

The relational impact on service interactions

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Purpose –

Based on the idea, that long term customer-supplier relationships are more efficient than short term transactions, the focus of this paper is the analytical assumption, that service relations implicate different dimensions. In a more aggregated form, I like to reveal, why some service relations are strong, substantial, durable and others not.

Methodology/approach –

For finding answers about the dimensions of service relations it seems to be necessary to focus on the interaction processes between customers and suppliers. Interaction is a critical dimension for relationship marketing and many researchers emphasize the meaning of interaction, as the core of relationship marketing.

The interaction between customers and suppliers brings out the needs and wants of those and constitute foundation for exchange. So in fact service relations are not only characterized by transaction and exchange proceedings. Especially interactions are the most important part of service relations. An interesting new approach is now the combination of interactional role settings like Goffman had postulated with the analytical assumptions of service relation dimensions. Interactional role setting is the first part of the theoretical approach followed by the presentation of the social network theory.

This kind of theory focuses on the relations among actors in different social networks. By assuming the action of entities (individuals, organisations or countries) as a relational not an individual act the social network theory does acts from customers or suppliers on the position they hold in a network. Networks could be everything for example: families, organisations, companies or soccer teams and the relations between those actors, brings out a special network structure.

In this structure of relations exists a positional framework where every actor who is part of the network act according to his position. The typical actions someone do (bus driver, mail man or actress) can be identified as role actions, which are attributed to the role he or she holds.

By using the social network theory and its analytical tools, as White or Granovetter have described it is obvious that the stability of service relations depends on embedded suppliers and customers. Relations between actors are not only structural connexions, moreover they create social identities: „Persons come into existence and are formed as overlaps among identities from distinct network populations ... Persons should be a construct from the middle of the analysis, not a given boundary population” (White 1992, S. 196f.)

For conceiving a relational understanding of service relations, I will combine the perceptions of interactional role setting with the assumptions of the social network theory, presented in the part of the theoretical chapter.

Findings

For understanding the different dimensions of service relations, it is important to observe the interaction patterns between suppliers and customers. Further dimensions beside the regularly transaction aspects are influences of interaction and social exchange. They might have a broader influence in the stability of service relations.

Both, customer and suppliers are embedded in different networks, which are not necessarily linked with each other. Taking this in consideration, it looks possible to understand, why evolutions, dynamic outcomes and developments in service relations emerge. According to this, I stress out the importance of service dimensions and structural embeddedness for service relations.

Research and practical Implications

Considering this contribution, it is possible to find some answers about the complexity of service relations. So this could be a contribution for the theoretically discussion about service interactions. Especially in the relational marketing context, it includes a lot of opportunities for creating solutions for customer relationships and sustainable development.

Moreover companies can use the contribution of this research finding to understand, the reasons for trustful, long term service relations. This could be useable for managing marketing activities in general, like social media marketing in the web 2.0 context.

Originality/value –

This contribution provides a theoretical and systematic understanding of service interactions and emphasizes the meaning of service dimensions and social embeddedness.

Key words (max 5)

services – relations – interaction – network – position

Paper type

This is a conceptual work in progress paper with first reflections on further empirically research