Multi-service touchpoint experience: Variation at single-point of entry

Abstract
Many service organizations that run several parallel services in the same physical space often incorporate a reception on their premises. The same goes for a trend in public services, where one-stop shops are being designed, online as well as in office environments. The experience such a “portal” creates depends on how well this portal can adapt. In this instance, the reception as a portal can be seen as a touchpoint in the different services of which it is a part. In this paper we will develop an idea around such a single-point of entry for multi-service touchpoint experiences, based on the concepts of variation and adaptability. This paper introduces the concept of touchpoint containers and draws attention to the coordination across services and adaptability required by such portals.

Author Keywords
Multi-touchpoint design; Service design; Customer experience
Introduction
Over the past three decades, services have grown to account for nearly 70 percent of the GDP in several developed countries. Service design as a practice emerged in the 90s, offering an outside-in perspective on service development and innovation [4; 11]. Recent advances in technology have led to the transformation of services into one-stop shops, both online and offline. Traditionally, reception desks and/or telephone operators have characterized the points of entry. The rise of the Internet has led to the integration of online portals to supplement the traditional ones. This has made it convenient for customers to access multiple services. However, the design of such services requires special attention to the coordination of service touchpoints across the board as well adaptability at the point of entry. While the portal may represent a single touchpoint in the customer journey, from the organization’s perspective the portal is a container for several touchpoints spread over multiple services. These containers are thus subject to variations in the process corresponding to the service they are a part of. This paper aims to outline research themes that explore the benefits and challenges of designing such single-points of entry for multiple services.

Dynamic configuration of resources
Within the marketing stream of literature, service has been understood as a perspective on value co-creation [2]. Actors co-create value for themselves through interactions [10] and it is dependent on their integration of the available resources in a service system [3]. Vargo and Lusch [9] argue that: “Service provision implies the ongoing combination of resources, through integration, and their application, driven by operant resources — the activities of actors”. Service systems utilise three kinds of resources – people, technology and information – in different proportions [8]. The integration of resources in a system also leads to creation of new resources.

In the case of multi-touchpoint experiences, resources in context also play an important role. Every actor uniquely affects other actors in the context as well as the context in its entirety. The continuous integrating, exchanging and creation of new resources with other actors constantly changes the context [1]. Thus, service systems evolve as a result of this dynamic resource integration. The “value” of the resources that are combined in distinct situations are affected by how their uses and limitations are understood in that interaction [7].

Empirical example
We are currently part of an ongoing research project, with a focus on patient-centred care. The project team utilised insights derived from interviews with patients and healthcare personnel to develop training videos. The purpose of the videos was to showcase the service variations that one encounters in the course of their work. Further, it was meant to sensitize staff to the plight of the patients as well as colleagues.

One of the videos focuses on the interactions at the reception of the primary healthcare centre. The reception is a touchpoint in several different service processes, and an access to several different service systems. Accordingly, the receptionist adapts depending on who is coming up to the desk. In every individual touchpoint different resources are activated to make sure that the service will function. For example, the situations vary from requests to switch
appointment times, renewal of prescriptions, complaints from patients in the waiting room, communication difficulties with foreigners among others. In each instance, the receptionist integrates and operates on different resources that are available. Further, the utilisation of the resources is done in a specific context within the service.

**Preliminary research themes**
The single-point of entry service configurations calls for research across a set of themes:

- Touchpoint containers
- Coordination across services
- Adaptability at the front

*Touchpoint containers*
When devising a single-point of entry, from a service perspective it will be a container for many different touchpoints. This is derived from the definition of “touchpoint”; “Instances of direct contact either with the product or service itself or with representations of it by the company or some third party” [5]. Or formulated in a way resonating with more contemporary views of service logic: Touchpoints are instances of value co-creation through direct or indirect contact in a service process by a co-creating actor of the service system, and the service system itself (represented by an institution, an actor, or a resource).

Even seen as service moments, it will not be the same service moment across all the different services. The experience of the service moment, with its diverse
touchpoints, will depend on similar resources, and the same front-line staff, but will be different, because these (as being the touchpoint container) will play different roles in the different services.

We would like to stress that such a touchpoint container needs to be designed in coordination between the different services that want to contain a touchpoint or a service moment there. Adding a new service to the container is a service design task of its own. Further, one should also consider that deviations from pre-defined service processes might result in unforeseen touchpoints in the container.

Coordination across services
A single-point of entry that is part of many different services’ co-creation processes will require design coordination across the different services. For this designers will have to map out and identify the overlaps and deviations that might occur at the single-point of entry.

Currently we have seen little research on how one may go about identifying invariants between different services. We have yet to identify research on what character of invariants would render a design decision to combine two (or more) touchpoints between two (or more) different services. Most research conducted around these issues mainly look at resource or process efficiency, rather than touchpoint invariants.

When designing for touchpoint coordination we would like to stress that adaptability at the front-end is of major importance. The mapping and identification of invariants could also lead to improved training measures for the front-end staff further enhancing their adaptability.

Adaptability at the front-end
A service system consists of technologies and people that adaptively compute and adjust to a system’s changing value of knowledge [8]. According to Mondada [6 p.4] “interactions are reflexively structured, i.e. conduct adapt to its context and at the same time, by interpreting it in a certain way, configures it by the very fact that it adjusts to this particular feature and not another – being thus both context-shaped and context-renewing.” The same can be said of interactions occurring at a single-point of entry, where the context both shapes the interaction and renews the context for subsequent interaction. When approaching a single-point of entry that is part of a service one is a co-creator of, the customer knows better than the front-end the service that is will be played out. As seen in Figure 1, the receptionist would need to adapt according to the various touchpoints in multiple customer journeys as they all involve different service provisions. The receptionist needs to intelligently utilise resources to serve a patient who has received a letter to have a gynaecological examination as efficiently as one who has had difficulty making an appointment.

As mentioned previously, pre-identification and subsequent training can vastly improve the touchpoint experience in the containers by sensitizing staff to variations that might occur. One might also improve adaptability by empowering staff to take decisions, thereby leading to quicker responses when faced with variation from service processes. Another area concerning adaptability is how might one prevent the
disruption of other services should something go wrong in the touchpoint container. Research should aim to uncover how such single-point of entry container would function should any service failures occur.

Conclusions
In this paper we have outlined three research themes that explore the design of single-point of entry for multiple services. These are touchpoint containers, touchpoint coordination and adaptability at the front-end. We have partly drawn on our experience in an ongoing project in the healthcare domain to illustrate the variations that occur at a single-point of entry. We have pointed out some gaps in current research and have suggested some avenues for researching variation in a multi-touchpoint setting. The goal is to have a better understanding of how touchpoint invariants may be used to improve the design of touchpoint containers for multiple services.

Acknowledgements
We would like to acknowledge European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement № 642116 as well as the development project in the County Council of Sörmland in collaboration with Experio Lab.

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