
A Case Study on Service Blueprinting in Travel and Tourism sector: a special reference to the Palace on Wheels

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Travel and Tourism industry has emerged as one of the key drivers of growth among the services sector in India. This paper has been prepared by focusing on the service processes provided by 'THE PALACE ON WHEELS', a pioneer of luxury train travel in India. It analyses the existing service blueprint from tourism and travel industry and recommends how to enhance the quality service as well as efficiency level. This service includes both the sections of Industry i.e. travel and tourism. Based on the customer reviews and feedback of the Palace on Wheels, a new service blueprint has been designed which shows the present and potential flaws in the existing process. High participation level from the tourists along with service providers and employees add a new value to the efficiency level of the service quality.

KEYWORDS

Service, Blueprint, Travel, Tourism, Palace on Wheels

INTRODUCTION

The Travel and tourism industry is one of the largest service industries in India. Tourism in India has significant potential considering the rich cultural and historical heritage, variety in ecology, terrains and places of natural beauty spread across the country and it also offers geographical diversity, world heritage sites and niche tourism products like cruises, adventure, medical, eco-tourism, etc. Incredible India has spurred growth in Tourists Arrivals and Employment.

According to WTTC, India ranked third among 185 countries in terms of travel and tourism's total contribution to GDP in 2018. India's ranking in the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index (TTCI) of World Economic Forum moved from 52nd position in 2015 to 40th position in 2017.

India is currently ranked 34 in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 published by the World Economic Forum.

Tourism tends to encourage the development of multiple-use infrastructure including hotels, resorts & restaurants, transport infrastructure (aviation, roads, shipping & railways) and healthcare facilities. India is the most digitally advanced traveller nation in terms of digital tools being used for planning, booking, and experiencing a journey. India's rising middle class and

increasing disposable income has supported the growth of domestic and outbound tourism. Tourism is also a potentially large employment generator besides being a significant source of foreign exchange for the country. As of 2019, 4.2 crore jobs were created in the tourism sector in India, which was 8.1 per cent of the total employment in the country. The number is expected to rise by two per cent annum to 52.3 million jobs by 2028. By 2030 India is expected to be among the top five business travel market.

Within this paper we will discuss the concepts of service blueprinting, design and their application in the Industry. This will be followed by a discussion of a case study examining the service blueprint of the pioneer of luxury trains in India, 'Palace on Wheels'. The paper will conclude with identification and recommendations for correcting the flaws in the blueprint.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the paper is to discuss the strengths and conceptual strategies about service blueprinting and present a reflection of the concepts and theories with a blueprint design of a service from Travel and Tourism Industry. This paper aims to find out the flaws to prevent the failures from occurring and reduce the risk of service failures. Specific research objectives are:

- Discussing the conceptual framework of service blueprint.
- Presenting the blueprint of a service from travel and tourism industry.
- Finding the flaws in the service blueprint
- Lastly, the paper also tries to improve the service design.

As the service organization, the pioneer of luxury train in India, 'Palace on Wheels' is selected.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Exploratory descriptive research was used for this case study analysis on Service Blueprinting in Travel and Tourism sector. The research method involves comprehensive secondary study on classic and contemporary theories and researches on "service management" and "service blueprinting." A case study approach is followed which is qualitative in nature. The reviews by the travellers were studied who experienced the service to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful observations. Analyzing reviews is best used when researchers won't get a chance to interview someone to collect data. The reviews provide a clear set reliable and comparable qualitative data. The data is collected by various resources such as news outlets, company website, newspapers and feedback portals, online reviews and research papers.

SERVICE BLUEPRINTING

The 7th P of service marketing mix is process. It refers to the actual procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the service is delivered – the service delivery and operating systems. The service process is designed and specified using the service blueprinting tool.

To march service specifications to customer expectations, the characteristics of the critical service process must be described objectively and depicted for the employees, customers and managers alike to know what the service is, what their role in its delivery is and understand all of the steps and flows involved in the service process. Shostack (1984) describes service blueprinting as a tool that addresses the challenges of designing and specifying intangible service processes.

A service blueprint is a picture or map that accurately portrays the service system so that the different people involved in providing it can understand and deal with it objectively regardless of their roles or their individual points of view. It is a tool for simultaneously depicting the service process, the points of customer contact and the evidence of service from the customer's point of view. It provides a way to break a service down into its logical components and to depict the steps or tasks in the process, the means by which the tasks are executed and the evidence of service as the customer experiences it.

SERVICE BLUEPRINTING FOR EXCISTING SERVICES

The Service Blueprinting design procedure is appropriate for existing services. By analyzing and illustrating the present status of the service process, it is possible to find the flaws in the service and see areas of improvement within the service sequence.

BUILDING A BLUEPRINT

Through the process of developing the blueprint, many intermediate goals can be achieved: clarification of the concept, development of a shared service vision, recognition of complexities and intricacies of the service that are not initially apparent and delineation of roles and responsibilities. The following are the steps in building a service blueprint:

- Identify the process to be blueprinted
- Identify the customer or customer segment
- Map the process from the customer's point of view
- Map contact employee actions, front-end and back-end and/or technology actions
- Link contact activities to needed support functions
- Add evidence of service at each customer action step

When people begin to develop a blueprint, it quickly becomes apparent what is actually known about the service. Sometimes the shared knowledge is very little. Biases and prejudices are made explicit, and agreements and compromises must be reached. The process itself promotes cross-functional integration and understanding.

SERVICE BLUEPRINT STRUCTURE & COMPONENTS OF SERVICE BLUEPRINT

The key components of service blueprints are customer actions, front-end contact employee actions, back-end contact employee actions and support processes. The customer actions encompass the steps, choices, activities and interactions that the customer performs in the

process of purchasing, consuming and evaluating the service. The front-end contact employee actions are visible to the customer whereas the back-end contact employee actions are invisible. The support processes cover the internal services, steps and interactions that take place to support the contact employees in delivering the service. A line of interaction is drawn to represent direct interactions between the customer and the organization. A line of visibility separates all service activities that are visible to the customer from those that are not visible. A line of internal interaction separates contact employee activities from those of other service support activities and people. One of the most significant differences in service blueprints compared with other types of process flow diagrams is the inclusion of customers and their views of the service process.

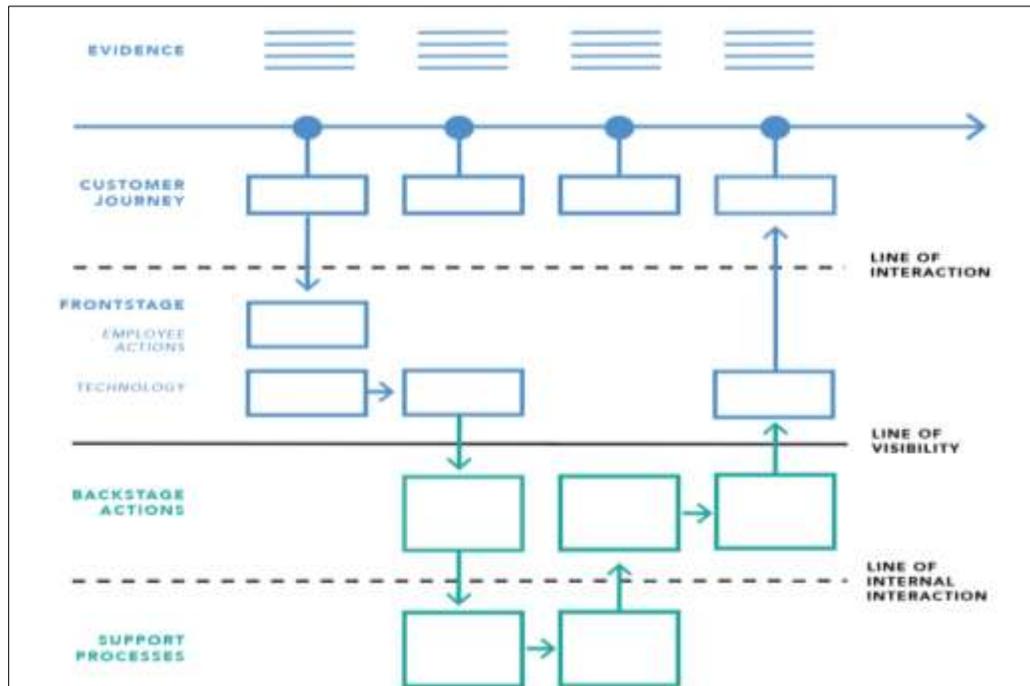


Fig. Skeleton of the blueprint structure:

USES OF SERVICE BLUEPRINT

Service Blueprints can be used at any stage of a project, but there are areas and contexts where it can provide important visibility.

- For a new service/product – the blueprint can help teams quickly identifying the cross-functional impact of work that needs to be done ahead of a launch, allowing them to prioritize accordingly.
- As a tool for change management – here, the blueprint can provide shortcuts for people across the organization trying to understand how future service changes may impact their area.
- To manage ongoing service – as existing services need to be changed (especially based on customer feedback), a blueprint can be updated, and highlight how these changes may impact other functions.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

This paper has been prepared by focusing on the service processes provided by 'THE PALACE ON WHEELS', a pioneer of luxury train travel in India. The service includes both the sections of Industry i.e. travel and tourism. Palace on Wheels like its name is a royal abode of Kings and Queens on rail. The lavish train travels through the royal landscape of Rajasthan for a journey of 7 days and like its tagline 'A week in wonderland', it offers one of the best experiences of luxury train traveling. The Palace on Wheels was started as a joint venture of Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation and Indian Railways in 26 January 1982. In 2009, the train was re-launched with new interiors, amenities, cuisines and itinerary. Travelling on the Palace on Wheels is one of the memorable ways to explore India's stately splendor. The carriages have been refurbished as replicas of the original saloon carriages of the Maharajas. The efficient traditional liveried staffs take care of everything one can think of, from accommodation, food, organized guided tours to shopping; there is nothing left to chance for passengers on The Palace on Wheels. The Palace on Wheels luxury train takes you on a scintillating journey into the royal land of sand dunes and regal palaces. Voted as the 4th best luxury train in the world, the Palace on Wheels carries with it an intrinsic ambience that goes perfectly well with the majestic charm and beauty spread so lavishly across the Indian terrain.

There are 39 Deluxe Cabins and 2 Super Deluxe Cabins on the Palace on Wheels train (with a total capacity is of 82 passengers). The train is completely self-sufficient and is fully air-conditioned, Each cabin has attached toilets, specially facilitated for the global luxury traveler with all modern amenities such as Wi-fi, mini pantry, music channel, a safe, wall to wall carpeting etc. Each saloon also has a personal attendant, also known as khidmatgars, at your service. You would find the royal past you etched into the historical coaches. The carriages are uniquely named after famous Palace & Forts of Rajasthan. The Rich Interiors of the Cabins are either in Hues of Ruby, Turquoise or Pearl. There are Two Resto-Bar lounges on the train & an ayurvedic spa facility. Complimentary Wi-fi services are also made available through sharing dongles. On the Palace on Wheels, your journey is full of exuberance and luxurious feeling and a perfect chance to relive the era when kings and queens ruled.

CASE STUDY: SERVICE BLUEPRINT OF PALACE ON WHEELS

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The physical evidence before the journey consists of the online web portal, where tourists book their tickets to enjoy a week in wonderland. During the boarding stage i.e. at the station in Delhi, the tourists witness the royal welcome by the service staff. Presence of the majestic royal train; Palace on Wheels, with the beautifully decorated station and musical performances that take place at the platform. Tourists witness the Rajasthani Folk performances and the band music while they rest in the lounge made at the platform. The physical evidence during the journey includes the intrinsic ambience and the majestic charm of the train. The train is completely self-sufficient and is fully air-conditioned, Each cabin has attached toilets, specially facilitated for the global luxury traveler with all modern amenities such as Wi-fi, mini pantry, music channel, a safe, wall to wall carpeting etc. The carriages are uniquely named after famous Palace & Forts of Rajasthan. The Rich Interiors of the Cabins are either in Hues of Ruby, Turquoise or Pearl. There are Two Resto-Bar lounges on the train & an ayurvedic spa facility.

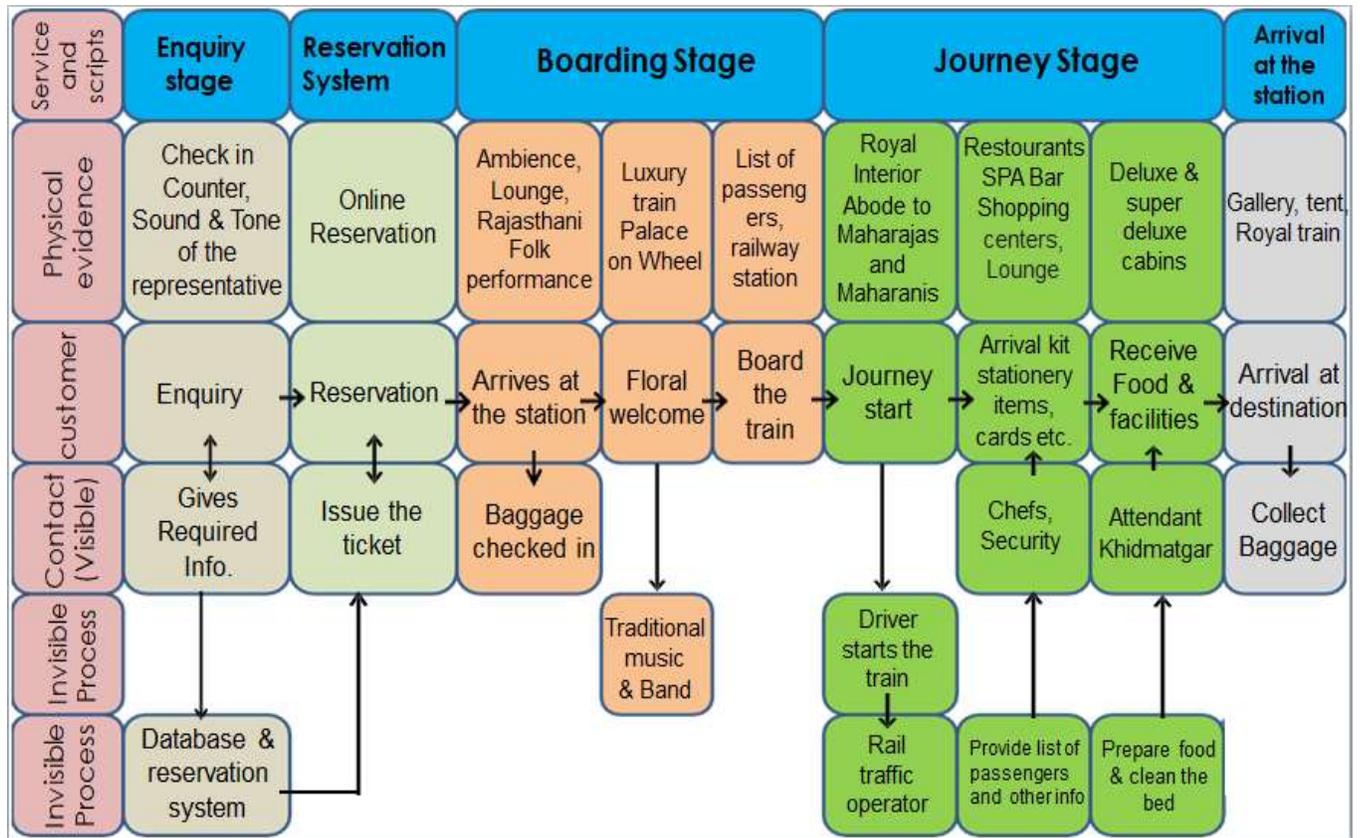


Fig.Service blueprint of The Palace on Wheels

CUSTOMER

The customer or the tourist enquires about the train and confirms his reservation. He arrives at the station and is received by a floral welcome by the staffs of the train. He latter boards the train and enters the journey phase. The luggage is picked up and taken to the respective saloons. Each guest is provided with an arrival kit consisting of stationery items, brochures, cards etc. anything additional can be asked for, from the attendant, always available at your service. An exotic array of dishes can be selected from the Continental, Chinese, Indian and Rajasthani cuisines available on the Palace on Wheels.

CONTACT

As is shown in Figure this part presents the contact points between the customer and the service employees. It can be divided into two stages-The front part and the back part. An attendant or ‘Khidmatgar’ is always at your service, to take care of all your travel needs. A pampering spa saloon is the recent addition in the train with a variety of therapeutic massages on offer to relax and rejuvenate the guests. The order is placed in the lavish and beautifully done restaurants; "The Maharaja" and "The Maharani" which serve mouthwatering Continental, Chinese, Indian and Rajasthani cuisines that would definitely make way to your heart through your stomach.

SUPPORT SERVICES

As is shown in Figure, support service is the forth and the last part of the blueprint that we designed for The Palace on Wheels. Adequate safety arrangements are made for you as well as the personal belongings in the train itself. It includes the invisible processes which includes the controlling and operation of train. The line man gives the signal, then the train driver start the train and the royal journey begins. It involves the rail traffic controller and the staffs of the train. The kidmatgar cleans the bed during the transit and the chefs at the royal restaurant prepare food on the demand by the customers.

FLAWS IN THE PROCESS

Lovelock and Wirtz stated that, a good blueprint should draw attention to points in service delivery where things are particularly at risk of going wrong. From a secondary viewpoint following flaws are recognized.

- Poor capacity utilization.
- Poor condition of tangibles as well as the stations.
- Hectic schedule for foreigners
- Unethical behaviour towards tourists.
- Old compartments

The train was not operating in its full capacity. 30-40% seats were vacant due to high cost which cannot be availed by Indian tourist. The palace on wheels was preferred only by foreign nationals. The condition of the platforms during the intersect were not good in comparison to the services provided on board. The foreign nationals are not used to a hectic life cycle. The environmental changes and travel caused fatigue and many tourists fell sick. The major flaw identified was the old compartments. During the night time the typical sound of Railways and the poor hydraulics caused a lot of movement than the foreigners were not used to and it hampered their sleep.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Rajasthan tourism and Indian railways can cut the prices for the Indian tourist along with few services, so that the train can run in full capacity and the cost is recovered.

The railways can dedicate a complete platform for movement of the palace on wheels, so that the service is not hampered and the tourists enjoy the best of India.

The visit to some monuments can be cut down considering the hectic schedule or the duration of the run can be increased for better experience and comfort.

The railways need to modernize the compartments to make it sound and jerks free for a comfortable stay for the tourists.

CONCLUSION

This case study is a novel attempt to design a service Blueprint in Travel and Tourism Industry with a special reference to The Palace on Wheels. The purpose of the study was to discuss the strengths and conceptual strategies about service blueprinting and present a reflection of the concepts and theories with a blueprint design of a service from Travel and Tourism Industry. In

this case, we see high participation levels of tourists as they directly take part in the service process and thus co-create value along with the service employees. This system is good as the tourist can get direct access to the service process taking the active role in it.

The Service Blueprinting design procedure was appropriate for existing services. By analyzing and illustrating the present status of the service process, it was possible to find the flaws in the service and see areas of improvement within the service sequence. The Palace on Wheels carries with it an intrinsic ambience that goes perfectly well with the majestic charm and beauty spread so lavishly across the Indian terrain. The level of customer satisfaction and delight is considerably high and the journey is full of exuberance and luxurious feeling.

Service blueprint is useful in managing ongoing service, as existing services need to be changed especially based on customer feedback. Few flaws were identified based on tourist reviews and feedback and required recommendation are provided to improve the service.

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