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Keynote Presentation

How do service research results reach textbooks and classrooms: Now it takes 10-40 years!

Having been involved in service research since the 1970s I am concerned with the difficulty of addressing critical research areas and disseminating research results. Service research established itself in the 1980s and 1990s and the interest in service is now bigger than ever. Research was international; Sweden and Finland ("The Nordic School") were among the pioneers. But US research dominated the research agenda. The Nordic School has kept its place in the forefront, both collaborating with the US and offering its own agenda.

With service-dominant (S-D) logic in the 2000s, international contributions are given a more prominent place. The contribution is new theory through a synthesis of the best of service research and exclusion of unsupported claims. This renewal is backed up by the huge IBM service science program. The focus has gone from the emphasis of services being different from goods and a preoccupation with surveys and satisfaction studies, to understanding that goods and services appear in tandem with a host of undefined phenomena, that they are interdependent, and that customers and other stakeholders are resources and value cocreators in complex service systems. It is further back up by the network theory applications of many-to-many-marketing and systems theory applications in the Viable Systems Approach (VSA).

Among my concerns are that service research is inadequately covered in textbooks on management and marketing but even worse that textbooks on service management, service marketing and the like present obsolete knowledge. It is claimed that the service sector keeps growing but it embraces everything from brain surgery to hamburger restaurants and is not a meaningful sector. Major service systems such as health care, the financial system, the legal system, and transportation are headaches for governments and citizens. The global financial meltdown that started in 2008 shows how vulnerable financial systems are and that they are largely controlled by fraudulent people and organizations.

Finally, has service become better since research started over 30 years ago? Nobody can tell as society has changed in so many respects that comparison over time become inconclusive. For example, technology has changed, and the new infrastructure of the Internet and mobile communication keep changing the service landscape.

Two crucial questions will be discussed:

- How can service research become more relevant?
- How can service education programs more quickly absorb new developments?