



Quality and value in university services

The experience of the placement service at the University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, to point out the concepts of quality and value; on the other hand to explain how university placement services can increase the value created for the various stakeholders of a University.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodology is based on empirical study carried out through the analysis of the placement service of the University of Urbino “Carlo Bo” through “participant observation”, related to the experience gained by the authors within the service.

Findings – This study reveals that the placement service at the University of Urbino is innovative in terms of organization and management. The involvement of all actors in design and implementation of the initiatives is a strategic factor, crucial for meeting the expectations of stakeholders, raising levels of quality and satisfaction and, ultimately, the value created.

Originality/value – Although limited to only one placement case – the University of Urbino – the research presents original features regarding the application of service management principles to an institution like the University, which is increasingly directed towards value creation for its stakeholders. This application appears necessary given that increased competition among universities is based not only on traditional core activities – research and training – but also on the ability to contribute to student employability after the obtainment of a degree.

Keywords Universities, Italy, Placement, Customer service management, Job placement, Value, Quality, Service

Paper type Case study



1. Services, quality and value creation

In the field of service management the concept of value is defined as the gap between benefits and sacrifices perceived, related to the long-term relationship between suppliers and customers and, more generally, between service companies and their stakeholders[1].

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Benefits may be functional (performance, service, tech, information and temporal accessibility, etc.), symbolic and of image, social and psychological (status, self-esteem and relational, etc.). Sacrifices, however, relate to the collection of information (research costs), the evaluation of alternatives (information processing costs, psychological costs), purchase (discovery costs, purchase costs), use (operating costs, maintenance costs, learning costs, costs of obsolescence, repurchase (conversion costs, psychological costs, costs of disposal) (Busacca *et al.*, 2004; Raimondo and Miceli, 2005[2]; Bocconcelli, 2005; Tunisini, 2008; Cozzi and Ferrero, 2004[3]; Raval and Grönroos, 1996; Woodall, 2003). Perception of benefits and sacrifices (and therefore value) is subjective. It depends on the client and the social context in which the individual finds him or herself and refers to a shared system of values (Buratti, 2004).

In this study, the concept of value should be articulated across the customer-supplier interaction[4], the service process and a value co-creation point of view (Grönroos and Strandvik, 2008). Stating that value is generated and distributed during customer-supplier interaction implies – that the company must manage the platform of interactions not only to support the creation of value for the customer but also to appropriate value for the service provider (Grönroos and Strandvik, 2008). Moreover, it is important to note that value is co-created within the long-term relationship between provider and client (Grönroos, 1999; Gummesson, 1996), where customers are the real value creators and the service provider's role is to facilitate customer value creation as a value facilitator (Grönroos, 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

This approach is particularly suitable for the purpose of our study because, although the university holds the lead in organizing and designing the placement service, value is generated by all stakeholders – who benefit from positive network externalities proportional to the other stakeholders' commitments. "The placement service may be interpreted as an interface, a kind of relational infrastructure capable of maintaining and enhancing the stability of relationships, trust and collaboration between stakeholders". The University of Urbino, students, businesses and local agencies create and receive value by belonging to the placement related network, each differently but interdependently.

Despite this, the service provider – the University of Urbino – may extend the opportunities in which the customer can create value, influencing processes of service consumption. This approach implies a interactive marketing approach, which goes beyond the wording of the value proposition (Grönroos and Strandvik, 2008) and is aimed at exploiting the moments of truth (Normann, 1992), opportunities – within the relationship – in which the customer perceives and enjoys both value and quality.

As Dahlgaard-Park highlights:

[...] the definition and the meaning of quality was continuously changed from "degree of conformance" to – "fitness for use" – "meeting customers' requirements" – "satisfying the customers" – and finally, in the TQM or Business Excellence age, the concept has generally been defined as "delight the customer". In the evolution process, the paradigm shift can be seen in the changing definitions, where the initial definition of quality, "degree of conformance", was mainly based on product quality and the products' functional aspects. The last definition of quality, "delight the customer", is a much more comprehensive way of defining quality rather than "degree of conformance" (Dahlgaard-Park and Dahlgaard, 2002, p. 329).

According to SERVQUAL theorists and the school of thought surrounding them (Grönroos, 1978, 1982; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985, 1988, 1991), the quality of services is a multidimensional concept and should be measured by comparing performance perceived by the customer and his or her expectations with respect to individual dimensions. Several criticisms were raised regarding this approach. Two are particularly useful for this study. The first is the initial premise, the need to separate the study of service quality from that of goods. Today, the distinction between goods and services seems redundant and not suited to grasping the true nature of supply[5]. The second and main criticism concerns the concept of quality understood as a comparison, in favour of an analysis related to the product or service and not placed in the relationship between subject (the customer) and object (the service). The attributes-based approach, rather, considers quality as a property of the product/service, as determined by its component elements, their variety and quantity. This would indicate, therefore, a different criterion for measuring the quality: no longer vertical – that is within the customer-service-provider – but horizontal, assessed by comparison with the offering of competitors, according to a set of variables which – although submitted to the subjectivity of the consumer – may be understood in terms of perceived performance, regardless of expectations. In this research both meanings of quality are accepted as complementary and not conflicting.

While conceptually distinct, quality and value are globally and holistically perceived by the customer during the interaction with the provider in the long-term relationship (Pencarelli and Splendiani, 2008). Another feature is the role of the image (both referred to the provider as well as the individual good/service) as a filter capable of influencing both perception of benefits (and thus related to value) and of performance (and thus related to quality).

Value and quality are therefore strongly linked concepts. Quality exists when internal and external customer expectations are met. Value derives from long-term comparison between benefits (functional, symbolic, temporal, economic, relational, psychological) and sacrifices connected to them. Quality, like value, depends not on only the offer, but also on demand behaviour. The offer plays a crucial role in understanding the stakeholders' often unexpressed expectations and for designing, proposing, and delivering value through offer policies in line with demand expectations.

In the next section we analyze the case of the placement service provided by the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo". This service is aimed at two types of "clients" – on the one hand, students, and on the other, businesses and local institutions. Students first need to be trained and then supported in the difficult path toward the world of work. Businesses and other local stakeholders expect the university to play an important role as a supplier and as an intermediary of qualified human resources. The University of Urbino has an opportunity to create value both for students and for businesses, enriching the training standards through the provision of high quality placement – both compared in terms of expectations/performance and in a evaluation by attributes. In any case, the management of a supplier-customer relationship and interaction platform plays a strategic role, as well as participation by users within the service process, from the design stage.

2. Universities as service providers from a management perspective: the case of placement services at the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo"

The placement service of the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo"[6] was founded in March 2008 in order to integrate and make a consistent set of services already in place

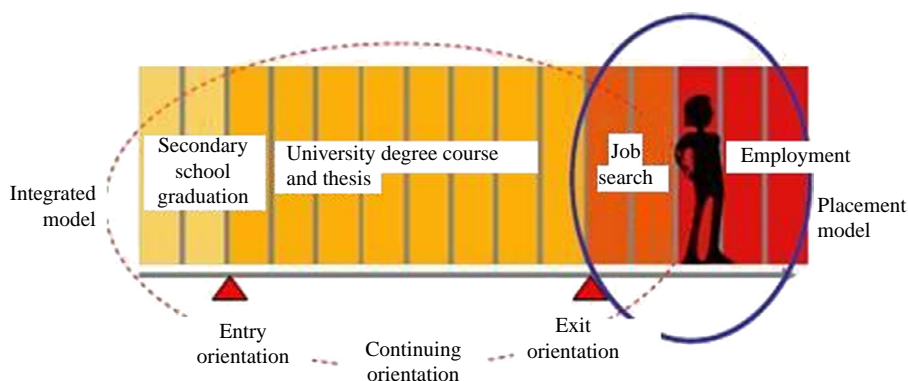
to promote employment of graduates. The aim is to guide the student in the final stage of the relationship with the University through exit guidance support to ensure that entry into the work-force is quick and as responsive as possible to both the skills of graduates and the needs of business (Figure 1).

Placement service is understood as the management of the last phase of the relationship between student and university, the stage at which the relationship expands to other entities such as businesses and local institutions. Even companies, in fact, may benefit from a reduction in the time and cost of research personnel, at the same time, contributing to the definition of training that responds more to the real needs of the professional world of work.

This paragraph describes and analyzes the placement service of the University of Urbino from a managerial perspective through the development of service offering model proposed by Grönroos (2002), in order to grasp the critical aspects related to quality and value creation. Following this model, it is possible to identify service management five phases are suited to describing our placement service:

- (1) Development of the service concept to guide the development of the bid through the evaluation of the benefits to the customer and define the characteristics of supply.
- (2) Development of a package of basic services, composed of the essential service, ancillary services and facilitation.
- (3) Development of a range of services increased by planning elements relating to accessibility, interaction and participation of the client.
- (4) Management of the image and external communication, which should serve as a support.
- (5) Organizational preparation to produce the desired benefits for customers in the service process (internal marketing).

2.1 The service concept determines the intentions of the company, which in this case consists in the desire of the University of Urbino to offer a placement service to its graduates (Goldstein *et al.*, 2002). The objectives were:



Source: Design documentation of FIXO Program, edited by Italia Lavoro

Figure 1.
Placement service in the
relationship between
student and university

- (1) to establish a centralised placement service networked with faculties for managing extracurricular post-graduate internships;
- (2) to provide a front-office service for students and businesses, aimed of promoting the services offered for exit guidance;
- (3) to increase placement activities particularly through accounting activities, in order to facilitate intersection between supply and demand; and
- (4) to implement an integrated service model capable of making permanent the centralized service of placement.

These objectives were pursued through the preparation of the following services:

- the organization of traineeships for new graduates and individual guidance in output;
- the management of relationships with businesses, providing an information service and reception of requests for work and internships that are received by them;
- information to companies about professional profiles of Urbino University graduates and selecting those consistent with their needs;
- support to graduates in searching for a job (help writing CVs and in job interviews);
- the organization of seminars and company presentations aimed at increasing opportunities for guidance and employment; and
- the organization of an annual Career Day[7], a day of meetings between companies and graduates.

2.2 The basic service package includes all services necessary for meeting the needs of users. It consists of three groups of services:

- (1) *Essential services*. The reason for being in the market, namely exit guidance activities providing information about job opportunities, facilitating the meeting of demand and supply of labour or internship.
- (2) *Facilitation services*. Facilitating the use of the service without which the essential service cannot be provided, such as the presence of an office with dedicated staff and information services to both users.
- (3) *Peripheral or ancillary services*. Services added to increase the value or differentiate the service from that of competitors. For example, the organization of events and regular workshops aimed at linking the application with the job (i.e. Career Day, targeted meetings between companies and graduates).

Within the placement service, an important project developed in 2008 which led to a profound reorganization of the entire service placement of the university – the FIXO[8] program (training and innovation for employment).

In line with a logic of integration and completion of the services already provided by Urbino University, the FIXO program proposed a model based on two categories of services: services to individuals and services to business (Figure 2).

Individual services are turning primarily to new graduates and are aimed at their employment. They may be divided into three categories: information, guidance and training, and employment training.

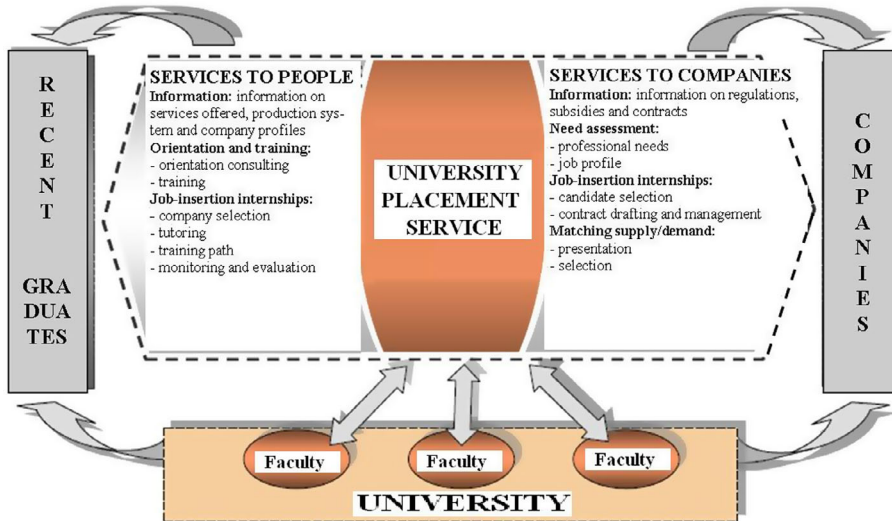


Figure 2.
Placement model proposed by the FIXO program

Source: Design documentation of FIXO Program, edited by Italia Lavoro

Business services, however, have the objective of optimising the match between demand and supply. They comprise: information, analysis of needs, training for employment, crossing supply and demand[9].

All these services brought the basic service package within the design of the overall service placement. Some of the services – especially those that require specific skills – have been activated through institutional partnerships with local entities involved in active employment policies (e.g. Employment Centres of the Province of Pesaro and Urbino).

2.3 The third phase involves the development of a service offering that goes beyond technical quality to address the determinants of the functional component of quality inherent in the delivery process of the service. In addition, since value is perceived by the user within this process, the same levers that act to increase the offer are valid for improving the perception of benefits and sacrifices related to the use of this service[10] (Figure 3).

According to the Grönroos approach, there are three basic elements that constitute the delivery process of services and on which we must act to increase customer value: service accessibility, interaction with the provider, participation and active rule of the customer. To this is added the brand image of the supplier, a cognitive filter capable of improving or weakening perceived value and quality of service, depending on the perception of image – positive or negative.

Within the placement service at the University of Urbino, these elements must be interpreted for both types of users: graduates and businesses.

2.3.1 We refer to various levels of accessibility:

- *Physical accessibility.* The placement office is located in the orientation office of the university's central administration offices, in order to gain greater visibility and ease of access. It includes two areas: the front desk with workspace and notice boards with posters for the various work proposals, and the back office

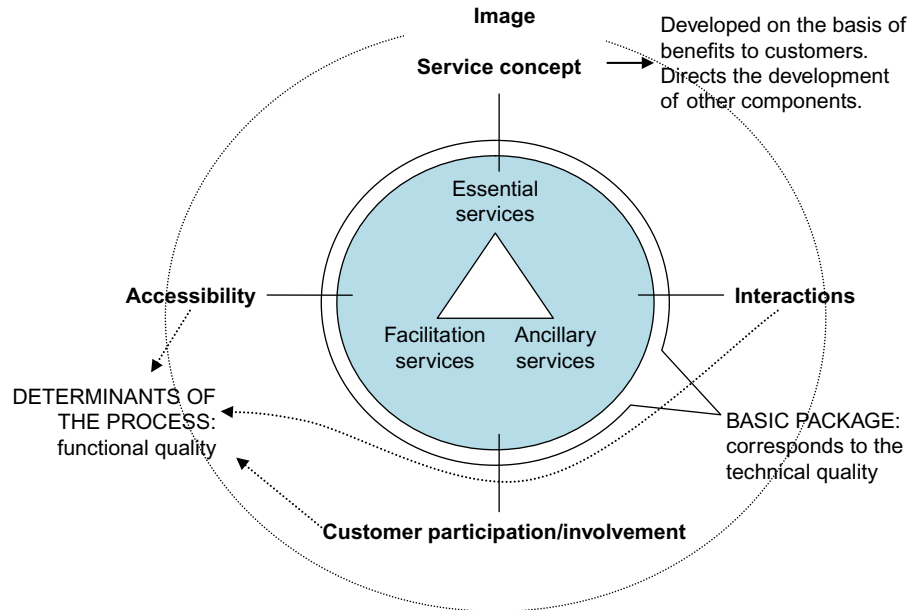


Figure 3.
Development of service
offering model by
Gronroos

Source: Our graphic formulation of Gronroos (2002)

with two complete workstations that engages in administrative activities and individual interviews with graduates and/or business representatives.

- *Informative accessibility.* Information is available online – through the university web site – and offline, through a printed brochure. There are also job offers published on the web, which are then sent to the monitor network circuit in the main offices of the university.
- *Economic accessibility.* Placement service is free to both graduates and businesses. Businesses must pay a fee only to participate in the Career Day. During the FIXO program graduates may receive a monthly contribution for the training period, amounting to €200 gross. In cases of 12-month trainee recruitment periods, companies could access a contribution up to €2,300 for tutoring activity.
- *Procedural accessibility.* The access procedure is very easy for users, both graduates and companies. They simply connect to the university web site and choose the appropriate section from which to obtain information about a service. In the section “laureate” (graduates) or “imprese” (companies), it is possible to view all information related to the service. For more information or to receive the necessary documents to access to the service, it is necessary to e-mail to placement office (placement@uniurb.it). Businesses can post on the board to specify the job profile. Graduates, however, may receive information about job opportunities and/or send their CVs to make it available to the companies[11].

2.3.2 *Graduate involvement.* Graduates play an active role throughout the service process. Based on job offers received by office, with the support of the office they select

the most interesting offer and send in their CVs. Then graduates participate in the selection interviews. After that, they design internships with businesses contacts in terms of activities to be performed, schedules and methods. Trainees are also required to participate in an ongoing and *ex post* evaluation activities in order to offer an opinion about the programme's activities, the host and the skills acquired during the period.

Businesses and local government/agencies involvement. Businesses and local institutions are directly involved in the design of the internship. Filling in the Job Profile, the company interacts directly with the operators of the placement office in order to evaluate exactly the profile they expect they will need, and on this basis they define together the skills and knowledge needed for that position.

2.3.3 Interactions – in terms of the opportunity for contact and comparison between the various actors involved – are triangular (university-graduates-businesses), where placement service becomes a sort of intermediary, a filter between the needs expressed by companies and the profiles of graduates enrolled in the service. For interactions that affect the communication of proposals, for example, the staff of placement service front-office comes into contact with the various faculties through the faculty presidential secretariats and the internship offices. This type of interaction occurs purely through posters distributed to a targeted mailing list and electronic mail via the web site. Direct communication with graduates also took place through a direct e-mail list-compiled from students who participated in public meetings in their faculties.

2.4 In terms of external communication, we distinguish between mass communication and direct communication. The first type is aimed at a broad target and is not customised. In the FIXO program, for example, there was a mailing list of organizations that had relationships with the university and therefore had already signed agreements to host students. In terms of direct communication, meetings were organized with local government and trade associations in order to explain the service.

The role of the university's image is crucial for the effectiveness of external communication. It should be easily remembered as it is heavily consolidated at the national level, both for the more than 500 years of history as well as a renaissance city UNESCO heritage site. The image is further reinforced by positive word of mouth of more than 16,000 students enrolled from all over Italy and abroad.

2.5 Placement organisation reflects the FIXO programme proposal. In particular, the "Operatore Unico di Placement" was created to deliver and manage all the services provided by the placement office, both for individuals and businesses. Duties are:

- to analyse the labour market with special attention to local business in order to obtain job applications and understand professional needs;
- to provide information to users about the services offered by placement;
- to support the graduate in searching for a job (level of employability) and in developing of a professional project;
- to support the launch of business initiatives;
- to facilitate matching between demand and supply of jobs and traineeships;
- to conclude agreements and manage procedures related to internships;
- to assist the trainee on the path of insertion in the business; and
- to monitor trends for training and evaluating outcomes.

At the University of Urbino these figures were divided according to degree of professionalism – senior and junior. Both must perform the functions above. Personnel employed in placement – six people including three part-time – was given on-going training in specific topics[12]. Service offering, coordinated by dedicated staff, works with a network of internal actors at the university such as teachers, student offices, faculty presidential secretariats, stage offices. These operators receive ongoing information on services and news[13].

This last aspect concerns the evaluation and monitoring of performance of the service. The FIXO program included within it a mechanism of performance review focused on internships made in a given period[14] and on the degree of user satisfaction (trainees and enterprises).

Irrespective of the FIXO program, placement quality control is implemented by the office through the collection of participant evaluation questionnaires. This assessment tool will be further developed, however, expanding in a competitive perspective and considering objective factors that determine the quality and service effectiveness and putting them in connection with services offered by other universities.

3. Conclusions

Italian universities are going through a phase of strong competition to attract growing numbers of new undergraduates, which allows them to access related shares of public funds from the Ministry of University and Scientific Research. This urges the universities to pay attention not only to training quality, which is – together with research and scientific output – the core of the offer, but also to the design of innovative solutions in the field of peripheral services. Among them, the job placement service and connection with the world of work is the subject of increasing attention at several Italian universities. While companies and the labour market require direct contacts with the universities – delegated to act as qualified human resource intermediaries – on the other hand, the same students expect not only education from the university but also guidance through the difficulties of access to employment and occupations. With placement service, universities have the opportunity to increase value provided to stakeholders, both in terms of broadening the number of services – adding peripheral activities to traditional ones – and in terms of support to the student beyond the obtainment of a degree.

This study has addressed some conceptual issues regarding value and quality in services. These clarifications are instrumental in the analysis of the case of placement services at the University of Urbino.

It has been said that value is a complex concept, defined as the difference between benefits and sacrifices perceived by the customer under a long-term relationship with the supplier, in which everyone involved takes on the dual role of user and producer of value. In the case of our study:

- (1) Students are recipients of a number of benefits related to the support offered to them during the “exit orientation”, namely at the moment of entry into work. At the same time they produce value for businesses and public institutions, becoming “human capital” qualified and available for development of companies and of region, represented by local authorities. Students also create value for the university by monitoring and evaluating services. This encourages the continuous processes of quality improvement. Finally, they create value for the university by

providing positive word of mouth, which has a strong impact on the image of the university.

- (2) Companies obtain value from the university when it plays the role of intermediary and interface with potential workers, in particular by reducing its costs of hiring searches. The same companies produce value for the university, as they contribute to the definition of path training and training of the students who – through their work “in the field”, obtains practical skills that make training more complete. In addition – along with the students – they play an important role in supervising service quality. Last but not least, they create value for the university by contributing to service communication stimulating the external circuit information through word of mouth.
- (3) Local public organizations receive value from students – who represent “human capital” as mentioned above – and from the university, the primary operator responsible for “training” young people and preparing them for entry into the world of work. Similarly, the role of local government is fundamental for value creation: they may facilitate the value network achieving informative and relational platforms and providing financial support (as in the case of the FIXO program).

This confirms the view expressed at the beginning, that the involvement of all actors at all stages of the relationship and at all stages of the service delivery process is crucial for maximizing value creation. Value creation can be observed both at the level of dyadic interaction between customers and suppliers, who are both in the network, and to which others could be added to the list of universities, graduates and businesses – such as donors and families of students. In the latter case, the university becomes a facilitator of value creation, playing the role of technology and human interface in the network.

Regarding service quality, it emerges that the acceptance of both approaches – defining quality as a comparison between expectations and experiences and defining it in terms of attributes – is desirable in order to prepare a quality control model for the service provided. In the case of University of Urbino Placement Services, for example, the system for measuring quality should follow two perspectives:

- (1) The first focused on the comparison of quality expected and experienced by users, adopting evaluation tools and techniques to measure and analyze deviations, first of all the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, 1991).
- (2) The second pays greater attention to the competitive dimension of quality aimed at a horizontal comparison with other universities. This comparison may be based on parameters indicative of the quality level identified ex-ante, and free of subjective evaluations of the client. The placement of a university could be defined, therefore, by a set of attributes and quality parameters (e.g. number of weekly opening hours of offices, number of affiliated companies, number and type of student services, etc.) and evaluated by comparison with the same parameters of other university placement offices.

The delivery process is still the primary element on which to focus management efforts. Not just because value and quality are globally perceived by the user as closely related within this process, but also because it is in the process that will produce the

most credible external communication, which Grönroos defines “communication related to service”. In a dynamic relationship, the image that clients develop of the supplier and the service received is formed primarily in the interaction process and, in the meanwhile, influences successive perception.

There is a need, therefore, for the University of Urbino and universities in general to adopt a managerial approach guided by service management principles and tools, in order to evolve in the direction outlined in this work – to create value and pursue service quality, particularly in placement services. This approach seems more necessary than ever today, when competition between universities extends from the geographical point of view and becomes stronger, due to adding the provision of innovative services to the traditional activities – training and scientific research. Including placement is an important example.

The new competitive environment can be analyzed using the development of the service offering model, attributable not only to one service (as has been the case so far), but also in a corporate view. Placement can be interpreted as the essential service of a basic package, differentiable from placement of other universities through ancillary services such as organizing events, conferences, meetings, etc. From a corporate-level view, the basic service package includes the core services like training, education and scientific research, while placement would be an ancillary service, with the task of enriching the university offer and distinguishing it from its rivals.

Until a few years ago this seemed a realistic interpretation, but today these ancillary services are growing in importance, considering the large potential for value creation, even to the point of being considered an essential component of the basic package.

This has led to a change in university missions both in terms of conformation and in terms of nature of relationship with the student:

- Initially focused on training and scientific research, offer has been enriched by including new and diversified ancillary services with increasing importance.
- Relationships with students have grown, both in terms of time reference and in intensity. They are no longer limited in time to the period where students are trained, but extend beyond obtaining a degree, and thus represents a new phase of relationship that leads to participation of new actors (enterprises and local organizations), which shows the logic of network and mutual exchange of value.

In the new competitive challenges they will face, universities will play increasingly on the ability to facilitate the creation of value in a network of individuals – of which the university could be the core – through offering innovative and high quality services, able to enrich the traditional mission-oriented training and research.

In modern consumer societies driven by the experience economy paradigm (Pine and Gilmore, 2000) competition between educational institutions and universities is gradually playing not so much on the quality of the package of core services or facilities, but on the presence or absence of high experiential components and participatory (products-experience) and transformations, in which the real product of the activities is the customer, i.e. the student.

In this approach, the student is taken care of by the university and will undergo transformation through the provision of educational knowledge (knowledge) and support for training in new skills, and competencies (skills), allowing them to apply their knowledge even across different applications and lecture halls. Furthermore, the more

competitive universities try to attract students but also researchers, offering them the opportunity to live unique, original, and engaging entertainment.

The new competitive environment is in fact moving towards strategies for education, or making education more entertaining in which the training activities and research are commodities, which offer homogeneous undifferentiated value perceived by families, students and workers. What does and will make a difference is the ability to provide rewarding experiences and engaging people in search of models of quality based not only on what, but how. Ultimately, teaching and research must grapple with the processes of spectacular society, not be confused with them, but know how to extract positive aspects for the success of the university as a competitive operator.

Notes

1. It should be stressed that perspectives on analysis of value may be different. This paper takes the consumer's point of view, whose value may be based on two elements (Buratti, 2004): value in use (personal utility obtained from the availability of a good or service) and the exchange value (price at which the product can be bought and sold). There is also a third concept – the cost value – which is the total amount of costs at which the company claims to produce and sell the product/service. The difference between exchange value and cost value expresses the competitive ability of the company (Porter, 1985).
2. The authors summarise some aspects of the client's concept of value relevant for the measurement of: "value is defined as a multi-dimensional construct, the dimensions of which may be generally defined as 'benefits' and 'costs', in turn made up of single factors of benefit and cost (multi-dimensionality of construct); the perception of the components of value is product or brand specific, and therefore refers to brands or products offered by a specific company; the perception of value is based on a comparative evaluation, or rather, an evaluation carried out with respect to competing offers (relativity); for any specific product or brand, this perception differs from subject to subject in so far as it is formed by the mental processes that each client activates as a function of their own cognitive repertoire (subjectivity); and for any given product/brand and a specific subject, the perception of value changes over time as a function of variables both external (such as technological innovation, economic changes, socio-cultural changes) and internal (learning) to the consumer. For each individual, therefore, the weight attributed to the components of value changes over time (dynamism)" (Raimondo and Miceli', 2005, p. 81, trans.).
3. The authors analyse the concept of value to the client in terms of differential perceived benefit (DPB), derived from the ratio between the perceived differential value (product of the attributes of potential usage value and the signs of value) and the perceived differential sacrifice (product of the psychological effects connected to the disbursement of a certain sum to purchase a specific product system, relative to a given threshold of differential perceived value).
4. The focus on interaction seems appropriate in the current context of de-materialisation of the factors of production, in which the creation of value is based on knowledge as a key factor of production (knowledge economy). In this context, "[...] the producer can maximise the utility of specialised knowledge possessed, better serving the consumer in the exploration of his or her needs, both obvious and latent. The consumer can take full advantage of the knowledge and skill potential that the supplier offers, extracting all potential usage value from a single activity defined through a cooperative relationship" (Buratti's, 2004, p. 9, trans.; Rullani, 2004).
5. This occurs for a variety of reasons, among which: the importance of the tangible elements of a product has passed into the background with respect to intangible and symbolic attributes; even tangible attributes are perceived by the consumer, who does not necessarily possess the skills necessary for an objective evaluation of the characteristics of the product. As well,

goods and services are both products. That is, they are output by a producer-supplier even though they possess different material characteristics.

6. The University of Urbino “Carlo Bo” was founded in 1506. More than 500 years have passed since then, and the university has grown and successfully renewed itself. It now has ten faculties (economics, pharmacy, law, letters and philosophy, foreign languages and literature, education sciences, science and technology, physical education sciences, political science and sociology), more than 16,000 registered students and approximately 3,500 annual graduates.
7. Career Day is an annual event aimed at bringing together on the same day in the same location businesses and institutions from a variety of sectors interested in meeting recent graduates of the University of Urbino. The main event has grown over time both qualitatively as well as quantitatively, and is now enriched by numerous ancillary events such as training seminars about accessing the work-force, seminars, laboratories, and informational seminars aimed at presenting participating companies and their labour needs. Through Career Day, graduates have the opportunity to enter into direct contact with company representatives and distribute their CVs. During the latest edition of Career Day (2008), three companies also held job interviews for hundreds of graduating/graduated students.

As well as Career Day – a university-wide initiative – some faculties are constantly active in working toward placement goals, albeit not uniformly nor planned, and promote various activities aimed at neo-graduates such as: the collection and posting of CVs to interested companies, organisation of business presentations, advertising of opportunities for neo-graduates, post-graduation work-study placements, etc.
8. In accordance with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and developed with the technical support of Italia Lavoro, the programme has concentrated on the growth of activities already present in the territory, favouring a “virtuous cycle” that integrates the university and the system of production. The programme’s objectives were: to permit universities to become an important link within the processes of insertion into the labour force, as well as transfer and spread of innovation and research; to implement an integrated service model able to incorporate the central placement service within the structure of the university so as to create and manage internships and facilitated work-placements for young graduates and near-graduates; and to broaden and consolidate the network of relationships with public and private institutions active in the labour force so as to promote employability and the actual employment of young graduates and near-graduates.
9. Specifically, the information area aimed at businesses/institutions offers information on: services performed by the internship and placement office; labour market regulations; legal subsidies for companies that hire participants; types, characteristics and particularities of the various forms of contract. This activity is accompanied by a professional needs assessment by way of identification of the professional profiles searched for by companies through: identification of companies’ professional needs; development of job profiles on the basis of needs emerging from the identification process; and regarding the organisation of the insertion internship, the service provides assistance to companies to identify recent graduates who most closely match the professional profiles required by the company. As well, the service evaluates the degree of satisfaction of the company by way of a questionnaire. Finally, in terms of matching supply and demand, the service offers support in finding the candidates that companies are looking for.
10. In this sense, one may think of the role that accessibility plays reducing perceived sacrifices.
11. For example, registration in the FIXO project can be done directly online, either on one’s own or with assistance from the front-office staff. The candidate must connect to the web addresses: www.uniurb.it or www.progettofixo.it, fill out the online registration form and attach some documents: the online application form, an updated and signed CV, a copy of a form of identification and a social insurance number. Candidacy includes insertion in a data base from

which candidates are identified to send to internships. The specific requirements for participating in the FIXO programme are differentiated according to whether the candidate is a graduate or near-graduate. In the first case, candidates must have graduated from the University of Urbino Carlo Bo not more than 18 months prior to the date of application to the programme. In the case of near-graduates, at the time of application candidates must have already formalised the title of their thesis and/or have obtained 150 training credit units for first level degree courses and 100 training credit units for specialised second level degree courses. Companies, on the other hand, only have to fill out some forms that provide an overview of the company and as detailed a description as possible of the type of person they are looking for.

12. Specifically, the training activity – developed with the technical assistance proscribed by the FIXO programme and provided by Italia Lavoro – addressed technical-operational methods used to offer services both to people (orientation activities, the construction of a professional plan, job interviews, etc.) and to businesses (accounting, identification of professional needs, filling out a job profile, etc.). This is accompanied by a service that drafts reports and documents *ad hoc* for service supply – for example, lists of contract types, labour market reports at the local and regional levels as well as the employment status of graduates.
13. Not only through the distribution of informational brochures, but also through *ad hoc* meetings.
14. Requests for participating in the programme on the part of near-graduates and graduates from the university number 347, while the demand potential – that is, the interest shown by business/institutions toward the service totals 379 requests, only about half of which have formalised a detailed and precise job profile request. By December 2008, 155 TIL had been activated to bring together the supply and demand values, surpassing the target of 150 TIL established by the project for the university. By the end of the project, 23 recent graduates had participated – 16 of which have used the incentives offered by the FIXO programme and seven of which took place through direct marriage of demand and supply of jobs without economic incentives for the company. This result, however, underestimates the true number since it does not take into account indirect insertions in companies stemming from the internship experience or work relationships governed by contracts of less than a 12 month term.

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