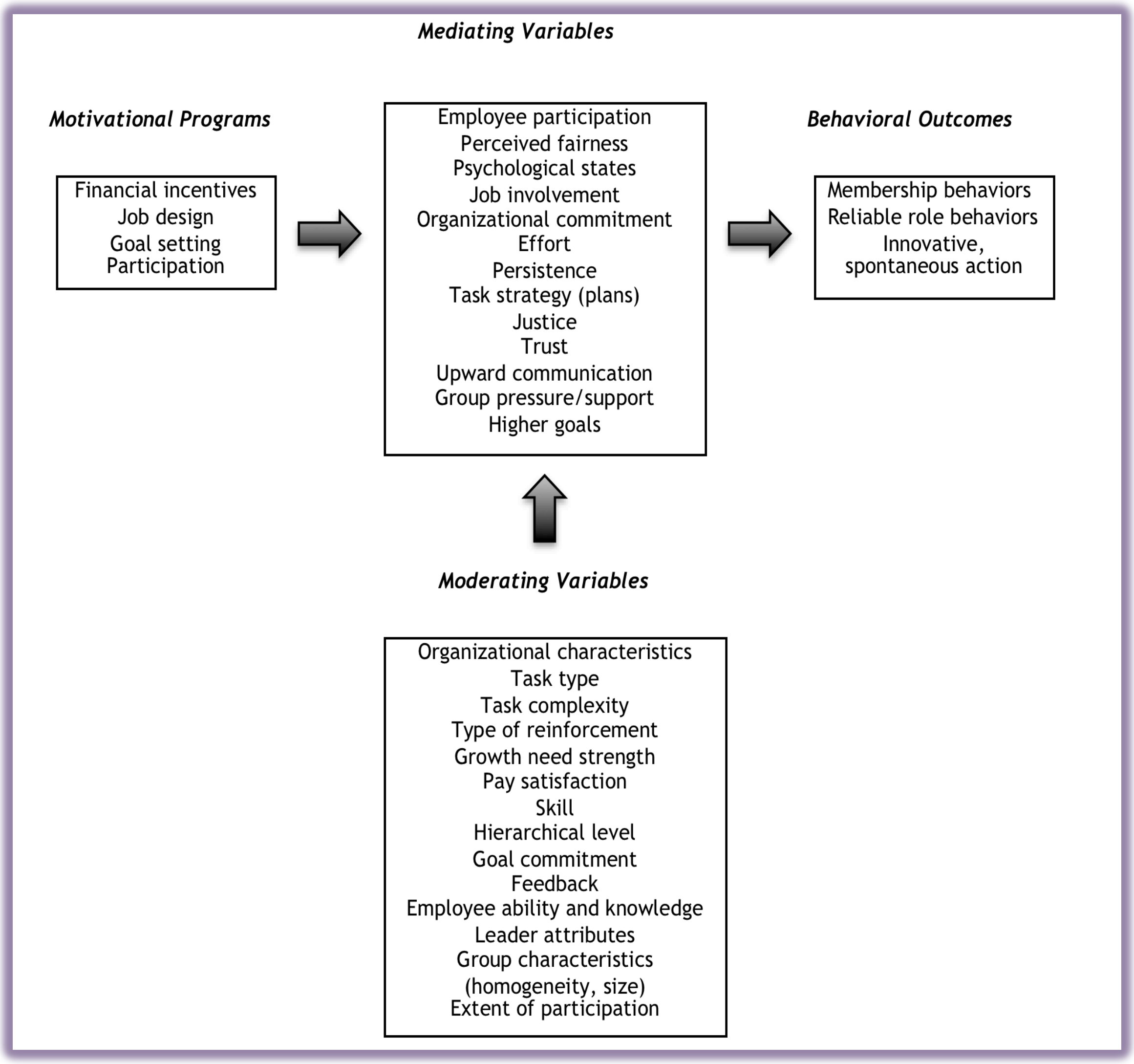

Figure 3: Framework for a review on motivating employees (Mesch et al. 2006, 506)

The review of reviews, written by Mesch et al. (2006) concentrates on organizations' use of financial incentives in increasing group and individual productivity and performance. One of the propositions of the review is that financial incentives improve task performance from moderate to significant. However the effectiveness of the financial incentives is dependent on organizational conditions. Combining monetary incentives, social recognition and feedback produce the strongest effect on performance. (Mesch et al. 2006, 506.)

According to Wilson (2001), the managers at service organizations place an increasing emphasis on the service performances of the employees. The management set the service standards and the task of delivering the standards falls to individual employees who interact with the customers. The performance of the employees may vary notably from situation to situation and from hour to hour. The variation in service performance can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. (Wilson 2001, 722.)

Wilson (2001, 725) claims that mystery shopping has at least a short-term impact as a motivational tool. The purpose of this research is to explore the employees' perceptions of the functionality of mystery shopping as a tool in improving salesperson performance in group and conference sales in a business-to-business context. Does mystery shopping have at least short-term impact as a motivational tool as claimed by Wilson?

4 Research methodology

The focus of this chapter is to explain the empirical research methodology, the process for carrying out the research, and the analysis of the findings and data. Empirical material for this study was obtained primarily through written stories. This method of collecting data offered an easy access to the data and was quick to gather. Narrative inquiry was chosen as the primary data collection method due to the nature of the research questions, and limitations as a result of the geographical location of the sales agents. The findings of the narrative inquiry were analyzed through qualitative content analysis.

Secondary methods of collecting data were participant observation, blueprinting workshop and email survey. Participant observation was a convenient tool, since the researcher works as a sales agent and therefore was able to observe other sales agents on a daily basis. Blueprinting workshop was organized in order to create a blueprint of the enquiry handling process, and to discuss about the possible differences in the process if the sales agent suspects that the potential customer is a mystery shopper. Four sales agents participated in the blueprinting workshop. Email survey was used to obtain data on how many of the sales agents had suspected or guessed that the customer was actually a mystery shopper.

4.1 Research strategy

The chosen overarching process, by which this thesis was conducted, is a case study. Case study is a typical research strategy in business administration. It is a suitable approaching method when generating development ideas or proposals. The object (the case) of the study can be for example a company or a process of the company. The case is always chosen based on the needs of the working life and on the goals that are set for the study. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 52 – 53.)

The research strategy for this thesis began by formulating the preliminary research questions. It is not mandatory to start the process by choosing the precise research questions because the research questions may be revised during the process. Revising and rewriting the research questions is a natural part of the process. (Ojasalo et al. 2009, 54.)

The process continued by studying and collecting theory on mystery shopping, service-dominant logic in business-to-business marketing, salesperson performance, different research methods, and former studies. The research questions were formulated and evaluated after studying background information.

4.2 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry was used as the primary method of collecting data in this research. The interest towards narrative inquiry has been growing tremendously and it has expanded to various fields of science (Ilmonen 2007, 142). Narrative thinking dominates vast regions of the humanities and human sciences. This development does not seem to have had much impact on mainstream management thinking, but the scene has been changing. The recognition of the importance of narrative in mainstream management has been steadily increasing. (Brown, Denning, Groth & Prusak 2005, 174 – 176.)

Narratives are ways of seeing the world. Murray claims that one constructs the world actively through narratives and lives through the stories. Narratives can be life stories but also stories about everyday experiences. Dan McAdams has written the following argument in 1985 “We are all tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories”. (Murray 2003, 112 – 117.)

According to Erkkilä (2009), the starting point in narrative thinking is the narrator’s perspective. Understanding the unique point of view of an individual is more important, than for example checking the reliability of the information from other sources. Narrative inquiry is contextual and it aims at finding connections between events, and answering the challenges of local knowledge. Narrative thinking refers also to the means of data collecting and to the means of analyzing it. Therefore it is important to give the participants a chance to talk or write freely. (Erkkilä 2009, 198 – 201.)

There are various theories about necessary elements of narrative structure, and they have one thing in common. The theories coherently agree on the importance of a temporal dimension and defined relationships between story elements. Therefore, the structure of a story includes these two important elements: chronology and causality. (Delgadillo & Escales 2004, 186.) Storytelling is an effective way in communicating and in enhancing organizational communication and performance (Hsiao, Lan & Lu 2013, 165).

The main method of collecting data for this research was a narrative inquiry. The researcher sent the first email (Appendix 1) request on March 20th, 2014. Based on the first email request, only few narratives were received. A reminder message was sent on April 11th, 2014 and another one on May 16th, 2014. The email request reached the sales agents in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway.

March and April 2014 were extremely busy time for the sales agents in all the Nordic countries, and it was difficult for the sales agents to find time to write about their experiences. Besides, it turned out to be challenging for the sales agents to know what to write about. The researcher wanted the sales agents to be able to write freely on the topic and therefore the topic was only limited to experiences on mystery shopping. No limit to the length was stipulated. This methodology allowed the sales agents to privately articulate their feelings and experiences in a written format and without any interference from the researcher. Eventually, enough data was collected in order to begin the analyzing part of the research process.

Altogether 16 narratives were received. The majority of the narrative were written by Finnish sales agents: 14 of the narratives were written by the sales agents in Finland, one narrative was written in Denmark, and one in Sweden. All the narratives were copied on the same file. The size of the file was seven pages altogether. Some of the sales agents had clearly devoted time and effort in writing the narrative. Some of the narratives were quick comments, opinions or event descriptions.

4.3 Qualitative content analysis

Every method of qualitative data analysis defines the method of how to overcome the shortcomings of our understanding. Qualitative analysis involves everyday understanding in its concern with meaning, but it also goes beyond our everyday activities. (Schreier 2012, 5.)

In this research, the researcher chose content analysis as a way of analyzing the collected qualitative data. Content analysis is a common method in quantitative research, but it can also be used in qualitative research (Silverman 2011, 64 – 67). Content analysis is an approved method in analyzing for example the studies of interactions between humans, describing experiences in phenomenological research, in describing perceptions in a phenomenological research or describing a lifestyle in a phenomenological research (Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2009, 14 – 15).

Content analysis is an accepted method of textual investigation. The researcher establishes a set of categories and then counts the number of examples that fit in each category. Conclusions are drawn based on those findings. (Silverman 2011, 64 – 67.)

In general terms, the purpose of qualitative content analysis (QCA) is to describe the meaning of material. Qualitative data tends to be rich and to produce a lot of data. QCA allows the researcher to focus on selected aspects of the material. The research question specifies the angle from which the researcher can examine the data. The coding frame can be changed even during the analyzing process if other important aspects strike during the analysis. The three important characteristics of QCA are systematic, flexible and data reducing. (Schreier 2012, 3 – 5.)

An analyzing technique is considered to be reliable when it yields data that is free of error. The consistency of qualitative content analysis refers to reliability. The goal of QCA is to go beyond individual interpretation and understanding at a given moment, by classifying the material according to a coding frame. (Schreier 2012, 6.) QCA is a systematic, transparent and reliable method, because it requires one to always follow the same sequence of steps (Schreier 2012, 34 - 35).

Not only is reliability important, but also the coding frame should be valid. The coding frame can be considered as valid when the categories sufficiently represent the concepts in the research question. In order to achieve this, the researcher has to adapt the frame of the research to fit the material. QCA is a highly flexible method and it allows matching the coding frames to the material. (Schreier 2012, 7.)

In qualitative research, interpreting data can be done in a number of ways. Data is not standardized, but it requires an active role in interpreting. It is not always possible to pin down exact meaning of the symbolic material, such as visual data, verbal data or artifact. Numerous interpretations of the same data can be equally valid. (Schreier 2012, 20.)

Researchers inevitably bring their own assumptions and background to the analyzing process. In QCA process this is acknowledged when creating a coding frame. It is recommended to allow someone else to take a look at the material and to take into account the other person’s perspectives in the process. (Schreier 2012, 32.)

The 8 steps in Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA):

1. Deciding on your research question
2. Selecting your material
3. Building a coding frame
4. Dividing your material into units of coding
5. Trying out your coding frame
6. Evaluating and modifying your coding frame
7. Main analysis
8. Interpreting and presenting your findings

Table 2: Eight steps in QCA (Schreier 2012, 6)

The researcher has applied Schreier's (2012, 6) eight steps in QCA in the analyzing process (Table 2). The research questions were defined in the beginning of the research process (step 1) even though they were modified afterwards during the research process. The research material was collected using narrative enquiry. All the narratives were selected for the analyzing step (step 2).

Building a coding frame is the next step of Schreier's analyzing process (step 3). Coding frame is used as a means for structuring the material. The structure should be applicable in answering the research question. First thing to do is to choose and specify the aspects of which one would like to know more about. The main categories of the coding frame are the aspects on which to focus. The research questions point the way when specifying the main categories. (Schreier 2012, 59 - 61.)

The main categories for this research were chosen based on the research questions. The generalized main categories that the researcher wanted to learn more about were: the meaning of mystery shopping in practice, the advantages and the disadvantages, permanent or temporary affects on the performance of the sales agents, and the sales agents' thoughts about the functionality of mystery shopping.

In practice, the narratives were all copied and pasted on one document. The researcher went through the narratives by highlighting the comments that were linked to each main category. Each category had its own color and the comments were highlighted with its own color of pencil (Figure 4).

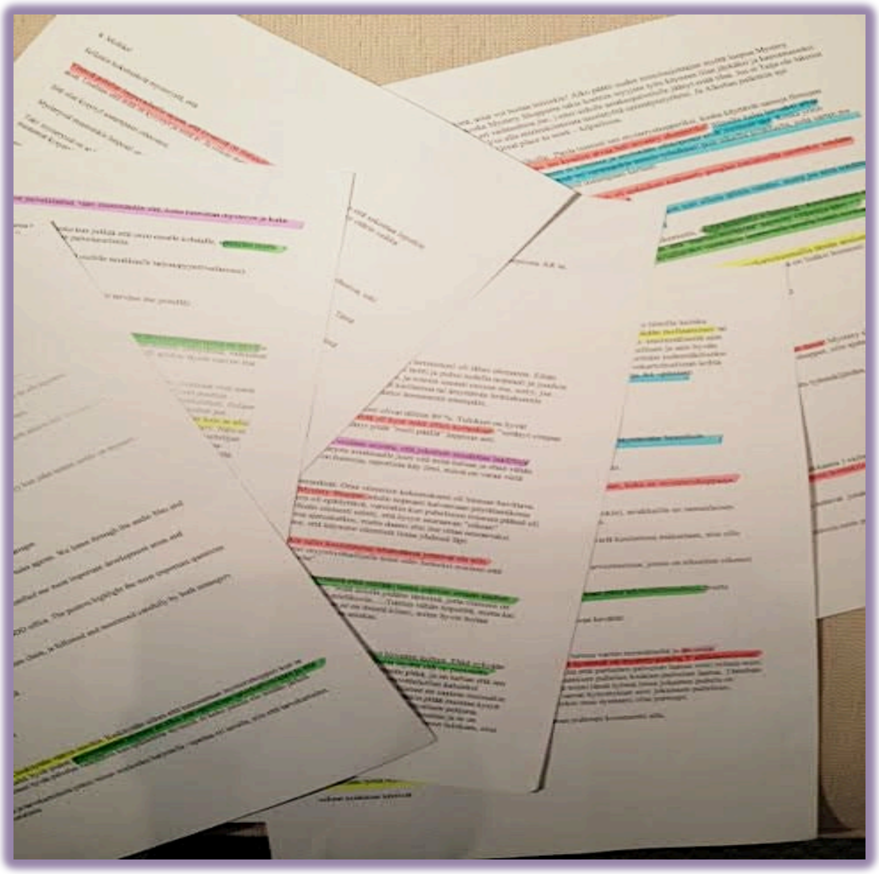

Figure 4: Highlighting based on the main categories (photo by Pehkonen 2014)

The next step (step 4) is to identify what is said about these main aspects in the material. These subcategories specify what is said about the main categories. (Schreier 2012, 59 - 61.) In this research, dividing the material into units of coding meant looking for strong themes based on the material. The themes chosen were: enquiry handling checklist, the skills of the mystery shopper, resources, why, some other method. The researcher wanted to illustrate the main focus of the themes by cutting, matching and gluing (Figure 5).

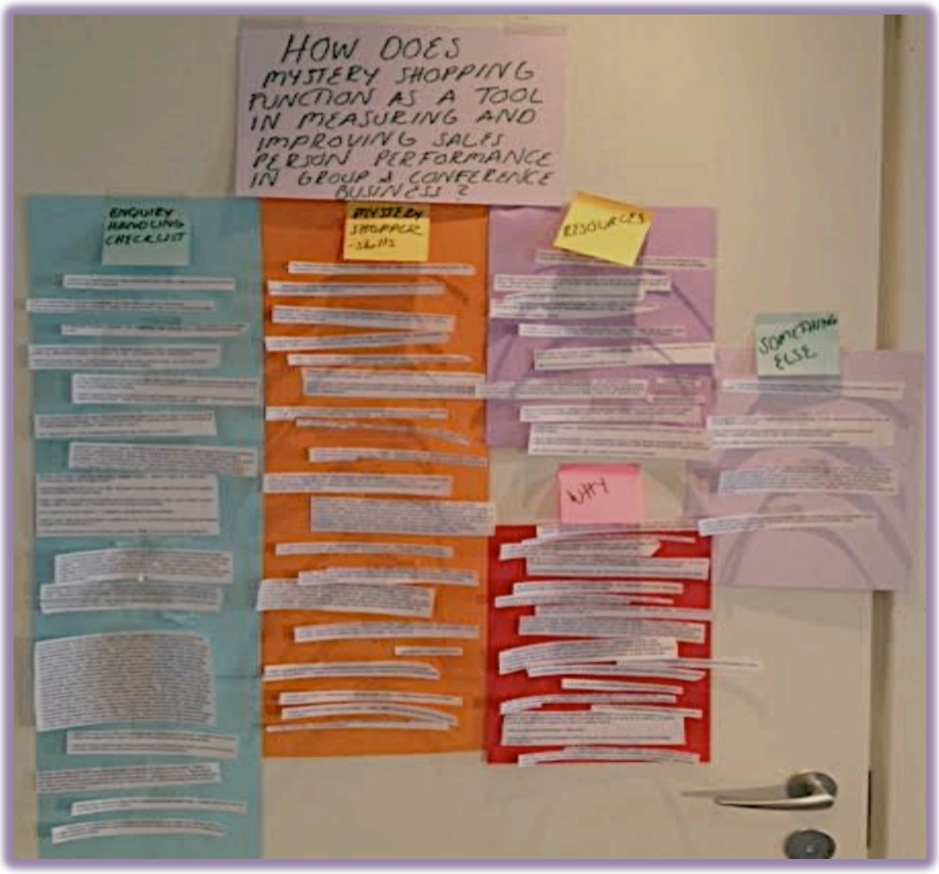

Figure 5: Cutting, matching and gluing based on the themes (photo by Pehkonen 2014)

One of the reasons why QCA was chosen for this research is because it reduces data. In the beginning or the research process, the researcher was expecting to receive dozens of narratives from her colleagues, and therefore she wanted to use a method that reduces the data.

Most qualitative data analysis methods deal with discovering new things about the data and opening it up, and consequently producing even more data. QCA focuses the analysis only on the chosen aspects. There are two ways to reduce the material: by limiting the analysis to those aspects that are relevant with a view to the research question and ignoring the rest, and by making the coding categories abstract enough to allow for comparison and concrete enough to preserve as many specifics as possible. (Schreier 2012, 8.) In this study, the researcher wanted to make the coding categories abstract enough to allow for comparison. The researcher wanted to be able to include in the research also the aspects that come up unexpectedly from the narratives.

Trying out the coding frame (step 5) and evaluating and modifying the coding frame (step 6) were taken into practice almost imperceptibly, as a natural continuum of the process. Only minor changes were made to the coding frame. Therefore, the findings and the analysis were created based on the sorted material.

4.4 Participant observation

In this study, the researcher used participant observation as one of the methods of collecting data. The researcher was the observer in her own organization. According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2009, 214) observation can be highly systematic or it can be completely unrestricted. The observer can be part of the group that is being observed or an outsider. In this research, the observation was unrestricted and adaptive, and the observer took part in the group's activities.

Other research methods, such as inquiry and interview, give information on what people think, feel or believe in. But these methods don't provide the information on what is really happening. By observing, this information is available. Observation is about studying the real world. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 212 - 213.)

Since the author of this thesis is working as a sales agent in group and conference business, it was natural for her to observe her colleagues on a daily basis. She was making observations and writing down her own thoughts and emotions. The observation could not be systematic, since the author did not know in advance about the potential mystery shopper phone calls or emails. But when the possibility of a mystery shopper was mentioned, she was alert to make notes.

In qualitative research, the analysis comes usually after two following steps. The first step is to reduce the material from the observation. The second step is to interpret the results. One has to remember that the material that has been collected by observing is not the answer to the research question. It is just material that the development process is founded on. (Ojasalo et al. 2009, 106 - 107.)

4.5 Blueprinting workshop

Service blueprint is a customer-oriented approach for service improvement and service innovation that was first described by Lynn Shostack in 1982. It is a tool that visualizes the service processes and the points of customer contact. Service blueprint is a tool that describes service process characteristics and depicts them so that managers, employees, and customers can know in concrete terms what is involved in the service and are able to understand the roles in delivering or co-creating service. (Bitner, Ostrom & Morgan 2007, 2-5.)

A typical service blueprint has five components: customer actions, visible contact employee actions, invisible contact employee actions, support processes and physical evidence. The first step in building a blueprint is to clearly articulate the service process to be blueprinted.

The second step is to delineate the actions of the customers. Then, the contact employee actions can be delineated, followed by support processes. Also links that connect the customer to contact employee activities and to needed support functions can be added. Physical evidence is usually the last component to be added to the blueprint. (Bitner et al. 2007, 7.)

Lynn Shostack (1984) applied the principles of service blueprint technique in telephone communication service already in 1984. Shostack stated that telephone communication is a component that is difficult and critical to control. In addition, it is one of the most powerful influences of customer perception, because it provides the only personal contact. In Shostack's study, the management decided to script dialogues for various situations, to establish procedures to make certain that calls never went unanswered, to train staff thoroughly in communication and response techniques, and to ensure accuracy by recording, logging, and confirming all customer instructions. (Shostack 1984, 137 – 139.)

It has been 30 years since Shostack described the service blueprint method. The technique has been developed and it has changed over the last three decades into an operational tool. The researcher chose to use service blueprint as a tool to describe the process that begins when a B2B customer contacts by telephone and asks for an offer.

The researcher organized a workshop at the head office in Espoo. Besides the researcher, four sales agents participated in the workshop. The researcher gave a short introduction of blueprinting as a method. None of the participants were familiar with the method. The primary goal of the workshop was to create a blueprint of a standard process that takes place when a B2B customer calls. The secondary goal was to discuss the possible differences in the process when the sales agent suspects that there is a mystery shopper inquiring for an offer.

The process of structuring the blueprint involved the following steps: the service process was identified as the enquiry handling process, the chosen customer segment was B2B customers, the service was pictured from the customer's perspective, and all the actions of the contact employees and other employee actions were pictured (onstage and backstage).

The blueprinting workshop lasted for one hour. The participants at the workshop learned the basics of the method very quickly. The researcher wrote down the suggestions made by the participants. The physical evidence, customer actions, onstage employee actions, backstage employee actions, and support processes were written down on post-it notes. The post-it notes were attached on a flip chart (Figure 6), so it was easy for everyone to participate in the conversation.

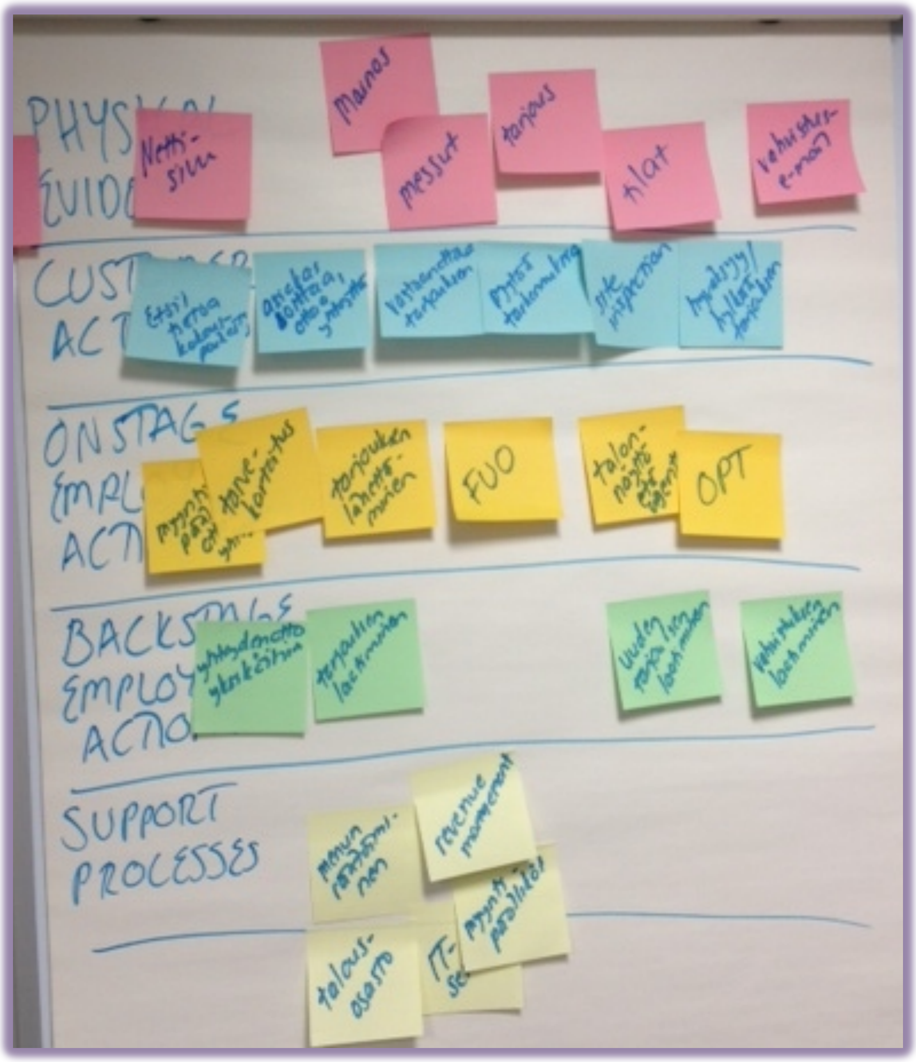

Figure 6: Creating a blueprint (photo by Pehkonen 2014)

After the blueprint was created, the participants discussed about the possible differences in the processes if the sales agent suspects that it is a mystery shopper inquiring for an offer. These comments and ideas were written on a flipchart. The participants were unanimous of the fact that there are differences in the processes.

4.6 Email survey

Surveys are likely the most common method of collecting primary data. Email survey is one of the survey methods. Email survey can be a relatively inexpensive and an effective method of collecting data. (Curtis 2008, 1.) Electronic surveys are becoming a popular method of eliciting responses (Holland, Smith, Hasselback & Payne 2010, 95 – 97).

One of the disadvantages of email survey is that the response rates are usually low unless several pieces of communication are sent to the respondents (Curtis 2008, 1). Using personalized email in requesting responses appears to be an effective method to add participation (Holland et al. 2010, 95 – 97).

Email survey was chosen because of its convenience and easy accessibility for the sales agents who took part in the survey. The researcher wanted the sales agents to answer with yes or no and therefore the question in the email was a closed-ended question. It is an efficient way to collect complete and relevant data in surveys by using closed-ended questions in the questionnaire and ideally the respondent chooses his choice of the set of presented response alternatives (Van Der Zouwen & Smit 2006, 245).

The researcher sent a straightforward email message to every sales agent who had been in contact with a mystery shopper. The researcher reminded the sales agent of each contact, when it took place, and was it an email enquiry, telephone call or a web survey. In addition, the researcher asked if the sales agent had suspected or guessed that it was a mystery shopper. The results were quickly available and the conclusions were made based on the results.

5 Research findings

This chapter summarizes the findings of each research method. The findings of each method are presented in its own subchapter. Original citations are used to give credibility and to emphasize the results.

5.1 Findings and analysis of narrative inquiry

A total of 16 narratives were received from the sales agents. The stories varied in length and style. The goal was to get the sales agents to write about anything that came into their mind about mystery shopping. Therefore, the email request for narratives wasn’t too precise. Some of the sales agents asked for more information because they didn’t know what to write about. Since there were no restrictions, some of the narratives were very informative and ample, whereas some of the narratives included a sentence or two.

Based on the narratives, five themes were strongly visible. The following table (Table 3) gives a short introduction to the themes with the sub-themes. The number of the sales agents, who referred to each sub-theme, is mentioned inside the parenthesis.

Theme 1: Enquiry Handling Checklist
It is a good support (5)
One goes through the list when suspecting a mystery caller (5)
Too many questions and the questions feel forced (6)
Theme 2: The skills of the mystery shopper
Mistakes in the e-mail and web enquiries (2)
Technical problems affect the scores (2)
Predictable and transparent (7)
Theme 3: Resources
Time-consuming (6)
Waste of money (2)
Theme 4: Why
To follow the procedures (6)
To keep the employees sharp and alert (2)
It shouldn't be the purpose of the work (3)
Theme 5: Some other method
Feedback from real customers (2)

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes

Theme 1: Enquiry Handling Checklist

The sales agents are supposed to go through an enquiry handling checklist during every phone conversation when a potential customer asks for an offer. All the sales agents have studied the checklist and it should be memorized, but a copy of the list is always at hand.

Based on the research, the sales agents use the enquiry handling checklist when they suspect that it is a mystery shopper on the other end of the phone line. The sales agents think that the enquiry handling checklist is a good support, but they don't think it is necessary to go through it during every phone conversation.

> *"(…) when you realize that the caller is not a mystery shopper, you think that you don't need to go through the whole enquiry handling checklist"*
>
> *"Some of the questions on the enquiry handling checklist seem a bit forced and don't come naturally, like (…) "what is important for you in order to make the event a success?" or that you have to be creative and to create mental images for the client… It feels a little bit silly, but I guess you can come up with another way of expressing yourself. At the end it is up to you, how well*

> *you take care of the sales situation, whether it is a mystery caller or a real client on the other end of the phone line."*

According to Scandic group & conference process & procedures (2013), the sales agents are supposed to use the specific enquiry handling checklist during all enquiries. Enquiry handling checklist could be a significant support in order to win the business by making sure that all the necessary questions are asked. But at the moment it seems like the checklist is something that causes stress and is taken seriously only when the sales agent is afraid of being evaluated by a mystery shopper. The main focus is in going through the whole checklist and asking the right questions, than listening to the customer, paying attention to the customer's needs and reacting spontaneously.

Theme 2: The skills of the mystery shopper

The second most popular theme that the sales agents wrote about was the skills of the mystery shopper. The sales agents criticized the unprofessionalism of the mystery shoppers, the predictability of the phone calls and emails of the mystery shopper, and the technical problems that may affect the results.

The skills of the mystery shopper are criticized, because the enquiries have errors and are not made carefully. The sales agents might feel that they have been treated unfairly, if the points are given based on a false enquiry.

> *"Besides, there were two different numbers of participants and the text was translated by using Google translator: so they do a sloppy job already when sending a request."*

> *"Some person with a strange name wants to make weird bookings and asks an awful lot of questions."*

The predictability of the mystery shoppers was criticized in the narratives. Some of the sales agents guess right in the beginning of the phone conversation, that it is a mystery shopper calling. This leads into some kind of a charade or a play, when the sales agent goes through the enquiry handling checklist carefully.

> *"My last experience of a mystery shopper was quite amusing. It was almost right in the beginning when I realized that is was a Mystery Shopper and I grabbed the check list from the drawer of my desk. I really felt like we were going through an identical list."*

> *"I really think that the Mystery Shoppers should be trained so that they wouldn't be so transparent."*

There have been technical problems with the phone systems that have affected the scores of the sales agents. This causes frustration, since the technical problems are beyond the control of the sales agents.

> *"The way they measure and emphasize. Can you loose dozens of points if the menu on the telephone doesn't work?? Anyway the evaluation system is not realistic."*

> *"Especially if the evaluation has been wrong and when the mystery has been during a very busy time. Especially frustrating is when there are wrong e-mail addresses and phone numbers that can't be reached (it's been told that the given number doesn't answer but there should be a voicemail)"*

Theme 3: Resources

The third most popular theme that arose from the narratives was the use of resources. The sales agents found the mystery shopping time consuming and a waste of money. There is not a day at the office when the sales agents have spare time on their hands. Because they are already busy in getting back to real customers and in replying to genuine requests, it is difficult to understand why to do extra work that doesn't bring any money. Based on the narratives, the mystery shopper contacts are too frequent. The sales agents are frustrated because they would prefer serving real clients instead of mystery shoppers.

> *"This event took at least couple of hours of work time from three persons to think about it… And when the results came, it took several hours for the supervisor to go through the results. During that week there were at least 3-4 mysterys and everyone had lots of e-mails and the phone was ringing all the time. I think we spent too much valuable work time on that."*

> *"That take valuable time for us that we can spend on real paying guests."*

> *"Is this some sort of game for them?? It's quite dubious that our company is paying for this consultant surely high amounts, but we are not convinced about the Mystery."*

Theme 4: Why

The reasons behind mystery shopping were dubious based on the narratives of the sales agents. The very reason of mystery shopping being used was accepted deep down. The reverse result of the mystery shopping is that it makes the sales agent worried and anxious. The sales agents are nervous about getting low scores from the mystery shopper.

> *"I think it's a good way to keep the employees sharp, alert and to secure that the procedures are followed."*

> *"We concentrate too much on mystery shopping, as if it was the whole purpose of our work."*

Theme 5: Some other method

The theme number five concentrates on alternative methods. Some of the sales agents suggested other methods to replace mystery shopping. This theme was also chosen, because of the forthcoming discussion in this thesis.

> *"I think that the best way to measure the quality of service is e.g. with direct enquiries from the customers. E.g. a customer would get an automatic phone call after the phone conversation concerning the quality of the service. Some companies are already using this. I think that mystery calls are not functional in this work, when each phone conversation is unique (…). The customers are expecting more personal service, not a "robot". Some other system would be better."*

> *"In measuring quality (when thinking about the sales process) it would be important to have feedback also from real customers, the customer situations differ greatly and creativity and your initiative should be "measured".*

5.2 Findings and analysis of participant observation

The author of this thesis took notes about the events related to mystery shopping during the whole research process. The notes were not taken on a daily basis. The author wrote about her observations and emotions when she or one of her colleagues had been in contact with a mystery shopper, or suspected it.

Extra time and effort

The sales agents become suspicious whenever there is an unordinary caller or an unordinary email request that they need to reply to. If the sales agent suspects that it is a mystery shopper requesting for an offer, the sales agent tries to follow the procedures as carefully as possible. Extra time and effort are spent on making a thorough offer and giving a follow up call on an exact date.

Behavioral change

The sales agent's performance may change if the sales agent suspects that it is a mystery shopper calling. The most obvious difference is that the sales agent goes through the enquiry handling checklist more carefully than during a normal phone conversation. The quality of the service is the same, the sales agent is very friendly and professional, but not as many questions are asked from a regular customer.

Anxiety

Even though the sales agent suspects that it is a mystery shopper on the phone, it still might be difficult to go through the enquiry handling checklist completely. The sales agent might get nervous during the phone call, because worrying about getting a bad score from the mystery shopper. Some of the questions are hard to cover because they might feel pretentious and forced.

Word of warning

The sales agents are alert and nervous about getting a phone call from a mystery shopper especially during a busy day. On a busy day, it seems like a waste of time going through the whole enquiry list with every caller. If the sales agent suspects that there is a mystery shopper on the line, one gives a heads up to the colleagues. The mystery shoppers usually make several calls at one sitting.

Annoyance

What does it measure, if the sales agent knows that one is talking to a mystery shopper? Even though the sales agent would guess that it is a mystery shopper calling, one would still have to go through the procedures as if it was a paying customer. It feels like acting in a play, going through lines with another actot. On a busy day, acting feels like a waste of time, since there is no real business coming in from a mystery caller.

Surprise

The sales agents don't always recognize the mystery shopper. Scoring well on a mystery shopper call and not even acknowledging one is being evaluated is joyous and rewarding. In the ideal world, the sales agents would never recognize the mystery shoppers but they would still score well every time.

5.3 Findings and analysis of blueprinting workshop

Service blueprint was created in a workshop. Besides the researcher, four sales agents participated in a one hour-long workshop. The method was new to the participants, but they learned the basics quickly and it was easy for the participants to name the actions and steps of the process. The service process is very familiar to them, since they are involved with every step of it. The goal was to picture the service from the customer's perspective and to picture the actions of the contact employee and technological actions. The final service blueprint is attached at the end of this thesis (Appendix 2).

There are five layers in the service blueprint. The uppermost layer is the physical evidence that describes everything the customer is able to see. Below physical evidence, there is the layer of customer actions. This describes all the steps that the customer takes. Below customer actions, there is the layer of onstage employee actions. Usually this layer describes the actions that are visible to the customer. In this service blueprint the actions of the onstage employee are the actions that the customer is able to see or hear.

Below onstage actions, there is the layer of backstage employee actions. This layer describes the actions that the customer is not able to see or hear. The undermost layer describes the support processes that are fundamental for the service.

The service process in the blueprint begins when the customer reads or hears about the venue. The customer is interested in buying service for an upcoming event. The customer calls and asks for information on availability and for an offer. The sales agent asks many questions in order to fully understand the needs of the customer. The length of the phone call depends on the customer. Some customers appreciate quick service and they want to give only the basic information. Some customers are more talkative and appreciate a more thorough needs analysis.

Making an offer may require a lot of time and effort in order to include all the requested service with correct prices on the offer. The sales agent might have to contact several people before one has all the information. First, one makes the bookings on the SCORPIO (reservation system), then checks the hotel room price from IDeaS (pricing and revenue software), double checks the price from the revenue manager, might have to ask for guidance in pricing of the meeting service, ask for a tailored menu, for a permission to invoice the company in question etc. Some of the enquiries are easy and quick to complete, but some of the enquiries require a lot resources, because the information is not easily and immediately available.

The sales agent is supposed to send the offer within 24 hours from receiving the enquiry. During a high season or when there are several sales agents temporarily absent, this might not be accomplished. After three days of receiving the enquiry, the sales agent contacts the customer. Sometimes the customer wants to negotiate about the prices, to ask for some changes in the details or wants to go for a site inspection to the venue. The site inspection will be organized and taken care of by a sales agent, hotel staff member or a key account manager. Updates on the offer are made based on the site inspection.

After seven days of receiving the enquiry, the sales agent contacts the customer to ask if the customer would like to confirm the booking. If yes, the sales agent sends a confirmation letter to the customer. This is the final action in the service blueprint of enquiry handling.

Based on the service blueprint created at the workshop, the researcher identified a possible failure point in the process. It takes considerable amount of time to make an offer, if the sales agent doesn't have all the information needed or if one is not authorized to make certain decisions. When making an offer to a mystery shopper, one takes a shortcut in order to send the offer on time, but with normal customers a shortcut might be fatal. The prices could be wrong or there could be other false information on the offer. This customer contact point should be analyzed more closely in the near future.

After creating the service blueprint at the workshop, the participants talked about the potential differences in the service process if a mystery shopper is suspected. Based on the discussions at the workshop, there are differences in the processes when a normal customer calls and asks for an offer versus when the sales agent suspects that it is a mystery shopper asking for an offer.

The phone call lasts longer, if the sales agent suspects a mystery shopper. The sales agent tries to cover all the questions on the enquiry handling checklist. Going through the whole enquiry handling checklist doesn't give extra value to all of the customers. Yet, the mystery shopping evaluation concentrates on how precisely does the sales agent cover every question on the checklist.

"You go through the enquiry handling checklist very carefully"

When making an offer, to a suspected mystery caller, the sales agent makes sure that the offer is sent on time. The offer itself may not be so profound, just enough to cover everything the caller asked for. The sales agent would not spend time and effort in checking all the details and prices from supporting department, as they would normally do. It is paradoxical, that it takes less time to make an offer for a mystery shopper than to a normal customer.

> *"You don't necessarily even add the reservation into SCORPIO if you suspect that it was a mystery caller"*

When suspecting a mystery shopper, the sales agents make sure that they will contact the caller on time and strictly according to the company's standards. They would not be so precise with the dates with normal customers, if they were being buried in work.

> *"When you call the mystery caller, the phone call goes through to an answering machine, nobody ever answers"*

According to the sales agents, the suspicions of mystery shoppers have been correct almost every time. Most of the mystery shoppers are recognizable. And when a sales agent believes one is talking to a mystery shopper, one gets nervous. It is difficult to ask all the questions on the enquiry handling checklist, even though you have the list in front of you. The conversation is not easygoing.

> *"Almost everyone has guessed when it has been a mystery caller"*

5.4 Findings and analysis of email survey

Based on the narratives and blueprinting workshop, the sales agents are quite confident that they recognize the mystery shoppers. Therefore, the author of this thesis decided to find out if this is really the case. The author received an excel file of all the mystery shopper contacts since July 2013, until September 2014 in Helsinki Destination Desk (HDD).

In October 2014, each sales agent was reminded by email about each contact one had had and when this had occured. The sales agents were asked if they remembered suspecting or not suspecting that it was a mystery shopper. Only those sales agents were contacted who are still working at Helsinki Destination Desk. In total, there were 49 contacts taken into notice in this research.

In 28 of the contacts the sales agent had guessed or suspected a mystery shopper and in 21 of the contacts the sales agent had not noticed anything unordinary. However, when comparing the results from the seven most recent months versus eight months before that, the results are very different. Between July 2013 and February 2014, only six of the contacts had been recognizable, whereas between March 2014 and September 2014 a total of 22 of the contacts had been recognized.

In the beginning, the researcher was suspicious of the sales agents being able to remember the mystery shopper contacts they have had. But surprisingly almost all of the sales agents remembered every contact. Some of the sales agents even described some details of the contact.

> *"There was a telephone mystery in December 2013, there was a small doubt that it could be a mystery. The caller seemed a bit confused. I was given quite bad scores, because I ended up thinking "this can not be a mystery shopper". Now afterwards, I'm a little annoyed about it."*

> *"In June 2014, there was a mystery through Meeting Broker channel. It was pretty obvious. Finnish name and telephone number, the name of the company was really weird and the request was in English. There was nothing that matched the normal bookings."*

As a conclusion, the sales agents have learned to recognize the mystery shoppers and the tool as it is, is coming to the end of the road. Something has to be done in order to improve the tool or it is not worth the investment anymore.

6 Conclusion

The research idea began to take shape in July 2013, when the researcher returned to work after maternity leave. The researcher noticed that there was a lot of emphasis on mystery shopping and on its' results. The researcher was wondering if mystery shopping was truly worth the investment. Did other sales agents feel the same? Did mystery shopping motivate them into better selling results and did it encourage them to follow the company standards more precisely? This chapter aims to tie together the conclusions that are drawn from the data collected by four different research methods.

Based on the narratives, it appeared that the opinions of the sales agents are quite critical on mystery shopping. The author is wondering if the selection of the sales agents, who decided to write the narratives, inadvertently included persons who are more vocal and critical. Perhaps the ones, who have more neutral or positive feelings about the functionality of mystery shopping, didn't bother to write. However, based on the participant observation method, the results are very much the same as based on the narratives. Blueprinting workshop even strengthened the conclusion that the sales agents' perceptions of mystery shopping are more negative than positive.

The main reason for negativity seems to be the predictability of the mystery shoppers. The mystery shoppers should do a better job and be more convincing. If the current service provider, with its mystery shoppers, is not able to fool the sales agents, then perhaps another organization would do the job. The researcher suggests that the mystery shoppers could be real customers or even Scandic's own staff members.

In the ideal world the sales agents would never recognize the mystery shoppers but they would still score well. The sales agents should not be able to expect the contacts from the mystery shoppers. It is questionable if the sales agents should even be aware of the number of the enquiries per quarter or per year. The author suggests also that there should be fewer enquiries per quarter.

Figure 7 describes the sales agents' perceptions. Based on the research, there seems to be more reasons against than reasons for mystery shopping from the sales agents' perspective. The reasons against mystery shopping are: mystery shoppers are predictable and recognizable, mystery shopping requires a lot of resources, and there is only a temporary effect on the salesperson performance.

Figure 7: Reasons for and against mystery shopping

The mystery shopping as a tool has also had positive effect on improving the salesperson performance. The most positive outcome of mystery shopping is that the sales agents have learned to ask more questions from the customers who are enquiring for an offer. Questions are easier to ask when they are memorized and when one does not have to read them. This makes the whole telephone conversation with the customer more proficient and smooth.

However, the author suggests that mystery shopping results should be integrated with other measures of service quality or service delivery process. Some examples of other measures are customer satisfaction, number of complaints, sales figures, and staff attitude. Fortunately, the company has already taken a step into the right direction. In September 2014, the sales agents begun to send an email link to all the customers who have cancelled a preliminary or a confirmed booking. The link is a questionnaire that gathers data straight from the real customers.

This thesis report benefits the mystery shopping company since it offers advice on how to make the enquiries the way that the sales agents do not suspect a mystery shopper. This thesis report benefits also the case company. The report describes the sales agents' perceptions of the functionality of mystery shopping. The findings of the research should be taken into consideration when developing processes and standards and when choosing the tools for evaluation and improvement. This thesis is also beneficial in internal conversations between the sales agents and the managers, because it deepens the understanding of the challenges with mystery shopping.

The management defines the ideal quality and standard of service also in mystery shopping. However, the management should listen to the customers' and employees' opinions more when defining the desired quality of service. When thinking about the way forward, it would be important to remember what really gives value to a customer.

As a recommendation for further research, it would be interesting to learn if the customers have noticed any change or improvement in the service? Is the quality of service better now that the sales agents are more precise in following the standards? It would be interesting to know what is the return on investment (ROI) when a company is using mystery shopping?

Because of the researcher's employment as a sales agent, it has been challenging to stay objective during the research process. Therefore, as a recommendation for future research, it would be interesting to see the comparison between the perceptions of the sales agents and the perceptions of the managers and the sales team leaders. This thesis concentrated only in the perceptions of the sales agents.

When improving or designing processes, the operations management should take into considerations the methods of service design. They should have more of design perspective in the improvement process. What if the processes of the sales agents were designed by listening real customers’ opinions and the experience of the sales agents? The author suggests that the processes and standards should be created with customers and employees from many levels.

It would be important for the management to remember that the sales agents are the primary revenue-generating mechanism in the company. The opinions of the sales agents should be listened to and respected in order to design processes that truly create value for the customer and for the company.

References

Aaltola. J. & Valli. R. (eds.) 2007. Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin II. Näkökulmia aloittelevalle tutkijalle tutkimuksen teoreettisiin lähtökohtiin ja analyysimenetelmiin. Juva: WS Bookwell.

Albadvi, A. & Hosseini, M. 2011. Mapping B2B value exchange in marketing relationships: a systematic approach. Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing. Vol. 26. No. 7. pp. 503 – 513.

Arantola, H. & Simonen, K. 2009. Palvelemisesta palveluliiketoimintaan – Asiakasymmärrys palveluliiketoiminnan perustana. Tekesin katsaus 256/2009. Helsinki: Tekes.

Arantola-Hattab, J. 2013. Family as a Customer Experiencing Co-Created Service Value. Hanken School of Economics. Department of Marketing. Helsinki. Dissertation.

Bitner, M., Brown, S. & Fisk, R. 1993. Tracking the Evolution of the Services Marketing Literature. Journal of Retailing. Vol. 69. pp. 61 – 92.

Bitner, M.J., Ostrom, A. & Morgan, F.N. 2007. Service Blueprinting: A practical Technique for Service Innovation. Center for Services Leadership. Arizona State University. Working paper.

Brown, J.S., Denning, S., Groth, K. & Prusak, L. 2005. Storytelling in organizations. Why Storytelling Is transforming 21st Century Organizations and Management. Burlington: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

Catoiu, I. & Tichindelean, M. 2012. Relationship Marketing – Theoretical Consideration. Annales Universitatis Apulensis: Series Oeconomica. 14(2), pp. 655 – 663.

Delgadillo, Y. & Escales, J.E. 2004. Narrative Word-of-Mouth Communication: Exploring Memory and Attitude Effects of Consumer Storytelling. Advances in Consumer Research. Vol. 31. No. 1. pp. 186 – 192.

Economic Outlook in the Nordic Countries 2014. The Nordic Working Group of Economic Trends Review. 2013. TemaNord 2013: 585.

Erkkilä, R. 2009. Narratiivinen kokemuksen tutkimus: koettu paikka, tarina ja kuvaus. In Perttula, J. & Latomaa, T. (eds.) Kokemuksen tutkimus. Merkitys – tulkinta – ymmärtäminen. Rovaniemi. Lapin yliopistokustannus, 195 – 226.

Grönroos, C. 2005. What Can A Service Logic Offer Marketing Theory? Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration. Helsinki: SHS intressebyrå IB.

Grönroos, C. 2007. Service Management and Marketing. Customer Management in Service Competition. Third Edition. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

Grönroos, C. 2009a. Palvelujen johtaminen ja markkinointi. 3., uudistettu painos. Juva: WS Bookwell.

Grönroos, C. 2009b. Marketing as promise management: regaining customer management for marketing. The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing. Vol. 24. No. 5/6. pp. 351 – 359.

Gummesson, E. 1991. Marketing-orientation Revisited: The Crucial Role of the Part-time Marketer. European Journal of Marketing. Vol. 25. Issue 2. pp. 60 – 75.

Gummesson, E. 2007. Exit Services Marketing – Enter Service Marketing. The Journal of Customer Behaviour. Vol. 6. No. 2. pp. 113 – 141.

Gummesson, E. & Lovelock, C. 2004. Whither Services Marketing? : In Search of a New Paradigm and Fresh Perspectives. Journal of Service Research. Vol. 7. No. 1. pp. 20 – 41.

Harker, M. J. 2004. Lenses and mirrors: the customer perspective on part-time marketers. Marketing Intelligence & Planning. Vol. 22. No. 6. pp. 663 – 672.

Heskett, J. L. & Schlesinger, L.A. 1991. The Service-Driven Service Company. Harward Business Review. Vol. 69. No. 5. pp. 71 – 81.

Hirsjärvi, S., Remes, P. & Sajavaara, P. 2009. Tutki ja kirjoita. 15th, partly renewed edition. Hämeenlinna: Kariston Kirjapaino.

Holland, R.G., Smith, A., Hasselback, J.R. & Payne, B. 2010. Survey Responses: Mail Versus Email Solicitations. Journal of Business & Economics Research. Vol. 8. No. 4. pp. 95 – 98.

Holmlund, M. 2008. A definition, model, and empirical analysis of business-to-business relationship quality. International Journal of Service Industry Management. Vol. 19. No. 1. pp. 33 – 34.

Hsiao, K-L., Lan, W-C. & Lu, H-P. 2013. The influence of the components of storytelling blogs on readers' travel intention. Internet Research. Vol. 23. No. 2. pp. 165 - 182.

Ilmonen, K. 2007. Muuan diskurssianalyysi. Esimerkkinä Chydenius-instituutin vaikuttavuustutkimus. In Aaltola, J & Valli, R. (eds.) Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin II. Näkökulmia aloittelevalle tutkijalle tutkimuksen teoreettisiin lähtökohtiin ja analyysimenetelmiin, 127 – 142.

Johnson, L.W., Leonard, S. & Walker, R.H. 2006. Re-thinking the conceptualization of customer value and service quality within the service-profit chain. Managing Service Quality. Vol. 16. No.1. pp. 23 – 36.

Jorgensen, D.L. 1989. Participant observation: A methodology for human studies. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

Kiviniemi, K. 2007. Laadullinen tutkimus prosessina. In Aaltola, J. & Valli, R. (eds.) Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin II. Näkökulmia aloittelevalle tutkijalle tutkimuksen teoreettisiin lähtökohtiin ja analyysimenetelmiin. Juva: WS Bookwell, 70 – 85.

Kokkomäki, J., Laukkanen, T. & Komppula, R. 2010. Determinants affecting the use of an intermediary when buying meeting services. Tourism review, Vol. 65. No. 2. pp. 21 – 27.

Maclaran, P., Saren, M., Stern, B. & Tadajewski, M. 2010. The SAGE Handbook of Marketing Theory. London: SAGE Publications.

Madhavaram, S.R. & Hunt, S.D. 2008. The Service-Dominant Logic and a Hierarchy of Operant Resources: Developing Masterful Operant Resources and Implications for Marketing Strategy. Academy of Marketing Science. Vol. 36. pp. 67 – 82.

Medhurst, A. & Albreicht, S. 2011. Journal of Management & Organization. Vol. 17. No. 3. pp. 398 – 411.

Mesch, D., Paarlberg, L. & Perry, J. 2006. Motivating Employees in a New Governance Era: the Performance Paradigm Revisited. Public Administration Review, Vol. 66. No. 4. pp. 505 – 514.

Murray, M. 2003. Narrative psychology. In Smith, J.A. (edit.) Qualitative Psychology. A Practical Guide to Research Methods. London: SAGE Publications, 111 – 131.

Newhouse, I.S. 2004. Mystery Shopping Made Simple. New York: McGraw-Hill Professional.
Ojasalo, K., Moilanen, T. & Ritalahti, J. 2009. Kehittämistyön menetelmät. Uudenlaista osaamista liiketoimintaan. Helsinki: WSOYpro.

PamInCa. 2009. The Essential Guide To Mystery Shopping. Cupertino: HappyAbout.info.

Perttula, J. & Latomaa, T. (eds.) 2009. Kokemuksen tutkimus. Merkitys – tulkinta – ymmärtäminen. Rovaniemi: Lapin yliopistokustannus.

Sarajärvi, A. & Tuomi, J. 2009. Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi. Jyväskylä: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi.

Schreier, M. 2012. Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice. London: SAGE Publications.

Shostack, G.L. 1984. Designing Services That Deliver. Harward Business Review. Vol. 62. January – February. pp. 133 – 139.

Silverman, D. 2011. Interpreting qualitative data. 4th edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Smith, J.A. (edit.) 2006. Qualitative Psychology. A Practical Guide to Research Methods. 3rd partly renewed edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Tutt Woods, P. 2010. Mystery Shopping Know-How. Mystery Shopping, a legitimate business. LaVergne, TN USA

Van Der Zouwen, J. & Smit, J.H. 2006. Effective Repair in Survey Interviews. Quality & Quantity. Vol. 40. pp. 245 – 258.

Vargo, S.L. & Lusch, R.F. 2004. Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing. Journal of Marketing. Vol. 68. January. pp. 1 – 17.

Vargo, S.L. & Lusch, R.F. 2008. Service-dominant logic: continuing the evolution. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science. No. 36. pp. 1 – 10.

Vargo, S.L. 2009. Toward a transcending conceptualization of relationship: a service-dominant logic perspective. Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing. Vol. 24. No 5/6. pp. 373 – 379.

Verbeke, W., Dietz, B. & Verwaal, E. 2011. Drivers of sales performance: a contemporary meta-analysis. Have salespeople become knowledge brokers? Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science. Vol. 39. Issue 3. pp. 407 – 428.

Wilson, A.M. 1998. The role of mystery shopping in the measurement of service performance. Managing Service Quality. Vol. 8. Issue 6. pp. 414.

Wilson, A.M. 2001. Mystery Shopping: Using Deception to Measure Service Performance. Psychology & Marketing. Vol. 18. July. pp. 721 – 734.

Electronic sources

Curtis, K.R. 2008. Conducting Market Research Using Primary Data. Western Extension Marketing Committee. Accessed 12.11.2014.
http://ag.arizona.edu/arec/wemc/nichemarkets/07conductingmarketresearch.pdf

Hesselink, M., van Iwaarden, J. & van der Wiele. T. 2004. Mystery shopping: A tool to develop insight into customer service provision. Accessed 19.8.2013.
http://repub.eur.nl/res/pub/1737/ERS%202004%20082%20ORG.pdf

ICC/ESOMAR. 2008. International Code on Market and Social Research. Accessed 12.10.2013.
http://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/ICCESOMAR_Code_English_.pdf

Nelli Information Portal. 2014. Laurea Library. Accessed 1.11.2014.
http://www.nelliportaali.fi/V/?institute=LAUREA&portal=LAUREA&new_lng=eng

Oxford Dictionaries. 2014. Oxford University Press. Accessed 24.8.2014.
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/

Theseus.fi. 2014. Open Repository of the Universities of Applied Sciences. Accessed 1.11.2014. http://www.theseus.fi/

Unpublished sources

BDRC Continental. 2013. Meetings Benchmark Tracker at Scandic Hotels. Assessment Criteria: Meetings 2013 Programme. Internal material. Scandic Hotels.

Concept & Quality. 2010. Internal material. March 2010. Hotel Operations. Scandic Hotels.

Fiumana, A. 2014. Mystery Shopping June. Internal material. Scandic Hotels.

Heikkonen, A. 2010. Staff Opinions about Mystery Shopping. Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Laurea Leppävaara. Espoo. Bachelor's thesis.

Kärpänen, T. 2011. Understanding Customer Experience through Methodological Triangulation – Case: Repair Services in Finland. Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Kerava. Master's thesis.

Laaksonen, T & Pelttari, T. 2009. Suitability of the Mystery Shopping and the Customer Satisfaction Inquiry for the Determination of Customer Satisfaction in the Retail Business. Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. Pori. Bachelor's thesis.

Mäkinen, U. 2011. Service Challenges: Sales Personnels' Perspective. Case: Alko Inc. Lahti University of Applied Sciences. Lahti. Bachelor's thesis.

Pihlaja, K. 2013. Mystery Shopping as a Method to Improve Kela's Customer Service Quality. Tampere University of Applied Sciences. Tampere. Master's thesis.

Scandic group & conference processes & procedures. 2013. Internal material. Scandic Hotels.

Scandic Meeting Mystery Shopping. 2013. Internal material. Scandic Mystery Shopping. Scandic Hotels.

Stahl, S. 2012. Internal material. Meeting 1.5 Project Workshop 23.-25.1.2012. Scandic Hotels.

Stude, E. 2014. Alko Inc. and mystery shopping. Email taija.pehkonen@gmail.com 30.7.2014. Printed 12.8.2014.

Vakkuri, J. 2009. What kind of effect does the employee's motivation have to the quality of service. Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. Seinäjoki. Bachelor's thesis.

Figures

Figure 1: The Group & Conference sales cycle (Scandic group & conference process & procedures 2013, 5) 17
Figure 2: Concept model of a meta-analysis (Verbeke et al. 2011, 410) 31
Figure 3: Framework for a review on motivating employees (Mesch et al. 2006, 506) 32
Figure 4: Highlighting based on the main categories (photo by Pehkonen 2014) 38
Figure 5: Cutting, matching and gluing based on the themes (photo by Pehkonen 2014) 39
Figure 6: Creating a blueprint (photo by Pehkonen 2014) 42
Figure 7: Reasons for and against mystery shopping 53

Tables

Table 1: Examples of previous thesis reports on the functionality of mystery shopping..... 8
Table 2: Eight steps in QCA (Schreier 2012, 6) 37
Table 3: Themes and sub-themes... 44

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Email request for narratives 65
Appendix 2: Service Blueprint 66

Arvon kollega,

Teen opinnäytetyötä mystery shoppingista ja **tarvitsen sinun apuasi**, että tuloksista saataisiin mahdollisimman luotettavat.

Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on kartoittaa työntekijöiden käsityksiä mystery shoppingin toimivuudesta myyntihenkilöiden kehittämistyökaluna kokous- ja ryhmämyynnissä business-to-business liiketoiminnassa.

Eli miten mystery shopping toimii meidän toimintamme kehittämisessä?

Pyydän sinua kirjoittamaan kokemuksistasi mystery shoppingiin liittyen. Voit kertoa hyvän tai / ja huonon esimerkin tai mitä vain mieleesi tulee aiheesta.

Käsittelen tarinat luottamuksellisesti ja nimettöminä. Voit halutessasi kirjoittaa tarinan anonyymisti ja toimittaa sen kirjekuoressa toimiston lattialla olevaan pahvilaatikkoon.

Vastaan mielelläni kaikkiin kysymyksiisi ja odotan tarinaasi **maaliskuun 2014 loppuun mennessä**. Tarinan saa kirjoittaa työajalla.

Dear Colleague,

I'm writing a Master's thesis on Mystery Shopping and **I am asking for your help** to make the results as reliable as possible.

The purpose of the thesis is to explore the employees' perceptions of the functionality of mystery shopping as a tool in improving salesperson performance in group & conference sales in business-to-business context.

How does Mystery Shopping work in improving our performance?

Please write a story about your experiences in Mystery Shopping. You may write about a good or / and a bad example or anything that comes into your mind about Mystery Shopping.

The confidentiality and the anonymity of the stories will be protected.

Please e-mail your story to: taija.pehkonen@scandichotels.com. If you wish to keep yourself anonymous, please send the story to: Taija Pehkonen, Scandic Marina Congress Center, Katajanokanlaituri 6, 00160 Helsinki, Finland.

I will be happy to answer any questions. Please send your story **by the end of March** 2014.

Appendix 1: Email request for narratives

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE	Fair/ad/ website	Telephone	E-mail	Telephone	Venue	E-mail	E-mail	E-mail
CUSTOMER ACTIONS	Customer looks for information	Customer contacts the sales office by phone	Customer receives an offer by e-mail	Customer receives a phone call from the sales agent	Customer visits the venue	Customer receives an updated offer based on the site visit	Customer receives an e-mail from the sales agent	Customer receives an e-mail from the sales agent
Line of Interaction								
			24 hours from the enquiry	3 days from the enquiry			7 days from the enquiry	
ONSTAGE EMPLOYEE ACTIONS	Key account manager meets potential customers at a fair	Sales agent answers the phone, goes through the enquiry handling checklist	Sales agent sends an offer based on the enquiry	Sales agent makes sure that the customer has received the offer and the details are correct	Sales agent, hotel staff member or key account manager meets the customer for the site inspection	Sales agents sends an updated offer based on the site visit	Sales agent asks if the customer wants to confirm the booking	Sales agent sends a confirmation letter
Line of Audibility/Visibility								
BACKSTAGE EMPLOYEE ACTIONS		Sales agent looks for information and prices from the internal files and programmes. Sales agent asks details from revenue manager, f&b manager, key account manager, accounting, hotel manager, head chef, meeting host, co-operating partner Sales agent makes the booking and an offer			Housekeeping, meeting hosts, reception staff, restaurant staff and hotel maintenance check the key areas for site inspection Sales agent makes changes on the booking and an updated offer based on the site visit			
Line of Internal Interaction								
SUPPORT PROCESSES	Marketing, technology maintenance	Technology maintenance	Technology maintenance	Technology maintenance	Venue maintenance	Technology maintenance	Technology maintenance	Technology maintenance

Appendix 2: Service Blueprint