



**Development ideas for customer journey in Meetings & Events
department of Clarion Hotel Helsinki**

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Abstract

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<p>In customer service industry it is crucial to weigh in the customer experience. Customer experience can be affected by sensorial or social factor and past experiences. Customer experience is related to customer satisfaction and service quality. Even though customer experience has been around as long as services, it was not fully acknowledged until 1990's authors Pine & Gilmore published their book Experience Economy.</p> <p>Customer journey is a set of experiences which includes all the interactions and touchpoints customer has with an organization through out the customer life cycle, starting from awareness ending to loyalty. Customer journey might take only one interaction with the organization or might take weeks to be completed.</p> <p>This thesis focuses on the overall picture of customer experience and customer journey development ideas in Clarion Hotel Helsinki. Customer journey is a relevant research topic because for every organization it is good to be aware of their customer's touchpoints and pain points during their customer's journey. The aim for this thesis is to point out especially the pain points and help the employees of the hotel to help the customers to overcome those. Because the multiple possibilities of event types, thesis demarcated to concern the day meetings in Clarion Hotel Helsinki.</p> <p>The main focus of the customer journey is on the core-encounter, when the customer is physically present in the hotel. The research is done with using Service Design methods, for example interviews, observation, and benchmarking. The implementation of the research and writing of the thesis happened during spring 2023.</p> <p>During research was found some pain points that customers of the hotel needs to overcome. One of the biggest was the signing in the hotel and how the signing might not always be clear for customers. Other pain point was internal communication between employees and being present for the customers. Based on the research can be concluded that with good and clear internal communication and being present these pain points can easily be overcome as these should be in the core of good customer experience.</p>
Keywords customer experience, customer journey, service design, customer service

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1 Introduction

Nowadays customer experience is crucial factor in customer service industry. It can be affected by past experiences as well as sensorial or social factors. Customer experience is affected by the customer journey and its touchpoints. The touchpoints give service provider the possibility to facilitate customer's service encounter and establish interactions, for example online platforms or physical contacts (Vorhees, Fombelle Gregoire, Bone, Gustafsson, Sousa & Walkowiak 2017, 269). Each touchpoint has its own customer experience, and these touchpoints need to be taken care of. Different touchpoints in customer experience and customer journey can be the factors that define the success of an organization. Customer experience is defined by multiple authors in diverse ways but still the main conclusion seems to be the same. Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) have compiled a definition of customer experience from multiple authors, LaSalle & Britton (2003), Schmitt (2003) and Shaw & Ivens (2005);

“The Customer Experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial physical and spiritual). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touchpoints.”

This thesis is written for Clarion Hotel Helsinki and especially considering the Meeting & Events department. I go through the recognized customer journey of a guest (customers are referred as guests in all Clarion Hotels) coming to the Meeting & Events (M&E) department. Then with the help of the interviews made for employees and guests, I aim to recognize the pain points and try to find development points for them. The main aim of this thesis is to help the guest's day go smoother; it aims to do the same to staff as well. When staff can recognize the possible pain points of the customer journey before they even happen, it will smooth out the guest's day as well.

The importance of this thesis lies in the reasons mentioned above especially for the staff of Clarion Hotel Helsinki. Also, it is important for other departments of the hotel to know the path of the guest using the hotel's services. Often the guests of the M&E department use also other services provided in the hotel, for example reception or the 16th floor bar. This thesis could also share some insight to other hotel's meeting departments and how their customer journey works.

Research questions I aim to answer in this thesis are:

Q1. Which are the pain points of the customer journey?

Q2. How to make the customer journey smoother?

Q3. How to help the staff to recognize the pain points of the customer journey in advance?

Because of the multiple different types of events that are held every year in Clarion Hotel Helsinki, I have demarcated thesis to include only customer journey of a day meeting. Day meetings are the biggest selling “item”. Even though most of the touchpoints of a customer journey are the same regardless of the event type, there are still many different touchpoints that this demarcation is necessary for this thesis. The demarcation is brought little bit further in the customer journey mapping phase, and I have concentrated in this thesis only to core-encounter phase when customer is physically in the hotel. Pre- and post-encounter phases are gone through briefly to show the whole customer journey.

Thesis starts with introductory of customer experience and customer journey which are the core of the thesis. Customer experience and its importance will be explained in the Chapter 2 as well as mapping the customer journey and recognizing its touchpoints. Especially, in an organization like Clarion Hotel Helsinki, it is important to recognize the touchpoints and take good care of them. Each touchpoint has its own customer experience, and a guest of Clarion Hotel Helsinki encounters multiple touchpoints during the day. The customer journey of a guest of M&E department is explained in the Chapter 4. The focus is on the core-encounter phase of the customer journey, as in when the guest is physically present in the hotel. But there are short descriptions of pre- and post-encounter phases of the customer journey since they are both crucial part of the journey as well.

Research is done with Service Design methods and tools and using Moritz’s model. Thesis includes the first two categories of Moritz’s model and partly the third category. These categories are SD Understanding, SD Thinking, and SD Generating. These categories will be explained in later chapter. Methods used to provide insights for the thesis, are interviews, benchmarking, observation, and customer journey mapping.

In the Chapter 5 the outcome of the interviews, observation and benchmarking are reviewed. The chapter includes insights of the touchpoints and pain points of the customer journey in the M&E department. And Chapter 6 introduces the conclusions and discussion.

2 Customer experience

In their article Lemon & Verhoef (2016, 71) describe customer experience as “a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to an organisation’s offering during the customer’s entire purchase journey”. Männistö (2020, 32) makes a shorter definition to the customer experience: “Customer experience is how customer perceives the brand through all the interactions through the customer life cycle”.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, there is as many definitions of customer experience as there are authors writing about it. Meyer & Schwager (2007, 1) define customer experience: “Customer experience encompasses every aspect of a company’s offering—the quality of customer care, of course, but also advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use, and reliability”.

The concept of Customer experience was first brought up in mid-1980’s alongside of literature about consumer behaviour. Even though it had some boost, customer experience concept did not come more relevant until 1990’s with book *Experience Economy* from Pine & Gilmore. Nowadays customer experience plays more important role in the success of organizations product or service. There is a relevant need to monitor the experiences originated from contact points between a customer and an organization since amount of these contact points have increased. Focal idea in this is to broaden the transaction-based view of Customer relationship to iterative concept of Customer experience. (Gentile, Spiller & Noci 2007, 395-396.) Today it is one of the leading ways for marketers to distinguish their brands. Consumers will prefer a brand which makes them happy and satisfied. (Männistö 2020, 32.)

Number of choices amongst consumers are more than ever before, choices are more complex, and there much more channels to pursue them through. Yet some organizations still do not understand the importance of customer experience and do not understand why to worry about it. Some organizations do collect and quantify the data, but they do not spread the data. Some organizations measure the data and distributes it but do not put the information to use. According to a study made by Bain & Company, 80 percent of the organization surveyed say that their customer experience is superior, but only 8 percent of the customers think that. (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 2.)

Customer experience is related to customer satisfaction and service quality, both being more focused constructs. Service quality could be described as predecessor of customer experience and customer satisfaction being one of the components of customer experience focusing on cognitive evaluation of the experience. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 74.) Meyer & Schwager (2007, 2) argue that

customer satisfaction is total of customer experiences, good experiences minus the bad experiences. Customer satisfaction happens when the gap between expectations and experience itself is closed. The problem with measuring the customer experience is that it does not explain how to achieve it. Understanding how to achieve it, an organization needs to review all the components of the experience. (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 2.) It is okay to ask from customers what they want, but also listen what they have to say, it is important to understand their behaviour. When making customers happy, they will stay as customers. (Männistö 2020, 134.)

Trust and commitment are related customer experience as constructs of relationship marketing. These may influence on customer's continuation experience. Commitment would typically be a consequence of customer experience. Trust might not influence the customer journey itself, but good customer experience might build trust on an organisation. Customer experience is related to customer engagement. Customer engagement expresses to what extent customer initiates contact with the organisation. Customer engagement becomes part of overall customer experience when engagement forms touchpoints along the customer journey and results in cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses on the part of the customer. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 74.)

Good customer experience must involve person in different levels in comprehensive and consistent way and it is not only the multiple features that are on offer (Gentile et al. 2007, 398; Meyer & Schwager 2007, 2). Gentile et al. (2007, 398) have conceptualized the customer experience to be a multidimensional construction consisting of elementary components. Customers consider each experience as complex but united feeling; components being hardly separated from each other. Components of dimensions of Customer experience are listed as following according to Gentile et al. (2007): *Sensorial Component* of customer experience stimulates the senses. An offering which goal is to provide sensorial experience, it can involve sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. It can also waken aesthetical pleasure, excitement, satisfaction and sense of beauty, for example Lush stores. *Emotional Component* involves the affective system through the production of moods, feelings, and emotions. Product or service can create emotional experience to make affective relation with the organisation and its brand and products, for example Kinder surprise. *Cognitive Component* connects to thinking or conscious mental processes. It is an offering which may commit customer to use their creativity or problem solving. Organization can lead customer to re-examine the original idea of a product or common assumptions. *Pragmatic Component* is the practical act of doing something and includes concept of usability, for example Apple's iMac computers. *Lifestyle Component* is the component of customer experience where the system of beliefs and values of a person are affirmed through embracing a lifestyle and behaviours. A product or service can provide such experience if the product itself or its usage creates adhesion to

shared values between customer and organization. *Relational Component* involves the customer and their social context, relationships with other people or their ideal self. The offering helps the component by tools of a product or service which encourage the consumption with other people (amusement parks), or which eventually ends up to the creation of community or group of fans. The product (for example high-end fashion) or service (for example five-star hotel or restaurants) can also be a mean of confirming social identity, as in finding sense of belonging or distinction from a social group. Relational component has a distinct connection with lifestyle component. (Gentile et al. 2007, 398.)

Customer's past experiences with the organization must be taken into consideration as well, it may affect current or next experience. Past experiences may impact on current experience through forming expectation and evaluating experiences. Previous experiences have an effect on customer satisfaction. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 78.) It is instinctive to compare new experiences with past ones, positive or other, and judge them according to those (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 3).

Why customer experience is important? Selling a product was easy if it was priced well and excellent quality. That has been changing recently, because of customer experience raising its importance. When looking at consumer's purchasing preferences, customer experience has become more important than product and price. Männistö (2020, 46) said in his book in 2020 that in few years customer experience will replace product and price as a main driver when making the purchasing decision of a product or service. (Männistö 2020, 46-47.)

The complete experience that a customer goes through with an organization can be called a customer journey. It includes all the interactions between a customer and an organization in all channels, devices, and touchpoints throughout every stage of the customer lifecycle. The customer journey is a sum of experiences while interacting with an organization, it documents the full experience of being a customer. (Männistö 2020, 7-8.) Lemon & Verhoef (2016, 74) explain customer experience as a customer's journey with an organisation over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touchpoints.

Männistö (2020, 10-11) gives the following differentiation to the customer journey and customer experience: customer journey is a chain of interactions the customer has with the organization on different stages of the customer lifecycle. The customer experience again is how the customer feels during the customer lifecycle.

2.1 Customer experience management (CEM)

"Customer experience management (CEM) is the process of strategically managing a customer's entire experience with a product or a company." (Schmitt 2003, 17.)

CEM is a customer focused and process-oriented satisfaction approach. CEM is a practical management tool that shows thoroughly how experiential value for customers can be provided in exchange for financial value for the organization. It differs from Customer relation management (CRM) by instead of recording customer transactions, CEM builds rich relationships with them. CEM has extensive view on how organization and its products (in this case services) can be relevant to a customer's life. It connects in every touchpoint with the customer and integrates different elements of customer service. CEM includes sales and brand preference but is involved with pre- and post-sale as well. It provides value to customers by giving information, service and other interactions that end in exciting experiences. With this, CEM builds loyalty with customers and increases value to the organization. CEM also takes a look to internal affairs. Employees influence the customer's experience and perception of the organization. Employees must be motivated, competent in their work, and innovative with their thinking to create a compelling customer experience. This means a good "customer experience" for the employees as well. (Schmitt 2003, 18.)

According to Rahimian, ShamiZanjani, Manian & Esfidani (2021, 1417) many studies have been conducted to examine the role and impacts of customer experience in hotel industry. And even though many studies have been conducted of CEM in different fields, none of them are in hotel industry. Organizations must concentrate on designing and delivering distinctive experiences (Rahimian et al. 2021, 1418).

Rahimian et al. (2021, 1420) presents the stages and steps of CEM in hotel industry in Figure 1. It is based on their literature research and interviews hotel managers. They have kept the initial stages as they are but added some instead, for example customer journey mapping, branding, brand awareness and measuring customer experience.

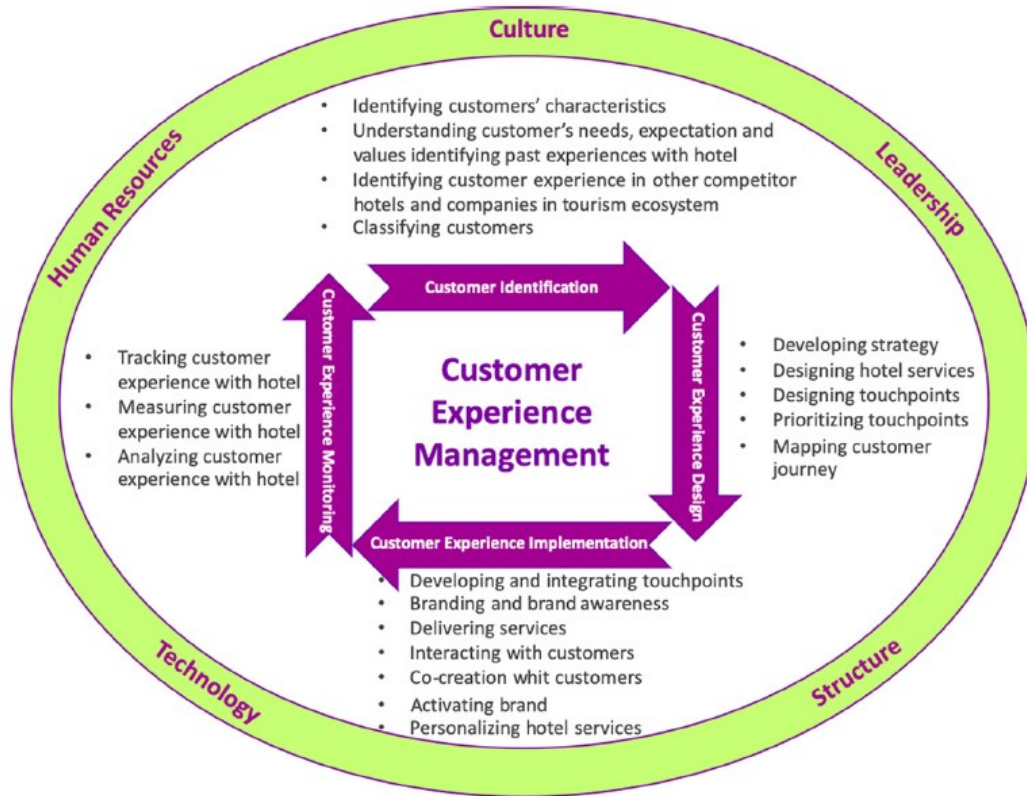


Figure 1. Customer experience management framework in hotel industry (Rahimian et al. 2021, 1422)

First stage of Customer experience management in hotel industry is *Customer Identification*. It means recognizing past experiences with the organization, as this might have an affect on the future experience of the customer. Importance of past experiences has been pointed out by Lemon & Verhoef (2016) as well. Recognizing customer's characteristics, customer's experience is mostly shaped by their personal motives, knowledge, and other personal characteristics. Understanding customer's needs, expectations, and values to create memorable experience and add value to customer and organization. Identifying their experiences with competitor hotels and other companies in tourism sector. Customer's experiences with competitor hotel gives valuable information of customer's expectations and of the competitor itself. Other companies in tourism sector, affect the experience itself as well, for example if transportation does not perform as expected, it might affect the whole experience. And after data collection and identification, classifying the customers. (Rahimian et al. 2021, 1422-1423.)

Second stage is *Customer Experience Design*. First step in this stage is to develop strategy to determine different touchpoints and channels which are interacting with the customer. All touchpoints need to be comparable with internal processes and organization's commitments and touchpoint activities must be consistent with identity of the organization. All channels, for example

organization's webpage, need to be customer-oriented and acknowledge customer's position in the purchase process. Customer experience design phase aims to customer loyalty, to get the customer try the journey again, to switch over from post-purchase back to pre-purchase. Next step is to design services. In Rahimian et al. article they talk about hotel's core services being the room services and the hotel's atmosphere. In Clarion Hotel Helsinki's Meetings & Events department, it would be as well the atmosphere and the meeting package. Service delivered has a profound impact on customer experience. Communities and events are designed to improve the customer relationship between customers and the organization. These encourage customers to be more involved with the organization. Third step is to design the touchpoints of the journey. First the touchpoints need to be identified and designed, then the customer journey is mapped. It is a map of interactions between prospective and actual customer with the organization to achieve their goals portrayed visually. The touchpoints need to be prioritized and selected because of limitations of financial and human resources. This is performed regularly based on information received from monitoring phase. (Rahimian et al. 2021, 1424-1425.) Customer experience design concentrates to create an ideal experience to customers in each interaction with an organization. Customer journey mapping is a commonly used tool in this phase. (Männistö 2020, 32-33.)

Third stage is *Customer Experience Implementation*. The first step is to start developing and integrating the touchpoints. Many touchpoints, for example websites, mobile apps, social media, have appeared since advancement of technology. It is vital to develop selected touchpoints, as brand awareness and brand activation, for next steps. Customer interaction and involvement provides more personalized and tailored customer service. Organizations must actively engage with their customers and support them. Customers are the co-creators of their own experience in the hotel industry (and in tourism industry all together). "Customer touchpoints should be seen as an opportunity to maximize customer value to improve CE (customer experience) throughout the whole customer journey while assisting the hotel to collect more data on the customers and better know them." (Rahimian et al 2021, 1425.)

Fourth stage (not the last one, as can be seen from the Figure 1. CEM framework is iterative) is *Customer Experience Monitoring*. It includes tracking, measuring, and analysing, experiences. Tracking is important to assure that the experience is unique and tempting to the customer. All the customer interaction should be tracked and customer voices to be heard. Monitoring customer data throughout the customer journey and its touchpoints helps organizations to gain better understanding for market contexts and to enlarge the range of touchpoints. Lastly, it is possible to gain more information about the customers, when analysing the procured information from tracking and measuring. This helps to provide better services to create better new experiences to

customers and for hotels to update their customer identification and experience design stages. (Rahimian et al 2021, 1426.)

Being in the era of experience economy, organizations compete to deliver excellent and memorable customer experiences. Each activity in the organization, including everything from advertising to post-purchase phase, must create an experience that is memorable to the customer. For organizations looking for to gain leadership, understanding customer experience and secure its efficient management is a significant goal. Especially for hotel industry being experience-based industry, Customer experience management is crucial. (Rahimian et al. 2021, 1426.)

2.2 Understanding customer's view

When researching customer experience key point of view is to understand customer journey. When analysing customer journey, organizations concentrate on how customers interact with numerous touchpoints, going from consideration to search and from purchase to post-purchase and consumption (again in services consumption normally happens about same time with purchase phase) and going to future engagement or repurchase. Goal of the analysis is to describe the journey and understand customers alternatives and choices for touchpoints related to multiple purchase phases. The goal of understanding the multiple possibilities and paths a customer might take to complete the task, is the focus of a customer journey. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 79.)

Lemon & Verhoef (2016) focus on three key elements of understanding customer journey. The whole service delivery process can be mapped with *Service blueprinting* all the way from internal processes to customer interactions. Service blueprinting can offer a solid foundation for customer journey mapping. It should be done from the customer point of view and that is why it needs customer input as well. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 79.) *Multichannel perspective*: Multichannel literature has probably the most developed aspect of customer journey analysis. It offers key insights into analysing, managing, and influencing customer journey. Channels are different in benefits and costs, meaning that one channel can be more useful in some specific stage than the other channels. These differences are made smaller by the advances in technology. Customers as well differ in their preferences and usage of different channels in different stages. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 79-80.) *Mobile*: Introducing a new channel, may cause even more switching between channels and add more complexity to the customer journey. There is an increasing importance of mobile channel and knowledge of that being still limited. Are the mobile devices, phones, tablets, etc. to replace all together or partially desktop devices? Mobile device channels

can interact, and they may interfere with the existing channels. They are better suited for searching information than actually purchasing products. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 80.)

2.3 Mapping a customer journey

Customer journey is a full set of experiences that a customer has with an organization. It includes all the interactions that a customer has in different channels, devices, and touchpoints through the whole customer life cycle, from awareness to loyalty. Customer journey may take only one day or weeks to be completed (Männistö 2020, 7). For example, in Clarion Hotel Helsinki guest may just arrive to the hotel and enjoy the meeting or event they are taking part of, when the organizer of the event has already weeks of planning behind them. Instead of only looking one part of the experience, the customer journey documents the full experience of the customer. (Männistö 2020, 8.)

To improve the overall customer experience, it is important to create detailed customer journey map with customer interactions, touchpoints, and collection of feedback. With detailed customer journey, every customer interaction can be taken seriously, processes can be streamlined, and best products or services can be designed. Recognizing potential weak spots and pain points in the service, gives the possibility to make changes that customers will appreciate and then keep coming back. (Männistö 2020, 14.)

Touchpoints are an essential part of customer journey, and each time customer interacts with the organization it is an opportunity to charm and to be convincing. With a help of a proper customer journey map, it is easier to understand where the touchpoints are and not to get lost in the data available. Customers may lose faith in organization's ability to keep brand promises if the means of communication between each touchpoint are not clear. Identifying the goals can happen with putting on the shoes of the customer and walking through the organization's process where customer is involved, covering everything from awareness to product and delivery. Creating a user persona could help to emphasize with the customer and understand her better. Embracing the details helps the customer journey map to come to life. Once main touchpoints are outlined, they have to be gone through thoroughly one-by-one to identify the important features and interactions at each stage. Comparing expectations versus reality is a valuable tool to evaluate if the desired outcome is reached. At each touchpoint, the desired outcome on the interaction with the customer is decided and then compared to the actual results of those interactions. Customers can be asked directly for feedback to have the actual results for the comparison. (Männistö 2020, 15-16.) Moritz (2005, 44) describes touchpoints as pieces of a puzzle. Each piece helps to shape the whole picture, while touchpoints complement the overall service experience.

Customer experience gap is the gap between a customer's expectations and what the organization actually delivers. It is the organization failing to meet the wants and needs of a customer in any point of the customer journey. The ideal situation is to have as small gap as possible or no gap at all. If this is not the case, then focus need to be shifted to how to bridge the gap. Männistö (2020, 16-17) recommends throwing to the rubbish the old saying by Henry Ford: "Customers don't know what they want!". He says it is a dangerous way of thinking because innovation often comes from the feedback from the people who are using the product or service.

Customer journey map allows the monitoring of everything from marketing to user experience, customer service, purchasing process to create better product or service and overall customer experience. Best way to start mapping the customer journey, is to walk through it in their shoes. It is important to sketch a map with every stage of interactions with the organization and the customer. These stages are the customer touchpoints, every phase when customer comes in contact with the organization. These may include social media reviews, website, customer service and follow-up feedback. (Männistö 2020, 17-18.)

Lemon & Verhoef (2016) describes the purchase stages of the customer journey prepurchase-purchase-post-purchase phases. In prepurchase phase all aspects of the customer interactions with the brand are included to this first stage, for example recognition, search, and consideration. Purchase phase is the event itself and includes all the interactions with the brand and its environment. It includes phases such as choice, ordering and payment. Post-purchase phase includes the customer's interaction with the brand after the actual event. This phase encompasses the usage and consumption (in service industry this is included to purchase phase), post-purchase engagement and service requests. Lemon & Verhoef give suggestions what businesses should do when taking into consideration these stages. First, they should find understanding in the perspectives of both the business and customer and identify the key aspects in each phase. Organisations should start to identify specific touch points or elements throughout the customer journey. And they should try to recognize any trigger points that might lead to customer to continue or discontinue their journey with the business. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 76.)

The data about the experiences, whether subject of study is organization or consumer, is collected at touchpoints, it is a direct contact with the product, service, or representation of two previous or third party. Meaningful touchpoints can change over the years, now it might be quicker the better, but later more time for example service personnel takes with a person might come more important. And not all touchpoints are equal in value. When the core offering is service, service interactions matter more. Touchpoints proceed customer to continuous and more valuable interactions, matter even more. (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 3.)

Lemon & Verhoef (2016) identify four categories of customer experience touchpoints. Customer might interact with these touch points categories in each stage of the experience. The importance of these touchpoints might vary in each stage depending on the nature of the service or customer's own journey. These touchpoint categories are brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/independent/external. Brand-owned touchpoints are customer interactions that are managed and designed by the organisations and are under their control. These include all brand-owned media, for example advertising and websites and any brand-controlled elements of the marketing mix, for example service or price. Partner-owned touchpoints are jointly designed, managed, or controlled by the organisation and one or more of its partners that happen during the experience. These partners could be marketing agencies, multichannel distribution partners, multivendor loyalty program partners and communication channel partners. The line between brand-owned and partner-owned touchpoints might be blurred for customer, as an example cleaning in the hotels. Also, the effects of partner-owned touchpoints to the customer journey are not clear, but literature shows their importance. Customer-owned touchpoints are customer actions that are part of the overall customer experience but are not under the control or influence of the organisation, its partners', or others. For example, payment method is a choice of the customer though partners might play a role here as well. Lemon & Verhoef say in their article that customer-owned touchpoints are most crucial in the post-purchase stage when consumption and usage take place (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 77-78), though considering service industry the most important phase for customer-owned touchpoints is the purchase stage when the consumption of the service takes place. Social/ external touchpoints highlights the importance of the roles of others in the customer experience. For example, during the customer journey customer is constantly surrounded by external touchpoints, such as other customers, peer influence, independent information sources, environments, which influences the customer experience. Peers may use influence in all three stages of the experience, other customers may have influence especially in purchase phase of service when the consumption happens at a same time with the producing. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 78.)

Identifying all the touchpoints is important, because anytime customer has contact with the organization at certain touchpoint, essential information has to be documented and centralized for easy access. Often organization only concentrate to the buying decision, and they do not see the data that could have an influence in the customer experience. Even though the buying stage is important, pre-sale and post-sale stages are as important. Happy customer can end up being a loyal customer giving insight on areas that need improvement. (Männistö 2020, 23-24.)

Every organization is different, but most touchpoints in prepurchase, purchase and post-purchase stages are quite similar. Prepurchase stage can include for example social media interactions,

reviews, advertisement, word of mouth. Purchase stage can include for example staff, sales team interaction, hotel (in Männistö's book office/store/website, but for this thesis hotel is more relevant), current promotions. And post-purchase stage includes for example invoicing, marketing emails. (Männistö 2020, 24-25.)

This typology of Lemon & Verhoef (2016, 78) gives organisations a framework for understanding potential influencing points in the customer experience. Organisations can recognize the touchpoints of the customer journey that they own or can influence and be aware of those touchpoints that they have no or little influence over, such as customer-owned or social/external touchpoints.

2.4 How to create best possible customer experience

All of us have probably experienced terrible, average, and memorable in good way customer service. To be able to define customer service, it is important to spend some time with the customer. And to reflect on the customer service experience's one has had themselves. To provide exceptional customer service is about understanding wants and needs of a customer and making sure that service provided meets or exceeds those expectations. Every customer basic expectation how they should be treated. To define customer service, it is important to be aware of the actions and behaviours that customer finds significant when they are interacting with service providers. (Männistö 2020, 88.)

Basic customer needs and expectations include for example personal recognition which means that customers want to be treated as individuals and not just as a number. Customers want to be treated courteously and with respect and it should happen without a question. Empathy is crucial aspect; customers appreciate when time is taken to look at things from their point of view. Customers want to be understood, to best demonstrate understanding is to listen to the customer. Customers are not to be rushed and showing patient is good way to demonstrate respect towards them. And it is important to remain professional in any situation. The way customer server acts in front of a customer might set the professional tone for the whole company. (Männistö 2020, 89-90.)

2.4.1 Employees

To create a best possible customer experience, organization need to start with employees understanding how to interact with guests. Managers need to set the example, if they do not act accordingly, why would the employees act as expected? It is also important to acknowledge the relationships inside the organization, including employee-employee and employee-manager relationships. The best way to deliver great customer service is to start with the internal customers, the employees, to treat them as is wanted the customers to be treated. (Männistö 2020, 210.)

Keeping the employees satisfied leads to keeping the customers happy as well. To keeping employees happy, the experience must be designed so that it makes them feel emotional towards the organization. (Männistö 2020, 231-232.) When an employee is fully engaged to their work and own a positive attitude, it naturally extends to the customer relationships. Happy employees deliver higher-quality service with consistency, leading to increased customer happiness and loyalty. Also, happy and satisfied employees miss less work, tend to their customers' needs more efficiently, and they are more creative with their customers. The interaction between a customer and an employee is not a scripted event. Innovative thinking is an essential skill to deliver great customer experiences. (Männistö 2020, 235-236.) Even though in a successful business model focus needs to be on customer, it cannot forget the employees (Männistö 2020, 237). Instead of thinking "the customer is always right", it could be said that "customers must be happy". To add to this, employees must be happy as well to business model to be successful. Employees are the face of the organization for the customers, so through happy and engaged employees can happy and engaged customers be achieved. (Männistö 2020, 240.)

2.4.2 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction and customer engagement are the key indicators of success. Customers have every day more and more information at their hands to choose where to put their money. Meaning customer expectations need to be met for better buying experience. Any business can offer their customers discounts, friendly service, and apologize when things go wrong in order to make their customers happier. These do not differentiate organizations from each other or develop lasting relationships with the customers. (Männistö 2020, 76-77.)

Organizations who recognize the significance of delivering great customer experience understand that generating customer loyalty is the key to long lasting success. The importance of customer satisfaction should never be ignored. It is important to track customer satisfaction to make customers happy, loyal, and in the end turn them into brand ambassadors. Put simply satisfied customer is happy with the product, service, or treatment they have received. And happy customers will not search what competition has to offer, they will return to the place that they were treated well. But customer satisfaction should be the bare minimum standard of customer service, not the whole goal. (Männistö 2020, 205-206.)

3 From services to experiences, the true Service Design

Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, and Schneider (2018, 22) say that customer experience has become more and more important for many organizations. Design has become valued method in innovation and management. Stickdorn et al. (2018, 22) place visibly service design in the intersection of customer experience and design thinking. Service makes up a huge share of most developed countries economies (Finland below) and design makes sure something fits its purpose. Service design could potentially be applied to shaping of human activity. But at least it has a place in service development, innovation, improvement of services, customer experience work, education, empowerment, government and in strategy of organizations. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 22.)

Service sector has formed about 70 % of Finland's GDP since 2009 and has steadily stayed there (Tilastokeskus 2023). Blue line is for service sector, yellow for industry and construction, and purple for agriculture, forestry and fishery.

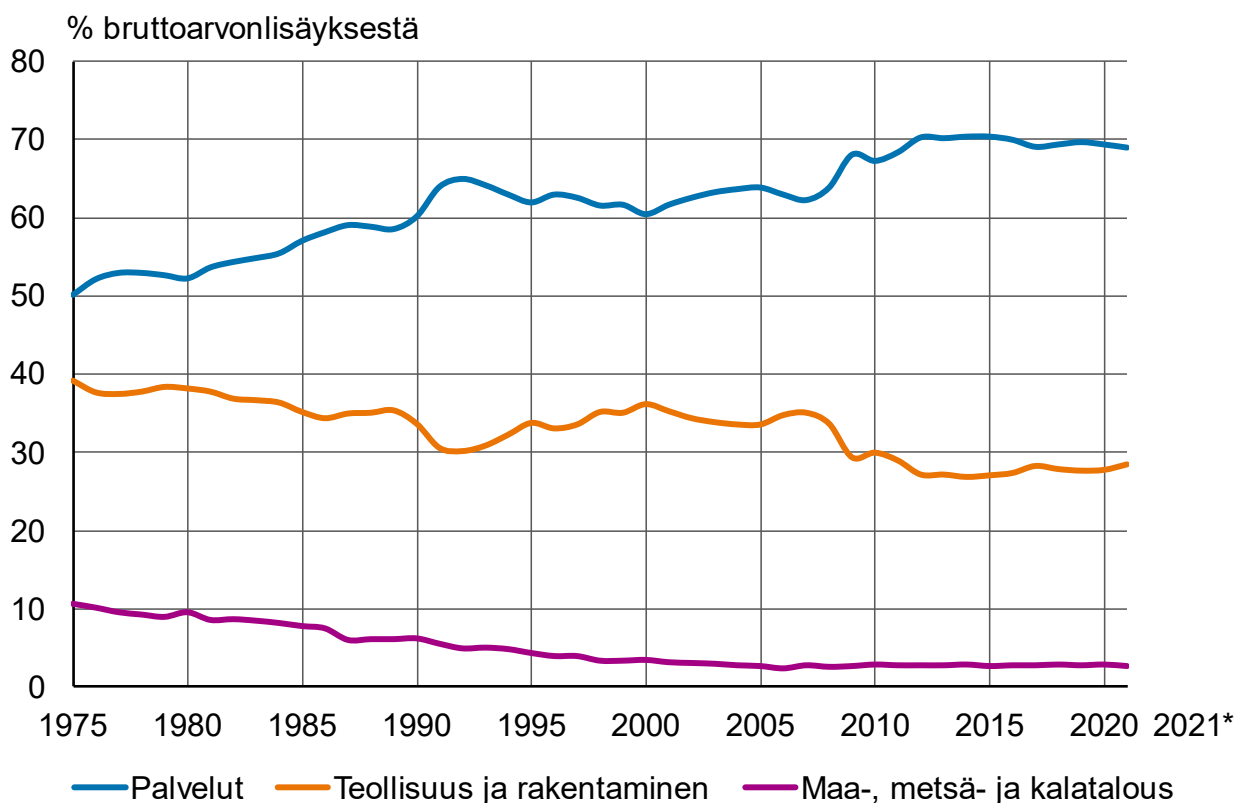


Figure 2. Change in economic structure (Tilastokeskus 2023)

In Finland people spend more and more money on services instead of goods. Services reached goods in consumption already in the 1990's. Long they went hand in hand but in 2010's services leave consumption of goods behind. In the beginning of the year 2019 people spent 17.1 billion euros on services but only 12.6 billion euros on goods. In the Figure 3. yellow line represents

spending of money on services and blue line spending of money on goods. (Niskakangas 12 August 2019)

Tavaraan kuluttamisen kasvu pysähtyi 2010-luvulla

Kotitalouksien kulutusmenot tavaroihin ja palveluihin

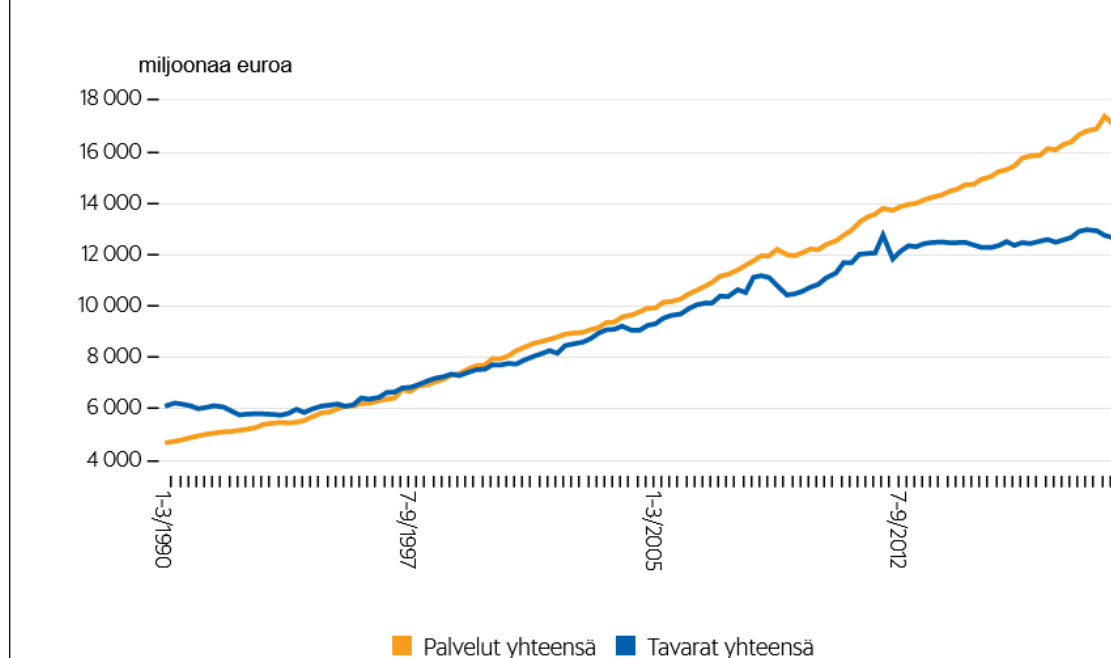
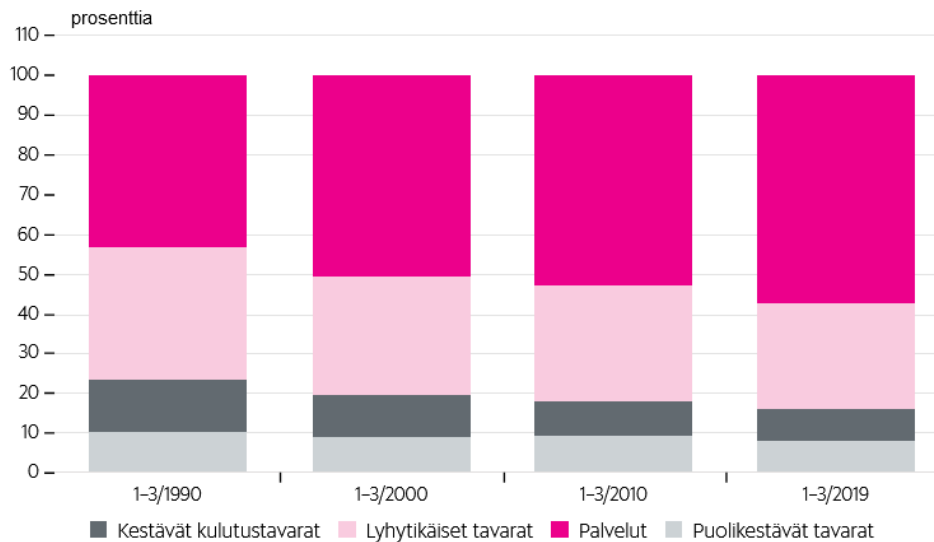


Figure 3. The growth of expenditure on goods stopped in 2010's (Niskakangas 12 August 2019)

From the Figure 4. can be seen how the spending of money in households in Finland has changed between 1990 and 2019. Light grey represents semidurable goods such as clothes and shoes, dark grey represents durable goods such as transportation vehicles, household appliances and electronics, light pink represents short-lived goods such as food, medicine and hygienic products. In the 1990 households spent on services 43.3 percent and in 2019 the same number is already 57.5 percent. The Figure 4. presents how spending on services have grown steadily from 1990's to 2019. (Niskakangas 12 August 2019.)

Kotitalouksien kulutusmenot lajeittain



Kestävät kulutustavarat, esim. kulkuvälineet, kodinkoneet ja elektroniikka.

Lyhytikäiset tavarat, esim. elintarvikkeet, pesuaineet, lääkkeet ja hygieniatuotteet

Palvelut, esim. asuminen, terveydenhoito, kulttuuri- ja vapaa-ajan palvelut ja vakuutukset

Puolikestävät tavarat, esim. vaatteet ja jalkineet sekä vapaa-ajan välineet

Figure 4. Sorted household expenditure (Niskakangas 12 August 2019)

People used to think that goods more valuable than services because there is something physical left behind. There can be seen a shift between generations and nowadays spending money on services and experiences are seen more valuable. Sociology professor Terhi-Anna Wilska confirms that according to multiple researches people get longer satisfaction on spending on experiences and services than they do on spending in goods. Value of an experience stays as a memory longer than the satisfaction of buying a good, which can end up being very short term. Wilska continues: "People do not suffer from shortage of goods, but the time they can spend how they want. Most valuable thing person can have, is time". (Niskakangas 12 August 2019)

Pine & Gilmore (2019, chapter Preview) think much the same way: "Time is the currency of experiences". They give a definition of services being time well saved, while experiences are time well spent. They define experience to be personal event and two people cannot have the same experience, even though they would experience it same time at a same place. Being personal is the core of experience economy and customization is key. Customizing goods turns them into services and customizing services turns them into experiences. When the customer is willing to pay for the time spent in the organization, it is the way of knowing that the experience offered is worth of their attention.

3.1 From Services to Experiences

Already ancients Greeks and Romans had services they consumed and paid for. Services are nowadays around us all the time, radio is on, we go grocery shopping or have it delivered. As the ancient Greeks and Romans prove, services are nothing new. (Moritz 2005, 23.)

It is helpful to define what services are not because their complexity. Moritz (2005) has outlined some features best to describe service. Services are not tangible; they have no physical form or cannot be touched. Services cannot be separated from the consumption because production and consumption of the service happens at a same time. Services cannot be stored. They lose their value if not used. Services cannot be owned; nobody can own a massage for example. Services happen over time, and they have several touchpoints, which makes services complex experiences. People experience services in many different levels and different from each other. Quality of service is hard to measure. Measurements of service are quite often qualitative instead of quantitative. (Moritz 2005, 29, 31.)

As mentioned before but cannot be highlighted enough, services are intangible. They are customized to meet the individual needs a known customer (Moritz talks in his book about clients but for clarity of this thesis, I will refer to customers in this section and later to guests). Services use goods to perform operations to a customer, for example haircut, or for a possession of a client, for example computer repair. Customers highly value the benefits of the service. Services provide a possibility to get tasks done by someone else (again as an example haircut). Even though goods are used to provide services, the line between goods and service can be very fine. For example, in restaurant clients eat tangible food but it is served by servers. Economists have still defined restaurants to be more towards service sector than goods sector. In service sector, individuals desire service. Consumers and business skimp on goods to spend it on services which they value more highly. (Pine & Gilmore 2019, chapter 1 subchapter Services.)

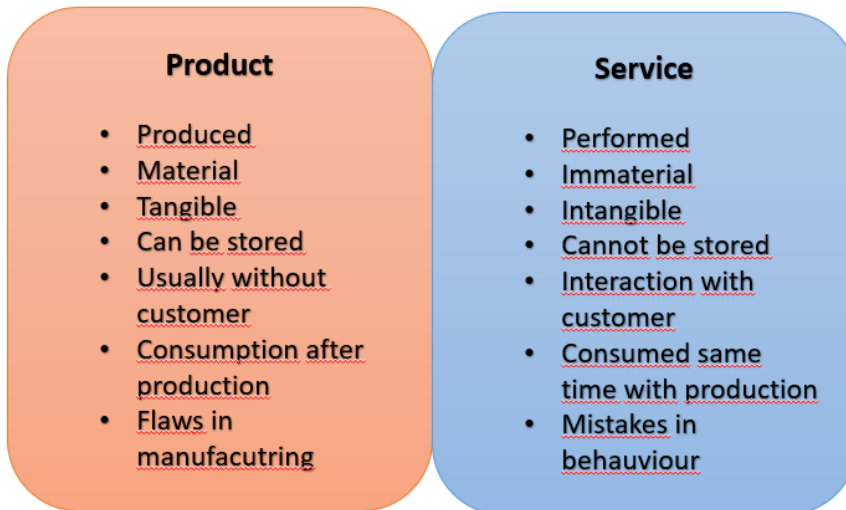


Figure 5. Products and services are different (adapted from Moritz 2005, 30)

Pine & Gilmore (2019, 2) explain the lifecycle from commodity to experience with coffee. This is definitely one of the best explanations of this lifecycle I know so far. It starts with cheap coffee bean one to two cents of a cup (United States dollars are used in the example). Manufacturer roasts and grinds the coffee beans into coffee grounds and sells them to grocery stores, price jumps to five to 25 cents a cup (depending on the brand and package size). Brewing these coffee grounds in a diner or quick-serve restaurant brings the coffee cup price up to 50 cents (not totally applicable to Finland, for example in R-Kioski coffee cup costs 2,20 euros). But when the coffee is served in a 5-star hotel or in a café such as Starbucks, the coffee cup price jumps up to five dollars (in Finland Cappuccino Tall is 5,20 euros). People are willing to pay this for the experience brought by the ordering, creation, and ambience. (Pine & Gilmore 2019, 1-2.)

Price of coffee offerings

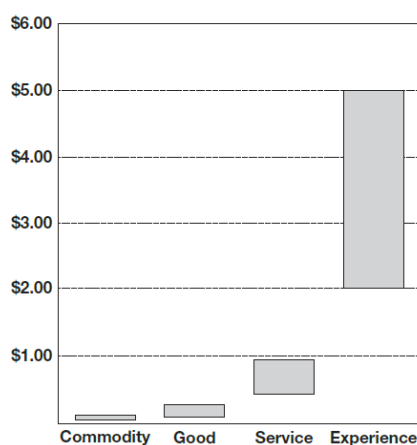


Figure 6. Price of coffee offerings (Pine & Gilmore 2019, 2)

Experiences are fourth economic offering, as far from services as services are from goods. Experiences have always been around, but they have been thought as part of services alongside for example car repair and wholesale distribution. “When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages—as in a theatrical play—to engage him in an inherently personal way.” (Pine & Gilmore 2019, 3.) Commodities are fungible, goods are tangible, services are intangible, and experiences are memorable. Experiences have appeared to create new value. (Pine & Gilmore 2019, 15.) People want experiences even though they lack tangibility, because of the value that lies in them and remains long afterward of the experience itself (Pine & Gilmore 2019, 17).

Services have unique features that influences greatly the experience customers have when comparing to products. Services have multiple different components, for example space, product, and the actual service components. Customer’s total experience is combined from these components. Services are different and they are complex. Because of products provided to consumers are different than services provided to customers, it is important for an organisation providing services to address research, innovation, and development differently as well. And that is where Service Design comes in. (Moritz 2005, 31.)

3.2 Service Design

“Service Design helps to innovate (create new) or improve (existing) services to make them more useful, usable, desirable for clients and efficient as well as effective for organisations. It is a new holistic, multidisciplinary, integrative field” (Moritz 2005, chapter Executive summary).

This is the definition that Stefan Moritz (2005) gives about service design in his book. Employees of service business are part of the experience and creation of the service. Services are not tangible; they cannot be stored, and they are used while produced. Design is a field of designing complex and interactive experiences. Designing services includes professionals and their expertise from related fields as well as the client to the designing process. Special tools and methods are used during the process. Service design connects management, marketing, research, and design and acts as a point of contact for customers and organisations. “Service Design is a very different way of approaching the way we think of the relationship between organisations and clients.” (Moritz 2005, 7.)

In Service Design different fields and customers are integrated to the design process. Moritz (2005, 42-43) has outlined five principles which makes Service Design unique.

1. *Service Design truly represents the customer's perspective:* It is important to recognize the customer's motivations, goals, and hidden needs in designing services. These are difficult to predict, and customers might not always be aware of these. Service Design gives the perspective of focusing on the customer as well as the organization providing the service and customers are included to the service delivery process. (Moritz 2005, 43.)
2. *Service Design addresses the unique features of services:* Customers go through different touchpoints over time. These are the pieces of an experience, and they can be built from product and service components. The overall experience is driven by a mental concept that customer has in their mind. And even though services are different from product, they are often connected, (Moritz 2005, 44) for example hotel room has a bed, if it is bad the whole staying in the hotel experience might go bad.
3. *Service Design integrates expertise from different disciplines:* Service Design often points out internal and external customers. There are usually people who need to be seen as customers inside the organization as well. With Service Design there is a possibility to get everyone involved to the process, and the different tools and methods are to make sure that both internal and external service experience is successful. Service Design wants everyone's contribution, it is a multi-disciplinary platform of expertise. It is born from design thinking, integrating multiple fields of expertise. Service Design is designed to focus on the multiple challenges of service economy. (Moritz 2005, 45, 47.)
4. *Service Design is interactive:* As mentioned before, in service process customer is an essential part of it. Service Design renders the possibility for customer to connect with the possible result. It gives the necessary components and resources to the customer to execute what they want to do. In services, the big advantage is that it is much easier to make changes. Depending on the complexity of the service, it is possible to prototype and test the deployment models, even though being new and difficult.
5. *Service Design is ongoing:* Because of the variety of existing services, Service Design deals with variety of situations and contexts of products. Systems created and improved in Service Design are complex and take time. What makes services unique is that they are alive. Services cannot be produced before consuming and cannot be stored until someone decides to use them. For example, Service Design keeps monitoring and constantly improving the service even after it has been developed and launched by service innovation.

Similarly, Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, and Schneider have listed in their previous book *This Is Service Design Thinking* (2010) five principles of how to describe Service Design. These are: user-centred, co-creative, sequencing, evidencing and holistic. But in their newer book *This is Service Design Doing* (2018) they have revisited these principles and made some modifications. They also added one principle, and the six new principles are:

1. Human-centred: The experience of all the people affected by the service has to be considered.
2. Collaborative: Service design process needs to include and actively engage stakeholders from various backgrounds and functions and actively.
3. Iterative: Iterating towards implementation, service design is an experimental, adaptable, and investigative approach.
4. Sequential: The service should be pictured and organized as a sequence of connected actions.
5. Real: Different stages should be tried out in reality. Such as prototyping ideas or researching needs.
6. Holistic: Services should steadily point out the needs of all stakeholders throughout the entire service and across the organisation. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 25-27.)

Service Design is practical procedure to create and improve the products or services of an organisation. Stickdorn et al. (2018, 27) describe Service design as a human-centred, collaborative, interdisciplinary, iterative approach which uses research, prototyping, and a set of easily understood activities and visualization tools to create and orchestrate experiences that meet the needs of the business, the user, and other stakeholders.

“Service Design is the design of the overall experience of a service as well as the design of the process and strategy to provide that service.” (Moritz 2005, 39)

Service Design helps the understanding of consumers, market, available resources, and the point of view of customer’s expectations, needs and experiences across touchpoints and over time. It is as well planning and shaping experiences to be useful, usable, desirable, effective, and efficient. Service design helps to reveal possibilities, produce ideas, solve problems, and create feasible solutions. It uses tools and methods to make the service experience similar, desirable, useful, and viable and to be in line with the brand. Service design connects the wants and needs of a customer with the wants and needs of an organisation. It offers relevant specifications, guidelines, and strategies, creates ideas, develops solutions, and generates outlines. Service Design also provides ways to understand insights, complex structures, and processes. It prototypes results before implementing them. (Moritz 2005, 39-40.)

Moritz (2005) has created a model to help understand the essence of Service Design (see Figure 5.). The model represents how Service Design works as an arbitrator between organization and customer. Orange arrows show that it provides higher productivity while making the services more effective and efficient. Orange arrows also represent raising the customer satisfaction when services are designed to be more useful, usable, and desirable. The grey arrows above represent

how resources, constraints, and context organizations operate in are explored and considered in Service Design. The grey circle on the left represent the organization and it includes staff, suppliers, partners, market segment, competition, and relevant technologies. On the right side the grey circle Service Design develops insights based on customer and market needs. It searches the customer contexts, for example, market, community, society, politics, economy, and trends. (Moritz 2005, 150.)

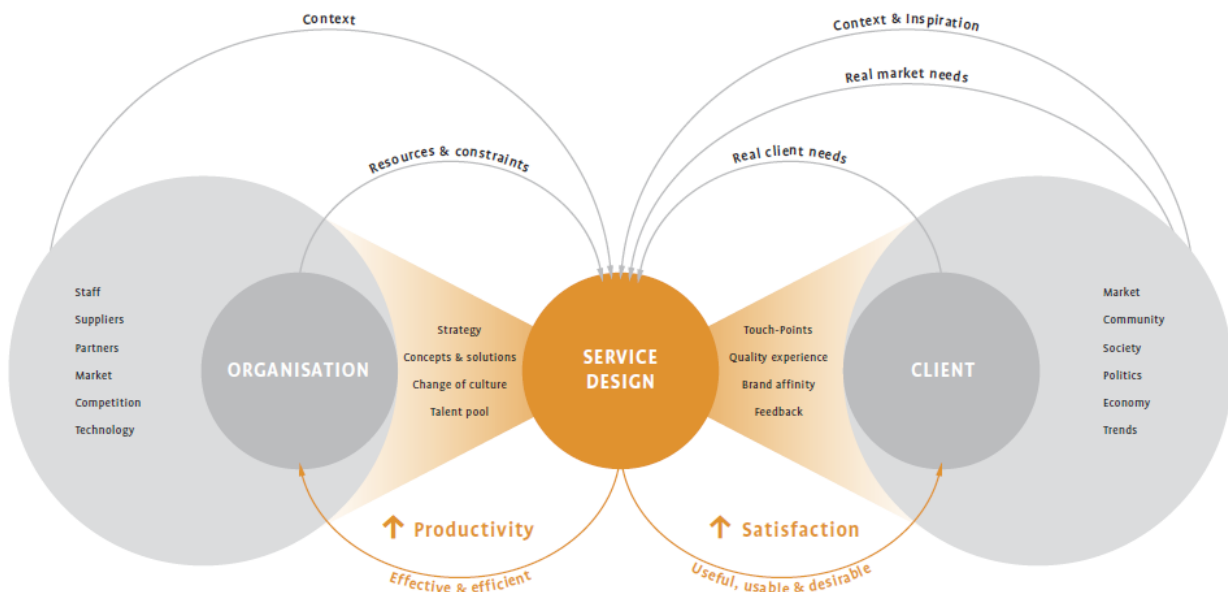


Figure 7. Service Design overview model (Moritz 2005, 152-153)

Service Design provides support for an organization in helping to create strategy and developing service concepts and processes. It designs the point of contact between customer and organization. The Figure 5. presents how Service Design works through both the organization and customer to investigate insights through to service delivery. It helps to design the touchpoints that a customer comes across and improves the overall service experience. (Moritz 2005, 150.)

4 Developing customer journey for Meetings & Events department in Clarion Hotel Helsinki

The aim is to recognize pain points and develop customer journey that guests (in Clarion all the customers are referred as guests) of Meetings & Events (M&E) department go through. Customer journey can be divided into three different phases and Vorhees et al. (2017) define these phases: pre-encounter phase is the phase before the core-encounter in which customers are led to engage with the service. In the core-encounter phase primary service is provided to the customer. In this phase customer's needs are fulfilled, which is the key reason for customer to engage with the service provider. In the post-encounter phase customer has a chance on reflecting and assessing the previous two phases. (Voorhees et al. 2017, 270.) I have earlier (page 11) described Lemon & Verhoef (2016) version of these three phases, but even though these two concepts are quite close of each other, I will be using the terms of Vorhees et al. (2017) and my will be focus on the core-encounter phase, but I will have a quick glance on the pre-encounter and post-encounter phases as well.

4.1 Clarion Hotel Helsinki



Figure 8. Clarion Hotel Helsinki exterior (Nordic Choice Hotels 2018 CC BY 2.0)

Clarion Hotel Helsinki opened its doors in October 2016 and is located in Jätkäsaari about ten minutes from the Helsinki city centre. In the Figure 6. hotel side can be seen on the left and Makasiini Event Venue on the right. Clarion Hotel Helsinki has 425 rooms, Makasiini Event Venue with 15 different sized meeting rooms, rooftop bar, rooftop gym, pool and sauna and a restaurant. The two towers of the hotel rise up to 78 meters and have become a landmark of Jätkäsaari. (Nordic Choice Hotels 2023a.) Clarion Hotel Helsinki is part of Nordic Choice Finland hotel chain, owned by Norwegian billionaire Petter Stordalen (Salomaa 19 February 2022).

Besides Clarion Hotel Helsinki, Nordic Choice Hotels have in Finland another Clarion in Aviapolis, Vantaa and 11 independent hotels in Helsinki and Espoo, including the legendary Kämp Hotel (Nordic Choice Hotels 2023b). Nordic Choice Hotels will open a new hotel to the airport in spring 2024. It will be the biggest hotel in Finland with over 700 rooms. (Salomaa 19 February 2022.)

Makasiini Event Venue is built to an old dock warehouse which is designed by Lars Sonck in 1930's. It has 10 different sized meeting rooms for groups from ten people all the way up 700 people in theatre seating. For round table dinners the biggest room can fit about 450 people. The biggest meeting room can be divided three smaller rooms. Besides these, one of the meeting rooms is located next to the Sky Room bar on the 16th floor. Makasiini Event Venue combines old historic building to the newest technical equipment's and modern customer experience. (Nordic Choice Hotels 2023a.) At the moment it is one of the biggest event venues in Helsinki.

The Meetings & Events department have about 100 000 guests annually (excluding COVID-19 affected years 2020-2022). Percentage of returning customers is about 50%. As a basic selling item in meeting department is meeting package, those are sold about 40 000 every year. (Clarion Hotel Helsinki 2022.) Meeting package includes small breakfast in the morning, lunch, afternoon break with refreshments and room rent and it is charged per person.

Clarion Hotel Helsinki won in 2022 Finland's Best MICE (Meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) hotel award. World MICE Awards is a sister event of World Travel Awards. (World MICE awards 2022.) Clarion Hotel Helsinki also offers a possibility to book smaller meeting rooms online. Booking system gives possibility to choose to have only room rent or meeting package. For bigger events there is possibility to make request for proposal. (Nordic Choice Hotels 2023c). Besides this Clarion Hotel Helsinki has been nominated as the Event producer of the year in 2019, the Big Event Venue of the year in 2020, and winner Small Event Venue of the year in 2019 in Evento Awards.

4.2 Framework

Moritz (2005) has presented a model with six categories to cover various tasks of service design. There are multiple tools and methods in each category that can be used as a support in service design. Because service design projects are different there is no specific order for the use of the categories. These categories can overlap just like in service business production, consumption and designing can happen at a same time. In the Figure 7. is presented Moritz's model how each category can happen simultaneously and in flexible order. The model does not show a definite order and requires imagination on behalf of the user. But it does show that Service design is an ongoing, repetitious, and complex process. (Moritz 2005, 149.)

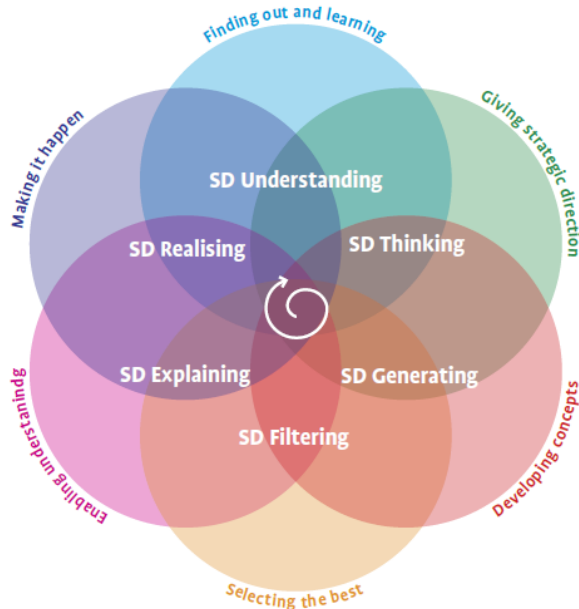


Figure 9. Service Design categories (Moritz 2005, 149)

These six categories are the basic structure to set up the Service Design process. They have an important role in any project. The process is easily understood and easy to follow. It is a tool for understanding the stages of the project and how they link to each other. (Moritz 2005, 154.) These categories make it possible to apply easier number of tasks and tools to projects. Tasks, for example interviews, are an intermediate step to help to reach a goal, for example understanding clients. The goal is a key step in the Service Design process but also represents a specific mind-set. All the goals can be achieved by several tasks. These categories have two functions; to create a simple and generic framework that helps to understand Service Design and to establish what different mind-sets are needed for Service Design. (Moritz 2005, 123.)

For the thesis first three categories are applied. *SD Understanding* phase customer's hidden and conscious needs, wants and motivations are examined. This phase is about searching context, limitations, resources and exploring possibilities. *SD Understanding* is the foundation of Service Design process. It is the link between a project and its reality. It creates insights that recognizes areas that the organization should be going for according to what is right for the organization direction. In this phase investigation goes deeper behind what people are already used to. For example, what are the things that people do not like? It takes into account the customer's goals in systematic way. "What do people desire? What are the possibilities? What will sustain a business?" This phase is important to Service Design in making sure that results are true, relevant, and appropriate. It is important to take into consideration in *SD Understanding* phase that most traditional methods do not provide tools to apply research results to design solutions. Quantitative market research and market segmentation is useful for actual selling products and services but does not provide adequate information on how people use services, especially ones in complex nature. Tasks in *SD Understanding* phase are understanding customers, understanding contexts, understanding providers, and understanding relationships. Tools and methods mostly used in this phase are for example, interviews, observing, benchmarking, client segmentation, gap analysis, market segmentation, and trend scouting. (Moritz 2005, 124-125.) In *SD Understanding* phase, I used interviews, observing and benchmarking.

SD Thinking is the giving strategic direction to the process phase. This phase includes identifying the criteria, developing strategic frameworks, specifying, and excluding ideas. Complex data is turned into ideas. *SD Thinking* phase reflects on all the strategic aspects, identification of direction and extent of Service Design process. It sets the parameters and is often the link between other phases. It recognizes the aim of *SD Understanding* for the project. For this phase it is also important to ensure that all other phases are in line with the strategy. In *SD Thinking* phase Service Design directions and guidelines for the process, but these are as good as the facts they are based on. That is why this phase is always based on information. Moritz (2005) explains that in short projects *SD Thinking* phase can mostly be done with natural common sense. Still, it is crucial to recognize that this phase is important and to be taken seriously during the process. Tasks in *SD Thinking* phase are Identifying, Setting, Planning & Feasibility, Analysis, Reviewing, and Direction. Tools and methods are for example Affinity diagrams, LEGO Serious Play, System thinking, Touchpoints. (Moritz, 2005, 128-131.)

In *SD Generating* phase intelligent, innovative, and relevant ideas and solutions are created and developed. During *SD Generating* phase meaningful ideas need to be developed and joined into strong concepts. It is about creating alternatives for roles, design, and concepts. But also, solutions have to be found and processes set up. "The service experience needs to be designed in every

detail and objects, spaces and other elements need to be developed.” It is important to find the right people for the team and to select the right surroundings to work in. SD Generating phase cannot be a random idea session but has to always be based on insights and strategy. Though this phase should still be innovative. Tasks in SD Generating phase are Developing, Creating, Finding, Implementing, and Crafting. Tools and methods are for example Brainstorming and Brainwriting, Idea interview, Think Tank. (Moritz 2005, 132-135.) This phase is only slightly started in this thesis, in the Outcome section can be found some development ideas for improving the customer journey in Clarion Hotel Helsinki.

4.3 Methods & Tools

In Service Design methods are a way to achieve something, for example to use interview as a research method and tools are concrete models that usually follow a specific structure, for example journey maps. Methods represent “how” certain tools are created and worked with and tools the “what” is used. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 36.) The list of possible tools and methods that can be used during Service Design project is endless. They are great support in understanding what needs to be gained in different stages of the project. Tools help to explain the framework of Service Design and at a same time make it tangible and practical. (Moritz 2005, 171.)

4.3.1 Interviews

“An interview is literally an inter-view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of common interest” (Brinkman & Kvale 2019a, 6).

In the human and social sciences, qualitative interview has become one the most common research methods (Brinkman & Kvale 2019a, 8). Interview's redeeming feature is its openness, there are no specific rules to follow while doing interview research or entire interview investigation. (Brinkman & Kvale 2019b, 2). Interview is a very common way to produce research material. The aim of a research interview is to give information and material that answers to the research question. Though the research question should not be asked as it is from the person being interviewed. Answering to the research question is the job of the researcher and this is why interviews are performed. (Kalinen & Kinnunen 2022.) It is a method of collecting information or opinions. There should be a possibility to record the interview in video, audio or note format. (Moritz 2005, 193).

Interviewer has an impact on the answers given. They can impact the answers and research material with presentation, demarcation, and styling of the questions. This should not be a problem but a feature that of course of the interview and analysis of the research material. (Kalinen & Kinnunen 2022.) The interviewer solely composes the conversation structure and purpose

(Brinkman & Kvale 2019a, 8). All this is taken into the consideration when planning, interviewing, analysing, and reporting the results. (Kalinen & Kinnunen 2022.)

When considering ethical issues of an interview, the produced knowledge depends on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. It gives the interviewer the responsibility to create a free and safe place to talk for the interviewee, especially because it is private space, but the answers are used in public. This means that there is a delicate balance in between pursuing knowledge and ethical respect of the interviewee. (Brinkman & Kvale 2019a, 10.)

In Service Design interviews are used to get people to tell their opinion or to learn about their experiences and expectations (Moritz 2005, 193). I interviewed for my thesis two employees from Clarion Hotel Helsinki Meetings & Events (M&E) department, Event Manager Otto Räsänen and Shift Leader Jasna Lehtonen and one employee from In-house-sales department, Event Coordinator and In-house-sales department supervisor Leena Lehtokangas. I chose these people specifically of their expertise and experience of the M&E department and their customers. I also talked to few of the customers using the facilities in M&E department, though they will not be named from their own choice. For these customers I only presented few questions concerning their day with us and if there were something they would change in how things work in the M&E department.

4.3.2 Observation

Observation is participatory study where the researcher is immersing to the setting where the respondents are while taking notes or recording. Method might include watching, listening, reading, touching, and recording of characteristics and behaviour. Observation can be divided to structured and unstructured observation and covert and overt observation. Structured observation method has specific variables and pre-defined schedule, as again unstructured observation has no set variables or schedule. Overt observation means that the observed person is aware about the observation and covert observation again person observed is not aware of the observation. (Dudovskiy 2022.) I used structured and covert observation methods. Partly because it is part of my everyday job to answer the questions asked from me and as Dudovskiy (2022) mentions, with covert observation, the results are more authentic.

Observation as a data collection method has lot of advantages, such as, direct access to the research phenomenon and flexibility concerning application and generating a record of the phenomenon. Observation's disadvantages are its long-time requirement, observer bias, observer's impact on data and the impact of observer's presence to the observed. Ethical issues rise with observed people not knowing that they are being observed, however observed knowing

that they are observed might affect the result. (Dudovski 2022.) There are no ethical issues affecting my thesis in the observation phase. As mentioned, it is my everyday job to answer these questions and there is no possibility to anyone recognize themselves or anyone else.

My observation period is conducted from during the spring 2023. As a part of the collecting valuable data for my thesis, I observed the behaviour of our guests. I observed, or more listened, what guests ask the most from the employees of the Meetings & Events department. And mostly questions vary in the field of where something is, “where is the meeting room?”, “where is the toilet?”, “where is lunch?”, “where can I leave my jacket/luggage?” and so on. Often repeated questions also include how the technical equipment work in the room and who can help with it. Often guests ask as well if their payment is all set, for example if all the invoicing information is correct. Sometimes questions are about bar or restaurant recommendations, though these questions are mostly asked from the hotel reception. These questions also came up in the interviews that was held for the three employees of Clarion Hotel Helsinki. They all said that most asked question from the guests of the hotel is where something is.

4.3.3 Benchmarking

Benchmarking or competitor benchmarking means comparing business to businesses operating in the same field, as in this case it will be hotel industry and specifically hotels with meeting spaces. Benchmarking could be called also role model analysis because the basic idea is to learn from others, challenge and to develop business' own operating models. (Meltwater 2021.)

Following the competition on the operating field should be one of the top priorities in a company. It helps companies to keep up with the market and what is been offered. It helps to make sure that campaigns are easily recognized, and they resonate with the wanted audience. (Meltwater 2021.)

Originally benchmarking refers as a concept to setting an overall standard that all the other measurements are proportioned. Overall benchmarking can mean almost any comparative assessment. There are multiple descriptive characteristics and subclasses. As a subject for benchmarking can be a product or its characteristics, media visibility of different operators, course of action in a company, brand awareness or customer's service journey. Main characteristic of benchmarking is that comparison analysis is made with direct competitors, for example in hotel industry it is other hotels with similar characteristics. It is good to remember that the objective of the benchmarking can be also a totally different product or service, but similarities are for example in time spent, visibility or monthly payments. There are multiple different applicable styles for benchmarking: comparing company's activity level to overall standards, identifying best possible course of action, and applying it to organisation and looking for best possible practices from the

same field. (Meltwater 2021.) Besides these there is still number of different styles of benchmarking, but these are most valid ones for this thesis.

Table 1. Benchmarking hotels

Benchmarking hotels with meeting rooms in Helsinki				
	Radisson Blu Royal	Scandic Hub Helsinki	Scandic Grand Central Helsinki	Sokos Hotel Tripla
Webpage	Easy to find information of hotel and meeting rooms. Possibility to make enquiries from meeting rooms	Easy to navigate in the page and find information. Smaller meeting rooms can be booked online as well	Same as the Hub hotel, as they are the same company	Easy to find information and navigate between different tabs. Smaller meeting rooms available for online booking as well
General info	Opened: 1991. 261 meeting rooms and 13 meeting rooms	Opened: 2021. 352 hotel rooms and 19 meeting rooms	Opened: 2021. 491 hotel rooms and 17 meeting rooms	Opened: 2020. 430 hotel rooms and 15 meeting rooms
Arriving	Next to Kamppi, long distance or local buses or metro, main train station about 1km away	City centre, tram from main train station, walking distance 700m	Next to main train station, from long distance bus station about 1km walk	Next to Pasila train station. From city center trams 7 and 9
Entrance	When entering hotel, hotel reception is on the other side of the lobby and meeting reception on the other side.	Possibility to enter straight to meeting area without going through hotel reception. Meeting reception in front of the door. The entrance to meeting area is little bit hidden	To access 2 nd floor meeting rooms, one must get a key from hotel reception, 1 st meeting rooms are little bit hidden for 1 st time visitor	For 1 st time visit elevators to meeting area hidden, but no need to go through hotel reception
Meeting Reception	Next to the door entering to meeting area, easy to notice. Possibility to access meeting rooms from hotel rooms	Customer goes through meeting reception, no matter which door enters	No meeting reception in either floor	Meeting rooms are divided into two different sections. Meeting reception only in the other side.
Staff	Staff in the meeting reception, showed me meeting rooms and other areas	No staff in the meeting area, hotel reception staff answered to few questions	Hotel reception gave a key to access 2 nd floor meeting area but no staff there. 1 st floor meeting area had staff who showed me around	Hotel reception was very kind and answered few questions. Meeting staff was busy and seemed like I wasn't welcomed there.

Benchmarking hotels with meeting rooms in Helsinki				
	Radisson Blu Royal	Scandic Hub Helsinki	Scandic Grand Central Helsinki	Sokos Hotel Tripla
General Areas	1 st floor areas nice and lit. -1 st floor little bit darker, no natural light. Age of the hotel shows	All the meeting rooms underground. Nicely lit, but no natural light.	Both meeting areas have nice natural light. 2 nd floor meeting rooms are next to hotel rooms	Hotel reception is very lit, might be bit crowded during check-in/-out times
Coffee Areas	Coffee areas in three different places, which makes it easy to divide people	Coffee areas in two different floors, similar sized with at least two coffee machines	2 nd floor meeting rooms had no coffee area. 1 st floor meeting area has nice big coffee area with big tables, big windows and high ceiling	Both meeting areas had their own coffee stations. Especially on the bigger side, the coffee area is nice and lit and good sized for big groups.
Size of the meeting rooms	Smallest for 10 people, 400 people cocktail events, 180 people round table dinners, 250 people in theatre seating	Smallest for 4 people. 500 people cocktail events, 300 people round table dinners, 200 people theatre in seating	Smallest for about 10 people. 500 people cocktail events, 330 people round table dinners, 270 people in theatre seating	Smallest for 6 people. 800 people cocktail events, 400 people round table, 600 people in theatre seating

Sokos Hotel Tripla

Sokos Hotel Tripla is in Pasila, Helsinki. It is in shopping mall, Mall of Tripla, which is one of the biggest shopping malls in the Nordic countries. It can be easily accessed with train, tram or bus. (Sokos Hotels 2023a.) Sokos Hotel Tripla opened its doors in 2020. Hotel rises 90 meters above the sea level, has 430 hotel rooms and 15 meeting rooms. Hotel's customer profile includes business travellers, staycation-travellers, and of course international travellers. (Rasi 13 January 2020.)

Sokos Hotel Tripla has 15 different sized meeting rooms that can fit from 10 people to 520 people. Some of the meeting rooms can be divided to smaller sections or have as one big meeting room. According to their webpage some of the smaller rooms can be also booked online. (Sokos Hotels 2023b.) Being able to divide the rooms, gives the space possibility to be used in multiple ways and offers flexibility with room arrangements, for example what kind of tables are used in the space.

My visit in Sokos Hotel Tripla was quick. In the hotel reception when I was asking the way to the meeting room area, the receptionist was nice and explained where to go and find the meeting

reception. To the elevators was easy to find with the directions given from the reception. When I arrived on the fifth floor, it was easy to find where to go. I immediately started going towards to the conference reception. I met the meeting host, explained what I am doing, but she did not seem very interested in me or my purpose to be in there. She left immediately but gave me permission to walk around and explore the space. I did miss a little bit that I could have asked something from her.

The signing was quite good, especially when arriving from the elevators but in the conference reception, the signing was not that clear anymore. Lobby area was nice and clean and seemed very spacious. Would be interesting to see how the space works when there are lot of people. Signs for the toilets were also quite small and have to look for them to actually see them, though that seems to be a trend everywhere.

I thought that the signing (see the Figure 10.) when arriving to the 5th floor was clear and I knew where to go based on those. And it is good that the conference reception is marked clearly because some of the meeting rooms are not in the same place with the reception and it could easily happen that customers do not meet the staff at all.

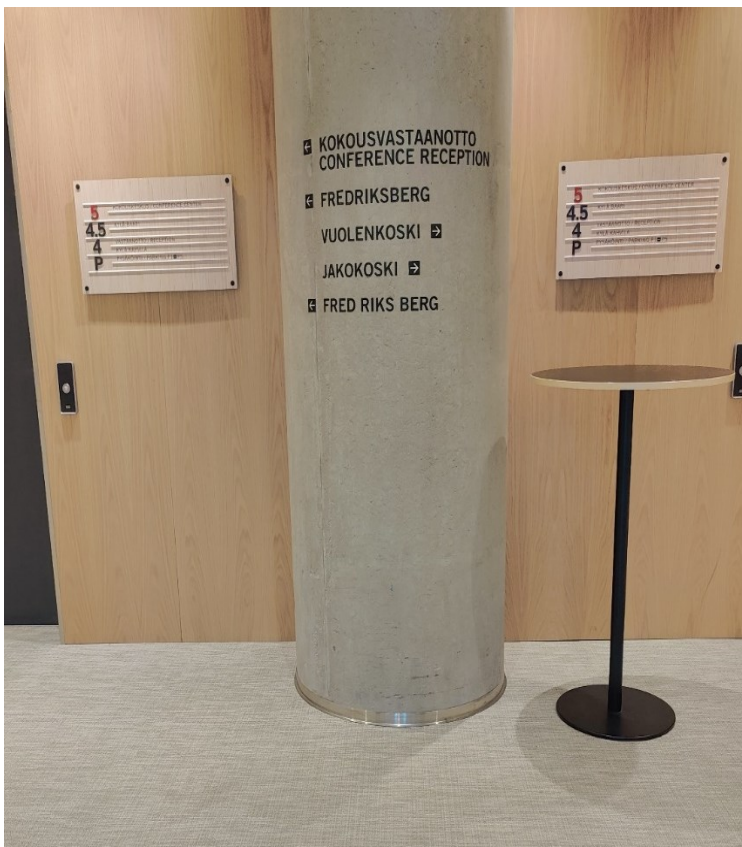


Figure 10. Signing in Sokos Hotel Tripla

Scandic Helsinki Hub

Scandic Helsinki Hub is a new hotel opened in Helsinki city centre in 2022. It is in walking distance from the main train station but can be easily accessed with a tram as well. Scandic Helsinki Hub has 352 hotel rooms in seven floors and 19 meeting rooms, biggest meeting room can fit 520 people. (Scandic 2023a.) Originally the building worked as a printing plant and after that it was European Chemicals agency. One of the leading themes of the hotel is their coworking space which is available 24 hours every day. In the meeting can be found more relaxed-style meeting space with 16 meter led-wall and with different kind of chairs. Of course, there can be found more traditional styled rooms as well with traditional tables and chairs. (Ruotsalo & Sandqvist 01 September 2022.) Scandic Helsinki Hub highlights their spaces to be best suited for co-working and innovative work. As well, their spaces are versatile and can be suited for regular everyday meetings or dinners. Their biggest meeting room can hold cocktail parties for 500 or seated dinner for 300 people. (Scandic 2023b.)



Figure 11. Entrance to the Meetings & Events Scandic Helsinki Hub

Luckily, I arrived at the Scandic Helsinki Hub from “right” direction, so I was able to access the meeting rooms from the right door. The door is located to the inner yard of the hotel (see figure 11.). If I would have arrived from different direction, I would have not seen the inner yard. Surprisingly in the hotel lobby or the main door was no signs to lead to the meeting area. I arrived at the meeting area and saw immediately the meeting reception. No one was there to greet me, but the time was already after four so I can understand that. The sign behind the meeting reception

was quite good (see Figure 12. on the left) and I decided to have a look around. The next sign was little bit confusing because even though it had arrows where to go, the arrow pointing up meant going down the stairs (see Figure 12. on the right). All the meeting rooms are underground but surprisingly well lit. Also, the light-coloured wood makes the space look lighter even though it is underground.

I liked the signs for being little bit different then in Clarion Hotel Helsinki. And even though natural light is preferred, the spaces underground was nice and well lit. Though spending the whole day underground might not be the best possible option. In coffee areas, the tables for food were solid which is good in a way that customers do not push it by accident but then again it restricts the possibility to change the interior. I found it interesting that milk was not in jugs, but in their original containers. This gives guests the opportunity to see the actual product, but it does not look that nice.

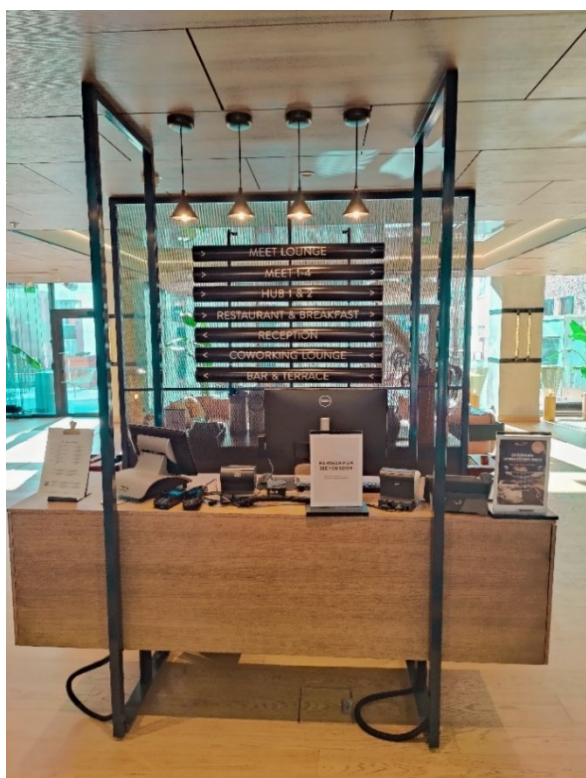


Figure 12. Meeting reception and signs in Scandic Helsinki Hub

Radisson Blu Royal, Helsinki

Radisson Blu Royal is a mid-sized hotel located in the city centre of Helsinki. It has 261 rooms in five floors and 13 meeting rooms. Hotel can be easily accessed with tram, bus or walk, and main train station is less than kilometre away. Hotel has been recently renovated and it breaths timeless Nordic-style. (Radisson Hotels 2023a.) Hotel's meeting spaces can be transformed from intimate

family events to 300 people exhibitions and meetings. As a speciality they have small meeting room called the Brain Box, which has no traditional meeting interior design, for example instead chairs people can sit on Fat Boy beanbags. They have offered excellent meeting services for over 20 years. (Radisson Hotels 2023b.)

Radisson Blu Royal is oldest from the benchmarked hotels and the compared hotel Clarion Hotel Helsinki. It shows little bit in the interior, for example the carpeting is reddish colour, this combined with marble floors, it starts to resemble something maybe from the late 80's or early 90's. Rooms have been recently renovated (Radisson 2023a) so it is little bit curious why was something not done to the meeting area as well. The first level has nice amount of natural light from the big windows but -1 level does not have it at all being underground. I do think it is important to have natural light during daytime. Even though the -1 level is well lit it does feel little lack of space. Meeting reception is easily seen when arriving to the hotel. Though signs are quite small, and someone could mistakenly think it is hotel reception. When arriving to the hotel through main doors, guests walk past the meeting reception. But different to the other hotels, you can access the meeting area from the hotel rooms as well. This again gives guests a chance to access the meeting rooms without walking past the meeting rooms and staff noticing them. It also might bring some restlessness to the meeting area and for meeting guests' sense of insecurity.



Figure 13. Lobby and Meeting reception in Radisson Blu Royal Helsinki

Scandic Grand Central Helsinki

Scandic Grand Central Helsinki is located next to the main train station in Helsinki. It has five floors, 491 rooms and 17 meeting rooms. Grand Central hotel opened in 2021. (Scandic 2023c). The art nouveau styled building is designed by Eliel Saarinen and built in 1909 and it has been an office and administrator building for VR (Finnish national railway) (Scandic 2023d). Biggest meeting space in Grand Central hotel can fit about 500 people in cocktail styled event. It has ceiling level almost in four meters and big windows to bring natural light to the space. All the meeting spaces are named after the original designer or his family and business associates. (Scandic 2023e.)

I visited twice in the Scandic Grand Central. My first try was on 29th of March and I could not get past the main lobby. I noticed that the door leading to the 2nd floor meeting rooms was locked and could be accessed only with a key. On my second try 4th of April, I had the chance to ask help from the hotel reception. They were nice enough to give me a key that I could go see the meeting area of the second floor. They gave me a brochure and from that I noticed that there were meeting rooms also on the first floor. I was aware that there is one big room, but not that there is more. Also, I noticed that the staff in the reception did not say anything about the first-floor meeting rooms even though I explained why I was there. The info screen was not very clear on this either.

The second floor had no staff, so I just quickly walked through the hallways and continued my way back to first floor. On the second floor, there hotel rooms on the same hallway with meeting rooms. This might cause some unnecessary noise, especially during check-out and check-in times. I would say that finding meeting rooms, when visiting the hotel for the first time might be quite a task. When I found my way to the meeting area on the first floor, I met a meeting host who took me to see few of the rooms and the coffee break area. The coffee break area was surprisingly big with big round tables. High ceiling and big windows give nice feel of space. I was surprised though that 2nd floor meeting area has no coffee break area at all. Maybe coffee is delivered to the rooms?

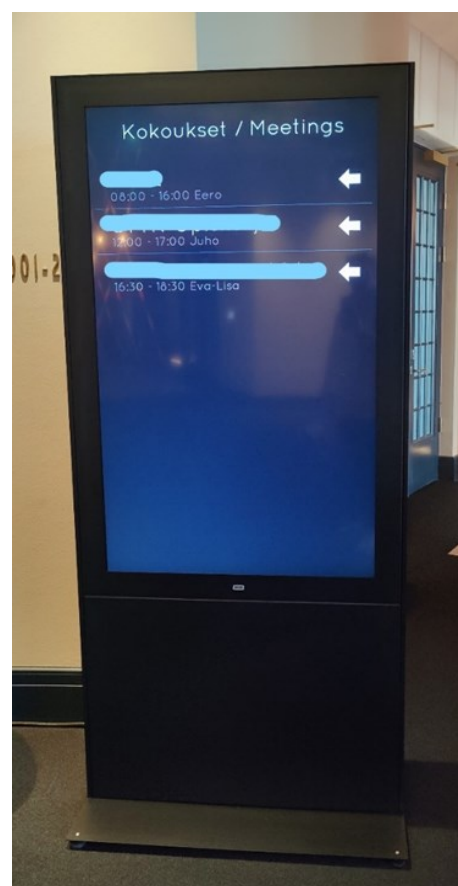


Figure 14. Info screen in Scandic Grand Central 2nd floor

I like their info screens that are very clear in the context of having white text and dark background (see figure 14.). I wonder how they greet the guests in practice. They do not have a meeting reception and meeting rooms are located in two different places. Do they just stand without doing nothing before the guests come? Staff has to be very alert in the meeting area, when the guests arrive two different ways. Of course, they might have a system that works very well. Would be interesting to see it though. As well as the Makasiini Event Venue in Clarion Hotel Helsinki, Scandic Grand Central is renovated from an old building which is protected Finnish Heritage Agency, so it brings some restrictions to the renovating. But visually the hotel is very stylish compilation of the old building and new decorations and technology.

4.3.4 Customer journey map

Customer journey map illustrates the experience customer has on a certain period. Journey map includes the experience that customer has with a brand, product, or service. End-to-end map visualizes the customer's experience from recognizing a need all the way to either using the service again or possibly complaining about something that had gone wrong. Being a human-centred tool, customer journey map includes the contact points between a customer and a business but as well shows the key steps of an experience. This tool helps to recognize the gaps in customer experiences and to find possible solutions. (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 43.) This is why it is a good tool to place the needs and experiences of a customer to the centre of an organization (Männistö 2020, 33).

Customer journey map in Clarion Hotel Helsinki M&E department can vary depending on the guest itself and the wants and needs of that person. Events that can be held in M&E department can be anything from a simple meeting for ten people to a whole day event ending in a party with a band for 700 people. The map used for this thesis is focusing on customer journey happening in a day-time meeting because those are most common. At least in Clarion Hotel Helsinki day-meetings could even be named as the core service of the hotel's Meeting & Event department. Core services are the primary purpose of the transaction (Management Study Guide s.a).

Pre-encounter and post-encounter phases are mostly same regardless of event type. The core-encounter phase is the one having most variables depending on the event type. In dinner event for example, guests mostly spend the whole time in same meeting room instead moving around like during day-meeting.

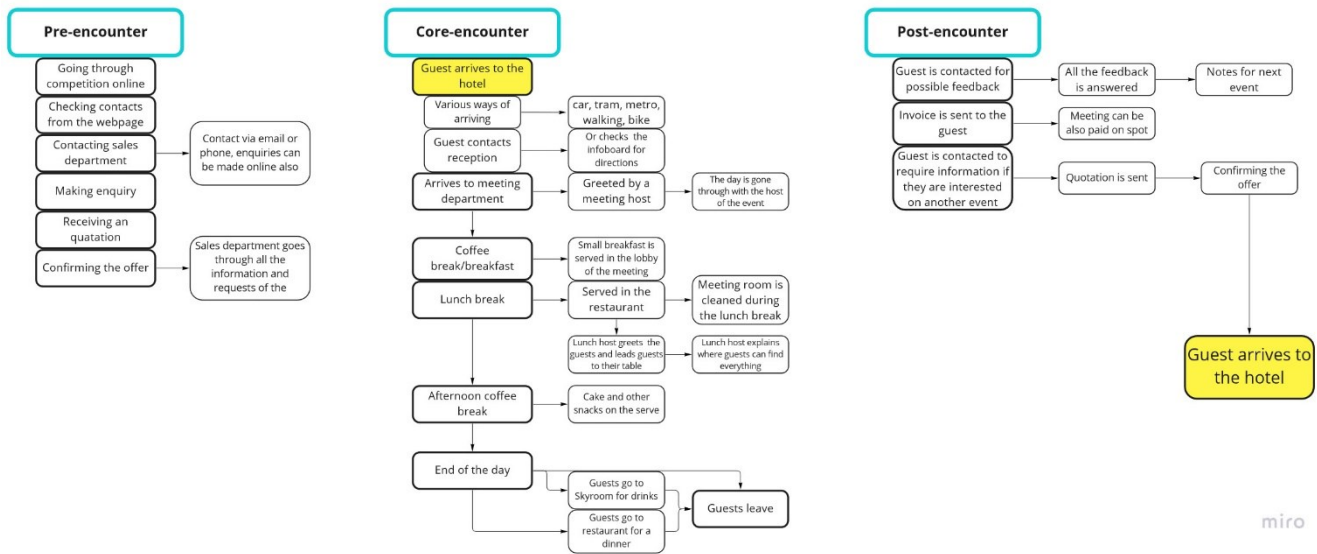


Figure 15. Customer Journey map in M&E department in Clarion Hotel Helsinki

Guest's journey pre-encounter phase starts with potential guest going through the competition, getting to know Clarion Hotel Helsinki and deciding to hold the event there. Guest can contact the sales department by phone or via email. There is also possibility to make enquiry and even book smaller meeting rooms online. Guest is still contacted by the sales department even if the online booking has been successful, there might be special prices that are not available online or details are not sufficient. Even though online booking has made booking of the events easier, most guests still like the more traditional way of calling to the in-house-sales department. When the enquiry is made, sales department contacts the guest with a quotation. Customer also has a possibility to check the facilities before deciding. After the offer is accepted, sales department goes through all the specifics with the organiser of the event. There might be only one contact or multiple contacts with the In-house-sales department, depending on the type of the event (Lehtokangas 13 April 2023). To some meetings the employees of M&E department can be included.

The core-encounter phase starts with the guest arrives to the hotel. There are multiple ways of travelling to the hotel, car, bus, tram, metro, walking or by bike. Guest can contact the hotel reception for guidance or check from the info screen where to go. Info screen is located on the hotel lobby in front of the main door. Guest can access the meeting department either with stairs or elevator and is greeted by a host of the M&E department. The host of the M&E department goes through the day with the host of the event. The day starts with the morning coffee break, where there is small breakfast served in the second floor M&E department. There is also a possibility to include hotel breakfast to the meeting. After the breakfast, guests continue to their meeting. There might a coffee break before the lunch. The next break is the lunch break. Lunch is served in the first-floor restaurant where lunch host is greeting the guests and guides them through where their

tables are and how the lunch works. While guests are enjoying their lunch, their meeting room is cleaned, and water jugs refilled. After lunch guests go back to their meeting and after that next break is afternoon break. During the afternoon break, there is some sweet and healthy snacks served for the guests. The end of the day can go various ways they can continue their day, for example in the first-floor restaurant or in the 16th floor bar. And of course, in some point they must go home as well.

In the post-encounter phase guest is contacted for feedback and possible renewal of the event. Also, the invoice will be sent normally few days after the meeting if the meeting is not paid on spot. With bigger events, hotel's in-house-sales department contacts the guest before sending the invoice, in case there is something to compensate before sending the actual invoice. These are rare, but it saves all employees valuable time to think ahead. All the post-encounters contact with the guests happens by the sales department unless the guests contact the M&E department themselves.

5 Outcome

Both Lemon & Verhoef (2016) and Männistö (2020) highlight the importance of recognizing the touchpoints of the customer journey. This includes the high peaks and the low points. Especially emphasis on recognizing the low points and how to get guests to overcome them. With the interviews, observation, benchmarking, and customer journey, can be found lot of insights about the customer journey and customer experience in Clarion Hotel Helsinki in Meetings & Events department. The interviews and observation brought up a lot of pain points in the customer journey, but at a same time, especially the interviews brought ways to overcome them. Internal communication and being present play a crucial role of making the guest experience as good as possible. With these it is possible to overcome almost all pain points of the customer journey. Benchmarking woke the question about the importance of having separate meeting reception. Some of the benchmarked hotel's did not have a meeting reception at all or it was located so that it is not necessary for guests to walk past it.

Next are presented the insights that were found about being present, internal communication, signs in the hotel, and other insights. I decided to focus to the first three because those were the most mentioned in interviews of employees and guests of the hotel. From the benchmarking rose the idea not having a meeting reception and that has been presented also in a separate subchapter.

5.1 Being present

Based on the interviews I made for the employees of Clarion Hotel Helsinki, they see as the most important thing in making the customer journey better and easier for guests, is being present and available for the guests. It is probably the biggest pain point of the customer journey but when it is done right it has the biggest effect making the guest's experience successful. Lehtonen and Lehtokangas (3 April 2023) both mentioned in their interviews the personal touch that should be in every guests' day in Meeting & Events department. Both mentioned couple of times the importance of being present in the meeting reception, especially in the morning. The guest needs to feel that they have been seen. Few of the interviewed guests pointed out that when they arrived or went to search for help no one was at the meeting reception (Guest 4 31 March 2023; Guest 5 5 April 2023). Guest 4 received help from the hotel reception and Guest 5 met meeting personnel quite quickly.

It is also important for both the guest and staff to go through together the schedule of the day in case there might be some changes. Also, for small group it is good to know if there is bigger group in the house as well. For example, big groups might jam the lunch, so for smaller groups it makes

the day go more smoothly if they can attend the lunch either before or after the big group. While going through the schedule, it is easy to help with the technical issues. Even though there is always help available, if all the guests need help with their technical issues at a same time, it takes time to reach everyone. There for it is something that can be already done before guest reach the point where they do not know how to continues themselves.

Lehtonen (3 April 2023) mentioned being present at the end of the day as well, being there to ask how the day went and saying goodbye. Ending on a good note has a great effect on having the guests back. For example, if the guest needs to pay the event at the end of the day and cannot find staff member to help, it might make the guest frustrated and leaving the hotel not satisfied to the experience.

5.2 Internal communication

Internal communication is communication that is carried out by individuals in an organization. Organization has to have good internal communication to reach its goals. Internal communication happens between employees of an organization. It is needed to keep good activity of operations. (Fakhri & Marini 2019, 46.)

Besides being present to the guests of the M&E department, the interviewees see as an important factor good internal communication and communication between guests and staff. (Lehtonen 3 April 2023; Räsänen 3 April 2023.) The conducted observation supports this outcome, especially when being present for the guests. Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) mentions in her interview that it is important for the staff of the M&E department to communicate their whereabouts especially in the morning when the guests arrive, that multiple people are not doing the same thing and that at least one person is available to guest's questions all the time.

Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) explains in her interview that guest might have one or dozens of contacts with In-house-sales (IHS) department before the actual event. This is something that Räsänen (3 April 2023) also mentioned in his interview. He said that having someone from M&E in the meetings with guests as well, would first of all improve the communication between these two departments and give the M&E department first-hand knowledge on the upcoming event. This also would help with giving the guests best possible service. The most important tool when working in M&E department in the order made in IHS department, so it is crucial to be up to date (Räsänen 3 April 2023). This again highlights the importance of good internal communication.

Lehtonen (3 April 2023) pointed out her interview that it is important to consider guest's allergies. Some allergies can have very severe symptoms, so it is crucial to communicate these well with

kitchen and mark them correctly to guests to see. Also here, IHS plays important role to have the correct allergies written in the order.

5.3 Signs

As observation and interviews prove, guests of the M&E department in Clarion Hotel Helsinki ask lot of questions about where something is. From the observation can be concluded at least that signing inside the hotel should be little bit clearer. Or in the when the schedule of the day is gone through with the guest, it could be gone through the location of toilets, restaurants etc as well. For example, in Clarion Hotel Helsinki, meeting rooms are located on a long corridor and when people are looking for toilets, it seems logical idea that toilets would be in both ends of the corridor, so signage where to find toilets would be important here. And the host is given every day a welcome letter with information so that could be updated to include this information.

Some of guests who were interviewed mentioned the info boards located in the hotel main lobby and on the 2nd and 3rd floor of the Makasiini. Either they did not notice the info boards at all, or they thought the text is too small. The same applied to the electronic signs next to the meeting rooms, especially if the event name is long, the text got way too small to read and you had to be close to the sign. Also, the location of the sign is quite high as was mentioned by one interviewed guest (Guest 3 28 March 2023), especially on the third floor of Makasiini Event venue the signs are located on top of the doors which puts them even higher than in second floor.

In Scandic Grand Central, they have similar info screen (see Figure 16.) to Clarion Hotel Helsinki, but the names of meeting guests were written lot bigger, and the text was written in white against dark background. This could be something to apply in Clarion Hotel Helsinki as well to meet the needs of the guests. Three of the benchmarked hotels Scandic Grand Central, Scandic Hub and in Radisson Blu Royal had similar to each other but smaller than in Clarion Hotel Helsinki screens placed about shoulder height again with white text on a darker background. Based on the feedback from the guests, this could be a potential option for the screens. Of course, changing the screens and their location is expensive, but it is a possibility to consider. Other option is to explore the possibility to change the type and colour of the text and the colour of the background. This could be a valid option to not spend money as much but needs technical knowledge and skills.

Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) mentioned the possibility to have someone even standing in the hotel lobby on a busy day when there is lots of meeting and hotel guests. That person could be there to tell people where to go. Especially when the info screen can be easily missed or misread if there are lot of people.

Though, in the end, it does not really matter how well the signs are done, some people still want to ask where something is or how something is done (Lehtonen 3 April 2023).

5.4 Necessity of a meeting reception?

When considering the meeting reception, from the benchmarking rose the question if it is necessary. For example, in the Sokos Hotel Tripla the meeting department is divided in two sections and the meeting reception is located so that the other side of the department can be accessed without passing by any of the staff. Also, in Scandic Grand Central, they have no meeting reception at all, so even though there is staff, they have no “natural” place to stand and wait for the guests. In Scandic Hub and Radisson Blu Royal there are more traditional meeting reception but for example in Radisson Blu Royal, the meeting rooms can be also accessed from hotel rooms without passing by the meeting reception. And Scandic Hub’s meeting rooms are divided in two different floors quite far from each other, which makes it more difficult to staff to see the movements of the guests.

Having a meeting reception makes it easier for guest to find help for themselves. During my observation phase I noticed, that even though guests were informed about a phone number where they can call if there are any questions, they still prefer to walk to the desk and ask help personally. And if there is no one at the reception they walk all the way to hotel reception to ask for help. This quite often makes the guests frustrated to have to do extra work to get help.

I want to highlight that regardless how I have evaluated in this thesis these four different hotel’s meeting areas and receptions; I know that they are professionals and most likely will not miss a guest arriving to the meeting area or to the meeting rooms. They all have their different ways of working which are not included to this thesis. This evaluation is based on what I have seen while doing the benchmarking.

5.5 Other comments

Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) mentioned in her interview that outsourced companies, such as housekeeping company or taxis, who are in tight cooperation with the hotel, are also a big factor in the customer experience. The cooperation between the hotel and outsourced companies needs to be fluent and seamless to create best possible experience for the guest. For example, if the meeting room cleaning is not sufficient enough or taxi is late, it affects the whole experience while using the services of the hotel.

In the observation phase few guests asked how to get to the elevator on the Makasiini Event venue side when the restaurant door is closed. They pointed out the bad design of having the elevator to

the event venue being behind locked door. That is true but for this there is no good solution, at least not at the moment. The door cannot stay open because of guests having access to restaurant but if it is closed, guests who need to use the elevator have no access to it.

The hotel is also quite hard to access with a car. The parking spaces in the streets have limited time and the closest parking hall is quite far away. This was pointed out by Räsänen (3 April 2023) in his interview and few of the guests in the interviews. Lack of parking space was also brought up by one guest interviewed. He said that that is the only thing that makes him consider the hotel's services in comparison to another hotel (Guest 3 28 March 2023). Räsänen (3 April 2023) pointed out that it has been a conscious choice of the hotel chain not to have their own parking space. One of the core values of Nordic Choice Hotels -chain is caring about the planet and reducing their environmental impact. (Nordic Choice Hotels 2023d.)

Räsänen (3 April 2023) pointed out in his interview about the opening hours of the hotel's other services, especially the restaurant and bars. He said that guests get frustrated sometimes when there is nothing open between the breakfast and dinner. Of course, this does not always apply to meeting guests, because they have lunch served. But they do want sometimes to have drink and there is nothing open in the hotel until the afternoon. With more wide operating hours of the restaurant and bars, hotel could serve their guests better.

The guest interviews were done during daytime so most of the guests who answered to my questions complimented the food, especially at lunch. Guests also commented how easy it is to come to M&E department because functioning and high-quality technical equipment and that there are different adapters for example for HDMI-cable (Guest 4 31 March 2023).

6 Conclusions & Discussion

6.1 Discussion

This thesis gives insights for the Meeting & Events departments in Clarion Hotel Helsinki how to develop their customer journey further and avoid the possible pain points of the journey. It explores what is customer experience and customer journey. Actions of research have been conducted with Service Design methods and the thesis follows the Service Design model of Stefan Moritz (2005). From Moritz's model I have used first three phases. To take this thesis further the next step is to start developing the ideas further, prototyping and bringing it to action with rest of the Moritz's Service Design phases. When taking this thesis further, one interesting Service Design method in reflecting insights and pain points of the customer journey could be to use LEGO Serious Play for the employees of the M&E department to come up with solutions for guests to overcome the pain points.

I demarcated this thesis to concern only day meetings in the M&E department in Clarion Hotel Helsinki and concentrated only the part when the guest is physically in the hotel. Demarcation worked well in this thesis, but I do feel that content was too narrow.

There are multiple continuations for this thesis to get more comprehensive picture of the customer journeys in the hotel. As the spending on services and experiences has grown in Finland steadily since 1990's (Figure 3.), one possible continuation for this thesis is to consider other possible customer journeys that there are with the M&E department, for example a guest coming for an evening event with dinner and a performer. Even though most of these types of events organized in the hotel are paid by a company and participants do not have to pay anything, some of them are not. Figures 3. & 4. show that people are willing to spend their money services and experiences rather than goods. Another possible continuation for this thesis could be to study the whole customer journey, starting from the first contact with the guest and ending it to the last contact.

To make this thesis more solid, I could have had more people to interview from the staff of the hotel to have more insights. Also, the interviews with guests could have been more detailed with more questions to get even deeper what the guests of the M&E department wish from the services of the department. As well, the interviews with the employees of Clarion Hotel Helsinki could have been more extensive to bring more ideas for the development of customer journey. When doing the interviews, it was surprisingly difficult not to bring up own thoughts about improving the ideas and just let the interviewee speak. It could have been interesting from the thesis results point of view to have a group interview to see how the ideas start flowing when interviewees have someone to brainstorm with. This might a good step if the research of this thesis is brought further.

As Brinkman & Kvale (2019a, 10) have mentioned in their article, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee could affect the answers given in the interview. I tried to create as relaxed atmosphere as possible to get most real answers of my interviewees. Two interviewees are equal to my status as co-worker, so there is no manager-employee relationship to affect the answers. With one interviewee being employee of mine, I tried to create a safe space for her to answer the questions as realistic as possible. The manager-employee status could affect the answers given in the interview even though the questions did not concern any personal work tasks.

To have more insights to compare the different meeting receptions in the benchmarked hotels, it would have been interesting to also interview the employees of these four hotels. The interviews could have brought some light how the meeting reception location or lack of it works for them and how they meet their guests when do not have the reception desk to stand behind.

M&E department guests interviewed for this thesis, were mostly nice enough to say that their day has gone smoothly, and they have enjoyed their stay, and they had no complaints or suggestions what to do better. Some of the people I asked, did not want to answer even few questions. I mostly did the interviews in my work clothes and one time I was in my civil clothes. People were more willing to answer when I was in my work clothes, but it left me thinking how truthful they were. Giving feedback face-to-face is not easy.

Some of the guests I asked the few questions, were guests that have been in the Clarion Hotel Helsinki multiple times and their answers were mostly that "Everything is okay, there is nothing I would want to change". These answers might also reflect that when a guest has been using certain services long enough, they become blind to the pain points in a same way as the employees. If the research is taken further, the guest interviews could focus more on the guests that are either totally new to the hotel or have been there only few times.

6.2 Conclusions

As the Figure 2. shows service industry is a big part of Finland's GDP and bringing guests experiences is part of that. As Rahimia et al. (2021) have mentioned, being in the era of experience economy, organizations compete to deliver excellent and memorable customer experiences. These are delivered especially by service organizations such as Clarion Hotel Helsinki with its multiple service offerings from reception to 16th floor sky-touching bar to the event venue originally built in 1930's. My research questions presented in the Introduction section, were answered but not in the extent that I would have hoped. Here applies as well that at least the interviews should have been more extensive.

It takes an open mind and lot of patience to deliver great customer service. It means that customers need to be treated with respect. When they are treated that way and their needs are met, these customers become organization's supporters. (Männistö 2020, 69.) From the interviews and observations can be concluded that maybe the biggest pain point of the customer journey in M&E department in Clarion Hotel Helsinki, is the signing and that guests do not know where to go. All the interviewees mentioned being present for the guests and good internal communication to help solving this pain point. Based on these comments, it can be concluded here that with good internal communication it is easier to be present to guests and help them to overcome the pain points of the customer journey. According to Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) if the day starts smoothly without any misdirection's or technical issues, ending on a good note is very achievable. In IHS department the big events are divided between the event coordinators, Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) also brought up the possibility to do the same in M&E department. Then it would be clear who takes care of the event both internally and for guest as well. One solution that Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) also suggested to solve the issue of guests not knowing where to go, was that somebody would already be in the hotel lobby to welcome guests on busy days. This procedure was in use before COVID-19, and she would bring it back now as well. Guests would have a welcomed feeling from the start, and they would be straight away directed to right direction. Hotel reception is sometimes very busy, and especially for meeting guests it is very frustrating just to wait to receive a quick answer where to go.

What can still be concluded here, it is important to keep up with good internal communication and good communication with the guests as well. Good communication skills are needed to maintain the relation with the guests (Fakhri & Marini 2019, 46). As mentioned above, it needs to be clearly communicated to the guests where to go in order to start their day on the right foot. In case of a misunderstanding or another mistake due to bad communication, guests might not come back because of a disappointment set to them (Fakhri & Marini 2019, 46).

Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) said in her interview that is important that the guests are given personal customer service, so they feel that they have been noticed. Männistö (2020, 89) highlights the importance of personal recognition so the customers do not feel that they are just numbers amongst others. Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) suggests in her interview that they could in In-House-Sales department already call few days ahead for the guest who is coming and go through the basics of the event, so that when they arrive, they feel already more confident about their event and its success.

Both Rahimian et al. (2020) and Lemon & Verhoef (2016) have talked about the importance of past experiences. It is natural to compare the past experiences, in good as in bad to the current

experience (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 3). In M&E department rate of returning guests is about 50% (Clarion Hotel Helsinki 2022), with this information can be concluded that the guests have had good past experiences with the M&E department because half of them are willing to come back. Of course, this number is not self-explanatory and does not give the whole truth about returning guests. M&E department has lots of contract clients which are “forced” to come back and in the other end are the guests who would come back but their organization requires to change the location of their events. Returning guests could also reflect on what Männistö (2020, 46) said in his book, that customer experience is becoming more important driver than price or product when buying services.

Lemon & Verhoef (2016, 77) talks about importance of partner-owned touchpoints, even though their effects on the experience are less clear. Lehtokangas (13 April 2023) mentions also in her interview the importance of the partner-owned touchpoints. She says that these touchpoints are crucial for the customer journey to succeed, if the taxi is late when leaving the hotel, it can ruin the whole day even though it would have been otherwise successful. This means a close contact and good information flow with the outsourced companies. Nowadays many hotels have outsourced their cleaning, it is important to have good cooperation with the housekeeping company. Especially to the outsourced cleaning applies what Lemon & Verhoef (2016, 77) have said about the line between brand-owned and partner-owned touchpoints can be blurred.

In the Scandic Grand Central, there is no meeting reception in either of the floors where meeting rooms are located. This feels a little weird, but has it been a conscious choice of innovative thinking? Maybe this could be something that could be worked on in Clarion Hotel Helsinki as well? The staff of the M&E department could be standing in front of the meeting reception instead of behind it when they welcome guests in the morning. As it was mentioned in the interviews of the employees, it is very important to be present for the guests. There is always a possibility of a mix up in the rooms or something else going wrong if they are not met when their events start.

Räsänen (3 April 2023) mentioned in his interview about the opening hours of restaurant and bars in Clarion Hotel Helsinki which have an affect on customer satisfaction of M&E customers as well. It would be good to have more extensive opening hours, but it brings more personnel costs and for now at least hotel has come to the conclusion that the current opening hours are sufficient enough.

6.3 Reflection

The thesis process was not easy for me and even though writing the thesis did not take much time, the whole studies could have been finished earlier if I would have started my thesis process earlier. I started my master’s degree studies in January 2020 juts before COVID-19 shut down everything

everywhere. As most tourism and restaurant industry employees, I got laid off. I was able to finish some courses but not to come up with any specific ideas for thesis. During these three years, I've been laid off two times, unemployed, and I have had four different jobs. Safe to say that it has not been easy to find a topic for the thesis, at least from the places that I worked in. Also, it was personally really hard time with a small child, restaurant entrepreneur spouse and my employment situation changing in fast pace.

I started at my current job in Clarion Hotel Helsinki about 20 months ago, and the idea of this thesis started to form in my mind. Starting the whole process was the hardest part, and due to, well basically life, I kept pushing it further and further. Finally, in the end of 2022, I was in a situation where I cannot do that anymore if I want to graduate. When I got the process started, it started to go quite well. As everyone ever writing anything, of course I got stuck with the process occasionally, but when the process had been started, it was easy to grab on to something.

When I started my master studies, I remember a teacher or guidance counsellor saying that start your thesis process as soon as possible. In that point I remember thinking that "Why? We have not even started our studies properly. I have no ideas for thesis yet". Once I actually got the process started, I understood why it would have been good to write thesis while doing the studies. There would have been so many courses really useful to my thesis and I would have been able to use the assignments as a base for the thesis. Like usually in life, you learn from your mistakes. Though I do not see myself going to school anymore (never say never). I think the biggest personal learning coming out from this thesis, is time management. Working full-time, studying, and personal life, it takes another workday to plan how all these things are managed. As probably all 90's kids, I love Disney. So, to finish off with a quote from Walt Disney that fits perfectly for my time management skills:

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questions for employees and guests of Clarion Hotel Helsinki

Employees

1. Kuka olet ja mitä teet?
2. Millaisena näet meidän asiakaspolkumme pääovelta takaisin pääovelle?
3. Mikä on asiakkaan näkökulmasta isoin kompastuskivi?
4. Entä meidän puolestamme?
5. Mitä voisimme tehdä muuttaaksemme niitä? Miten voisimme niihin vaikuttaa/parantaa?
6. Mitä asiakkaat kysyvät useimmiten?
7. Mihin he tarvitsevat useimmiten apua?
8. Voisimmeko tehdä jotain helpottaaksemme näitä asioita?

Guests

1. Kuinka päiväsi on sujunut?
2. Onko täällä mielestäsi helppo toimia? Jos ei, mitä muuttaisit?