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Outsourced Marketing In Relation to Finland Indie Game Companies

Case company: Kuvion

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ABSTRACT

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Finland has one of the fastest developing game industries in the world, with a turnover of 2.36 billion euros in the indie game market in 2017. Nevertheless, the author has learned that many indie game developers do not have much interest in marketing, as they prefer to work on their products instead.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine, research, and improve the business service product and customer base of the client company using service design methods. With the help of the methods it is possible to create the prototypes, which is the outcome of this thesis. The designers use service design in a broad scope focusing on user and customer experience, too. The thesis is a portfolio-based report consisted of the introduction, theoretical framework, a presentation of the portfolio works, and lastly, conclusions, and reflections.

The case company Kuvion is an advertising and marketing company based in Oulu, Finland. Kuvion's business strategy deals with marketing for game developers that need help in marketing their games. Kuvion provides an affordable and detailed list of marketing services required in indie game marketing such as PR, influencer contacts, and creating promotional material. The services of Kuvion are composed of two main areas: first, website development and second, marketing. In this thesis, the main focus lies on marketing products and services of Kuvion

The Double Diamond model provided by the Design Council is used as the primary source in the theoretical background of the thesis. The double diamond model is separated into four sections, which are mutually beneficial and flexible in their composition. In each section, different types of methods that fit the context and aim to build and validate a new service model prototype for the case company are used.

In conclusion, a total of four factors not included in the case company's service list were discovered. Two out of these four were seen as potential new marketing service models, i.e. partnership with the indie game publisher and partnership with mentorship hosting companies/ organizations. Two other improvements based on the findings were changes in portfolio and being more proactive with the customers

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Keywords: Outsource marketing, indie game company, service product development, prototype, service design

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

This section presents the purpose of the thesis, research problems, research questions, and the background of the commissioning company. The aim of this section is to introduce and help the readers understand the motivations and purposes of the thesis.

1.1   Purpose of the thesis

The main purpose of the thesis is to examine, research, and improve business to business (B2B) service product and customer base of the client company using service design methods. The service design methods enable the author to create sustainable solutions and generate solid experiences for customers and any stakeholders that are involved (Sarah Gibbons 2017, cited 13.12.2020). Service design puts major importance in being customer and user oriented. The main goal of this thesis is to develop a prototype of a new marketing service product for Kuvion by utilizing various methods. The main principles lie in the double diamond model. The Design Council states that the double diamond model is used for describing the design process comprehensively and visually (2015, cited 3/12/2020). The methods will be able to shape prototypes, build plans, and explore the problems that the customers can experience.

To explore the possibilities and to segment the customers more effectively, the methods will be holistic, and qualitative research will be used along with workshop methods. Whereas the double diamond model involves early-stage research that can be re-evaluated multiple times, the structure of this thesis might differ from the traditional process. The design principles from the Double Diamond model (Design Council, 2015, cited 5/11/2020) states that the key method is to think from the customer's perspective and be customer oriented. It will also require other stakeholders such as company members to be involved in although briefly. The author will also explore the recommendations as well as limitations that certain methods can pose. This thesis report follows the structure of a portfolio-based report. Introduction, theoretical basis, presentation of the author's works, and finally conclusion and reflection, are the general skeletal structure of this thesis.

1.2 Background of the commissioning company

Kuvion is an advertising and marketing company based in Oulu, Finland. Found in August 2017 as a joint-stock company, Kuvion is a small to medium company (SME) that are mainly composed of three core members. Teemu Kinnunen, Managing director. Joonas Ylläsjärvi, Technical project manager, and Lauri Ikkala, Marketing chief. Kuvion came to be when a group of people agreed that there were just too many potentially good games that failed to see the green light due to the lack of marketing. Since then, they have been involved in multiple projects for both indie games and triple-A games (Kuvion 2020, cited 5/11/2020). They have shown desires to expand the business and to find more ways to serve the indie game companies in Finland. Kuvion's vision is to solve the marketing problems of the game industry and to grow influence in Finland. Kuvion expects these goals to be met by having an outstanding, and potentially, original types of marketing services. The thesis subject has been commissioned in an effort to better achieve the mentioned goals above.

Upon a short discussion with the case company, the author learned that Kuvion's business strategy is to penetrate the slim market for game developers. Kuvion's customers need help in marketing their games due to reasons such as wishing to focus on the product development, not being familiar with the marketing scene, or some that need extra help in the marketing department. Simply put, the indie game developers oftentimes lack the ability, time, or money to do marketing (Carol, J 2017, cited 6/11/2020). This is when Kuvion comes into play. Kuvion provides an affordable and detailed list of marketing services needed, in a pleasant user interface website that is easy to calculate the total cost of individual services. Kuvion is aiming to have a professional but casual and easy business culture for the customers that are not very used to the corporate cultures, such as game developers. The marketing services of Kuvion are mainly composed of two divisions. They are website building & management, and marketing of the client's product. The focus of this thesis will be mainly on the marketing products of Kuvion and related services.

1.3   Definition of the indie game companies

The 'Indie' in the indie game refers to independent companies that are usually composed of one person or a small group of like-minded people. They usually have little to no financial support. However, as the indie game market grew from flash games to billions of US dollars per year, so did the indie game companies. In modern times, there are about 3 major groups of indie game companies. A hobby game maker, an indie game developer with little to no financial aid, and an indie game company (or a team) branching out from the mother company with greater financial, intellectual, and human resources.

The reason behind why large publishers or gaming companies might have subsidiary indie companies is due to the smaller team with less management and fewer stakeholder expectations can aim for greater creative freedom. Indie games in general tend to focus on experimental and innovative gameplay. For the triple A (AAA) games that have a larger brand name, they have a larger risk of failing and receiving criticism. Unlike the AAA games, indie games have the opportunity to produce unique experiences in art games and explore the medium. Since indie games have lower financial capabilities, they tend to be sold through digital distribution channels rather than at brick-and-mortar stores (Bycer, J 2017.).

1.4   On research problems and questions

Finland is known to be one of the most famous game producing countries in the world. Angry birds from Rovio, Control from Remedy, and Clash of Clans from Supercell are all globally known games made in Finland during the last 10 years. Not only that, there are also estimated about 220 companies related to the game industry in Finland alone (Neogames report 2018, cited 13/10/2020). This is not only due to the excellent quality of the product, but it is also due to success in marketing and service design. Entertainment as a commodity is by its nature can be forgotten quite easily. However, the games mentioned above are still widely known and remembered. According to Neogames Finland indie game report (2018), there are about 270 game-related companies in Finland, most of them are SMEs focusing on mobile game development, and among them are marketing companies, publishing companies, and PC and console game developers (ibid.). The game market in Finland had a turnover of 2.36 billion Euros

in 2017, with large game companies such as Supercell with a revenue of 1.8 billion euros (Helsinki Times, 2019, cited 11/11/2020). Finland also has the highest gaming revenue in the world concerning the population size. (ibid)

In the summer of 2018, the author had a professional training in Kuvion. The training gave chances to meet multiple indie game companies and people who work in the sector. The author also attended several events that supported the growth of new indie game companies such as game lab and business Oulu. However, the author learned that most of the indie game companies, even with a solid product, would not think much about marketing their games. Therefore, the author found it necessary to aid the game companies improving their marketing strategies. Therein, the outsourcing marketing was the author's choice. It was his workplace, and it showed multiple advantages over self-marketing and publisher marketing. Simply put, the marketing costs less, the developers did not need to spend time in marketing, and there is much flexibility on choosing which marketing services can be accomplished (Wiegert, A 2014. Cited 17/12/2020). From there, the author developed the research question.

> *'Which factors dictate the necessity of outsourced marketing in Finnish indie game companies?'*

However, the research question in this thesis is only relevant in the beginning as a starting point, and not very central to the entire process as the author will be expanding and contracting upon the topic. This is due to the service design method called the Double Diamond, which the author will be using in this thesis, involves numerous methods that stem from the research question. The method expands on the subject in a broader sense to explore the question further.

2   DOUBLE DIAMOND MODEL

The purpose of this section is to present a service design model called the Double Diamond, which is the theoretical basis of this thesis. This section presents the background, basic concept, each stages, principles of the Double Diamond and the advantages of using this model.

2.1   Background

The double diamond model was first launched in 2004 by the Design Council. It has been used and referenced multitudes of times in websites and academic papers. Its strength comes from the comprehensive structure, clear visualization, flexibility, and numerous methods available when conducting the design. This model was made by researching the methods and the processes that the various designers made.
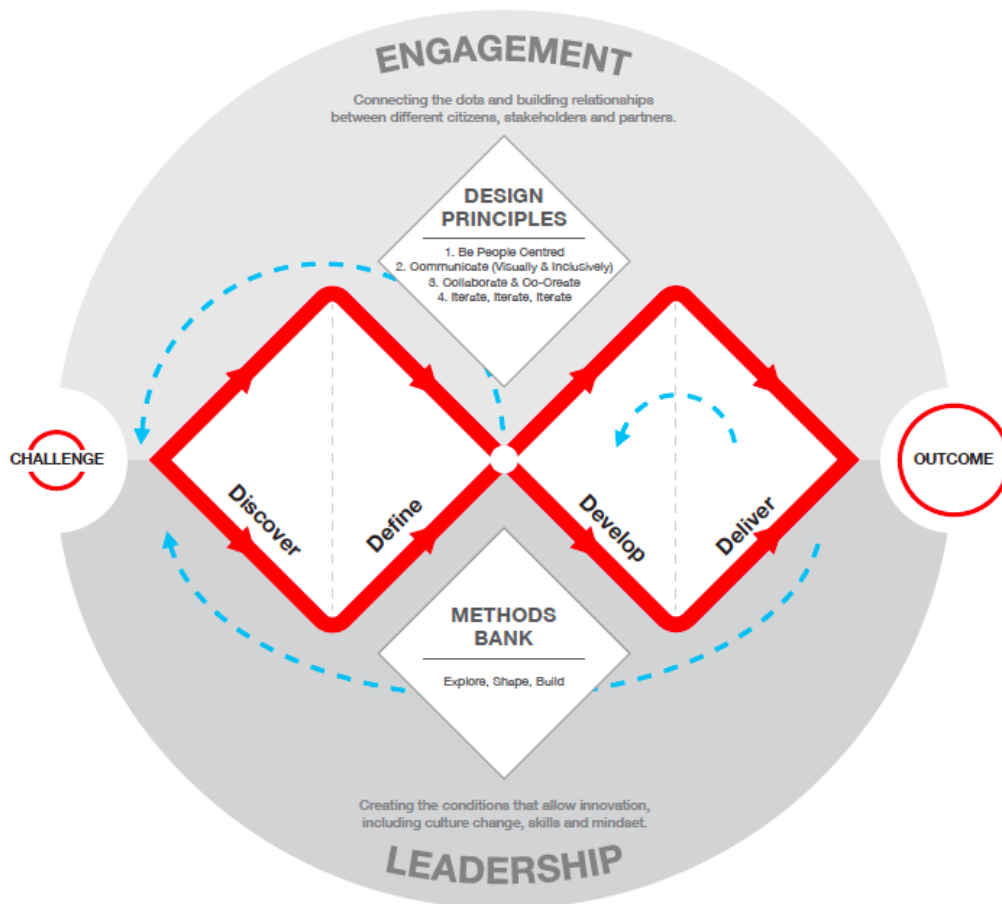
FIGURE 1. Double Diamond Model. (Design Council, 2004)

The double diamond model stems from the divergence-convergence model by Bela Banathy in 1996 in the book called Designing Social Systems in a Changing World (1996, cited 6/12/2020). The book was considered to be one of the kind at its time in the design method field. Drawing from a wide range of knowledge, it integrated evolutionary insights creatively, with various models provided. The divergence convergence model has a similar visual aspect but a different interpretation and is strictly linear in each phase, not allowing the researcher to reprocess the methods again. The advantages of using this theoretical basis is that each method used can compliment and add on to each other. For example, the methods from Discover phase can also be used to support and provide information in the development phase.

2.2 The four phases of the Double Diamond

There are four phases in the double diamond model. Discover, define, develop, and deliver. This is not a linear process. In every phase of the model, there might be a new discovery or learning that might lead the author back to previous phases (Design Council 2015, cited 8/12/2020).

Discover is the first stage of the process. Here, we discover and think deep into the problem, diving into the variables of the problem at hand. This stage is all about gathering insights, understanding, and generation of ideas which can take the form of a focus group, brainstorm, or using equipment to explore the customer's reality. The aim of this stage is to identify and understand opportunities or problems.

In the **Define** phase, the main aim is to filter and focus on the factors and ideas that the author has identified in the previous stage, shown by the model where the two lines collapse into one singular point, instead of spreading out like the Discover phase. This is a great filter of ideas. By using the methods in Define stage, one is able to focus on real problems whereas focusing on irrelevant data might increase the failure on the outcome plus the time spent. At this stage, it is important to know the financial, resources, and logistics to know which one might be possible and which might not.

The **Develop** phase is the phase where the service development starts. All of the methods aim for a singular outcome: to create a prototype and find the solution. The most significant point here is to work and co-create together with other stakeholders to ensure minimal and optimal prototype outcome. The final testing of the prototype is done in the **Deliver** phase through small scale validation methods. This stage measures the impact of the prototype on the customers and to test if there are no major faculties. However, it is important to keep in mind that even after the testing and validation, reflection, and improvement based on that reflection is important. As the arrows in the diagrams show, the reflection and data collected in this stage can lead the author to any previous phase.

2.3 Principles of the Double Diamond

The design principles are represented by the circle in the top middle part of the diagram. This part represents the four principles that the designers should adopt in their works. These principles help them to work as effectively as possible, so it is always beneficial to have these principles in mind while implementing the process in the methods.

The first principle deals with the issue of being customer oriented. To truly understand the customer, "the true understanding of habits, culture, social context and motivation of users are crucial" (Stickdorn 2011, 28). The second principle is communicating visually and inclusively. Since marketing service is not a physical idea that can be grasped with hands, they need to be visualized for ease of understanding. People in the modern era are increasingly more dependent on visuals due to the progress of technology and its omnipresence. Therefore it is crucial to materialize what normally is abstract. The third principle is to collaborate and to co-create, in which collaboration is important in the double diamond model. A flow of information from one direction to another is beneficial and can reduce time and resources wasted. The fourth principle in the diagram is iterating. Iterating will minimize the errors and be able to spot the errors early. If possible, being able to double-check everything and thinking about it carefully once more provides more insight. Not only will this reduce the chance of having errors in the process, but it will also give a new perspective and give a chance to improve the methods further.

2.4 Method of assessing the success

There needs to be an assessment of the success of this project. Although the aim is to create a service design prototype, it will be important to have a form of assessment to really identify the capabilities and success of the prototype.

However, due to the nature of the tight schedule, the SMART method might not come into fruition. If not pursued with a tight schedule, the author would have used SMART method. **SMART** method is a common goal-setting method used when setting a long time goal, with a structured approach (Dave Chaffey 2020, cited 14/11/2020). The SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely goals. It is imperative to know the right questions to ask in this

method. In S, one should as What should be accomplished, Why is the goal important, and Who is involved. In Measurable, one should ask What are the factors that can be accounted. Actionable is used to broaden the possibilities of a project without going to impossible lengths. When answering the Relevancy, one should ask if the project seems worthwhile, and if it matches the needs and the efforts of the company. Unfortunately, due to the limited time resources, it was not possible to conduct such method. However, the SMART method can still be used by the case company and the author would strongly recommend in doing so.

3 METHODS

In the double diamond model, there are various methods the author can use to reach the goal. The service design methods for the Double Diamond models are suggested and introduced in the Design Council, University of Eastern Finland, and furthermore books and papers such as Business Model Generation by Alexander Osterwalder, and This is Service Design Thinking by Marc Stickdorn, Jacob Schneider. The relevant methods that correlate with each of the four stages are used in order to find problems, solutions, and create a prototype at the end.

3.1 Discovering phase

As for the start, the **brainstorming method** will prove to be useful to generate ideas quickly and effectively. After a warmup brainstorm of something slightly related to the problem of marketing, the author brainstorms with the focus on the main research question, 'Why do indie game developers need marketing'. The target is around 30-50 bullet points. This way it is possible to build ideas upon the previous ones like the train of thought goes down.

This brainstorming method has proven to be very useful when using at the rest of other following methods. This method provided the fundamental basic ideas and questions to ask in quantitative surveys, and what research question to look at in the secondary research stage, as well as validation and formulating relevant questions in interview. It also enables the author to be able to look at the problem at hand from as many different perspectives as possible, such as guessing the relationship between the quality of service being provided and the number of people in the company receiving it. The full brainstorming lists are shown in Appendix 1, Brainstorm bullet points.

Stakeholder maps are a very good way to define the issues and gain a basic understanding of the stakeholder groups in and out of the company (Design Company 2015, cited 23/11/2020). This is beneficial since it might reveal unaware stakeholders and make the author reconsider neglected stakeholders as well. The author can also define the relationship between each stakeholder. There are many different types of stakeholder maps available, but the author used the figure from the Stakeholder analysis for R&D project management of Arun, Robert, and Laurie

(2002, 307). Due to the reason that this model allows to clearly visualize the most and the least impact each stakeholder hold as well as being able to define external and internal stakeholders at the same time in the following steps.

For a brief definition, stakeholders are defined as a person or group of people who own a share in a business (Cambridge dictionary, 2019.) meaning those that are affected by the company's activities and who have a stake in the business. From here, the internal stakeholders are referred to as people who have stakes inside the business, such as manager, owner, and employees. The external stakeholders are the ones who do not have a direct relationship with the company but are still affected by the activities of the business. These might include the government, society, shareholders, and customers. To remind the focus of the project, this thesis' purpose is to understand, research, and improve the B2B service product and customer base of the client company by creating a prototype. It is imperative to have this aim in mind during the process since the stakeholders that will be on the figure 3 and figure 4 must be relevant to our project. The stakeholders that are listed here must be somewhat interested or involved in the new service prototype. The figure 3 is a visualization of the stakeholders and their assorted classifications according to the above classification.

There are four definitive steps taken to make the stakeholder map in this method.

Step 1. Defining external and internal stakeholders.

Step 2. Weeding out the irrelevant ones to the project and only keep the relevant stakeholders. The relevant stakeholders are shown in figure 2.

Step 3. Using a simple classification presented by Lauren Kress, rank them with a number and letter, representing their interest and influence in the graph. The classifications are shown in the table 1.

Step 4. Putting the classified stakeholder in the assigned quadrant. The result of this step is shown in figure number 3.

TABLE 1, Influence and Interest classifications. (Created on 14.12.2020)

Interest	Influence
1 - Most interest	A - Most influence
2 - Some interest	B - Some influence

Internal stakeholders, Owners	Customers
a.Marketing chief 1A b.Technical projectmanager1B c.Managing director 1A d.People in innercommunity2C	a. Award/grant/other means indie companies 2A b. Supported by parent company 3B c. Hobby game makers 1A d. Customers who hire outsourced as an extension of their own marketing department. 1A e. Customers in social community (Followers) 2B
Competitors	**Government**
a.Game publishers 1B b.Marketing agencies 1B c.Game marketingcompanies1B	a.Business Oulu 2C

FIGURE 2, Classification of stakeholders. (Created on 14.12.2020)

Interest

People who are affected by the company

Keep informed
1B & 1C

- Technical project manager
- Competitors

Manage closely
1A

- Marketing chief
- Managing director
- Hobby game makers
- Customers who hire outsourced
as an extension of their own marketing department
(Customers Supported by parent company)

Regular contact
2B & 2C, 3B & 3C

- People in inner community
- Customers in social community (Followers)
- Business Oulu

Anticipate and meet needs
2A & 3A

- Customers who got award/grant/other means of financial support

Influence

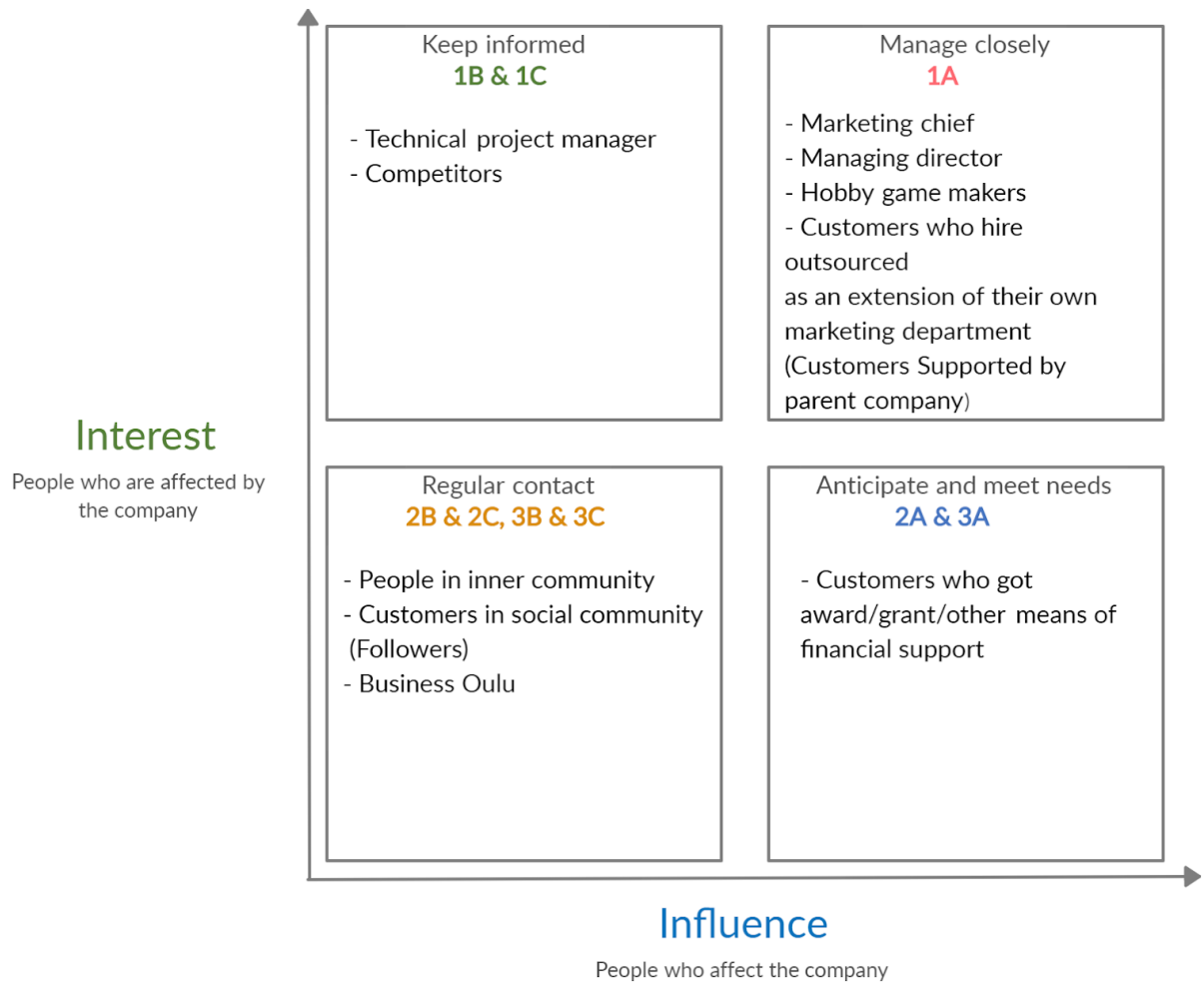People who affect the company

FIGURE 3, Stakeholder map classification according to importance. (Created on 3.12.2020

Figure 3 lists the importance and the influence each stakeholder has in the company, represented by the x axis and the y axis respectively. The figure 3 lists the most and the least important stakeholders, the most important is in the top right quadrant and the least on the bottom left. This tells us the relationship that the company should keep with each stakeholder to service product marketing. The case company can also use this to focus on those who should be managed closely, who should be kept informed or should be informed, and who should be kept in regular contact with. In this case, most of the case company employees are in the 1A quadrant, and so are the customers. The stakeholder map can be used as a good direction to select which stakeholder should be put importance on. Selecting the important stakeholder can be used in other methods such as Being Your User or to see how the prototype affects each stakeholder and

how important it is. Different from figure 3, the figure 4 below represents basic relationships between each stakeholder as well as showing the stakeholders in a clearer and visually comprehensive way.
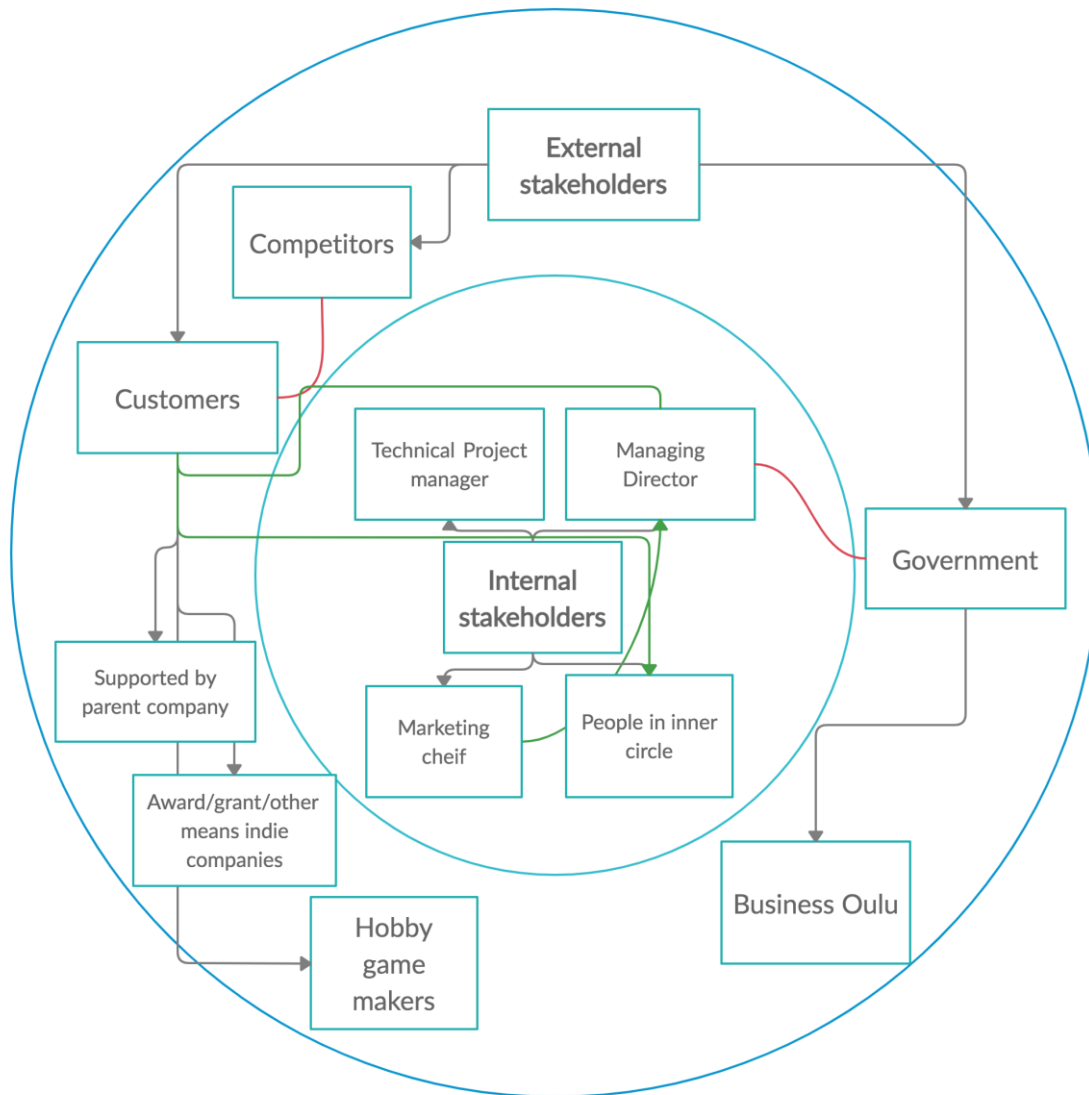

FIGURE 4, Stakeholder relationship map. (Created on 16.11.2020)

The next method is called **Being Your Users'** method. This method is used to build understanding and empathy with the users of the service. Being able to target the right customer group is important. This method involves carrying out the tasks that the customers do that are relevant to the project and their daily life to an extent. The time required can vary from a few hours, to sometimes even weeks. In this method, the author will spend a few hours to an incrementing amount of time if required. Analyzing the stakeholder map has determined that the hobby makers were one of the most important customer groups that the company must manage

closely due to it being in high interest. This means that the company can have a high effect on the customer, such as helping their company achieve greater success, and they can also influence the company since they are the main targeting group of Kuvion. This customer group is also the most feasible option, especially during a pandemic. The planed process is to be a simple game app developer. Thankfully, the author has been working on an app with a program called Android Studio, one of the easier tools to use in the market. However, for the sake of this method, the author will pose it to be an android game app. The author will also track the tasks by keeping a timed journal and a few remarks and notes. It is important to immerse oneself into the project and into the reality of Finland indie game developers to comprehend the user experience and mindset. One of the error margins is a language barrier. Although the author is a beginner in Finnish with a translator tool, it won't be comparable to a fully Finnish person. However, this was a fairly minor offset as most of the social media and pages were available both in Finnish and English.

To summarize the findings, the author found out the keywords used, most frequent sites visited and seen, the social media hubs that Finnish indie game developers use, and the general motivations and problems that arose when trying to market a game app. As a personal experience through this method, the author felt like marketing is a hindrance in itself for a single person, a normal game developer. It's a long and arduous effort to even start marketing. A while after looking for the methods and ways, the start in itself made me question if this was worth it. Our thoughts were that we could be making improvements to our own app instead of focusing on marketing. Therefore, looking for an outsourced marketing team or some type of marketing help was a tempting option.

The author has also discovered several barriers as an indie game developer when considering hiring outsourced marketing teams. The major factors that were hindering one's decision of hiring an outsourced marketing company were finance, determination, and confidence in our own app. There is no guaranteed short term ROI (Return on investment) in marketing the game in the red ocean of the game app market. Another surprising factor was that in many threads and posts in indie game developer social media, they have a negative view and comments of hiring an outsourced marketing team, which made the author demotivated to even try searching for an outsourced team. In contrast, many people were in favor of self-publishing or trying to submit their game to a publishing company. The indie game developer needs to have a very secure financial

means, major confidence in his app, or be tired of marketing at all to even start looking at other options.

A **quantitative survey** is another method that the author can use to drag out the factors or aspects the author could not think of with the previous methods. There are chances and limitations of a single person's imagination that might deter the viewpoint and prevent the out of box thinking. The authors have used Google forms as an online survey tool for its nature of clean design, easy navigation, and ease of recording the answers into the Google spreadsheet. The initial plan was to send the questionnaire to about 200 game companies or related using a list of indie game companies in Finland (names provided by Neogames). However, the list has decreased down to about 74 since most of the companies did not have available direct email addresses that the author could find. The author was expecting to get more or less 50 survey answers, but unfortunately, it has resulted in about 4 responses so far. The survey questions were based on some of the bullet points from method 4.1.1. The techniques used to compose the questions and to analyze that data here are regression analysis and the Likert scale, due to its effectiveness in analyzing survey data (Fricker, R 2016.).

Unfortunately, the collected amounts of data were a bare minimum of 4; the author was not able to extract useful enough information using this method. Since this is the time of the mass pandemic, the author did not consider the option to conduct a physical survey as it would risk other's health. The author has emailed and posted the link to the survey on indie game-related Facebook pages and 2 indie game developers' Discord channel. The total amount of amassed was 4, far below the expected amount of 50. Therefore he could not progress with the methods described above.

The **secondary research method** in its basic is research based on pre-existing literature of materials. They include articles, academic papers, news, and encyclopedias. When analyzed in unison with quantitative research, this might result in quite an insightful approach to the large range of information about the competitors, customers, and trends in the market.

The author has selected multiple questions and keywords to search in the online websites and works of literature available on scholar websites. An appointment with a librarian to aid me in searching for the keywords and learning the mechanics of using the scholar websites has helped the author a great deal to find useful papers. For example, depending on the term you search

with, you can narrow down the results shown or you can expand the results shown with the opposite method. Business Source Premier, searching for the exact keywords "service product development " AND "Outsource marketing" has yielded zero results. However, "service product development" AND marketing has resulted in 10 papers. However, as a personal experience, finding a larger term with different keywords and narrowing it down has worked better for me to find a specific paper the author wanted. For example, "outsourced marketing" OR outsourcing AND SU customer retention or customer loyalty or customer satisfaction has resulted in 197 results. From here, submitting ("outsourced marketing" or outsourcing) AND SU (customer retention or customer loyalty or customer satisfaction) and SU marketing has specified the results down to 26 results shown. The author has gotten many reference articles using this system. The authors' primary sources were from sites and tools such as EBSCO, Ebook central, Google scholar, Emerald insight, Elsevier Science Direct, and Business Premier, and of which the author found EBSCO most useful.

3.2   Define phase

This stage will define the main challenges of the project. The methods that were conducted are Drivers and Hurdles, and Interview. The findings from the previous stages and methods are also used in these methods.

Drivers and Hurdles is a method that helps identify the area that one should focus on (Design council, 2015. Cited 8.12.2020. This can help us understand the perception of the subjects. In this case, the subjects are indie game developers. In this method, the author collected the ideas from previous steps and separated them into motivators (Drivers) and what poses limitations (hurdles) on hiring outsourced marketing. This helped sort out which motivations are best to focus on developing and identify the problems that are present. The drivers and hurdles, like interviews, allowed the author to focus on the problem and develop it further for the creation of the prototype. The motivators, in this case, answered what motives the indie game developers to hire outsourced marketing, whereas the hurdles list why they were reluctant to do so.

TABLE 2, Drivers and Hurdles. (Created on 11.12.2020)

Drivers	Hurdles
Not wanting to spend time on marketing	Limited funds
Lack of professional knowledge	Lack of confidence
Extra help on marketing department	Lack of guarantee on success
Low price lower risks	Relatively high risks
Focus on other things than marketing	Lack of information on outsourced marketing companies
Higher sales of their products	Self marketing
	Choose publisher and not outsourced marketing

The interview is a widely used **qualitative research method**. Open-ended questions allow the author to delve deeper into the problems and define the solution or insight into more problems from a different perspective. Interviews can also validate the previous points of the authors' statements and methods. Two out of three interviews were conducted online. One in Discord, and the other in Google meet. The last interview was done face to face. All of them were recorded. The author aimed to interview current and previous customers of Kuvion. Unlike surveys of random samples in an industry, interviewing the customers will provide more detailed and personal information gained. The author also revealed challenges in the current service method of the case company. The interviewees got the list of questions beforehand so they could see if they were doable or not. If so desired, the author gave the option to classify the contents of the interview. This was to assure and make the interviewees comfortable and to provide more freedom of speaking honestly. The main tools that are used are a voice recorder, laptop, and a third-party desktop recording application called XSplitbroadcast. The voice recorder lets the author hear the interview again to analyze and define the interview better. The aim of this interview is the validation of the previous factors that the author has discovered and to discover new information regarding the marketing service of Kuvion. The names and the dates of the interview are shown in table 2.

TABLE 3. Company names and Interview dates. (Created on 13.12.2020)

Company name	Interview dates
Kaamos games ltd	09.12.2020
Typing Master	11.12.2020
VRKiwi	12.12.2020

There were valuable information's the author uncovered through the interviews. The questions asked are added as Appendix 2. Following the guidelines provided by Carter McNamara (2015, cited 6.12.2020), a basic interview guide listing the interview format, topics to talk about, and main aims before creating actual questions has been created. The questions are based on the brainstorming method, as well as the guidelines (ibid).

Questions were formed as open-ended questions, and some questions were added on spot to expand on a topic that came up, such as asking Kaamos games why they would hire a marketing company over hiring a new employee. The main aims for the questions were to find out what marketing service is attractive for indie game developers, to find out what new marketing service can be included in Kuvion, and to find out the problems and deficiencies of service product marketing of Kuvion.

The first interview was **Kaamos games** Ltd, a previous customer of Kuvion from 2 years ago. They have developed multiple game apps and launched them in the market. Kaamos has hired Kuvion for Website development, portfolio creation. The interviewee was Ville Helttunen, CEO of Kaamos games and SPECTARIUM, as well as a manager in an organization called Pelifarmit. Pelifarmit is similar to Oulu Game Lab, and he was overseeing the people who made games as a hobby. Upon further research, Pelifarmit was an organization with flexible game activities and mentorship, hosting e-sports, LAN parties, and mentoring hobby game makers.

The second interview was with **TypeWriter's** marketing manager, Sini Taskinen. She hired Kuvion for user acquisition strategy and consulting service for their new desktop game called TypeRush. **VRKiwi** was the third interviewee and a current customer of Kuvion with a size of 20-30 employees. They created games but also dealt with b2b business such as website

development. Kuvion worked with them on web development and game marketing. Interviewed is Jani Kaipainen, COO of MeKiwi. Those are the backgrounds of the interviewed company.

The author made 3 major factors that could be classified after looking through the interview notes and listening to them again. The first factor is the validation of the previous ideas and facts, the second is potential improvements on their current services, and the last factor is new marketing services that were suggested or talked about in the interview. The results of said segmented factors are in appendix 3, due to its size.

3.3   Develop phase

In the development stage, the author will be developing a 'physical' prototype using the method provided by the design council (2015). Although marketing service is a non-physical service, the marketing prototype can be made physically with help of visualization. Visualizing the prototype is very effective in communicating the author's idea to the stakeholders of all the parties. Creating the prototype helps the author to give insight on how the design is used as well at the later stages of validation. The prototypes will be built mainly based on the points discussed in interviews. As a reminder, creating a prototype for a marketing service is the aim of this thesis.

The author has decided to use Service Blueprint as a template for the prototype (Sarah, Gibbons. 2017). However, it is only inspired by the design and the visual side as the prototype does not follow the exact method of service blueprint. Using this template will show the factors of what the customer wants, the evidence supported by the previous methods, what actions can Kuvion can take, and what will be the foreseeable effect.
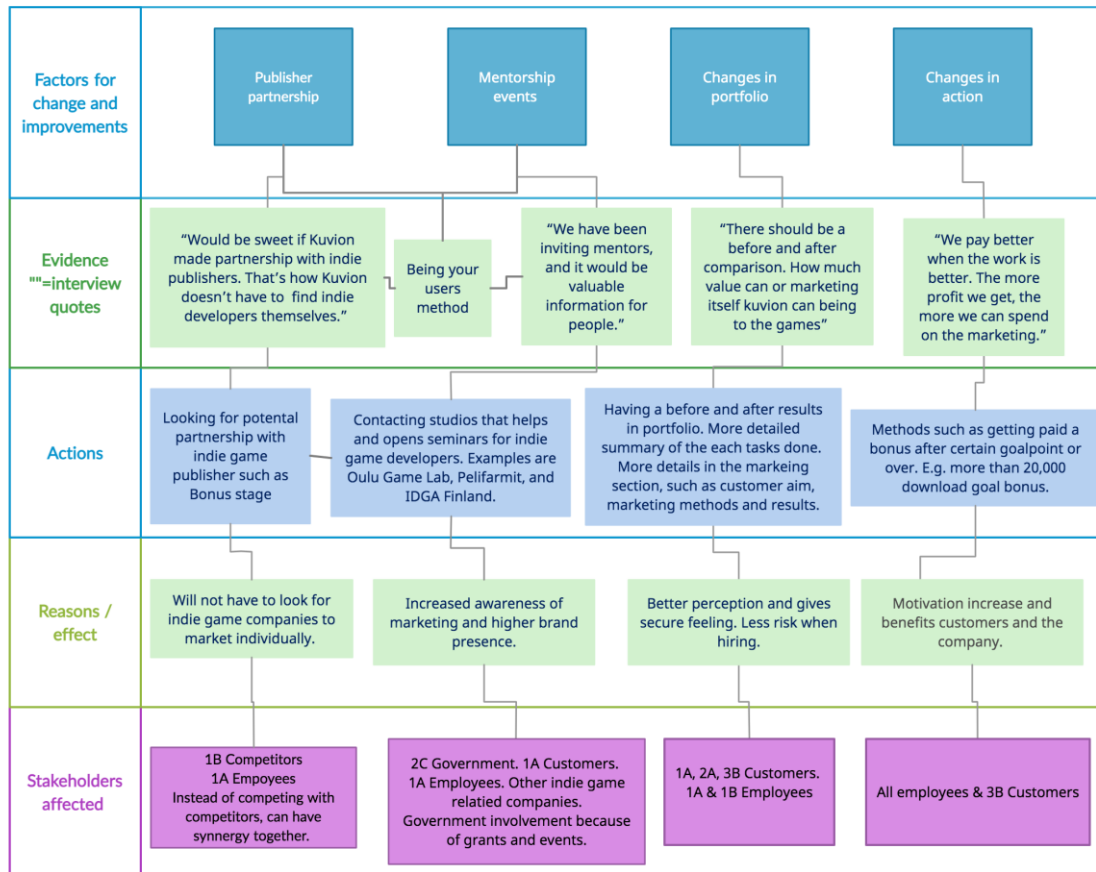
FIGURE 5, Prototype Model

The prototype is divided into 5 sections, factors, evidence, actions, reasons/effect, and stakeholders affected. Factors contain the basic title for the improving service market. Evidence is from the quotes of the interview and from analyses of previous methods. Actions contain more detail on potential actions that the company can take to fulfill the factors. Following the actions, reasons describe the logic behind the actions. The stakeholders' section uses the stakeholder map that the author has created in the Discover phase. It lists down which stakeholder it will influence and what type, which then can suggest which factors are important and influential. The author has chosen these 5 quadrants and the diagram, to best represent the title, proof, suggested actions, reasons on such actions, and which stakeholder it will influence.

Analyzing the prototype model, the Publisher partnership and Changes in their portfolio are the major factors that influencing the company and the customers the most. The author would suggest the case company investigate these first and foremost.

3.4   Deliver phase

In the Deliver phase, the author will validate, clarify, and amass the information collected using the relevant methods provided by the Design Council. This phase will be also used to validate the prototype from the previous phase.

As the first point of validation, the author has created a **business model canvas** concerning the prototype to provide a business overview with the fresh discoveries. These include how the revenue stream will flow, who are the key partners, key activities and what value there is for the customers and partners. This allows narrowing down the scope of implementation and results of a service design project in a visual way (Alexander, Osterwalder and Yves, Pigneur. 2010).
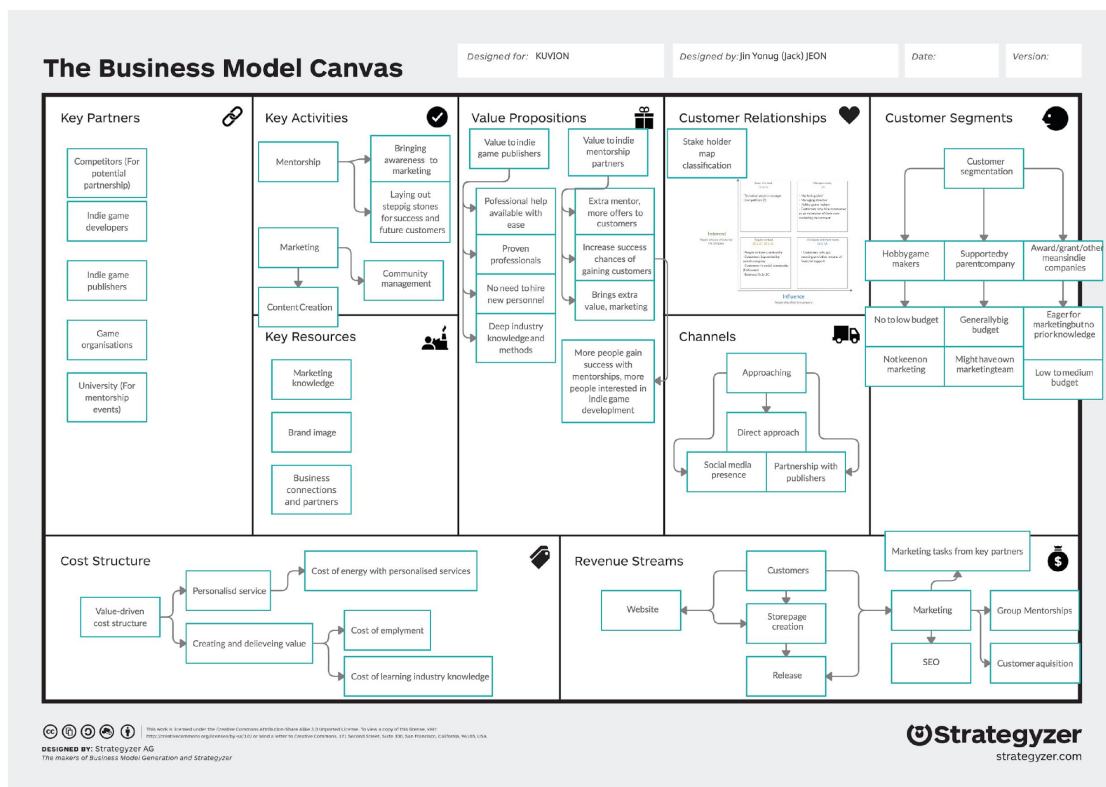
FIGURE 6, Kuvion Business Model Canvas, created on 14.12.2020 (Hyperlinked to appendix 4, larger version)

The author has decided to use the business canvas to validate and explore 'Publisher partnership' and 'Mentorship event' factors from the prototype. The other 2 improvements are not relevant in this model since its process can be understood and applied relatively easily. To analyze the business model canvas, the author has used the definitions from the book Business

Model Generation (ibid). Important aspects to analyze are the values that Kuvion can bring in factors one and two. Kuvion is a company with extensive experiences in marketing games, which makes Kuvion experienced, therefore trustworthy. The indie game publishers will not have to hire more personnel and risk training them for a long duration, can instead hire Kuvion, thus minimizing risk and time spent. The mentor partners include universities that hold mentoring events, indie game mentorship related companies such as Business Oulu, Pelifarmit, and Oulu Game Lab. This model is more value-driven, i.e. that the company focuses on creating and spending values. This method has been chosen due to the costs and risks of running the factors above projects are time and energy, having minimal impact on the revenue.

Method bank is a form of communication method within an organization. They are essentially an accumulation of the author's work documented with pictures, videos, and sketches. By uploading the works done so far, the stakeholders can add their own opinion and build out from the works that that author has done so far. The purpose of this method, in this case, is to enable the case company to build, adapt, and get more details. It is also possible to open the method bank to the public to raise awareness, but the author has decided to give that decision to the case company.

The author has uploaded all the used and unused resources that are related to this project. Google Drive was the primary choice to store these materials, due to the ease of access, widespread usage, as well as free, unlimited storage time. The case company or anyone with a shared link can watch or download the resources. Security is a non-issue since the author, who is the owner of the folder can observe the traffic in and out of the site. The resources shared include; 2 desktops recorded interview .mov files, 1 voice recorded file, 3 written interview papers, 3 thesis presentations, 8 pdf files, 2 of them which are business canvas and value proposition canvas. 11 images, 4 related presentations, and about 7 theses that the author has read to understand subjects better. All the methods and diagrams created by the author, and all the books used by the author as well. To avoid confusion and messiness, the author has created folders within the method bank folder to organize each material presented.

The initial intension was to use a method called **Phasing**. The phasing is all about small scale testing. Even with a functioning prototype, implementing them without testing can result in unseen problems or obstacles. Therefore a small scale testing is valuable. Author has planned to get group of about 5 people and test out the prototype. Using note-taking, asking the right questions, letting the subjects contribute, and being neutral is the key in this method. After this method of

phasing, the negative aspect found were planned to be corrected and altered according to the results. (Design Council, 2013. Cited 12.12.2020). However, conducting this method has been found to be quite troublesome since the author did not have much time left for the validation process of asking the previous interviewees and the case company for their opinion and input on the subject.

4   CONCLUSION

Here, the author will conclude and validate the results that the author has provided in the paper. The author will also self reflect upon the research choices, failures, and limitations that this thesis poses.

4.1   Results

As it was mentioned in the beginning purpose of this thesis, the author's aim was to research, examine, and improve B2B service products and the customer base of Kuvion, the case company. The final aim was to have a prototype model of a new service marketing product to improve the case company related to the goals mentioned above. The author has used the double diamond model and service design methods to achieve these goals.

The methods used were correlated with each other. By performing the Brainstorm method concerning the research question of "Which factors dictate the necessity of outsourced marketing in Finnish indie game companies?" the author gained the basic foundation for other methods. In quantitative surveys and interviews, the author has obtained the inspirations for the questions asked. By using the methods that mutually influence and benefit each other, the author gained the advantage of formulating a stronger argument and prototype supported multiple methods. However it should be mentioned that there was some time loss in re-doing process of many methods, which is how the double diamond model was designed around. For the sake of understanding how each methods related to each other, the author has made relationship and usage figure, displayed on the figure 7. The arrows signify the direction that it has been used. For example, brainstorming method was used in formulating questions and validating thought out facts in the interview method, hence the arrow pointing at its quadrant.
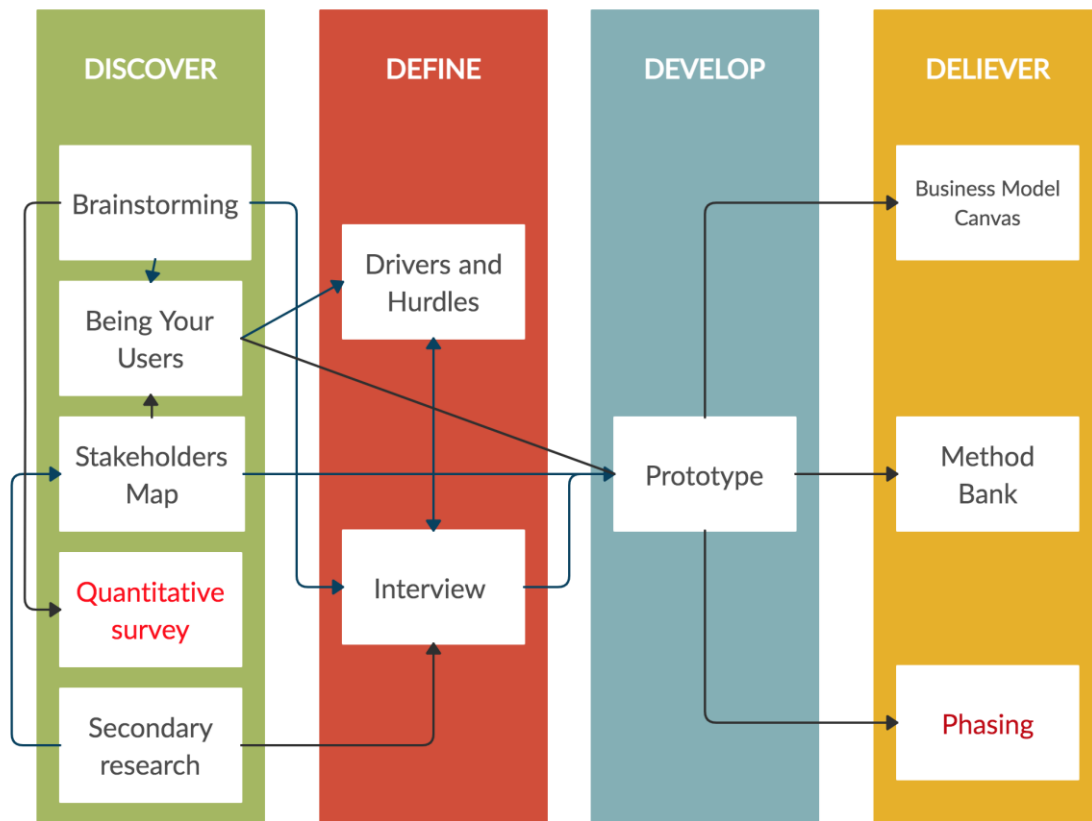
FIGURE 7, Relationships and usages between each method. Created 16.12.2020

In conclusion, the author has successfully found 2 new marketing service products and 2 improvements that could be applied to the case company. We feel that we have followed through with the schedule and accomplished the tasks given to the best of our abilities.

The last thing that the author should mention is that prototypes, as the name implies, are products that are preliminary, and not finalized. Although the goal of producing the prototype and improving service products was met, it is entirely dependent on the case company to use the prototype model and apply them.

4.2   Self reflection

Self-reflection is one of the most important parts of a project. It provides the opportunity of describing success as well as It allows one to review the process and reflect upon their project. This allows for room for self-criticism and allows learning from some of the mistakes and regrets.

Self-reflection also allows the author to look forward and highlight the limits and the scope of which the project can be applied to.

The **research choice** was something that the author has been wanting to explore further since years ago. The fascination with marketing and the reasons behind behaviors were the primary motivation of the author to select the choice. The author does not regret the subject choice and case company. Although the author does not regret the choice of focusing on Finland, he also recognizes that there is a possibility that choosing a specific geographical location severely limits the scope of application on the results. However, it should be noted that limiting the geographical scope has achieved more detailed and reliable information.

This was the first time that the author has learned and applied the **double diamond model**. The author felt oftentimes that there could be a better method to use. The author suspects that there might be more methods that the author has not thought of using or did not come by to learn. Therefore not being able to fully utilize the capability of the double diamond model. The author also feels that the execution of the thesis could have been done better. A large portion of allocated time was spent going back and forth on some methods such as brainstorming and quantitative survey. The received responses limited the ability to carry out the analysis and to use the prepared equations and formulas. Perhaps it would have been wiser to not spend time in this method at all, as the author got more valuable information from the first-hand research interview.

Despite the shortcomings, the author feels content that he has selected and the utilized methods in a way that mutually benefited each other and resulted in a successful prototype. A fresh theoretical basis also provided an ample opportunity of learning and experimenting. The author is confident that performing the next service design project will result in better and more fluent effort.

As mentioned by Marc Stickdorn and Markus Edgar (2018), service design is something that is constantly changing and evolving throughout time. This is especially true at this age where information is readily available in mere minutes of searching and uploading. The field of service design and the indie game market is continuously improving and evolving just like a growing sapling, therefore the limitations are clear that time will be one of the major factors.

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Warmup brainstorm: How can I use marketing to get people more interested in space?

Use interesting facts about space

Use awe inspiring photos

Use train logic to make people know that this is needed

The main question as a reminder.

Which factors dictate the necessity of outsourced marketing in Finnish indie game companies?

1. Why do indie companies not want to contact outsourced marketing businesses?
2. Why do indie game companies seem to not care about marketing their games?
3. How do the indie game companies market their games?
4. Do indie game companies know about outsourced marketing companies such as Kuvion?
5. How much do they consider?
6. What route do the indie game developers come to know Kuvion?
7. What are the stakes that the indie game developers decide for indie game development?
8. How much are they interested in marketing compared to game creation?
9. How do they usually market their games without the help of marketing professionals?
10. How can we convince indie game developers to market their games better?
11. How do I know if they even need marketing? For example, some posts in reddit r/gaming might just explode and that's a viral market on the go. Or they can seek an alternative method such as epic game store where they feature certain games in the store page. They can also contact the streamers or get an influence over voting sequence.
12. The extent of their capability of marketing depends on the size of their company and who they are supported by. For example, who are the publishers that are doing the publishing and marketing?
13. The difference between publisher marketing and individual marketing done by outsourced company.
14. The outsourced company are very interested in marketing the game weather or not they think it will sell or not.
15. The publishers will only market and publish the games that they think will sell good.

16. The key difference between both is that if developers choose outsourced or inhouse marketing, the publisher or 3rd group do not have a sway in the development process or the game making process.

17. In my opinion time is one of the most important factors people use *any* outsourced companies. If they had enough time or manpower they would have trained a new one or get a professional. They also might be pressed in a sense that the deadline is close and they need some external help fast. However in this case of indie game companies time aspect is important since they cannot focus on learning marketing while developing a game.

18. Besides, most of the time that the indie game developers need marketing is just before and after the game has been released, not throughout the whole process. So in really, they will hire the outsourced company for a few month or so

19. How long do they need the outsourced marketing for? In what aspect is it useful?

20. With different packaging, the developers will only select what they think that they need. But that's impossible to know without knowing the marketing scene very well. If the game fails to gain traction than the blame can be upon the outsourced marketing company.

21. Are there any relationship between the quality of service being provided and the number of people in the company receiving it?

22. How much can the outsourced marketing company really do in game marketing? Important to know the extent of the company's abilities and so on.

23. Why do they require the service of outsourced marketing. Maybe the publisher rejects might. For example, fingersoft is a game developing company AND a publisher.

24. Maybe publisher themselves need outsource marketing. These days a small company can be their own publisher.

25. How do the indie game developers navigate in the web

26. What are the keywords that the developers use

27. What are the factors by at which the developers select the outsource marketing company

28. It is possible that the factors just not rely on one but several facts?

29. What are the main factors at which the indie game developers select the outsource marketing company?

30. What are their motivations behind hiring a marketing company?

31. What medium do they use the most to look for marketing materials?

32. What kind of opinion do indie game developers have towards marketing in general?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND FORMAT   APPENDIX 2

Interview guide

Interview format:
1. Facts
2. Fact based open ended
3. Ask about present before past or future
4. Questions that the respondent might want to add onto.

Topics to talk about
1. Basic background information.
2. Kuvion's previous services
3. Likes and dislikes
4. What marketing services are needed for indie game developers.
5. Extra things to add on the interviewee side.

Main aim(s)
1. To find out what marketing service is attractive for indie game developers.
2. To find out what new marketing service can be included in Kuvion
3. To find out the problems and deficiencies of service product marketing of Kuvion.

Interview characteristic: Relaxed and calm.

Background:
1. What is the name of your company?
2. Could you tell me a little bit of background on your company?
3. When did you hire Kuvion?
4. What did you hire Kuvion for? (Any specific tasks that you remember)
5. How did you get to know Kuvion?
6. What is your position and name?

About Kuvion's services:
7. Was the marketing goal met?
8. Was your expectations on the marketing services met?

Likes and Dislikes
9. What did you like about the services in general?
10. What did you dislike about the services in general?
11. Can you tell me what you didn't like specifically?
12. What benefits did you encounter with Kuvion?
13. What problems did you encounter with Kuvion?
14. If you could, what things would you have discussed or done differently?

Improve:

15. How do you think Kuvion can improve in marketing?
16. What was the biggest complaint that you had while working with Kuvion?
17. Were you satisfied by the marketing product options that Kuvion provided? https://www.kuvion.fi/game-marketing-services-en2/
18. If you hired an outsourced marketing company like Kuvion again, what would it be for?
19. If you could add, what other marketing services would you like to be provided in the future?

Marketing type

20. What do you think indie game developers require most out of outsourced marketing companies?
21. What was one factor that you are dissatisfied with the outsourced marketing?

Add ons

22. Would you like to add any other points?

Factors	Statements	Evidences
Validation	Time is valuable	"Time is pretty valuable for indie companies."
	Don't want to bother with marketing or some area of marketing.	"They think it's enough that you have social media, but it needs to be way more professional than that. They don't even want to touch on the marketing side."
	(Kuvions') Prices are good. Cheap.	"The price was one of the main reasons. Their service was good and cheap."
	Indie games oftentimes don't see the value in marketing and prefer to create games instead.	"Indie developers usually underestimate the value of marketing." "They prefer mostly do their thing instead."
	Kuvion's specialty in in-game marketing is valuable	"We had players, and they were submitting ideas. We are very active with them. And that's why we decided we should get someone more on the marketing side that knows how we should do this. We didn't have the knowledge ourselves."
	Location can be valuable	"It's always easy to work with someone based in the same country as you."
	Contacting influencers, most valuable.	"Indie developers want to focus more on game development. They don't

		know how to reach influencers."
Improvement	Faster process (faster development times)	"The development time could have been faster, although we agreed that we could take more time."
	Hiring more people	"Hiring more people will allow Kuvion to have more types of services."
	Keeping the track of tasks and the schedule.	"Sometimes they (Kuvion) would miscommunicate with my marketing manager."
	Being more proactive.	"I would like it if Kuvion told us some improvements that we can create before we think about it."
	Make the portfolio clearer and more visual.	"When I look at them (Outsourced marketing companies) I don't know what I'm going to get. But Kuvion seemed like they were good."
	Make the prices different, such as bigger for larger corporations	"Maybe it could be like. You have called the consulting for indie studios cheaper than a big corporation. That might sound even more professional. It looks like a great deal for indie studios"
New service marketing concepts	Getting more when the marketing is better. A new concept of defining thinking action.	"We pay better when the work is better. The more profit we get, the more we can spend on the marketing."
	Providing real-life examples if possible.	"The biggest problem is that the indie game developers do not realize the value (of marketing). A real-life example of how much they can affect sales (Would be good to have). There should be a before and after comparison. How much value can or marketing itself Kuvion can bring to the

	games"
Mentorship partnership with indie game-related organizations.	"We have been inviting mentors, and it would be valuable information for people."
Kuvion can partner with indie publishers. Publishers can bring works.	"Would be sweet if Kuvion made a partnership with indie publishers. That's how Kuvion doesn't have to find indie developers themselves."

The Business Model Canvas

Designed for: KUVION

Designed by: Jin Yonug (Jack) JEON

Date:

Version:

Key Partners

Competitors (For potential partnership)

Indie game developers

Indie game publishers

Game organisations

University (For mentorship events)

Key Activities

Mentorship → Bringing awareness to marketing

Laying out steppig stones for success and future customers

Marketing

Community management

Content Creation

Key Resources

Marketing knowledge

Brand image

Business connections and partners

Value Propositions

Value to indie game publishers

Value to indie mentorship partners

Pofessional help available with ease

Proven professionals

No need to hire new personnel

Deep industry knowledge and methods

Extra mentor, more offers to customers

Increase success chances of gaining customers

Brings extra value, marketing

More people gain success with mentorships, more people interested in indie game developlment

Customer Relationships

Stake holder map classification

Channels

Approaching

Direct approach

Social media presence

Partnership with publishers

Customer Segments

Customer segmentation

Hobby game makers

Supported by parent company

Award/grant/other means indie companies

No to low budget

Generally big budget

Eager for marketing but no prior knowledge

Not keen on marketing

Might have own marketing team

Low to medium budget

Cost Structure

Value-driven cost structure → Personalisd service → Cost of energy with personalised services

Creating and delieveing value → Cost of emplyment

Cost of learning industry knowledge

Revenue Streams

Customers

Website

Storepage creation

Release

Marketing tasks from key partners

Marketing → Group Mentorships

SEO → Customer aquisition

Strategyzer
strategyzer.com