The Evolution and Discovery of Services Science in Business Schools

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1 Introduction

The growth of services in economies around the world has vast implications for business practice, academic knowledge creation, and education. Service industries have dominated the U.S. and other established economies for decades. Increasingly, manufacturers and IT companies are also shifting to a focus on services as growth and profit engines for their companies. Many contend that future success (for companies, whole economies, and personal quality of life) depends on service innovation across industries. We are among a small group of academics worldwide who have devoted their careers to the study of services. We are co-directors of the Center for Services Leadership (www.wpcarey.asu.edu/csl) at Arizona State University, the first academic center devoted to research and education in services management. Within business schools in general, however, the resources devoted to services management have not been commensurate with the economic importance of services. Similarly, while there are isolated degree programs and executive education offerings for services management, the number of such programs is surprisingly small.

Today we see a surge in interest in what is being called “services science.” This awakening is occurring not only in the established economies, but also in countries that are managing explosive growth such as India and China. There is growing demand for new knowledge and education; yet, we feel that much can be learned from existing research and knowledge produced within business schools. There is a need to apply robust research findings related to service excellence, service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty, and service delivery and design. There is also a need to develop new knowledge and curricula to address the emerging challenges of the global service economy. In this article we highlight the development of services science knowledge and education in business

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schools, advocate for its application, and identify current trends facing business today. These trends will shape future services research and drive the development of trans-disciplinary curricula.

2 Evolution of Services Science in Business Schools

2.1 Emergence of Services as a Field of Study

The study of services has a history in business schools that cuts across disciplines including management, marketing, operations, and human resources. However, the preponderance of the published research has come from services marketing, a field that emerged between 1970 and 1990. The field evolved quickly in the 1980s, primed by the demands of a business community looking for ideas, theories, and new models to address critical challenges. The rapid growth of the service sector, increased competition emanating from deregulation, the complexities of managing services, and the lack of relevant curricula and research all contributed to the field’s rapid development (Berry/Parasuraman, 1993). A number of important conferences and events sponsored by the Marketing Science Institute and the American Marketing Association provided catalysts for knowledge sharing and networking among scholars and practitioners who were intrigued by the challenges of services management. Centers devoted to the study of services began to develop at business schools around the globe. Over 20 years later, many of these same forces are coming together again – right now – to provide another impetus for services research and education; this time under the nomenclature of “service science.” This time the impetus stretches beyond the business disciplines into engineering and computer science, industrial and systems engineering, organization theory, and economics.

2.2 Characteristics of the Field: Substantive, Cross-Disciplinary, Multi-method, Global

Because the field grew out of the demands of the business community, its dominant topics are focused on real business problems. In addition, due to the inherent nature of services (for example, they are often delivered by people, they are heterogeneous, they frequently involve the customer in the production process, and they are relatively perishable compared to manufactured goods), the study of services management is inherently cross dis-