

The Service Relationship: Literature Review

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Abstract

This article is a literature review on service relationships dealing with two important theoretical approaches in which service relationships are classified: the Perspective Approach and the Interactionist Approach. Then, a service relationship conceptualization based on the study of several definitions. This literary review also presents service models highlighting the service production process, called "servuction" in marketing literature (actors and visible and hidden parts of service production). These models also reveal relationships that are concomitant to the service relationship and which condition its success. These relationships are marked by structural tensions. We, equally, present marketing works realized by specialist authors on service relationships which deal with co-production aspects, the shortcomings and the possibilities of improving service relationships.

Keywords: service relationship, prescriptive approach, interactionist approach, concomitant relationships, co-production

Résumé

Cet article est une revue de littérature sur la relation de service selon deux approches théoriques importantes dans lesquelles se classent l'ensemble des travaux traitant la relation de service : approche perspective et approche interactionniste. Ensuite, une conceptualisation de la relation de service est réalisée à la base de l'étude de plusieurs définitions trouvées. Cette revue de littérature donne lieu également à présenter des modèles des services faisant ressortir les acteurs de la servuction tout en visualisant les parties visibles et cachées de la production du service. Ces modèles font ressortir des relations concomitantes à la relation de service et qui conditionnent son succès. Ces relations sont baignées dans des tensions structurelles. Enfin, nous exposons des travaux marketing sur la relation de service réalisés surtout par des auteurs spécialistes qui ont traité l'aspect de la coproduction, les insuffisances et les possibilités de perfectionnement de la relation de service.

Mots-clés : relation de service, approche prescriptive, approche interactionniste, relations concomitantes, coproduction

Introduction

The service relationship subject was topical in research work dealing with service production analysis in the 1990s. Many disciplines were interested in this subject: Psychology, Sociology, Economics and Management... Each research is a substantial renewal of the study subject: actors, different investigation methodologies, conceptual reviews and ways of writing work reports. Focusing on the service relationship concept means, first of all, considering the staff in contact and the customer in the co-production of service. However, it is not enough to work on the transactional and economic criteria of the service relationship.

Our approach to service relationships is multidisciplinary and rich without overlooking any theoretical contribution. We choose to focus on the subject of service management. However, it is essential to go beyond the customer's perception in the study of service relationships and to understand it as a whole.

Accordingly, the main aim of this article is to, first, present these two important theoretical approaches in which all the works dealing with the service relationship are classified under the name of the Perspective Approach and the Interactionist Approach. Then, we present a conceptualization of the service relationship while discussing the relevance of all the definitions mentioned. After analyzing the literature, we present our own definition of the service relationship. This literature review also makes it possible to present models of services in order to identify the actors of “*servuction*” while visualizing the visible and hidden parts of the production of the service, in a way to identify other relationships that influence the service relationship. Finally, we present marketing work on the service relationship carried out by specialist authors who have extensively studied this concept in service marketing.

1. The service relationship: the perspective and interactionist approach

We present the two theoretical approaches that have dealt with the service relationship. Indeed, the works dealing with the service relationship are classified into two distinct categories. The first category concerns the prescriptive current whose work focuses on the encounter between the staff in contact and the customer, who provides him with satisfaction. This satisfaction comes with respecting the organization’s procedures and standards. The second category includes works called interactionists. These works examine the interaction’s real course without considering the service relationship as the result of the prescribed procedure’s execution.

1.1. The prescriptive approach

Examination of the literature from a prescriptive approach to services reveals, a diversity of subjects covered. This field of research is far from being unified, it is described as a particularly fragmented set with a preponderance of the following subjects studied: The service relationship, the execution processes, the service rendered and the result, and the implementation of the supply system (Tannery, 2001). The following paragraphs deal with the service relationship from the traditional perspective of marketing and service management.

1.1.1. The foundation of the field: marketing

Generally speaking, Literature about the management of service that deals with all aspects of service organization management are called “service marketing” in management encyclopedias (e.g., Eiglier et al., 1997), or in dedicated books such as Lapert, (2005). This lineage is the result of the historical domination of marketing as a discipline in the field study of services.

This dominance of marketing as a discipline is related to the approach of “customer’s satisfaction” to service delivery. The client can form an opinion of the encounter with the agent in contact from the service provider company. It is a moment of truth (Normann and Blindel, 1994) of the execution of service “*servuction*”, where the customer recognizes his satisfaction. The central element for any marketing process is to satisfy the customer, this is the basic assumption (The customer returns if he is satisfied and satisfaction has an indirect relationship with the continuity of the company's activity and in reaching its revenue).

To sum up, many studies on the service relationship under the prism of the phenomenon of customer satisfaction fix the challenge at the level of the agent in contact management and sometimes even the management of customer behaviour. In other words, the management of the service relationship is limited to controlling behaviour.

1.1.2. Works on service relationship management

Often works on service relationship management focus on a special angle that makes it possible to implement all the tools and conditions that govern the appropriate behaviour of “customer-oriented” employees. On the customer’s side, the management of the service relationship provides for all the conditions that allow customers to fulfil their roles prefixed by the management of the service processes. According to Chase and Heskett (1995), “*services are a network of encounters that must be coordinated in time and space to achieve both a result and a satisfactory experience for the customer*”.

Since the 1980s, and rather in 1985 Mills asserts that greater attention must be paid to the mechanisms for monitoring the performance of employees in their meetings with customers. The behaviour of the agents in contact depends on the vision of Human Resources Management. These behaviours have an effect on customer satisfaction and, therefore, on the quality of service. Farrel et al. (2001) state that “*the evaluation of service quality relies almost entirely on the behaviours of front-office employees; organizations rely heavily on these employees to improve overall service quality*”.

Other works deal with the subject of identifying the behaviours of agents in contact (Peccei and Rosenthal, 1997) as well as their personality traits (friendliness, emotional control, etc.). Other researchers wonder whether organizational systems, standards and internal procedures make it possible to achieve “customer orientation” actions from agents in contact (Hartline et al., 2000). In this sense, the rather behaviourist prescriptive approach consists in studying the circumstances in which the delegation of power or “empowerment” (which means the autonomy of the agents in contact) (Mills and Ungson, 2003; Peccei and Rosenthal, 2000) accompanied by customer orientation managerial processes (Peccei and Rosenthal, 2000), facilitate the achievement of desired behaviours considered to have a positive effect on the customer's perception of the quality of service delivery (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). The theory initiated by Jaworski (1988) of “marketing control” has also evolved recently through the examination of the adoption by agents of a code of ethics influencing their respective behaviour vis-à-vis customers (Schwepker and Hartline, 2005).

According to Guy Bellemare, the interest of these innovative managerial practices is to design “pseudo-relationships” in accordance with customer expectations. Indeed, this author affirms that the training of agents in contact aims to show them: What attitude and behaviour to have? What to say? What emotion to display? and finally how to obtain a favourable atmosphere for the conduct of the service. At the level of these functions, resistance can manifest itself through the refusal to smile to customers...” (Bellemar, 1999).

Always with the objective of customer satisfaction, his role and his behaviour are relatively uncertain, perhaps even sometimes inappropriate during the service encounter, which is likely to have repercussions on his effective satisfaction (Beard, 1996; Bitner, 1994) and that of customers present at the same time (Lapert, 2005). It is, however, useful to specify all the elements constituting its role by ensuring that the instructions are understood. This can culminate into a strategy of “organizational socialization” of the clientele (Goudarzi, 2005), which will facilitate the integration of the client and his adaptation to the values of the company. This approach can thus be enriched by tasks that he performs himself in order to develop the content of the work (Bancel-Charensol and Jogleux, 2004). Other researches, on the contrary, reveal that the tasks performed by the customers are rather one more constraint to manage for the actors of the meeting. This involves adopting behaviours aligned with the strategic orientation. The complexity of the situation at the time of service during the encounter is related to the second place. This is a limit often mentioned when talking about scripts that define behaviours beforehand. Improving the quality of service delivery is a priority in the strategies of the service company. The script method requires staff to standardize quality. Nevertheless, this method practiced in a mechanical way is found to be dysfunctional. Indeed, it leads, on the one hand, to the neglect of service relationships and their complexity, and on the other hand, it causes intrapsychic difficulties in agents (Alis, 1998). We can see, but without deciding the discussions, that these reasonings on the tools managing this relationship are to the detriment of an overall vision of a complex relationship between the agents in contact and the customers. This relationship is not regulated only, through consumer satisfaction, from a customer orientation strategy that we are content to apply. This way of seeing is also shared with interactionist research dealing with the service relationship. It is interesting to detect the contribution of interactionist work to the service relationship in the organization.

1.2. The Contribution of Interactionist works to the management of the service relationship

The origin of interactionist work is the research of a sociologist, Erving Goffman (1968). He is the founder of the triangular model (it is made up of a requester, a repairer and a complex system to be repaired) which informs about a relationship that is especially widespread in the environment of basic agents in public services. We integrate under this interactionist banner all the works, whose discipline can be varied, but

which consists in studying the real and effective deployment of the service interaction and not dependent on a flow chart or an internal procedure to apply.

Why not limit it to a simple prescriptive approach?

Basing the service relationship solely on the intermediary of customer satisfaction accompanied by a customer orientation strategy is quite simplistic. The service relationship involves several relationships at the same time, crossed by structural tensions, namely: market relationship, wage relationship, internal relationship and even concomitant relationships. Let's find some answers in the interactionist approach. The latter brings together under its banner all the work dedicated to studying the actual course of the interaction. The triangular model of Goffman (1968), founder of interactionism has been the subject of several works to inform about the work of the basic agents (those in direct contact with the users) which is a revelation for the public organizations in the 1990s (Lipsky, 1995). The autonomy or discretion (Lipsky, 1995) of the agents in contact during the service is amplified. Indeed, the latter is, at the basis, considered a performer in the prescriptive approach (Borzeix, 1995).

From there, and according to interactionist's works on service organizations, it is useful to guarantee the quality of the service. In other words, it is necessary to review the way in which the service is produced, focusing on the specific moment of the interaction (Jeannot, 1995). The interactionist approach to the service relationship accuses the standardization of the work of the agents in contact because it is carried out to the detriment of the latter since it obliges them to assume a shift not recognized by the organization. In this way, the service relationship presents a deterioration of working conditions or denial of competence.

All in all, change lies in the importance of the place occupied by contact employees. His daily activity, in the service relationship, opposes customer satisfaction to "customer orientation" managerial indications which are not always the same. In other words, we recognize the pre-eminence of "low" level (Gadrey, 1990). *"Compared to the quality approach, the analysis of performance is not only done according to the vision of the organization's customers and shareholders. It is essential to integrate the vision of the employees in the quality assessment to increase the quality of the service without degrading the working conditions of the latter and especially those in direct contact with the customers. The deployment of service quality aims to reconcile the interests of all the company's stakeholders"* (Jougleux, 2006).

Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to start from the service interaction as it actually takes place in its complexity to re-examine the principles of its prescription. As Grosjean (2004) pointed out, exploring service interactions is possibly a promising research strategy, which consists of starting with the service relationship as it unfolds, to question the service as it is prescribed. Interactionist research on the course of service delivery has made it possible to raise the power relations between postal counter clerks and customers (Jeantet, 2003), police officers who have categorized the public (Boussard et al., 2006) and the emotional commitment of agents of associations, free of charge in a helping relationship (Weller, 2002).

Nevertheless, limits of the interactionist approach appear. First, we can talk about the exclusive focus on the interaction. In this sense, reproaches are also made to those researchers in sociology who tend to omit the organizational perspective of the social. Indeed, Valléry (2006) asserts that by focusing on interaction functions, researchers neglect the adjustment mechanisms of collective structures as well as the existing power relations between the actors of the interaction. He goes on to point out that interactionists rarely include the technical and organizational means devoted to agents in their models (Valléry, 2006). Secondly, the consideration of back-office experts is as important in the realization of the service relationship as the interaction itself.

Another approach by professional peers has also been the subject of some research. The notion of profession evokes a group that shares a similar cognitive framework, practices and activity. The professional approach to the service relationship is a possible junction between the two approaches, this is where many authors fit in, such as the case of Brivot (2007), Laing and McKee (2001).

The main aim of this approach is not to give a new understanding to the concept of profession, but, above all, to ask the question about the relationships that the proven actors of a profession may have and the structures in which they exercise (the doctors in hospitals and receptionists in a hotel reception...). This is important in the current conditions where marketing arguments have considerable weight and can counter the traditional values conferred to professionals. The conceptual authors of this dynamic are mainly linked to research dealing with the competence of agents where the concept of profession or professionalism is often mentioned.

To sum up, in the literature review we discussed that we owe a service relationship which is at the root of these three big ideas:

- On the one hand, to limit the success of the service relationship to the smooth running of this service between the service provider and the beneficiary. The “good” character coincides with the customer’s satisfaction, which can increase the market share. Nevertheless, the question must be asked if the customer’s satisfaction is the only element of the prescribed service relationship and service management.

- On the other hand, limit the service relationship to the simple follow-up of a process dedicated to a prescribed service relationship. Isn't it a complex advantage, since it depends on several parameters, not only economic, but rather related to the employee in contact with the customer because he is central and must be considered in the service. It would be more interesting to understand the way in which these choices are made at the level of all the actors of the company. These choices are gradually made, designed and thus equipped, in order to be, at a certain moment, stabilized by all the actors.

Once these approaches have been clarified, we focus in the following paragraphs on the conceptualization and characteristics of the service relationship.

2. Conceptualization and Characteristics of the Service Relationship

Several disciplines have taken an interest in defining the service relationship in order to better assimilate and understand the service experience (Lovelock and Jochen, 2004). We draw on certain relevant works in sociology and economics to discuss all the definitions given to “the service relationship”, while presenting models that best clarify stakeholders.

2.1 Conceptualization of the Service Relationship

According to Borzeix (2000) *“the service relationship is several things at the same time: an object of research, a concept, a model, a daily experience, an orientation in terms of public action, a set of initiatives that are situated between managerial practices and discourse”*. This definition, Borzeix (2000), refers above all to the richness and complexity of the service relationship as a concept.

According to Gadrey (1994) *“service relationships are interactions (relationships between human actors where the action of some influences or aims to influence the behaviour of others), which take place in connection with the provision of services, between provider agents and user agents. They are not limited to the strong moments that often constitute, face-to-face, or direct discussions. They can in certain cases exist and be studied as lasting relationships”*.

According to Meyssonier and Zakar (2016), the service relationship can be defined as *“all the exchanges between the staff in contact and the customer that occur at the point of sale during the service interaction”*.

The service relationship also originates in economics; it marks the transition from a transactional approach of services to a relational approach that is similar to management sciences and social sciences (Bourdieu, 2003). This relational approach considers the complexity of the interaction and perceives all the dimensions of the interaction between two people. This is when people have heterogeneous statuses and roles (Goffman, 1968); hence, the existence of an asymmetry of information can be the source of misunderstanding. Problems related to language exchanges (Pochat and Falzon, 2000) and language dominance are sometimes a source of comprehension difficulties or communication breakdowns. The interest in mastering languages is

major in the hotel industry because the agents in contact must communicate with tourists of different nationalities and sometimes speak only their mother tongues. The service relationship is perceived as a special mode of social relations. In addition, Goffman sees it as "a specialized professional activity". Indeed, for this researcher, the service relationship is related to a personalized service, particular care, wanted by the recipient and requiring a skill that the latter does not have.

For Gadrey and Bandt (1994), the service relationship, according to the economic approach, is primarily problem-solving. These authors are the main theoreticians of the service relationship, they were inspired by the work of Ervin Goffman (1968). For them, the service relationship is a new presentation of the relationship between a buyer and a consumer. They define the service relationship as "*a method of connection between a service provider and its customer in order to solve a problem for which it is addressing the service provider*". Bressand (1990) argues that the service relationship becomes a component of product definition and design instead of being a support for ordinary marketing. The service relationship according to this approach is not specific to the service sector. In addition, the notion of problem designates a service relationship dedicated to the after-sales service of products whose mission is to correct the shortcomings of a product. In our article, we define the service relationship as "*a stage in the provision of the service, a component of the service production process which is carried out systematically and not only in the event of a problem, failure or break in the service; it is not the service relationship that is part of the time studied in relationship marketing. Rather, it is the set of exchanges between the contact staff and the customer that occur during the service interaction*". This literature review aims to understand and analyze the concept of the service relationship in the context of "*servuction*", where service interaction forms an integral part of service delivery; whereas, the approach of Gadrey and Bandt (1994) designates the service relationship when the rupture of the service takes place because at the basis the researchers are interested in their definition in the service relationship which concerns the resolution of a problem. We do not subscribe to this approach.

Hill (1977) presents an interesting approach to the service relationship, because it is based, on the one hand, on a service that serves to transform the conditions of an individual or a good. On the other hand, it is necessarily the result of an exchange of information between the economic agents involved in the service relationship.

As an extension of Hill's approach (1977), and to support the notion of change of state resulting from the consumption of the service, Zarifian (2000) proposes a new definition, based on the notion of the value of the service- a service to understand the concept of the service production process (called "*servuction*" in marketing literature), and where he no longer speaks of economic agents but rather of service provider and recipient. Its definition is as follows: "*the service is defined as a transformation carried out in the conditions of activity and the dispositions of action of the recipient, and subject to an evaluative judgment, which can fall under four main types: judgment of utility, justice, solidarity and aesthetics*". In this sense, the employees in contact are only the advanced end of the production system (*servuction*) and of the set of professional skills where the relevance depends above all on the quality of the processes and the professional collaboration between the expert in back office, technical support and direct front office interaction (Zarifian, 2000). It is for this reason that the presentation of service models is useful at this stage.

2.2. The Service Relationship and Service Models

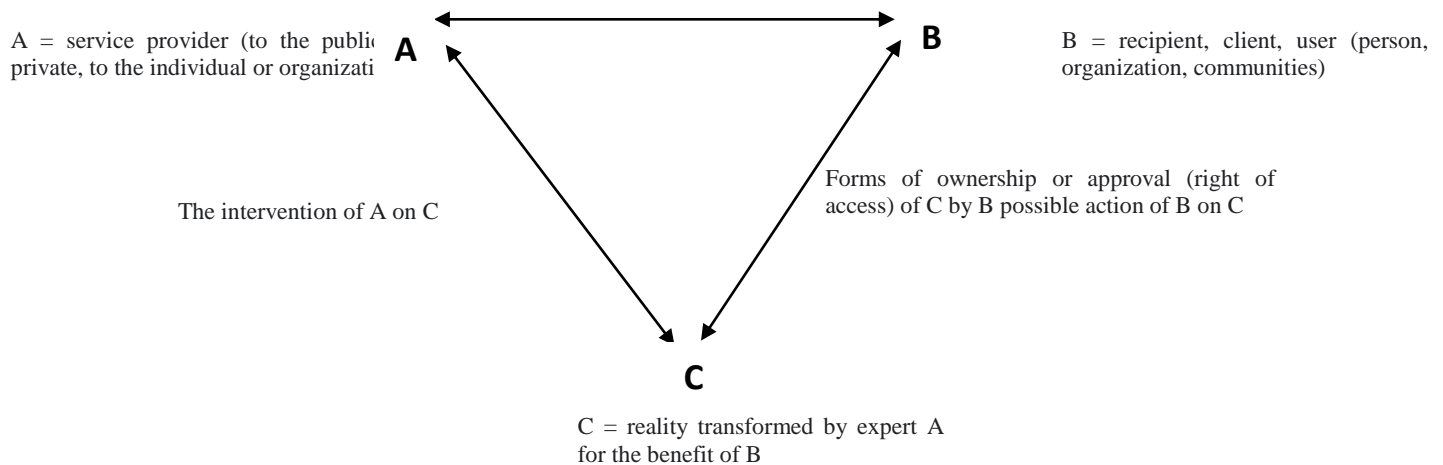
It is true that the service relationship is the face-to-face moment between the actors of the service, but it is conditioned by other organizational dimensions. Indeed, service is not only conceived in the interaction, but also elsewhere in places and times disconnected from the service interaction; hence, arises a rhombus-shaped and pyramidal service model. We see them in the following text with more detail.

2.2.1. The Service Triangle Model

The service provided by the organization is a transformation of the customer's state and the service relationship is a component of this transformed process. Gadrey (2003) asserts that a service activity "*is an operation aimed at transforming the state of a reality C, owned or used by a consumer B, carried out by a service provider A at the request of the recipient B and most of the time in relation to it, without leading to*

the production of a good that can be exchanged economically". To illustrate his definition, Gadrey (2003), presents the following illustration:

Fig. 1: The service triangle



Source: Gadrey (2003)

Reality is understood here in the sense of:

- Material objects or systems (transport activities, repair, maintenance, etc.)
- Information
- Individuals according to some of their dimensions (physical, intellectual)
- Organization, according to some of the dimensions (techniques, structures, collective knowledge)

In the following paragraphs, we present the rhombus service model created by Durand (2004).

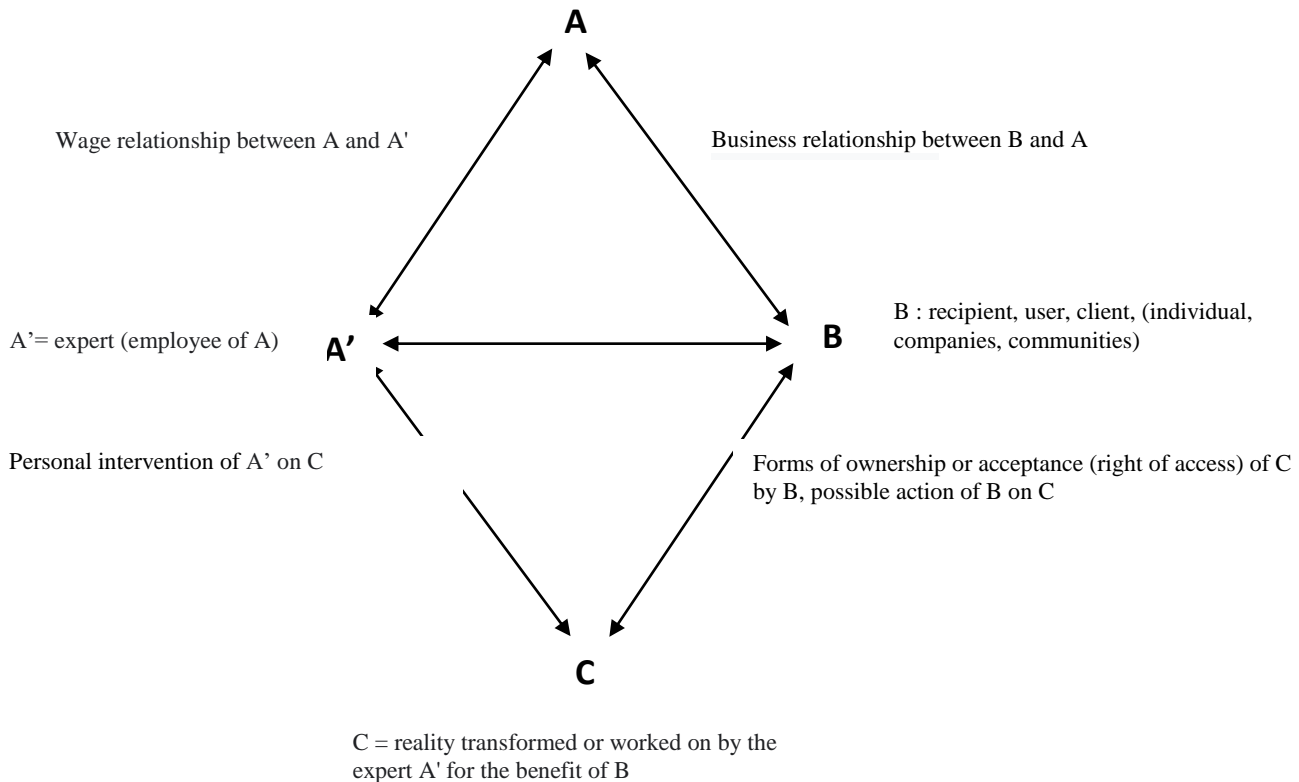
2.2.2. The Service Rhombus Model

According to the definition of Gadrey (2003), which identifies the service as a modification of the conditions of reality (C) that are owned or used by a recipient, this definition represents a triangular relationship between a recipient (B) and a provider (A) and the reality (C) to be transformed. Nevertheless, this triangular relationship offers the possibility of understanding the activity of a hairdresser, a shoemaker or a physiotherapist...

It is to be completed in the case of a hotel, a fast-food chain or a bank... This results in the intervention of a third person, an employee in the front office of the company dedicated to maintaining the service relationship. It must be admitted that the service relationship is an interaction which binds a recipient (B) indirectly with a service provider (A) because it is thanks to the intermediary (A') an expert employee of (A) that the interaction of the service is carried out.

This clarification leads Durand (2004) to add in his service model, a relationship between the employee (A') and the company (A) which is an employee relationship. He also adds the existing market relationship between A and B. These relationships combined with the triangle of Gadrey (2003) reveal a model in the form of a rhombus of the service relationship (figure 5 below):

Fig. 2: The service relationship as a rhombus



Source: Durand (2004)

The capital contribution of the rhombus model is to offer a sharp perspective of the actors which conditions the success of the service relationship. On the one hand, it demonstrates that to assimilate the involvement of expert agents in contact (A') (as Durand, 2004 called them), it is insufficient to examine the interactions instituted with customers (B) during the relationship on duty. It is also important to consider the conditions of their employment and work or the salary relationship that binds them to their employer (A). On the other hand, this model insists on the attitude of the recipient (B) towards the company (A) and, on occasion, those who represent it (A'). These relations are crossed by tensions, and the paragraphs which follow expose them.

2.2.3. The Structural Tensions of “Servuction” Actors

According to the previous lessons, there are three stakeholders in the service model: The service provider, the customer and the expert employee (the latter two are involved in a service relationship). All of these actors have divergent interests, which generate structural tensions. First, the service relationship implies a wage relationship that pits labour against capital.

The objective of the employer is to maximize the productivity of his agent in contact in order to reduce the cost. The employee, for his part, tries to negotiate an increase in his remuneration in return for the goodwill or the additional profit. This wage relationship may condition the success of the service relationship.

Then, the service relationship also induces a market relationship in which a service provider confronts his client. These two actors also have divergent interests. On the one hand, the service provider seeks to maintain the difference between its selling price and its production cost to meet its expectations.

The customer, on the other hand, seeks to personalize the service as much as possible so that it best meets his needs. It is for this reason that the notion of negotiation is important within the market relationship and the latter can condition the success of the service relationship.

Finally and according to Jeantet (2003), the service relationship leads to interaction. She perceives the service relationship as a social relationship that goes from a simple interaction in a situation of co-presence to a service relationship at the crossroads of institutional, temporal and intersubjective dimensions.

According to the assertion of Goffman (1968), followed by that of Joseph (1998), Gadrey (2003) and Durand (2004), the restorative effect of the service relationship includes three dimensions traversed by different tensions:

- A technical dimension: implies that the front-office agent needs relevant information in order to carry out his diagnosis and transform reality C. In this service relationship, the technical dimension underlines the co-production between the front office expert and the customer. One depends on his interlocutor to obtain relevant information. It is a relationship of co-dependency or reciprocal power (it is a source of tension) where the competency framework is decisive. If the front office expert has this skill set, it is easier to steer and control the interaction. Otherwise, the client is subject to piloting the intervention of the expert. This is more common in front office jobs that require low qualifications.

- A contractual dimension identifies the cost, but also the scope of action. The main tension remains in the event of contractual incompleteness either in relation to quality (ex-post evaluation given that service and consumption take place simultaneously) or in relation to price (in the event that a price range is communicated or in the case where a gap is identified in relation to the content of the service “which does what?”).

- A dimension of civility evokes marks of politeness and respect. The concept of service goes from the sense of “serving a cause” which is the noblest, to the sense of “being served” which is the most servile. According to Jeantet (2003), the word service has several uses, these are different ways of apprehending the relationship to the other, since serving refers to instrumentalization up to altruism when the service is carried out without obligations... She also emphasizes that the term service has the meaning of “rendering a service”, as it refers to an inequality between social strata which works for some to the detriment of others. In this way, a front office expert in the same activity can have the feeling of being at the service of someone, who, on the contrary, can feel that he is doing him a favour. As a result, there is a balance of power that settles in the dimension of civility. To properly assimilate it, it is necessary to take into account at least two variables: the differential at the social level and the differential at the degree of competence (mentioned above). Looking at the research of Jeantet (2003) on the social level differential, customers do not all have the same resources to bring the front office agent back into submission in a relationship of servitude. Some have assets (cultural, social, linguistic and economic) and physical attributes that allow them to inflict certain symbolic violence while respecting the principles of courtesy (Jeantet, 2003). Others lack useful resources to express their dissatisfaction. Moreover, the ruling class has all its means to put pressure on the expert. Thus, from servitude to service, there is only one finger. The tension that the dimension of civility assumes is the result mainly of the service conflict. In other words, the configuration presented by the service relationship reveals the domination of the customer (Jeantet, 2003).

In the following paragraphs, we continue with the service pyramid model produced by Tiffon (2009) which develops the relationships concomitant with the service relationship but which conditions its performance.

2.2.4. The Service Pyramid Model

At the beginning, Gadrey's triangular model (2003) highlights two actors in the service relationship, a service provider (A) and a recipient (B), by integrating a third actor "the front office expert" (A') in a model that has thus become a rhombus. Durand (2004), reveals wage and market relations that condition the quality of the service relationship. The contribution of this author is certain, but Tiffon (2009) gives birth to a pyramid model by adding back-office experts called (A'') - the one who really intervenes in the reality to be transformed.

Indeed, Tiffon (2009) assumes that the service relationship represents an interface between the company and the customer. It is very common to note that several “*servuction*” situations are resolved elsewhere than in

the front office, but rather in the back office, in order to respond to a customer's requests. Like the case of a butler who takes a customer's order and it is the chef who prepares it for him.

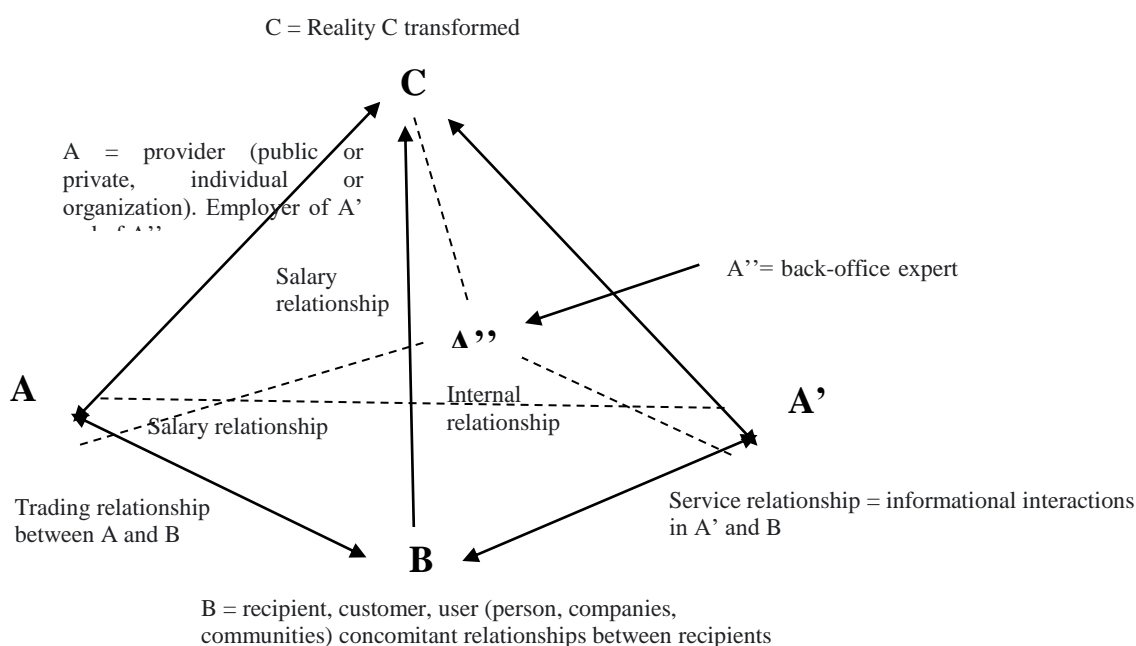
The quality of the service does not only depend on the quality of the interaction or the reception, it is also dependent on the performance of the work carried out in the back office by (A"). For Tiffon (2009) the front office includes all the staff working in direct contact with customers, they are the experts who interact in the service relationship. For the Back office, it includes all the remaining staff. In other words, all the staff who do not work in the service relationship with the recipient.

As for market, wage and service relationships, Tiffon (2009) completes the model with an "internal relationship" existing between the front office and the back office. This internal relationship is also mentioned by Eiglier and Langeard (1987), it corresponds to the relationship between the employees in direct contact and the internal organization system, the latter including management, human resources, and marketing ... of the company. The internal relationship is also subject to structural tension due to the fact that the back-office expert (A") is working on the reality C to be modified but he is not in contact with the client, it is then (A') who manages the face to face in case of dissatisfaction and satisfaction of the latter. It is now certain that what conditions the behaviour of the customer in a service relationship cannot be linked solely to the course of the interaction. The agents in contact have to face the anger of the customers despite their having nothing to do with it, it is a structural difficulty which results from the division of labour in the company.

Tiffon (2009) adds to the rhombus model the contribution of the service provider (A) to the modification of (C) because it participates in "servuction" by setting up the means of production necessary to work on reality (C). That being said, Tiffon (2009) points out that there may be concomitant relationships established between the customers present during the course of the service relationship.

To summarize, the model of Tiffon (2009), gives rise to the existence of four actors of the "servuction" of the service: the customer (B), the expert front office (A'), the expert back-office (A"), and the employer service provider providing the means of production (A). Notwithstanding this pyramid model is only valid for large companies, this is where there is really the split between (A), (A') and (A"). In this line, we can see by deduction that even employee and internal relations do not have to exist in the case of a VSE (very small enterprise).

Fig. 3: The service relationship as a Pyramid



CNB (Necessary Contribution of B) =	- BC: - Forms of ownership (right of access) of C by B - Possible action of B on C - Informational contribution at the level of the service relationship
CPA' (Productive Contribution of A') =	- A'C: possible work of A' on C - Informational contribution of A' at the level of the service relationship
CPA" (Productive Contribution of A") =	- A"C: Possible action of A" on C after the interaction - Informational relationship between A' and A''
CMP (Contribution of the Means of Production =	- AC: Support of the execution of some tasks useful for the production of the service
- - - - - The broken lines, from the customer's point of view, express that the back-office experts, and employee and internal relations are placed on the hidden side of the service.	

Source: Tiffon (2009)

After a literature review presenting the different definitions of the service relationship as well as the different service models, we identify the actors involved in this service. The essential contribution of these paragraphs is to expose models of service which reveal relations concomitant to the service relationship and which condition it. The pyramid model (Tiffon, 2009) offers the possibility of going beyond interaction between a customer and a front-office expert. The term "expert" is in favour for three reasons. First of all, it saves us from using the term professional so as not to confuse it with the sociology of professions (Dubar and Tripier, 1998), or specialist who relates to the medical figure type (Goffman, 1968), neither salaried nor civil servant so as not to be limited to the public or private sector. In addition, it has a connotation of competence and mastery that the worker has for his work. Beyond the interaction, the service relationship is, globally, the moment of truth in the production of the service. This is where the contribution of the pyramid model is conclusive, given that it reveals the service, internal, wage and market relations linking all the actors of the service production. Furthermore, these relationships are steeped in structural tensions.

The aspect of co-production in the service relationship is widely studied in service marketing by Eglier and Langeard. In the following paragraphs, we present the contribution of these authors to the service relationship.

3. The Service Relationship in Marketing

In service marketing, research on the service relationship focuses mainly on the employees in contact and the effect of the latter's skills on customer satisfaction in the provision of services, in general. The first authors interested in this field are Eglier and Langeard (1987) who conceptualize service as an experience. During a service delivery, the customer examines a series of service interactions (Eglier and Langeard, 1987; Gronroos, 1990). In other words, specific times when he is in direct contact with the service organization. The service encounter is a moment of truth, it is defined as an interaction between the various resources of the organization and the customer. During the service interaction, the customer is put in front of the company's "servuction" system components. It can be either physical support, the employee in contact or both at the same time.

The papers affirm that the majority of service organizations train agents in operational contact, while they are left to their own devices concerning relationships, each reacting according to his education, his culture, his intuition or his sensitivity (Eglier, 2004; Douillach et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, relational skills are decisive in the management of the service relationship with the customer and a relational failure can hinder the technical quality of the service and by deduction compromise customer satisfaction as well as the brand image of the organization. It seems that the complexity of managing employees in contact lies in the appropriation of relational skills.

In services, the service relationship is not a choice, the exchange is only effective when there is direct contact between the customer and the company, at least a minimum of interaction. Eiglier and Langeard (1994) devoted themselves to the study of this interaction which is no less than the service relationship.

This interaction is variable, it has neither the same duration nor the same content, and nor the same frequency because each service situation can be unique. Eiglier and Langeard (1994) present a list of characteristics which is not exhaustive, but sufficiently stable to serve as an identity card describing the service relationship:

- The service relationship is not accidental; it is always motivated by an objective or an intention
- It is a relationship that often induces a skill or a profession
- This interaction necessarily requires the presence of people who do not know each other
- The field of interaction is designated by the type of service and the actors in this relationship have little freedom to leave it
- The information shared during the service relationship is a combination of decisive data for the production of the service and informal exchange, the amount of each type of information is very variable
- The role of each protagonist is well designated in the service relationship

The service relationship is far from being an improvisation, it conditions the design and installation of the service offer. It is first necessary to tackle the concept of co-production in the service relationship.

3.1. Co-production in the Service Relationship

The research of Eiglier and Langeard (1987) on service production or “servuction”, offers the possibility of having an additional approach to complete the vision of the service creation process. These authors expose the systemic effect and the essential relationships between the components that form the co-production. They are, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs: the physical support, the employee in contact and the customer, the service and the internal organization system of the organization. A change at a component level implies a transformation in all components and relationships. This explains the complexity of having consistent quality. The latter is even more complex if we add to it the power games that Gadrey (1994) emphasizes as inherent in the service relationship. At this level, the co-production will be perceived as relevant as the role interpreted correctly by the employees in contact and the client at the time of the face-to-face. It is the middle manager who must ensure the smooth running of this co-production. According to Julien (2005), co-production can be conceptualized as the moment when the protagonists participate in the realization of the offer. It is divided into three main stages of intervention: pre-design, co-design, and co-production. The co-design stage indicates the moment when the offer is established, and even the extreme limit of the personalization of the offer. Carton's (2004) definition of the concept of co-production is as follows: "a relational and technical joint production within the scope of a service offer defined at the base by the supplier". Indeed, the active participation of the customer in the co-production of the service constitutes a main dimension in the service relationship. We can cite as an example the relevant information given by the customer at the interface, which will help to understand the customer's request or need. The service relationship cannot be limited to a simple commercial relationship. Indeed, it is broader since it integrates the process of production and consumption of the service. This is a relationship that Eiglier and Langeard (1994) call “the global relationship”. The management of this relationship encompasses the role of the client

as co-producer of the service delivery. The service relationship forces marketing first not to reason in well-defined functions but rather in process. The simultaneity of the production and consumption functions of the service implies a division of operational responsibilities. The control of supply and demand in a rigid context linked to capacity forces marketing actions to manifest opposite qualities. On the one hand, reconciling the event with the market situation with flexible intervention, on the other hand, conscientiously testing the effect of these actions on the service relationship. Managing this state of affairs requires strong collaboration between human resources, marketing and operations.

Customer satisfaction and his perception of performance are, undeniably, linked to the production process of service delivery. According to Eiglier and Langeard (1994), how the service actually happens is just as important as the end result. During the service, the customer will keep clues to himself and then associate them with his overall experience of the same service. The negative or positive effect of these “life sequences” generally outweighs the cold evaluation of the result. The signs accompanying the service relationship are, for example, the use of the formal name addressed. But, the common way is to limit oneself to "Hello Madam, Miss or Sir”.

The management of the service relationship is an essential component of customer orientation, which particularly favours the elements constituting satisfaction. In services, it is essential to achieve final performance compliance but alone is not enough to achieve customer satisfaction. It is also necessary that the service relationship experienced meets the customer's expectations.

Along the same lines as this observation, it is interesting to focus on the role played by the customer in the production of the service. Whether active or passive, the client contributes to the preparation, execution and control of certain tasks. This is the operational side of the service relationship. Are we allowed to improvise? can we recognize the roles wanted by the client, without imposing our choices? It is essential to manage the role of the customer in the production process of the provision of the service. The customer is one of the elements forming the service system. According to Eiglier and Langeard (1994), it is necessary to approach service managers and share with them a good mastery of segmentation or the propensity of the customer to contribute to the execution of operational tasks.

In summary, the theoretical contribution is of capital importance since it goes from marketing to all the disciplines that deal with service management, where their capital meeting point is the service relationship. According to Eiglier and Langeard (1994), the service relationship is particularly important, but its management faces several obstacles, including the significant gap between marketing practices and discourse. Service relationship management encounters other obstacles, which we will discuss in detail in the following paragraphs.

3.2. The Shortcomings of the Service Relationship

It is always interesting to see a research review devoted to the importance of the service relationship and to focus on the determinants of the quality of this relationship. Unfortunately, a significant gap exists between rhetoric and practice. According to Weller (2002), the service relationship is only a slogan that sometimes loses all its meaning. This observation evokes the hypothesis that this relationship is capable of having a model scale, not in the sense of representation to be followed, but in the perspective of exposing the articulations that maintain between them the different dimensions of work (Ughetto and al., 2002). Optimizing the service relationship requires long-term maintenance of firmness in the construction of the service system (prescriptive approach) and in the content of the offer. The previous failures in a pinch are still there. They are related to commercial habits (the captive customer) or the form of exploitation (mixing different customer segments). Other obstacles are added. They are related to the shift in the life cycle of the service in comparison to its production process. Other strategic choices can also be obstacles to rigour, such as the case of alliances.

3.3. Opportunities for Improving the Service Relationship

Proximity or mass services constitute a substantial part of service situations. The human service relationship has disappeared giving way to ATMs (Automated Teller Machines). Managing the service relationship in a

relevant way in this context consists in assimilating its operational and social consistency; taking the best of new technologies and ensuring the service relationship when the need arises. Finally, it is to promote the idea among the public that there will be fewer service relations, but, above all, there will be better service relations.

A service relationship can be distinct depending on the segment. This distinction builds the service relationship according to the targeted segment or by a distinction of service relationships in each point of contact.

Every sign is apprehended in a service relationship. The management of signs is based on the identity of customers, which is classified into three areas: market indifference, bureaucratic anonymity and tertiary friendliness. Through attitude and communication, the company has to send a message of solidarity or a declension of the customer's domination.

The management of social relations, inevitably, has an effect on the management of the service relationship. It is obvious that if social relations deteriorate, any problem becomes a conflict and everything is settled by strikes. The service relationship in the midst of all this certainly deteriorates; hence, the interest of research in the sociology of work.

Two criteria of the service relationship, uncertainty and unpredictability, must absolutely be considered in its management, as well as the usefulness of implementing crisis management within a very short span of time.

To sum up, a centralized operating approach causes an alienated spirit in the interface staff and deteriorates the service relationship. Several market activities, whose structures are centralized, have compensated for the possible coldness of the interface by standardizing emotions. We can cite restaurant chains. Finally, some organizations have chosen employees in contact with a high level of competence. They preferred decentralization while developing the formation and self-management of emotions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to carry out a literature review on the subject of service relationships. We note that this literary review comes from different disciplinary identities, which explains the rarity and the difficulty of dialogue around a common subject "the service relationship" perceived from different perspectives, objectives and means. We first have discussed the important theoretical approaches in which all the works dealing with service relationships were classified. We further presented the prescriptive approach whose research on the service relationship comes from service marketing. We mainly focused on the employees in contact and the effect of the latter's skills on customer satisfaction. Then, we concentrated on the interactionist approach based on works in Sociology and Economics. It considers that the service relationship involves several relationships at the same time, traversed by different structural tensions.

Accordingly, a definition of the service relationship was formulated after a discussion of all the definitions presented. We identified several relationships that are concomitant to the service relationship and that condition the success of the service relationship. These relationships are:

- A market relationship
- A salary relationship
- An internal relationship
- A concomitant relationship between the customer and the other customers presents on-site at the moment of service

These models highlight actors of "*servuction*" and other relationships that influence the service relationship.

Jeantet (2003) perceived the service relationship as a social relationship that goes from a simple interaction in a situation of co-presence to a service relationship at the crossroads of institutional, temporal and intersubjective dimensions. It integrates at least three stakeholders who have divergent interests, which generate structural tensions.

We Finally, pointed out marketing works on the service relationship as carried out, especially, by Eigliers and Leangeard (1994) who have extensively studied this concept. These authors highlight the importance of the concept of co-production between the agent in contact and the customer. They also evoked the shortcomings of the service relationship while revealing the possibilities of improving this same relationship.

This article is a literature review of service relationships as a concept. Future lines of research can focus on the control of performances of these relationships, given their importance for the success of the company, by an empirical study and in a given service context.

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