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Improving Customer Home-like Feeling Through Service Design

Hoang, Thu

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Improving Customer Home-like Feeling Through Service Design

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Improving Hotel Customers' Home-like Feelings Through Service Design

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This thesis project was commissioned by Original Sokos Hotel Albert to investigate the hotel's needs and customer demands. The aim of the project is to understand the connection between customer expectations and business strategy to generate higher service value. Sokos Hotel Albert offers hotel and restaurant services and the purpose of the thesis project is to improve the hotel customers' home-like feelings. The project focuses on increasing the variety of the hotel services and solving the problem that the hotel lacks an effective development plan.

During the thesis working process, basic research methods and service design methods were applied. All data were collected through research and communication with the staff of Sokos Hotel Albert. The research design methods included the customer journey, customer emotional mapping, service blueprinting and brainstorming. The implementation of the methods led to a conclusion that the hotel needs to have a detailed development plan, enhance the variety of its services and staff performance in order to offer a good home-like feeling experience to its customers.

The thesis report proposes to the company three new ideas for the company. The first one is a detailed development plan for short term changes. The others are two concepts: a co-creative space and a staff training program.

Keywords: customer experience, homelike experience, service design, hotel services

Hoang, Thu

Title of the Thesis

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Tämä opinnäytetyö on tutkia Original Sokos Hotelli Albertin tarpeisiin ja asiakkaiden vaatimuksiin. Tämän projektin objektiivinen on ymmärtää asiakkaiden odotus ja yritysstrategian välinen yhteys tuottaakseen korkeamman palvelun arvoa. Sokos Hotelli Albert tarjoaa hotelli ja ravintola palveluja ja tämän opinnäytetyö tarkoitus on parantaa hotellin asiakkaiden kotimaista tunnetta. Projekti keskittyy lisäämään moni eri hotelli palveluja ja ratkaisemaan hotellin puutteita tehokkuuteen kehityssuunnitelmissa.

Opinnäytetyön aikana sovellettiin perus tutkielman menetelmät ja palvelumuotoilu menetelmät. Kaikki tutkielmista ja kommunikaatioista Sokos Hotelli Albertin työntekijöiden kanssa saaduista tiedoista on kokoonnuttu. Tutkimus menetelmät sisältyy, asiakas käyttäytymistä (customer journey), asiakkaan tunteiden kartoitus (customer emotional mapping), service blueprinting ja aivorihi (brainstorming). Menetelmistä saatiin tuloksia, että hotelli tarvitsevat yksityiskohtainen kehitys suunnitelmia, jotta voisi parantaa eri palveluja ja henkilökuntien toimintaa asiakkaille ja asiakkaiden kokemusta kotimaiseen tunteiseen hotelissa.

Tämä opinnäytetyön ehdottaa yhtiölle kolme uutta ideaa.. Ensimmäinen on saada yksityiskohtainen kehitys suunnitelma lyhyt aikaväliseen muutokseen. Kaksi muita ideoita ovat kaksi käsitteitä: kanssaluomista (co-creative) tila ja henkilökunnan koulutusohjelma.

Keywords: asiakaskokemus, asiakkaiden kotimaista tunnetta, palvelumuotoilu, hotellipalvelut

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1 Introduction

In the age that strongly requires the development of services, especially in the field of hotel and restaurant, customer always has high demand in customer experience and service quality. This leads to the fact that creating great customer experience along with high service quality is the main proposition that many hotels are aiming to develop and provide to customer.

As far as customer experience is concerned, like other hotels, Original Sokos Hotel Albert is seeing improving hotel service quality as the main strategy. Moreover, Sokos Hotel Albert concentrates on creating better home-like feeling for customer. Therefore, this thesis centers on the question that how to improve customer home-like feeling through service design. This focused area was decided based on not only the company's need, but also personal and objective working experience reflection since the thesis worker worked for Sokos Hotel Albert for a year before starting this thesis.

The process of this thesis work consists of studying different sources of theory, applying service design methods for researching and brainstorming, analyzing, as well as finalizing the researching and brainstorming outcomes to create new development plan and concepts for hotel service. The key step is the implementation of service design methods in order to establish new concepts and ideas. The applied methods are, for instance, service blueprint, customer expectation map, interviewing, customer journey, and observation. Furthermore, the whole working process is driven by the communication between the thesis worker and Sokos Hotel Albert's manager, customers, and thesis supervisors, which has been carried out flexibly and actively. This thesis is clarified with four main sections which describe the whole thesis working process. The four sections are: Theoretical background, Company business background, Research and service design methods, and Service design implementation.

More specifically, the topic "Improving Customer Home-like Feeling Through Service Design" was chosen after carrying out some first research methods. The research results to the fact that customers expect to have better experience about services and convenience like at home, managers and staffs have demands for more creative improvement for the hotel service, coziness, staff performance while customer is centered.

2 Theoretical background

The thesis project is implemented on the basis of customer experience and service design. Moreover, the thesis also requires knowledge about customer home-like feeling. For that reason, the theory about these elements is the key of the project, which will be analyzed in this section.

2.1 Customer experience

As one of the main concerns of hotel service, customer experience is strongly affected by service design, which has been considered as a foundation for this thesis project. Theoretically, customer experience is identified as how a certain service creates customer feeling including physical and emotional elements. Customer feeling is a further point that will be considered and clarified in the next section. It is also said that customer experience is a combination between service interaction and customer expectation through different touch points and channels. (Shaw & Ivens 2002)

Particularly, depending on the service type, physical customer experience consists of many components, such as: accessibility, products, quality, environment, location, availability and services (Shaw & Ivens 2002). Customer experience is defined in 5 stages of experiencing the whole service as demonstrated in the following graph (Shaw & Ivens 2002). The graph appears to validate the obvious visibility of physical interaction while customer experiences the service.

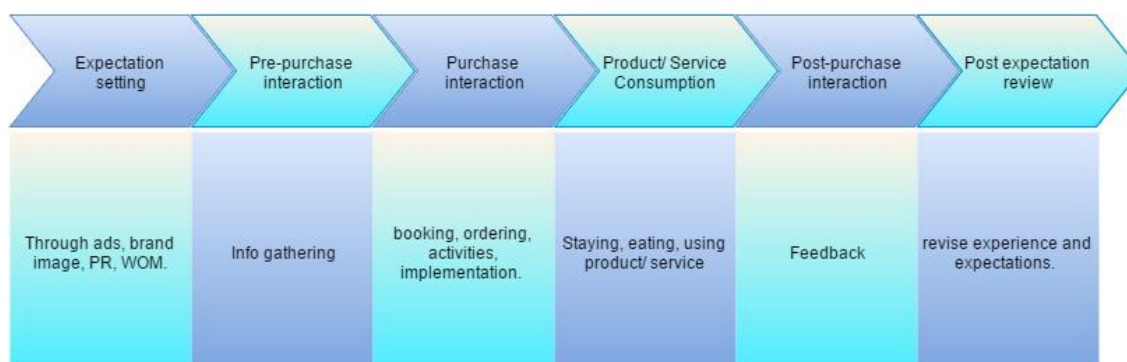


Figure 1. Stages of customer physical experience

Another equally significant aspect of customer experience is emotional experience, which is built simultaneously together with the development of creating customer physical experience. (Shaw & Ivens 2002) The company always wants to get closer and create connections to customer's emotionality by, for instance, improving customer satisfaction, establishing emotional motivation and increasing investment (Berenbaum n.d.).

In brief, value of customer experience is competitive in service sector. As for hotel service where customers are vulnerable, along with high expectation, it is important to highly meet their expectation, as well as differentiate the service, branding customer experience (Shaw & Ivens 2002). Another important point is that in order to provide great customer experience,

the service is built focusing on customers - “outside in” service design, not the company itself - “inside out” service design. (Shaw & Ivens 2002)

2.1.1 Customer homelike feeling

A significant aspect of customer experience is customer feeling in which home-like feeling is the central concern of the thesis. In fact, customer feeling is a complicated concept that is involved to as well as affected by other elements in the business and service, such as: service quality, time, service interaction and touch points. Since customer feeling is derived from emotional connections, it is unpredictable in many cases and not able to be guaranteed in any level. (Richardson 2014) However, there are common feelings which are often seen in hotel service, for example: feeling welcomed, respected, comfortable, understood, important, and be listened. (Mackay n.d.)

Particularly, while staying in a hotel, home-like feeling is formed from many elements which bring to the customer the touch, the remembrance, the comfort of home, and even of family. In other words, a hotel providing great home-like feeling is a place that customer at the same time experiences and senses the restful atmosphere, the flexible service, and the personal privacy. Based on service design and customer experience design of the hotel, the home-like feeling is generated through customer service touch points, room design including room space, lighting, furniture, artifacts, and furniture. (Bergman 2011) Providing home-like feeling is an effective way for hotel business to engage customers because it implies the central expectation and demand of all service users which is care giving. (Downs 2014)

With the reference of customer home-like feeling to the company’s development, it is important for the company to improve their emotional connections with customers by enhancing or re-image the service quality. (Richardson 2014) The service image is built on the basis of customer experience design and service design. Additionally, it is also directed by how the service feels the customer’s feelings and response to them.

2.1.2 Customer service

Customer service is a familiar concept which appears in many business sectors with certain level of customer expectation, demand in service quality and staff performance. Specifically, in hotel service, communication is the first and the key factor in customer service. It is demonstrated in staff skills consisting of listening, conversation concentration, observing, and using body language. Moreover, a successful customer service is to give more than customer expects, which brings a great value on relationship marketing strategy. (Friedmann n.d.)

2.1.3 Customer satisfaction

During the customer experience process, customer satisfaction is a value which is always being generated. It cannot always be seen directly and physically, but through the results of interaction between customers and services. This means that customer satisfaction is measured based on evaluation of customer for service quality. Some elements that affect the customer satisfaction are for instance customer service, cleanliness, safety and security, entertainment services, location and physical attractiveness. (Guzzo 2010)

Customer satisfaction has a strong influence on the business. In particular, positive customer satisfaction can increase the position of the business in the market, as well as enhance business profitability by bringing effect on customer's post-purchase actions such as WOM, recommendation and repetition of using the products or services. However, negative customer satisfaction measured through unsatisfied customers' complaints and WOM bring negative effects to the business. Therefore, in order to develop customer satisfaction, the company needs to understand and analyze thoroughly the needs and desires of customers to generate great customer experience. (Guzzo 2010)

An important point regarding to creating customer experience is that the business needs to see from outside-in perspective meaning from customer perspective aiming at the innovation, customer expectation and motivation. (5 Keys To Customer Experience Success In 2016 & The Future 2015)

2.2 Service Design

As being outlined in the previous sections, service design plays an important role as a solution for creating and enhancing customer experience. It is the confluence of many research activities and design methods having high applicability for various services. (Miettinen & Valtonen 2012) Further discussion in this thesis includes and clarifies five principles of service design thinking which are: user-centered, co-creative, sequencing, evidencing and holistic. Service design is a foundation of any service development because its outcomes meet customer needs in experiencing innovative and attractive service, as well as needs of the business in marketing and differentiating the services in the market. This thesis will analyze the co-creative and customer/user centered principle. (Schneider & Stickdorn 2010)

2.2.1 Co-creative principle

The co-creation with customer is seen as how the company implements service design with the participation of customers as co-creators. Through this, customers are invited for collabo-

ration with the company to generate value and experience. There are many ways to apply the co-creative principle. Physical co-creation is mostly applied, for example surveying, interviewing, meeting, digital supported and some practical activities. Depending on the companies plan, customers can decide the level of their contribution to the service design project.

At the same time, so as to efficiently execute this principle, the company needs to create suitable context for customers to take part in. Furthermore, there are some essential elements like effective communication, open and friendly atmosphere, supporting materials and spaces.

2.2.2 Customer centered principle

Customer centered principle is one of the most important factor in any business and service, especially in hotel and restaurant. The service focuses on end-customers' needs and demands, and the ease-of-use of the service to make it customer-friendly. As being mentioned in the co-creative principle section, the company creates change and development from outside-in perspective. This principle helps the business increase customer loyalty and profitability. (eGain Communication Corporation 2004)

Applying this principle, the business needs to be consistent to avoid confusion of customer during the service design process, as well as the customer journey. The company also needs to understand customers' emotion, expectation and experience that the customers may have to create efficient communication and motivation for them. (Customer-centric design: three questions to guide your approach 2014)

The role of service design in service innovation appears to validate how business and services benefit from it. In particular, applying service design methods fitting business strategy brings huge impact on business profitability and growth, giving direction for short term and long term development. As being mentioned, service design certainly associated with innovation which is used to support catching up with new market trend and customer demands. For this reason, it brings challenges to service innovation and design because of the resistance of different target groups, along with the risks in financial management and failure of plan, strategy.

In this thesis, since the company is in hotel service sector having high demand in improving customer experience and service quality, service design is strongly and efficiently utilized throughout the whole thesis working process. Therefore, most of the methods applied in this project are service design methods which will be specified in the next section.

3 Company business background

Original Sokos Hotel Albert has been chosen and agreed to be the partner company for this thesis. The hotel is part of the strong hotel chain in Finland - Sokos Hotels. As an original hotel, Sokos Hotel Albert was designed based on Finnish local culture and mindset which brings different experience from other Break and Solo Sokos Hotels. It locates in Helsinki city center and has convenient transportation connection to travel around Helsinki, and to other areas.

The hotel offers services for accommodation, breakfast and restaurant, sauna, conference and banquet. Specifically for room offers, there are standard single rooms, standard queen rooms with possibilities to arrange extra bed, and standard twin rooms. Sokos Hotel Albert is an ideal stay destination for both business and leisure travelers since its rooms provide suitable and comfortable furniture for working and relaxation. Moreover, the hotel offers various extra small services, such as: toys for children, ergonomic pillow, room wines, and welcoming bags for pets. (Original Sokos Hotel Albert - individual like you n.d.)

Additionally, the hotels build wide partnerships with many companies and organizations, for example, Radisson Blu hotels and resorts, S-kanava, Finnair, VR, Viking Line, and Red Cross in Finland. (Our partners n.d.) Original Sokos Hotel Albert has been through long-term development, facing with many challenges. There have been changes in human resource, business strategy, financial strategy, and service development.

4 Research and service design methods

Admittedly, researching is an essential step in any project. Besides that, as being mentioned, service design methods play an important role in the thesis. This section illustrates how the research has been conducted and how service design methods are applied during the thesis working process. In general, the first purpose of implementing the methods is to gain more knowledge and understanding about Original Sokos Hotel business. The methods convey information from different channels growing critical thinking and awareness on customers and business demands. Subsequently, they are the tools to get through the whole process of the thesis, from understanding, exploring to generating ideas, creating new concepts, and finally to presenting the outcomes and implementing them.

Additionally, it is also said that the methods support three phases of the service design project including discovering, defining and developing. Discovering phase is the stage of researching, find out and learn more about the company, the market needs and the theoretical background. Then, the thesis work defines the direction of developing service design ideas through some methods like brainstorming and benchmarking. The third stage happens after

the ideas are generated from the second stage. The ideas will be analyzed, considered and developed into practical, useful and applicable service design ideas with concrete recommendation and plan for the company.

4.1 SWOT analysis

The first method conducted for the research process is SWOT analysis. It is known as an effective strategic tool and framework for business, which brings thorough approach to the company from internal to external understanding. (Mind Tools Editorial Team n.d.) It also helps to generate a realistic point of view from the company's business value. These are the reasons why SWOT analysis is an appropriate method supporting the study about Original Sokos Hotel Albert.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good location - Strong hotel brand in Finland - Experienced long-term development - Having clear develop direction - Strong partnerships - Cozy and local atmosphere - Family, pet and business friendly hotel - Very friendly staffs - Basic offerings are good - Having benefits for staff as motivation - Variety of touch points for customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A bit behind renovation and design compared to other hotels - Still lack of motivation for staffs - Missing an effective training program - Too much workload for managerial team - Low variety of services - Lack of creative decoration - Lack of seasonal tastes - Diversity of working days - Low differentiation compared to other hotels - Missing detailed change and improvement plan |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many competitors - Lots of tourists - Creative and potential staffs - International market - High customer expectation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global financial crisis - Competitive pressure - Time and workload pressure - Competitors - Expensive city and country |

Table 1. Original Sokos Hotel Albert SWOT analysis

As can be seen from the above analysis that even though Sokos Hotel Albert has had stable position in the market, it is important to note the limitations and challenges of the company in controlling the threats and creating impacts on the weaknesses. In addition, the analysis indicates that strengths-opportunities strategies and weaknesses-opportunities strategies are the potential development ways. For instance, creative and friendly staffs can contribute their ideas to improve the diversity of the services. High customer expectation is a motivation for staffs' working days. Moreover, there are some points that are very helpful for the service design process, such as: the variety of customer touch points, clear development direction of the hotel, and the weaknesses in creating differentiation and detailed improvement for the hotel service.

4.2 Customer Journey

Since the main customer segments are businessmen and tourists, which makes the customer journeys for them similar to each other, the customer journey map below created focus on customer as businessmen. It is combined with the 5 stages of customer physical experience mentioned in section 2.1 in order to convey a clearer view on the customer journey. Overall, the journey is similar to other hotels' customer journey because of the similarity in hotel and restaurant services. This supports the point that Original Sokos Hotel Albert has low differentiation from other hotels.

Specifically, during the service consumption, there are more purchase interactions happening at the same time. For example, customers are able to purchase room wines and snacks, order room breakfast service, and pay for dinner at Papa Albert restaurant. Besides that, as can be seen in the figure 2, there is no customer action listed under the post expectation review, because at this stage, customers have their own emotional reflection and experience, which are not consisted in the journey.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY

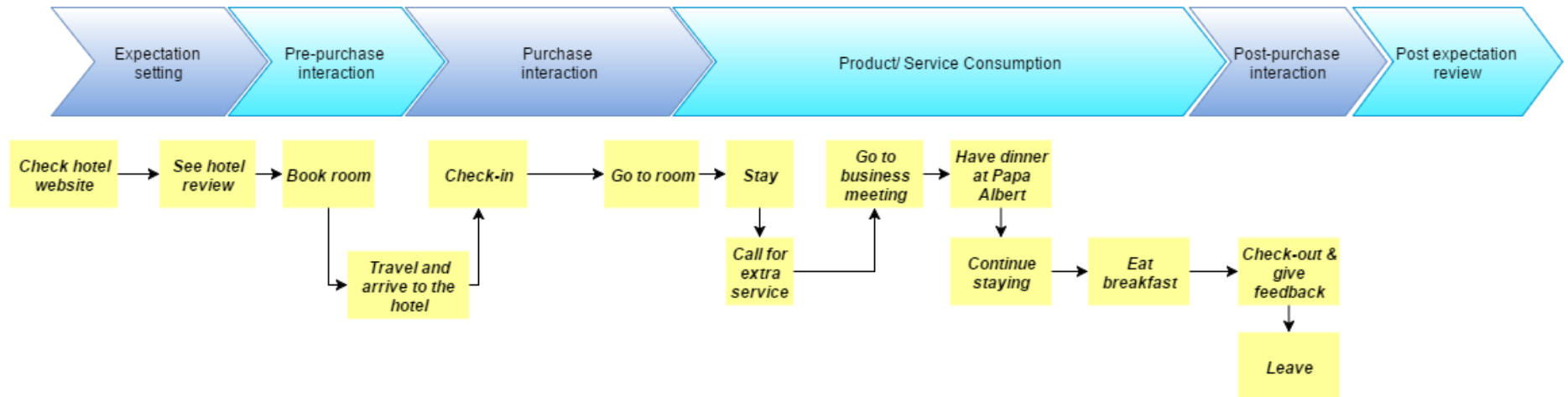


Figure 2. Customer Journey map

4.3 Interview

Since the two mentioned methods - SWOT analysis and customer journey - give basic knowledge about the hotel and its service, the thesis project requires more detailed information from different sources so as to have more understanding about company development strategies, customers' needs and expectation, staffs' motivation, direct customer communication, and management point of view. Therefore, interviews with customers, staffs, and hotel managers were conducted gathering useful information.

4.3.1 Interview Martin Andergård - General Manager of Original Sokos Hotel Albert and Solo Sokos Hotel Aleksanteri.

The interview with Martin Andergård was conducted in the beginning of the thesis working process. Due to his limited time availability, the interview was done quickly focusing on the company's development direction and strategy. Therefore, he said that the company would be interested in improving customer experience through the hotel's coziness, friendly atmosphere, and creating customer home-like feeling. (Andergård 2015. Personal Communication.)

4.3.2 Interview Tiina Kuikka - Original Sokos Hotel Albert Manager

In order to have a closer approach to Original Sokos Hotel Albert's service in general and clearer understanding about their development strategy, the interview was initially carried out between the thesis worker and the hotel manager - Tiina Kuikka who has been working in Sokos Hotel Albert for 5 years. The interview centered on the manager and hotel staffs' point of view about different related questions and topics.

First of all, Tiina provided background information about the hotel based on interview questions. According to Tiina, Original Sokos Hotel Albert is following Sokos Hotels brand change and development direction, however it has its own personality which is expressed clearly in the slogan "Choose character, choose Albert". The hotel is focusing on how to make Albert the first choice of customers when travelling. Main customers are businessmen during the year, and more leisure customers in summer. Currently, Sokos Hotel Albert does not have much special services for kids and family, only some small gift toys, but interacting with kids has been done very well. As for loyal customers, they are often given special gifts like flowers, cards, candies as surprises to engage them with the hotel. (Kuikka 2015. Personal communication.)

Tiina also discussed about her point of view, as well as the company's direction in improving service and especially in creating customer home-like feeling as being mentioned in the in-

interview with the General Manager above. She said all creative ideas would be definitely welcomed, however, the hotel would support ideas of small changes or something that does not lead to much extra cost or workload. Speaking of customer home-like feeling, it was mentioned about customer expectation understanding in what make them feel like home from heart, why they wanted to stay in the hotel. From her opinion, home-like feeling comes from the general atmosphere of the hotel where different types of people are understood, listened welcomed and kindly taken care of. (Kuikka 2015. Personal communication.)

4.3.3 Interview staffs

There were five staffs interviewed - two working in the reception, two in housekeeping department and one in hotel restaurant. The interviews were actually open conversations. Overall, according to the interviews result, the hotel is rated as offering good quality service and most of hotel customers are satisfied. Customers staying in Sokos Hotel Albert expect high quality basic hotel service meaning for example clean and fresh atmosphere, comfortable stay, good breakfast, friendly staff and affordable price. Taking from their working experience, the most important elements while operating the hotel services are room quietness, breakfast service, and cleanliness. Most of the interviewees were interested in some ideas such as: offering special room scents, more entertainment services, and decoration.

There was also some discussion about staff satisfaction. They all admitted that there have been certain working pressure, especially the pressure of time and workload. They mentioned that they hadn't got enough training which caused much pressure and confusion. However, the working environment is very friendly and open.

When being asked for suggestions from customers' perspective, customer behaviors and interests were brought out as their feedback for service improvement. They would prefer to have better and more various types of food in the restaurant. The room and the hotel in general could improve the cleanliness and decoration seasonally or in special events.

4.3.4 Interview customers

The interviews with customers were implemented mainly at the hotel restaurant during breakfast time, sometimes at the hotel bar and lounge during day time. The customers were asked about their general satisfaction and rating for Sokos Hotel Albert, their expectation when staying and using the services, and some suggestions on what should be improved.

First of all, when being asked for rating the hotel from one to five meaning from strongly unsatisfied to very satisfied, the average result is 3,8. Majority of customers were satisfied,

however they also had some feedback for the services, such as: the breakfast food and service should be improved, staff performance in some circumstances should be more flexible and effective. Customers think that the hotel lacks of variety of services, especially low cost or free entertainment activities and services.

The customers expected high service quality as that was what they paid for. In their opinions, the quietness, coziness, breakfast service, cleanliness and friendliness in staff performance are very important. The customers also expected to have high-tech equipment with fast internet accessibility, good cooling and heating system as they have at home, and some extra services to make them feel more special, comfortable and more like home beside the basic hotel offers that all other hotels could provide.

4.4 Observation

The observation method was applied from the beginning of the thesis working process through several visits in different day times. In this section, it is important to consider personal reflection as well while working for Sokos Hotel Albert before starting the thesis. The observation was carried out in various hotel departments including housekeeping, restaurant, maintenance, reception and management departments.

As a result, it is obvious that the basic hotel service is well offered. The staffs are very helpful and friendly. However, all the mentioned points above about the variety of services, and staff performance are strongly agreed. Additionally, customer opinions and feedback have not been considered well enough, which is the reason why Sokos Hotel Albert has not had significant changes and improvement recently.

4.5 Service Blueprint

Another tool supporting service design process is service blueprint. Theoretically, it describes in detail the process of service interactions based on a certain customer journey. Through the visibility of the interactions, customer experience can be easily seen and analyzed. (Service Design Tools n.d.)

In the case of Sokos Hotel Albert, the service blueprint is created on the basis of business customer's journey. At the same time, an emotional map is graphed and analyzed throughout the journey. The level of customer satisfaction in the emotional map was based on the research result in the following table. The research included observation about 10 cases and interviewing 10 customers.

| | Unsatisfied | | Neutral | | Satisfied | | Very satisfied | | Results | Notes |
|--------------------------------|-------------|---|---------|---|-----------|----|----------------|---|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | O | I | O | I | O | I | O | I | | |
| Check hotel website | x | | x | 2 | x | 8 | x | | Satisfied | |
| See hotel review | x | | x | 2 | x | 8 | x | | Satisfied | |
| Book room | x | | x | 0 | x | 10 | x | | Satisfied | |
| Travel and arrive to the hotel | | | 3 | 0 | 7 | 10 | | | Satisfied | |
| Check-in | | | 0 | 1 | 10 | 3 | | 6 | Very satisfied | Great customer service |
| Go to room | | | 5 | 7 | 5 | 3 | | | Neutral | Lots of luggages Small lifts |
| Stay | | | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | | | Neutral, Satisfied | Noise, brightness |
| Call for extra service | | | 2 | 3 | 8 | 7 | | | Satisfied | On time |
| Go to business meeting | | | 3 | 3 | 7 | 7 | | | Satisfied | Meeting space at the hotel lounge |
| Have dinner at Papa Albert | | | 2 | 4 | 8 | 6 | | | Satisfied | Crowded |
| Continue staying | | | 3 | 5 | 7 | 5 | | | Neutral, Satisfied | |
| Eat breakfast | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | Neutral, Satisfied | Crowded |
| Check-out | | | 0 | 1 | 10 | 2 | | 7 | Very satisfied | Fast, friendly staff |
| Leave | | | 0 | 2 | 10 | 8 | | | Satisfied | |

O: Observation

I: Interview

Table 2. Customer Emotional Map Research

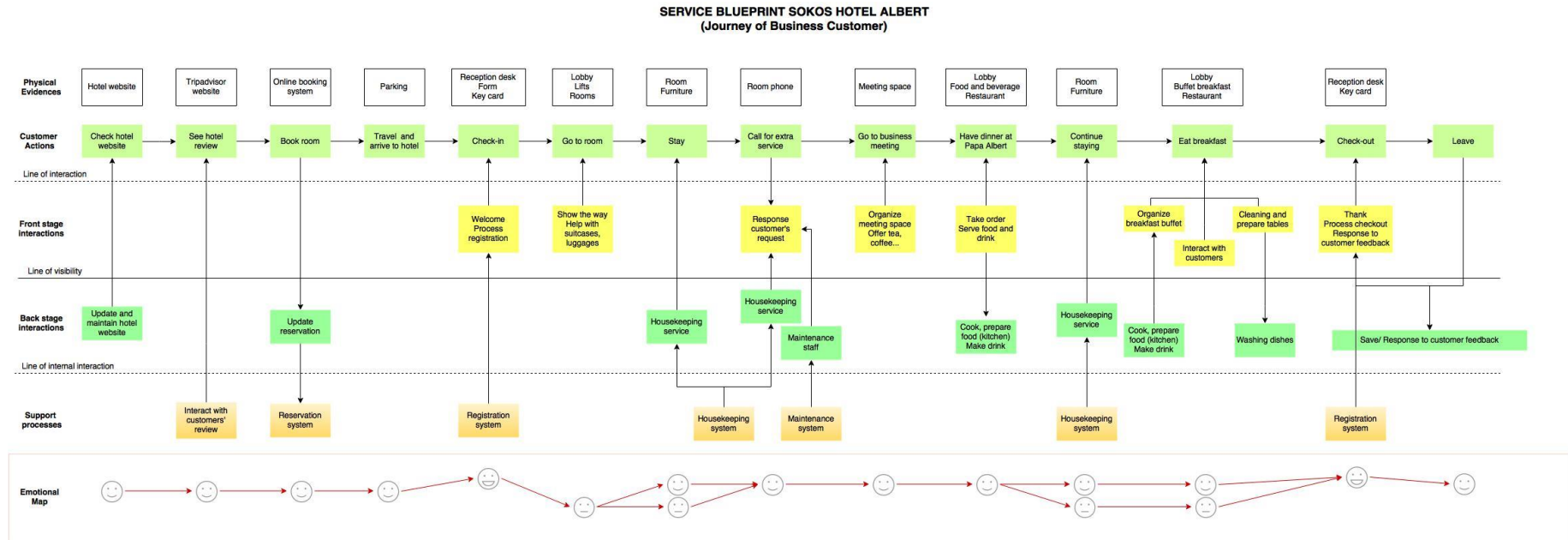


Figure 3. Service Blueprint of Original Sokos Hotel Albert

As can be seen in the blueprint, the customer is mostly happy about the service, especially when the customer is at the customer service, having direct communication with hotel staffs. However, there are some points needing consideration and improvement. For example, there is a case that the customer does not feel comfortable when going upstairs to the room through the small lifts because some lifts are small and their doors are heavy and not automatically opened. The customer is not satisfied if the room is not well cleaned and prepared for the stay. Another point is the breakfast service, the customer is confused about the position of food and beverage since the signs for them are not clear enough. Moreover, the restaurant is full and too crowded, there is no table available and no proper take-away service or packages either. Therefore, there is possibility of having failed service points caused by the backstage actions.

4.6 Customer physical and emotional expectation map

In order to create great home-like feeling in customer experience, applying customer physical and emotional expectation map is an appropriate method. Through this map, the concept of generating customer home-like feeling is seen more obviously. The map is created as a result of observation, interviews and graphing service blueprint.

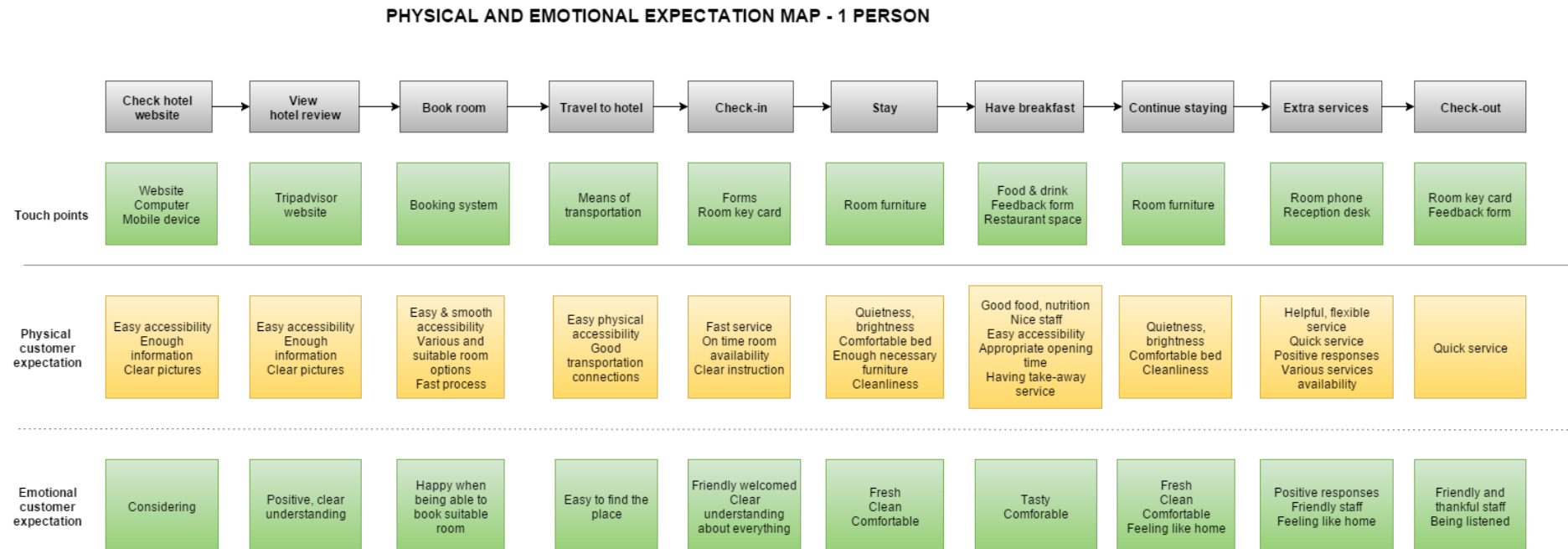


Figure 4. Customer physical and emotional expectation map.

4.7 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a very useful service design tool which helps to indicate the gaps in hotel service quality (Wang, Yuanyuan & Huiqin 2014). In the case of Sokos Hotel Albert, internal and competitive benchmarking methods were applied. The situation of Sokos Hotel Albert supported the thesis process has been that its business is stable along with its human resource, overall service system and customer satisfaction.

The objective for the benchmarking was firstly to determine position of Sokos hotel Albert service comparing to other original hotels in Helsinki in particular, and moreover in Finland and other countries. The second objective was to get inspired and generate service design ideas for the hotel. Furthermore, the scope of this method covers hotel services and customer experience. The metrics chosen to do benchmarking are rating and comments on Tripadvisor, hotels facts and figures, room design, home-like feeling experience and supporting services. The data are collected by visiting and researching the hotels' websites, personal reflection, social communication and visiting Tripadvisor website. The outcome is presented in the following table.

| | Tripadvisor rating and comments | Hotel facts and figures | Room design | Home-like feeling experience & supporting services |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| Sokos Hotel Vaakuna | Rate: 3.5 Outdated decoration There is mascot for entertaining kids. No WOW effect, tight elevators Too crowded breakfast | Large lobby, but some rooms are quite small. There are chairs, tables and light for businessmen working. | There are flexible tables for using/ working on bed. | Nice kids room Children breakfast area |
| Sokos Hotel Presidentti | Rate: 4.0 Late room cleaning time Great TV programs in English with Finnish sub. Recommended to upgrade | Old hotel (since 1980s) Big conference, event rooms and facilities | 4 rooms for the disabled. | Separate bar Reading place with many books Self-service laundry |
| Scandic Hotels | | Different types of hotels (family, romantic, cafe, road side...) | Having mascot | There's always something fun for children. |
| GLO Art Hotel | Rate: 4.0 | Bike renting service Gym partner company across the street Weekly event updates | | Staffs do not have skills about health or similar for urgent situations. |
| Radisson Blu Royal Hotel Helsinki | | Having fax, printing in hotel business center in the hotel lobby | | |

Table 3. Hotels benchmarking

4.8 Brainstorming

Brainstorming is the last method applied to generate ideas and form the final development concepts. This method is carried out by using lotus blossom creative technique and mind map. Particularly, the brainstorming is mainly based on the lotus blossom technique since it is more structured than the mind mapping. Moreover, it pushes creative thinking which effectively leads to ideas extension. The process of proceeding the lotus blossom technique is found in the following tables.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| | Entertainment for kids | Food and beverage | Relaxation | Food and beverage | Make the room like home | Cleanliness | Services for the disabled | Staff skills |
| | Family touch | Long distance call service | Hotel design | Co-creative | Kids ideas | Wish lists | Health | Restful |
| Take-away boxes | Family events | Home-like decoration | Feedback | Staffs | Businessmen's ideas | Comfortable beds | Food nutrition | Safety |
| Meetup platform | Cooking | Drawing/painting | Family touch | Co-creative | Health | Crafts | Paintings | Toys |
| Recommendation from hotel | Hobbies | Toys | Hobbies | Home-like feeling | Artifacts | Seasonal | Artifacts | Sticky notes |
| Games | Reading | Gym | Room design | Food and beverage | Amenities | Calendar | Pictures | Decoration |
| Colors | Brightness | Paper models | Take-away break- | Food art | Wish list | Extra package/ | Restful | Favorite |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|--|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|
| | | | fast pack- age | | | service | | |
| Working tools for business- men | Room design | Kids games | Sea- sonal | Food and bev- erage | Salad bar | In can- dles | Amen- ities | Sur- prise |
| Design your own room | Creative corner | Sea- sonal deco- ration | Sand- wiches | Kids food | Color soft- drinks | In flow- ers | Bath- room | Sea- sonal |

Figure 5. Lotus Blossom Creative Technique implementation


After applying all mentioned researches and methods, some thinking connection is created based on common factors among the results. There are some most significant points which are considered as part of this thesis service design outcomes. The first one is that most of the research results say that Original Sokos Hotel Albert lacks of variety of services and differentiation with other hotels. Secondly, it is currently missing detailed development plan, training program, and co-creative interaction with staffs and customers.

5 Service Design Implementation



Based on the outcomes of research and service design methods mentioned above, there are three main recommendations for the hotel. They can be seen as new concepts and development plan.

5.1 Detailed development plan

This recommendation is a list of small elements in the hotel which can be improved and changed in short time by the staffs. These improvements support improving the customer home-like feeling since they increase the comfortability, safety and family taste during thy stay. The list is made based on observation reflection and customer interviews.

| Department in charge | Tasks | Description | Visualization |
|----------------------|--|--|--|
| Reception | Long distance call service | The service point supports customers who need to make calls to other countries without using calling apps on smartphone or internet. The service can be free or low-cost. | |
| | Hand writing wishes/ special wishes in cakes, chocolates... | The wishes can be for special occasions or simply daily wishes. They will be put in, for instance, sweets or cakes in restaurant, chocolates in rooms, and attached in room breakfast service. |   |
| | Travel support service (early flight, after flight packages) | Examples: Take-away breakfast service; early breakfast service; refreshment (food and package) after flight always available at the hotel restaurant or reception. |  |
| Housekeeping | Sleeping package/ menu | Customers are able to buy extra sleeping packages or get them for free in some special occa- | |

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | <p>sions. The package includes pillow menu, herbal sleep elixirs, sleep sound, masks, night care cream, etc.</p> |  |
| | <p>Seasonal decoration</p> | <p>The hotel in general, the rooms and corridors are decorated with the seasonal atmosphere. The decoration doesn't need to be complicated, too colorful, but simply brings the coziness of family touch like how people often do at home.</p> |  |
| <p>Restaurant</p> | <p>Take-away breakfast service</p> | <p>This ideas support customers in many circumstances. The service offers convenient take-away packages for individuals, families or groups. The packages can be made ready or left open for customers to pick the food themselves.</p> |  |

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| | Buffet signs | The clear signs for breakfast, lunch or other types of buffet at the hotel restaurant are strongly recommended. They make customer feel more comfortable when having their meals, avoid unnecessary confusion. |  |
| | Seasonal food and decoration | Seasonal food is like a taste to welcome some special occasions, remind people about home-made food when travelling far away from home. Seasonal food containing good amount of nutrients for the trip makes people feel safe and comfortable. Special seasonal food decoration will delight customers' feeling, especially kids and family. |  |
| Maintenance | Accessibility for disabilities | It is recommended for the hotel to equip more facilities and high technology support for disabled customers, such as: supporting access facility at the en- | |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | | trance, buffet design, access to the lifts and rooms, get-on-bed support, and support with suitcases. | |
|--|--|---|--|

Table 4. Development plan recommendation

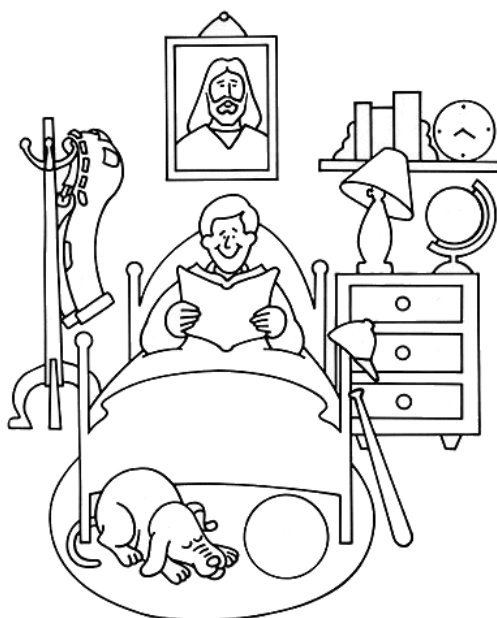
Obviously, the ideas of improvement in the list above are assigned to suitable departments. They are all open for staffs' creativity.

5.2 New concept 1 - Co-creative space

Co-creative space is a new concept that could be developed for Original Sokos Hotel Albert. This concept is an opportunity to co-generate and implement new creative ideas with staffs and customers, which at the same time creates impacts on improve the variety of hotel services. Another important point in this concept is that customers are the ones creating part of their experience.

The concept includes new customer actions and interactions in new hotel entertaining services. For instance, kids and family are able to experience "designing your own room" activities through hotel room coloring books, kids drawing their favorite rooms, playing in digital game board/ game apps on hotel website, and decorating their own rooms. Their work can be displayed in the hotel or hotel website, and recorded for further consideration. Below are some pictures that can be used for the coloring books and room designing game.





Another example is that in some special occasions, customers can take part in making their own food and drinks, such as: decorating their own cookies, making “karjalanpiirakka”, and making their own cocktails.

5.3 New concept 2 - Training program for staff

As being mentioned in the interview with the manager of Original Sokos Hotel Albert, human factor meaning the role of staffs is the key element creating home-like feeling for customer. Additionally, the home-like feeling comes from the experience that customers feel safe, welcomed, restful and comfortable. Hence, there should be a training program including guidance and practice about various skills and working situations.

To demonstrate this concept, the training program can be designed focusing on customer service. The program consists of two main parts. The first one is basic introduction and training applied for everyone, especially for new staffs. Its purpose is to provide and equip to all staffs all necessary and important information, such as: the hotel structure, information about hotel departments and services. Moreover, this part is suggested to include some get-to-know-each-other activities. The second part contains various training sessions in targeting different groups or individuals depending on training demands. The training sessions are periodically organized as in-house training, outdoor training, cross-training and soft skills training. The table below analyzes some examples of recommended training sessions:

| Sessions | Objectives | Content | Activities |
|----------------------|---|--|---|
| Safety and emergency | Staffs are able to handle emergency situation. Improving problem solving skill | Listing and guidance about how to deal with some certain emergency situation, such as: accidents, violence, fire, etc. | Group work, simulation |
| Creativity | Motivating and improving staff creativity | Creative thinking Applying creativity at work | Team work, team building activities, brainstorming sessions, internal competition (Dale Carnegie Training 2008) |
| Service attitudes | Able to set goals for improvement Contributing to build customer relationships | Stress management: How to understand and differentiate positive and negative stress Balancing working day | Workshops, group discussion, team work, team building activities, games, attending events from other |

| | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| | | Positive thinking Patience and self-control Assertiveness Humor Accuracy (Markidan 2014) | companies. |
| Interpersonal skills | Improving staff performance in customer relationship and communication | Appearance, self-presentation Caring Inspiring trust Negotiating Problem solving Responsibility (Doyle 2015) | Simulation, team work, workshops, games |
| Communication | Enhancing quality of customer communication | Face to face impression Positivity: positive language and performance Listening: actively, using body language Confidence (Markidan 2014) | Workshops, simulation, group discussion, team work, team building activities, games, attending events from other companies. |
| Event management | Staffs are able to plan and organize events professionally | Event planning Event organizing: marketing, logistic, finance, catering. Problem solving | Practicing with actual events, team work, outside events observation, simulation |

Table 5. Recommended training sessions

Another important thing is that the training program also needs to consider how to measure impacts and improvement after training. This strongly affects the working quality and training plan in the future.

6 Conclusion

Home-like feeling is created and influenced by numerous factors. In the case of Original Sokos Hotel Albert, it is simply presented as the feelings when customers are welcomed, listened, feeling safe, restful and comfortable. It is also about how customers experience various ser-

vices providing above feelings and family touch. The customer experience considers the roles of services and staff performance.

Therefore, the homelike experience increases the customer loyalty. At the same time, it positively influence on the hotel position in the hotel and restaurant market. From the company's point of view, focusing on improving customer homelike feeling is seen as a determination of development path leading to future success.

In conclusion, the research and service design methods lead to three main outcomes as being analyzed in previous sections. The first one is a detailed development plan aiming at short term development and creating impacts directly on customer feelings. The second one is the concept of co-creative space formed by creative activities and services where customers are most welcomed and listened. The third recommendation is the training program supporting building human factor as the key factor generating values for customer home-like feeling and experience.

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Appendixes

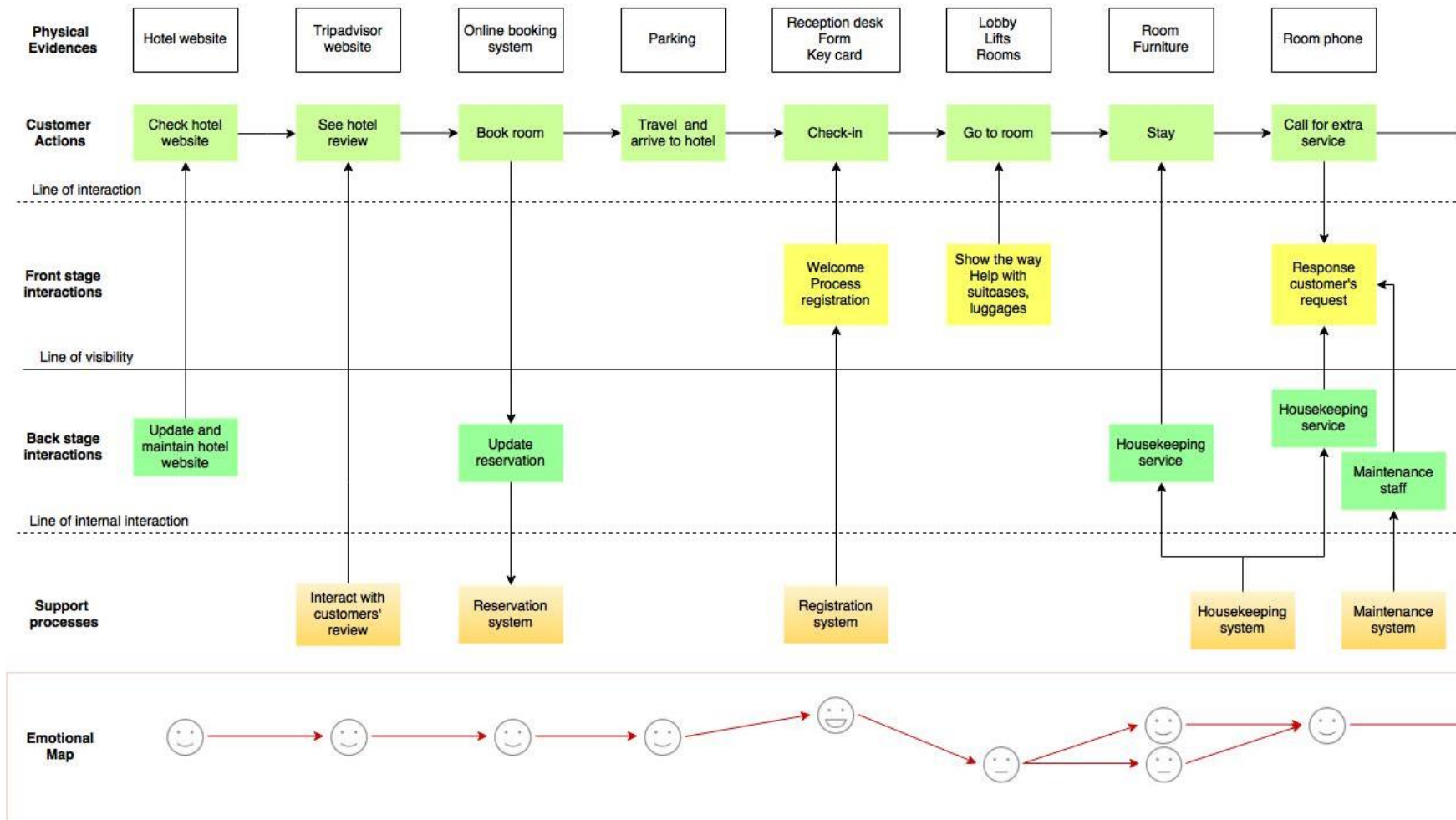
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Appendix 1. Customer Interview Questions

1. Ages:
 - a. Under 18
 - b. 18-23
 - c. 23-30
 - d. 30-50
 - e. Over 50
2. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Occupation
4. How often do you stay in Original Sokos Hotel Albert?
5. With whom do you often travel and stay in the hotel? (Kids, family, friends, or alone)
6. Which are your purposes of travelling and staying in the hotel? (Business, visiting friends or relatives, or relaxation)
7. Have you ever stayed in other Sokos Hotels?
8. Please rate from 1-4 your level of satisfaction of following experiences during your journey in Original Sokos Hotel Albert.
 - a. Overall hotel service
 - b. Hotel website
 - c. Reviews for hotels in Tripadvisor
 - d. Room booking system
 - e. Traveling and arriving to the hotel
 - f. Check-in
 - g. Staying & room service
 - h. Calling for extra services
 - i. Dinner at Papa Albert
 - j. Breakfast service
 - k. Check-out
 - l. Leaving the hotel
9. What is your opinion about the following services of Original Sokos Hotel Albert?
 - a. Reception
 - b. Room cleanliness
 - c. Restaurant service
 - d. Homelike feeling while staying
 - e. General atmosphere
 - f. Staff performance
 - g. Kids and family services

10. What do you think should be improved in Original Sokos Hotel Albert? For example, homelike feeling, food, room design, and cleanliness.
11. Is there any hobbies or routines you would like to keep while traveling and staying at Original Sokos Hotel Albert? For example, drawing, painting, in-house workout, cooking, reading, video games, and playing musical instrument.
12. How do you rate the importance of the following elements while staying in a hotel?
 - a. Quietness
 - b. Homelike feeling
 - c. Coziness
 - d. Breakfast service
 - e. Room colors and design
 - f. Room brightness
 - g. Room special scents
 - h. Kids and family service
 - i. Hotel restaurant

Appendix 2. Customer Journey and Emotional Map - Part 1



Appendix 3. Customer Journey and Emotional Map - Part 2

