

In Situ Research: Statements on Contemporary Service Research Methodology

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Introduction

This paper addresses alternative ways of conducting service research that get closer to the research phenomenon and aims at a more valid representation for better theory building. It relates to the discussion in recent thinking in the discipline of service research on how to advance existing methodologies, not just 'methods'. Basically two questions are addressed: 1 What is this phenomena called service, and 2 How can we learn more about it? The discussion is influenced by the fact that so many service researcher today talk about "value-in-use", i.e. the kind of value consumers experience while using service, but still tend to apply research methods limited to examine "value-ex-use", i.e. informant responses of value before or after the very service experience. The most up-front evidence of this is the bulk of studies using survey and interview methods beyond the service situation and service experience, a methodological tradition that for quite some years have be problematized and in turn led to an increase in applying approaches such as practice-theory studies in order to understand and explain the complexities of service processes, service organizations, and consumers everyday lives. The paper discusses some methodological matters

and addresses a somewhat new direction for service research, here labelled *In situ methodology*.

Occasionally researchers prompt reflections on how far a discipline has developed and how far, and where, it has still to go. The area of service research has been established and during the decades been fertilized by different perspectives for developments. Much influence comes from the broader area of market research (mostly from private and commercial sector and less from public and non-profit sector). Service research has continuously been changed due to different and changing conceptualizations of what is a service, how to understand it and grasp the essence of how value is realized. The discussion here will mainly be built on some of the recent conceptual developments linked to the concept of 'value co-creation' and its implications for how to conduct and advance service research.

A specific focus of this paper is the implications for collecting and analysing data. A major implication of the value co-creation and value-in-use argument put forward by Vargo and Lusch (2004) and many others before and after their seminal work, is that customers understand, perceive or realize value when they use services or products, and for that reason research could benefit from staying close to that situation. This paper will argue for this *situation* as the crucial point of departure for all type of service research. The situation is the locus of the first order value experience, both positive and negative, and a place where informants (a better word for respondents) in fruitful ways can contextualize and specify their experience. Taking the given situation seriously we have reasons to pave the way for different forms of *in situ* methodologies. Before a profound discussion on these matters, six somewhat

provocative statements are put forward as points of departure. They address ontological, epistemological, and methodological matters and provide some historical context.

1 Research have had a vague understanding of what service really is

What is the argument for this somewhat arrogant statement, facing the fact that service research is heavily demanded in society, industries are “servicizing” and distinguished scholars agree on the service (dominant) logic? At the time of the acknowledged birth of service marketing, and for the following decade, the common way to discuss services was to distinguish services from goods on a number of attributes (Shostack, 1977). Scholars thus shaped the service management thought by the means of the goods and services dichotomy¹. The intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (IHIP) characteristics served as loyal companions in several academic battles to establish the research field of services (e.g., Bateson, 1979; Parasuraman, *et al.*, 1985). Few of the critics, however, felt compelled to publish their arguments which thus appeared as verbal criticism by reviewers and conference participants (Brown *et al.*, 1994). One of the few published criticisms argued that the taxonomy of goods versus services was dysfunctional (Wyckham *et al.*, 1975). Relating services to goods could be dysfunctional because it plausibly rules out inherent characteristics of services that lack a dichotomy counterpart in goods (Lindquist and Persson, 1997). This has also remained a main argument for service marketing critics, who frequently have argued that services are not different

¹ It first appeared in the dissertation of Johnson (1969), where he asked, “Are goods and services different?”

from goods, and that the identified service characteristics are not in fact unique to services (e.g., Alvesson, 2000; Hjern, 1990).

Perhaps the fact that quality as one early main foothold of service research (Brown *et al.*, 1994) was developed out of the quality management movement in manufacturing industry (Deming, 1986), played a significant role for the establishment of the dichotomy paradigm. It was argued that since services were not produced in factories and later consumed by the customer, services did not have the same characteristics. For example, traditionally the role of marketing is to bridge the gap between production and consumption, and therefore the marketing mix management and having a specialized marketing department is logical and effective (Grönroos, 2000). The gap, however, is not explicit in a service context. The argument for IHIP was logical at first, and pedagogical to use. The argumentation was even necessary as the history had favored a goods-oriented paradigm, due to the fact that value has been equal to “stuff” for centuries (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). Nevertheless, the argumentation led to researchers indirectly concentrating their efforts on what a service is not, which again could be dysfunctional as it may block out important aspects of services.

Today, it is not a radical point of view that some service management thinking 10 or 15 years ago left IHIP². In the current S-D logic era, after the value co-creation turn, it is sad to hear service researchers still use the standardized list of IHIP or components of it when motives are presented for conducting their research. Not many years ago, Grönroos (2003) argued that introductions of articles in journals

²For insights on this subject; see Brown *et al.* (1994), or Fisk *et al.* (1993).

begun with some of the IHIP arguments to justify the special service research approach on a situation. At the opening panel-session at AMA ServSig Conference, Reims in June 2003, several influential service researchers argued that service research has not had any greater impact on practice and expressed disappointment over the misunderstandings of the early service research thought. If this is a correct description, it indicates that a large degree of service research has failed and implicitly blames the IHIP for not delivering enough insight worth considering to companies. This is a discouraging reality for a research field whose contributors are believed to work close to practice with the expressed interest of having a direct influence on management (Brown et al., 1994). Some of the ballast of service research we can heave overboard, especially management research built on anecdotal data and literature-driven *à priori* conceptual research designs, that may fall into the trap of limiting research efforts to reproduction of constructs and models with vague or no empirical grounding. The recent S-D logic (or service logic) paradigm, built on some of the early roots in service research in the late 70's and early 80's, is a renewed attempt to grasp the very essence of what service really is (the ontological aspect) by addressing the fundamental aspect of 'co-creation' or 'interaction' as the main mechanism for value production.

2 Research has confused the service sector with the service perspective

An original aim of service research was to offer management an alternative strategic approach regarding the new competitive situation. Service marketing was mainly to be conceived of as a perspective (cf. Grönroos, 2001; Levitt, 1972; 1976; Shostack, 1977) not just something that could replace the word 'product' in the 4p marketing mix model. Unfortunately, practice seems to have adopted service marketing as a

special case of product marketing while marketing according to a service perspective for many years have been viewed as a mission of everyone in an organization (Gummesson, 1998). It is a way of thinking and behaving, not just an issue of distributing responsibility, such as establishing a separate marketing department (Grönroos, 2000). It is strategic perspective that departs from, and is structured in relation to, the benefit offered to the customer. This is a somewhat different ontology with complicated organizational matters.

A perspective is open to every organization to adopt and use which in turn is quite different to the view that service marketing principally concerns a service sector with its special conditions. The definition of a service sector has mostly been from an economic and political science point of view³ and has been used by service research to, for example, justify the study of services. In the beginning, that definition was apart from both the marketing and the service perspective, which intended to handle competitive aspects that traditional marketing did not (Shostack, 1977). It has even been suggested that defining services, as something provided by a certain type of organization, is not only outdated but also misleading for business managers (Grönroos, 2000). Today, we can trace conceptual shifts in service research, from perceiving services as *specific cases* in the market, overperceiving *service aspects* from a given viewpoint in different kind of business, to addressing service as a *perspective* viewing business as services, and more recently view service (dominant) logic as a perspective of value creation in all types of industries (private, public nonprofit). The shifts are linked to different conceptions of our socially

³ Whereas there are definitions of the service sector within service research, it is an area lately suggested to be in great need for improvement as it is inconclusive (Menoret *al.*, 2002).

constructed reality. All, more or less new conceptions of the object of study, will have implications for research and R&D activities.

3 Service research needs to focus the inherent characteristics of service

Even though few efforts have been made to develop complementing approaches to IHIP or the dichotomy thought, there have been suggestions as to how service research could move forward. Researchers have pictured services as being contextual and situational dependent on a continuum, where a product is closer to one end, i.e., an offering is composed of tangible and intangible dimensions (Bateson and Hoffman, 1999). Shostack in the late 70's acknowledged the difficult task of defining a pure service as separate from a pure good and instead argued for a different view on how to market a service (Shostack 1977). Depending on how a commercial product is recognized, which in this case inhibits physical or mental elements, will affect how to market the product. A Bang Olufsen stereo, for example, can be as intangible (the feeling of owning the extraordinary piece of sound machine and artful design) as any service like a restaurant, which in turn often relies on goods (the place, the primaries, seating comfort, etc.).

Another argument made is the notion of the 'missing product' that departs from the service itself (Grönroos, 2001; Lindquist and Persson, 1997). The question raised in this approach is what does the customer experience with a service if there is no physical product? It suggest that customers experience and perceive the process they are involved in as a user or consumer of the service. The notion of involvement in the process is characterized as an interaction between the customer and the company (Cook, *et al.*, 2002; Lindquist and Persson, 1997). This description of a

service is here defined as departing from the inherent characteristics of a service and not a good.

Outside the IHIP service characteristics services have, in order to be realized, been distinguished by the interaction between the customer and company, which follows from services being simultaneously produced and consumed (Normann, 1984). The interaction (i.e., the moment of truth) means that the customer plays an interesting and multifaceted role in the service organization in serving as a participant in production and delivery (Normann, 1984). Thomke (2003), for example, argued for a different view on service development compared to product development, as he emphasizes that service development needs to be considered live and in the moment of truth. In line with this, most scholars state that services are activities, deeds, or processes and interactions (Lovelock, 1991; Solomon *et al.*, 1985; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000) but such conceptualizations are quite unprecise. In relation to the amount of skepticism that the 'IHIP package' has received, the 'prosumption' nature of services (Toffler, 1980) has been appreciated by the research community as an argument for service research, one of the roots for the contemporary notion of 'co-creation' as interactions with resources. Instead of concentrating efforts on what a service is not, the face-to-face meeting (i.e., the moment of truth) as the archetype of services has implicitly been proposed to enfold the service nature as an interaction (Lindquist and Persson, 1997). Service encounters have even been defined as the interaction process between the server and the served (Cook, *et al.*, 2002). To conclude, there are good arguments for the contemporary service (dominant) logic conceptualization of the service phenomena as co-created. It is not just another view of the phenomena; rather a more profound and better ontology.

4 A service equals interactions

Services are inherently relational in character as any service organization always interacts with its customer (Grönroos, 2000). If we depart from the service as being an interaction, we will probably come up with different research questions than in the “this-is-not-a-good” paradigm. For example, researching a healthcare service without having a clear understanding of the ‘nature’ of service or viewing it as some kind of mystified holistic entity, may lead to research questions on how this ‘entity’ is perceived and managed by organizations, service employees or customers and how it in turn influence their well-being, satisfaction or end-states (e.g. health). While researching this service as ‘interaction’, other research issues may be elicited, such as what constitute the very interactivity between actors, how is the interaction structured and produced, what interaction elements, actions, configurations of sub-activities, environmental cues, or other ‘touch-points’ etc. create value and what elements destroy value on customer level, employee level, or organizational level? Value is not always co-created (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011).

As the traditional and conceptual boundary between ‘pure’ services and manufactured goods gradually fades away, the rationale of service research has been questioned. The above described ‘nature’ of services, however, puts the interaction between a customer and an organization into focus, and also serves as a key distinguishing impetus for service development (Bitner *et al.*, 2000; Grönroos, 2000; Lindquist and Persson, 1997; Thomke, 2003). Consequently, the heart of service operations and service management is how the interaction is managed and

how the production process and consumption process is matched in order to satisfy involved actors, not only the customer. For sure, what is “processed” in the interaction is more than time. It includes issues such as sensemaking activities and construction of symbolic meanings.

The service-centered logic implies that value is ultimately defined by and co-created with the customer and determined by the customer on the basis of value-in-use, rather than embedded in predefined output (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). The service-centered model describes an active customer involved in the service performance, interacting with personnel, service script, and/or supporting tangibles implying a need to develop close and trusting relationships. Relations and processes are based on and constructed by interactions, and not vice versa.

5 Interactions are in situ experiences

Once upon a time before any service research was conducted, the needs of people were identified in the very interaction between buyer and seller. This was made in the market place. But as the idea of reaching scale were developed, companies and customers were forced apart and a need to “investigate the customer” arose. Market research was born. The task was to be informed by the customer by using different methods especially before and after purchase and consumption. It became difficult to get access to the very interaction.

By this arrangement a wide range of problems were facing managers. There was a need to develop methods to communicate to and from actual and potential consumers. This was made most effective by using *à priori* categorized schemes of

questions (surveys) in a written and standardized format. The scripted communication became the 'tunnel' to consumers. A rich flora of literature on how to construct surveys, scales and items in a manageable way was developed. Although such manuals are of great merits, managers developed a tradition of constantly neglect the type of communication that are provided in interpersonal interaction and specific situations. The wide range of non-verbal modalities, multimodal communication and contextual cues were not used for information on and understanding of what is important for consumers. Consumer analysts and researchers were forced to simplify the life worlds of consumers and use *a priori* constructs for measuring their so called 'behaviour'. This, inspite the knowledge that humans normally use a myriad of other modalities when to express themselves. Many aspects of consumption experiences are difficult to express in words or by clicking at a predefine response. Interviews, focus groups and case studies have more useful capacities of grasping the 'authentic' individual or social reality of customers. Still, methods such as these have weak links to the implicit situation investigated. The contextual factors the situation provides are not fully captured and opportunities for more in-depth analyses and theory-building are lost.

The obstacles of understanding the customer, because of ineffective research methodologies, have implications for industry, especially for service developers. The obstacles are associated with the distance between an organization and the actual users of products and services. The concept of mass-production often results in a separation of the researcher and the researched, with no or very constrained dialogue. Service organizations may argue that they are customer oriented, but in reality have quite a distance to them or having a distorted theories about them. In

order to transfer knowledge, as in product and service development, it is thus essential to overcome the gap that has emerged (Griffin and Hauser, 1992; Li and Calantone, 1998). A consequence of this gap is the separation of market information from market communication, two sides of the marketing management coin. Going back to the situation and taking a closer look on what is happening using methods that can be applied *in situ*, will be a way of collecting more relevant and contextual data. Services provide excellent opportunities for such studies and developments due to the nearness of customers, providers and other actors. The richness of the situation, its actors, discourse, and meaning provides potential resources for in-depth analyses, better interpretations, more relevant hypotheses, more insightful explanations and ultimately more valid theories.

6 Serviceresearch overlooks the theoretical premises inherent used methods

In the literature of service research we find descriptions of different methods relevant for collecting data. Such descriptions are implicitly based on some kind of understanding of the service phenomena. Here the reasoning folds the idea that individual researchers and developers always has a theory of the phenomena they are working with. However, in published research such premises are often not made explicit, and are often overlooked. The relation between 'data' and phenomena is not self-evident. Managers and researchers will have validity problems if the gathered 'data' (based on a set of main stream *á priori* concepts) is not reflecting the intended phenomena. All concepts (constructs) have a history and are, explicitly or implicitly, used as a mental grid for interpretation. In article reviews we too often find propositions and theoretical models to be tested that more or less is built on earlier

literature, with no or limited grounding in the empirical field in which it is said to have explanatory power. To blame a limited access to data or earlier literature are bad excuses. The result is a flora of preliminary knowledge with vague or no proper empirical grounding. The very choice of research approach determines what could be found. Traditional quantitative approaches are very productive in investigating and constructing the consumer reality, but validity will always be a problematic issue.

Blind tests have serious weaknesses when we want to understand consumers. In laboratories and blind test experiments the natural context is excluded. This is a problem. The natural occurring context has important keys for a proper understanding and valid interpretation. When important aspects for the consumers in natural occurring situations is excluded in a study, important aspects of the phenomena are missing. Such approaches produce or verify distorted theories. *What* is measured before, during and after a situation are not the same thing. Perceptions, meanings and opinions differ due to when the respondents are responding. Yes, the separate perceptions (results) are overlapping to some extent but they correspond to different parameters.

A common idea among researchers is that if we triangulate (using different methods to fix the phenomena) we can compensate for not being close to the situation. This, however, is built on ontological assumptions of stability; the 'object' does not change using other techniques of data collection and in another situation. Sometimes, results are non-consistent, do not overlap in the way we want. It looks like different methods have different capacities to determine phenomena and therefore different capacities to produce good theory. One can even argue that different methods grasp different

phenomena or at least grasp different levels of it. This because each method is bound to a specific choice of communication, such as formulation of items, questions, scales etc. Whatever types of communicative modalities are used, specific discourses are addressed and/or used, specific premises are used which in turn is linked to specific discourse. It is extremely difficult, maybe impossible, to use exactly the same construct in different items or questions. Even if the same construct is used the meaning differ depending on the cognitive context it is used within and the specific social context at hand. Contextual factors that influence the response situation is clearly described in standard textbooks on methodology. Though, the existence of these influence factors give as a result that what is measured with different methods is not the same thing. When the situational context is more or less the same, there is a higher level of correspondence between the chosen constructs. But, changing the situation is to change the study phenomena.

Normally the data collection phase is followed by a quite brushy and wriggle process of shaping the results and interpret what it means. So, arguing for triangulation on the basis of using different methods has somewhat false grounds. The argument may not be empirical, rather philosophical or epistemological. Maybe we can prove empirical differences between different methods. Comparing methods and produced results in a systematic way could shed light on the issue. However, such attempts are also limited by empirical and contextual situation at hand. So the argument against triangulation maybe just philosophical.

In the methodology literature, researchers focus on discussing strengths and weaknesses with different methods. Problems are highlighted and acknowledged.

But it seems that the relatively weaknesses of methods are seen as something manageable (and acceptable). Traditional research methods (specifically quantitative survey techniques) are supposed to have the capacity to compensate for such problems. This is to accept a given (lower) level of data quality. This is not to take these matters seriously. In both quantitative and qualitative methodologies there are techniques to take care of “major distortions” and these measures are often looked upon as sufficient, meaning ‘It’s the best we can do.’ Well, that may be true but we could add “...within the framework of chosen research approach.” If the argumentation in this paper holds, there is a need to in more in-depth discuss and problematize the methodological issues. As a research community we may reach a more authentic understanding of our study phenomena by getting more close to service interactions. Grasping such authenticity, followed by analytical work unearth the crucial mechanism that describes and explains the service phenomena and its outcomes.

Discussion

This paper argue that we should consider a somewhat new direction for empirical service research, based on the notion of a service (dominant) logic where value is co-created in interaction. The specified ontology urges us to develop methods and use methodologies that (better?) account for the service phenomena as co-creation, its character and links to other elements. The question mark indicates the philosophical question of if it is possible to reach a better scientific understanding or such attempts only provide ‘another’ understanding. Are changes in scientific knowledge due to changes in perception of reality or changes in perception *per se*? Do concepts, narratives, models we as scientists use really correspond to something outside itself?

Are all scientific constructions equal with reference to validity or is it just a matter of aesthetics or hegemonic power? Many volumes have been written about how theoretical or political positions, either implicit or explicit, shape the research task. Contemporary postmodern thinking challenges the very basis for what is knowledge and the possibility of reaching better knowledge. It addresses the limitation of human knowledge pointing to the link between mental processes (thoughts) and human language (communication). Deconstruction, i.e. the reflective turn of social science texts made by postmodern anthropologists, denying the possibility of universal laws, could be as emancipating as it can be the end of the scientific endeavour. Increasing the sensitivity to situational and contextual issues is a way to navigate in the multi-paradigmatic field of service research.

In the contemporary research community of service research we hear voices calling for an even more profound understanding of the customer and what really produce customer value-in-use. A problem when we formulate ambitions such as “arriving at a better and deeper understanding of the customer’s value co-creating” or “getting more close to customer processes and service interactions” is that we deliver a lot of assumptions about what phenomena has priority in investigations. In service research it concerns issues such as what is measured, when we measure, where we measure, who we measure, by what tools we measure etc, and if the answers/responses we get in adequateway reflect the reality we are interested in. Here is argued that service research has gained important developments on the complex phenomena of service production. We think that the field has arrived to a point where the conception of the service phenomena is described in positive terms, which are descriptions that focus on what it is rather than is not. Service research

have been a standard-bearer for a partly different perception of the business reality and pointed out new issues of importance in creating business value, mainly the notion of service as something that are being realized in the very interaction between customer and system of resources, on both organization side and consumer side. This understanding gives us a more profound platform of thinking and a less distorted theory of what we study. If this argument holds, it might have consequences for how we should assess former research approaches and produced theory. It might also have consequences for how to outline research in the future.

To conclude, this paper argues for a somewhat new direction for service research. There are basically three arguments. The first one is *ontological* and concerns the nature of social entities, such as services. Some of the statement presented earlier touches this aspect. The discussion is in a tradition of trying to examine the social reality with the ambition of grasping the 'real' reality or at least the best preliminary version of it. It accept the premise that reality is a social construction and as such a dynamic concept for the research society. But we also think that research has the capability to reach better and better understanding of the service reality; a form of critical realism standpoint. So, the research society should avoid use literature-based conceptualizations in a routinized manner (reproducing the hegemonic tradition) but also avoid the position that any theory goes (the relativist dike).

In situ methodologies problematize retrospective reconstructions of what happened or what normally happens in service provision, or what respondents prospective imaginations of what might happen (buyer intentions). Understanding the situation

where value is realized is crucial. Research activities need to draw near to service production and experiences of that production, out there in the field. Assumptions of the service reality give direction to how to develop new and hopefully better research approaches. It has implications for what scientific paradigm and study approach should characterize service research.

The second argument is *epistemological*. Following the idea of holding a theory about how people (researchers, customers, users) attain knowledge about social activities, services, products, we can say that such knowledge are based on subjective meanings of the individual, continually interpreting the symbolic environment, which includes actions of others, and acts on the basis of this imputed meaning (symbolic interactionism). With this standpoint it is important to catch the process of interpretation, through which actors construct their actions. Where is the place for this? We have outlined some statements concerning this. Building on an anti-positivistic hermeneutic view of social action, embraced by the vast majority of service researcher (or?) we can outline study approaches that take advantage of social resources used by customers and in the hand of the researcher. We think there is an impetus to orient studies towards the relevant contextual situation. Epistemological assumptions on the possibilities of gaining knowledge need to be stringent to ontological assumptions of the socially constructed reality. The wide range of cognitive and social resources of the researcher should be used to reach a better understanding of the wide range of cognitive and social resources of the actor (-s) under study. Creating and developing different kinds of *in situ approaches* to the study of service research may be promising.

The third argument is *methodological* and comes as a logical consequence of the two previous arguments. Some of the statements mentioned earlier are concerned with this. Here, methodology means how concrete methods are consistent to assumptions on the possibility to gain knowledge (epistemology) about a given reality (ontology). This definition shows that methodology could be perceived not only as mere concrete methods for data collection or data analysis but also as assumptions on consistency between ontology, epistemology, and methods used. This means that we face a challenge to use methods highly relevant for the phenomena we are studying. We as service researchers need to develop more 'penetrating' methods oriented towards the service situation *per se*. It is a question of grasping the perceived, relevant and important reality 'out there'. Data collecting techniques using natural occurring data are preferred over retrospective surveys. Customer involvement techniques and real-time data should be prioritized. Against the background of the existing main stream bulk of retrospective quantitative surveys of *á priori* determined constructs or variables we may have doubts on its relevance. This is not to say that quantitative measures are of no value. Rather, what is proposed is that the starting point for research (even using quantification) should be *in situ*. A minor consequence of this is that scientific papers ought to account for the consistency of implicit assumptions and use of concrete methods. Hopefully we will see examples of more attractive, relevant and effective scientific narratives. The 'power of the example' is one application made possible by an *in situ* approach.

Another is the contemporary attempts to apply practice-theory approaches (cf. Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001) in order to identify and unfold practices, i.e. doings and sayings in human action, in the endeavour of theorizing our social

world. This way of grasping the conditions of human action and social order in mundane routinized practices, can be found in early structuration theories put forth by Giddens (1984: 2), or in the recursive triad (practice, habitus, and field) of Bourdieu (1977), and other cultural theorists, such as Foucault, Garfinkel, Latour, Taylor or Schatzki. These researchers argue that social practices are seen as key to understanding, not merely individual actors, but also any form of social totality. A social system approach allows all activities to take place within social systems and individuals to have the potential to learn, adapt, and make choices based on their perceptions of meanings in their socially-constructed world.

In line with this, there are arguments that support a development towards more creative in situ methodologies, taking as departure the situation, as built by different 'elements' or parameters such as activities, behaviours, experiences, impressions, symbols, meanings, cultures, environmental cues etc. We know that such elements may be important but only the context and the involved actors can adequately describe what meaning they carry. Some may, in a given context, be more important than others. Methods that allow closeness to the phenomena and the involved actors (whatever perspectives they have) can grasp this plural reality. The idea that subjectivity and intersubjectivity of actors is constructed in interaction, internally and externally leads to that our understanding of reality is always temporary, although we embrace the idea that research has the capability to reach more profound understanding of the reality we are interested in.

Examples of collecting and analysing data in situ are using natural occurring data on service conversations (conversation analysis), collectively produced meanings

(discourse analysis), recorded observations (videoethnography), and other methodologies for social culture analysis. A common misunderstanding is that these methodologies only represent and reproduce a given (service) reality, having no or limited depth. Rather, these provide analytical material and the building blocks needed for building empirically grounded theory, and not to forget, provide rich resources for service developers and other practitioners. For example, observing consumers actual (not imagined) behaviour in a real service setting and involving them in analyses of their own life world, or confronting them with different working hypotheses, preliminary research ideas, may enrich the analysis substantially. Another example is shadowing consumers while using services. In some cases we as researchers have gained the ability to observe and articulate things that informants (respondents) have difficulties to articulate. In such cases we can use an 'under cover' approach entering the service situation and use our personal observational and analytical sensitivity to uncover important factors. Observations can be supported by video recording, making it possible to repeatedly observe and ensure descriptive and explanatory models of service realization (production).

A final provocative thought in line with the reasoning in this paper is that if in situ methods gives better understanding and explanations of consumers there is also a need to remove inferior methods from the methodological agenda. All methods are not worth to use any more. Better methods may give better theories and hopefully provide a better foundation of our theoretical understanding of service production. There is an impetus to not just continue to add new methods to the list. However, this is not the place for pointing out such methods, just to addresses important matters of service research methodology. For sure research traditions are paradigmatic and

changes follow the people. Is the matter of adoption of new contextual and situational methodologies a question of research generations (Kuhn 1970)?

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