Chapter 3
Service Customization Through Dramaturgy

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Abstract The customization of a service often depends on the “performance” delivered by front-stage service employees. Drawing on theories of dramaturgy and service marketing, we present a typology of four distinct and viable configurations for achieving different types of service customization. We explain how variations in the time pressure to customize a service, and the degree of customization required, combine to determine the characteristics of each configuration. With service organizations increasingly operating on a global basis, we discuss the

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fit between the preferences of different multicultural segments, the operational characteristics of a configuration, and the level of customization offered.

Abbreviations

FSA  Financial Services Authority  
UK  United Kingdom

3.1 Introduction

Mass customization has been one of the most studied and discussed topics of the last 10 years, in the area of operations management, and yet there has been very little research, conceptual or empirical, that examines how service organizations deliver effective forms of customization. This is the case despite the fact that operations management scholars have argued that there is a need for research on mass customization in service organizations (Da Silveira et al. 2001, Roth and Menor 2003), and that many service organizations would benefit from “segment of one” strategies (Peppers and Rogers 1999) for “molecular markets” (Day and Montgomery 1999).

With this chapter we seek to address this gap, by presenting a typology that reveals how service organizations might design and manage their processes based on different dramaturgy concepts (Clark and Mangham 2004, Gardner 1992, Goffman 1959, Grove and Fisk 1983, 1997, Grove et al. 2000, 2004, Haathi 2003, Ritti and Silver 1986). In particular, we focus on how the “drama” of the service encounters – the engagement of service employees and customers – can be designed to achieve different forms of customization. We suggest that these encounters can be viewed as some form of adaptive performance that is acted out by service employees (the actors) for customers (the audience). Using two key dramaturgy concepts, scripts (the set of rules and instructions that govern the content and delivery of a service process) and improvisation (the ability to rewrite and deliver a script), we explore the range of service customization that can be achieved.

To show how the nature of a service performance can be effectively designed to satisfy different customer expectations, we use two operations management dimensions: the relative time pressure to customize and the degree of customization required. Different combinations of these dimensions result in a typology of four service customization configurations (embellished customization, predetermined customization, prompt customization, and intuitive customization), each of which specifies an “operational type” that is defined by a set distinct operational characteristics (Bozarth and McDermott 1998, McCarthy 1995, 2004a).