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Applying Role Theory in Developing a Framework for the
Management of Customer Interactions in Hospitality Businesses

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The determinants of consumer satisfaction have long intrigued researchers and practitioners alike. Unfortunately, in the case of service businesses and, in particular, the situation of the actual customer service interaction, little information has been amassed. Rather, the bulk of current knowledge focusing on the service transaction has been accumulated in the domain of operational conformance to standards tied to mechanistic service procedures where the performance evidence is substantial. Thus, the nature and attributes of a positive service experience and the role the service person plays in that experience remains, for the most part, a mystery. This article is an attempt to add to the understanding of the service person's role and its various dimensions relative to the service interaction. In order to bridge the gap between the provider of the service and the consumer of it, the service person's instrumental role in consummating the transaction will be examined from a conceptual viewpoint adapted from a sociological perspective on role theory and human interaction. The focus of this effort will be in the application of a behavioral viewpoint to the management of service interactions in the context of hospitality businesses.

Introduction

On the cover of the 2 February 1987 issue of Time magazine the generally perceived poor quality of service in the U.S.A. was brought home in a dramatic way. To counter this the quest by service firms to improve service across all elements of the

service industry is becoming a national passion. Scholars and practitioners are zealously pursuing ways to improve upon the entire process of service delivery and thus achieve excellence in service. Presently, the consensus in the literature with regard to improving service appears to revolve around the customer/service employee transaction. While many have advocated improving the skills of the service employee, others have suggested co-opting the customer into the transaction in order to improve upon service delivery. While we do not disagree with the goals of these efforts, our intention here with regard to service improvement is to focus upon the process portion of that transaction itself and the roles played by individuals who are party to that transaction.

This paper is an attempt to add to the understanding of the service person's role and its various dimensions within the service transaction. In order to bridge the gap between the provider of the service and the consumer of it, the service person's instrumental role in consummating the transaction will be examined from a conceptual viewpoint adapted from a psychological perspective on human interaction. The focus of this effort will be in the application of a behavioral viewpoint to the management of the process of customer service transactions.

Service revisited

The distinction between goods and services continues to be an elusive one. While some authors conclude that products and service lie on a continuum (Sasser et al., 1978), others surmise that the two are quite different (Mill, 1986), while yet a third school of thought contends that there is no difference between

the two (Levitt, 1976). There is no doubt that an element of product can be evidenced in every service and vice versa. For purposes of this paper, we shall view service, generally speaking, as possessing two distinctive albeit complementary characteristics; the tangible or physical dimension and the intangible or emotional dimension.

In understanding the nature of services, one is often faced with some typical descriptions. They are usually classified into four areas: intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity of the product and simultaneity of production and consumption (Sasser et al., 1978). Sasser contends that, in order to understand how service firms are different from manufacturing firms, it is useful to recognize these distinct definitional characteristics of service.

In Fig. 1 a model of the service transaction is illustrated. This model incorporates the above mentioned characteristics along with a more systematic and wholistic perspective of the customer service transaction (Barrington and Olsen, 1987). While it is not our intention to present a thorough discussion of this model at this time, some brief comments about the figure are in order. To begin with, the customer begins each and every service transaction at some time interval before actually engaging in the purchase and delivery of the service product. This phase is called that of anticipation and the customer incorporates all the variables indicated in the first stage of the transaction. Frequently this element is heavily influenced by the customer's last experience with service in this organization or the word of others about their experiences. Thus, these perceptions also have a major

influence on how they will evaluate the next step in the service delivery process, that of the actual experience.

Once committed to the actual transaction or actual service experience, all the elements of this component of the transaction, as illustrated in Fig. 1, come into play. Service product components refer to the actual physical, psychological and sensual characteristics of the tangible and intangible elements of service. The product characteristics, such as the temporal and heterogeneous, bring into the service concept the notion that service is intangible, complex and viewed differently by each customer and service employee and that these perceptions of service change over time. The service product dynamics refer to the operational problems associated with the actual delivery of the service and the control of standards throughout the delivery. The service repertoire is one of the more complex elements associated with the actual delivery of service. It represents a systematic process designed to assist in the management of the delivery of the service and provides a way of incorporating all of the components associated with this stage of the process. It is the service repertoire that will serve as the foundation for the concepts presented throughout the remainder of this paper.

Residue is the last phase of the service transaction and refers to the 'after taste' the customer carries with him with regard to his perceptions of the service experience. The residue and anticipatory phases of the process are the most difficult for management to shape and control but nevertheless must be considered as essential to the total customer service transaction.

In order to enhance the applicability of this framework to everyday management needs for improving service, each of the elements must be explored more completely. In the following section only one element of the transaction, that of the service repertoire, will be examined from a role theory perspective. Each of the constructs of the role theory concept will be detailed and an example illustrating its applicability to the service transaction will be offered.

Role theory

Role, a term borrowed directly from the theater, is a metaphor intended to denote the conduct adhering to certain parts rather than the players who fill them. Role may be defined as a prescribed way of behaving in a particular situation for any person occupying a certain position (Coutu, 1951). The current term developed out of several earlier forms, roll, rolle and rowle, the reference for which was a sheet of parchment turned around a small wooden roller (Latin rotula) for convenience of handling. The sheet of parchment carried the written script or 'part' from which the actor recited.

For effective participation in any culture, human beings must locate themselves in a number of ecological systems. They must locate themselves in the self-maintenance system, the space time system, the social system, the normative system and the transcendental system (Sarbin and Allen, 1964). Although placement in all these systems has relevance for role theory, our focus is on the placement in the social system, in the structure of the organization or the work place specific to service businesses.

A word regarding the meaning of 'theory' in the term role theory. It is said to denote a set of propositions emphasizing a consistent idiom that guides the search for facts. In other words, this can be explained as being a general principal, formula or ideal construction, offered to explain phenomena and rendered more or less plausible by evidence in the facts or by the exactness and relevancy of reasoning (Webster's Dictionary, unabridged, 2nd edn). As we apply this meaning of theory to the discussion, the constructs regarding role theory will be presented in the paragraphs to follow.

Role enactment

Unlike some psychological theories, role theory, with its focus on role enactment, bridges the gap between the individual and the group, between personal history and social organization. Where the object of observation is a service person enacting a professional role, the customer can rarely use a correct-incorrect criterion; rather they assess the appropriateness, propriety and convincingness of the interaction. The assessments can only be done through the use for the human judgmental processes.

Contained in the process of judging the effectiveness of role enactment is the implicit operation of probabilistic inference (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). Sarbin and Allen contend that the audience's judgements about the appropriateness, propriety and convincingness of the server's role is based on sampling of overt conduct of the actor, of complementary actors and of settings including symbols and artifacts. This means then, that the success of the service transaction is dependent on the customer's subjective judgement of it.

In principle, the number of roles that a service person is expected to enact can be counted. Such roles as the host, the friend, the expert and the clown have appeared in the reports of observation of the restaurant waiter. It is obvious that the more roles a service person can enact, the better able he or she is to meet the exigencies of the job. To the restaurant operator, this implies that the server who possesses a variety of well pretested, realistic and professional roles is better equipped to meet new and critical job situations than the person whose role possibilities are meager, relatively unpracticed and professionally unrealistic.

It is possible to identify role enactment characteristics along an intensity continuum. Sarbin and Allen have denoted this variable as organismic involvement. At one end of the continuum is a low level of effort and emotional participation. The role of a counter person in a McDonald's restaurant may be an example of an order taker with minimum involvement. At the high interaction end of the continuum one can imagine placing the maitre d'hotel of a formal dining facility.

Figure 2 is designed to illustrate this continuum with the low involvement end representing the fast food segment where the service persons role is characterized by low involvement in the service transaction. The next level of service and role type is referred to as casual role enactment. This is defined as service interaction on an 'as needed' basis such as the server behind the cafeteria line as in most institutional foodservice operations or commercial cafeterias which is made up of many self-serve sections. In this case, the servers' involvement with the customer is only on an 'as needed' basis if the customer seems to be having a problem. The interaction is casual in the

sense of being not prescribed as in the next level on the continuum. At this level the service person's role is more ritual. The oft repeated statement by the friendly waitress at your local steak house, 'Hi, I'm Sarah your waitress for the evening', is the classic example of this type of ritualistic role performance. This ritual continues throughout the entire customer service transaction with the role generally being fairly well defined and in many cases somewhat inflexible. As an example of the other end of the continuum, the formal dining experience calls for a more engrossed service transaction. In this case the service person's role capabilities must be extensive and experienced.

As can be seen from the above explanation and Fig. 2, the degree of role involvement and complexity in the service transaction will depend on the demands placed upon it based upon where that job falls on the continuum. Efficiency of conduct throughout the transaction would be compromised if service personnel did not match their role output with the demands of the situation. There exists then, as far as the role enactment construct is concerned, an optimum level of effort and involvement in each type of job.

Role expectations

The conceptual bridge between the service setting and the server's professional enactment behavior is the idea of role expectations. This is a cognitive construct, the content of which consists of beliefs, expectancies, subjective probabilities and so on. As illustrated in Fig. 1, this cognitive construct works to shape the anticipation of the customer in the first stage of the service transaction. Role

expectations, in the case of the service person, encompasses both the technical (job description) as well as the conceptual and human relations (behavioral and interpersonal) aspects of the role. Role expectations operate as imperatives pertaining to a person's conduct and cognitions while he enacts a role (Sarbin and Allen, 1968).

A sommelier, a key service employee in many fine dining restaurants, is not only expected to wear a distinctive uniform and preside over the wine list, he is expected to be dignified, adept, knowledgeable and polite. In order to insure appropriate role enactment in this and other instances, it is necessary to identify the specific performance expectations of each of the variety of roles that the service person must enact. If there is congruence between performance and expectation then the service transaction is generally successful, leaving a positive residue. However, the greater the negative discrepancy between expectations and performance, the greater the corresponding dissatisfaction upon the part of the customer (Churchill and Suprenant, 1982).

Zeroing in on role expectation of service personnel can be greatly facilitated by an understanding of some of the dimensions of this concept. The first has to do with its time and space aspects. The other is the rigidity of the role expectation. At one end of the plenum, role expectations for some positions, such as the griddle operator in a hamburger operation, specify precisely the required behavior. At the other end of the plenum, broad rules, as in a consulting assignment, give the service person the opportunity to enact the role in the particular way he or she prefers within a wide range of acceptable behaviors.

Given that conformance to role expectations is fundamental to a positive service interaction, the next step is to measure this expectation. To do this, one could draw upon the same techniques that are used to measure cognitive structures in general. For example, how should the server in XYZ restaurant behave? From such a question we may expect to obtain a consistent and integrated cluster of duties and responsibilities of the service person.

In a study investigating the role expectations of potentially helpful persons (Langer et al., 1979), role expectations included such attributes as willingness to maintain communication, assigning importance to one's problem, sensitivity to tension and discomfort and helpful with decision-making difficulties. A similar study could reveal interesting aspects of the role expectations of service personnel as perceived by the customers.

Role location

In order to perform, service personnel must be able to locate themselves accurately in the organizational structure. The cues to the location of the service person's role are acts and appearances, including titles, uniforms and name tags. The recognition of these objects on a person leads to predictable role behavior on the part of the subject as well as those one serves and is one of the more covert forms of communication in achieving role consensus in the mind of the customer.

Under normal service conditions, the location of the service person occurs without deliberate reflection on the part of the consumer, partly because the various service positions are more or less obvious. Occasions arise where the more obvious

cues do not provide correct information for correctly locating the position of another. An example is the use of important sounding titles for service persons such as customer service representative (CSR). In this instance, while the organization may be attempting to make the employee feel important, it may be misleading the customer who may misread the level of responsibility and authority associated with the title. The customer then, following from this mistaken assumption, may make a request that would lead the CSR to cause a delay in the transaction (perhaps even put the customer on hold as is often the case) while he or she gets supervisory approval. It is thus important for the cues to conform to the role expectations of the consumer and set the stage for the interaction.

Role demand

Once the participants in the service transaction accurately assess the location of each other on the basis of the aforementioned cues, the range of possible roles is reduced from near infinity to a smaller number. The behavior of the customer or guest in this case guides the location of the server and serves as a basis for the selection of the appropriate role.

The interaction, as it progresses, will continue to offer a number of opportunities for role selection. Because every service transaction is a dynamic event, shift in roles may be called for depending on how the situation evolves. This process often creates role demands or demand for a specific role enactment.

Role conflict

Because of the many demands placed upon the service employee, many of which are brought on by the multitude of roles to be played in the typical transaction, role conflict is to be expected. Role conflict can be described in terms of an actor on stage finding himself concurrently in two or more positions requiring contradictory role enactments such as comedy and tragedy. An actor who is in conflict must necessarily ignore some of the expectations of one or more of the roles and, to the extent that he does so, he is held to be ineffective (Getzels and Guba, 1955).

The severity of role conflict in a service encounter may be evidenced by an example of the server's inability to satisfy the demanding diner who insists upon more personal attention than can be reasonably expected of the situation due to unanticipated business volume. The need for the service person to meet other customers' role demands equally creates a potential conflict situation since the demanding customer will be dissatisfied due to the lack of expected service and other patrons will be angered if their needs, as perceived by them, are not being met.

Role consensus

The fundamental unit of the service transaction is two people in a stimulus-response situation, otherwise known as a dyad. The focus of this paper is the customer-server dyad. The extent to which role and norms in the service situation are understood by the role participants makes dyadic interactions easier (Tosi, 1966) and the likelihood of the service transaction's being a great success. The key to accomplishing this begins with employee and customer preparation and education

with respect to the role the other is expected to play during the transaction.

Role consensus implies that a smooth service transaction is a function of reciprocal knowledge of role expectations on the part of the server and the customer. This has some interesting implications. On the one hand, the service person's role needs to be clearly defined in terms of its attributes. This is only half the job. The second half deals with defining the role of the customer and how he/she fits into the service interaction.

In the process of training service employees it is imperative to define the service person's responsibility for the identification of the numerous and probable customer roles that they will be required to adapt to during the transaction. Management's responsibility in this case is two-fold. One is to provide employees with a scheme to classify customers according to their demographic and psychographic profiles to enable them to cognitively map the customer's role location. Secondly management must provide for the employee the opportunity to simulate the probable roles they will encounter and to stipulate the appropriate range of adaptation to each.

A similar, though less formalized and comprehensive effort must be made to educate and shape the customer's expectations of the service transaction. The customer's role needs to be shaped by the communication messages of the organization so that his anticipation conforms to the capability of the system to deliver. Not only should this effort condition the customer as to what to expect from the system, it should shape the expectation of the role of the service person in providing the service and the context of the situation in which the service is delivered.

As implied in the above paragraphs, role consensus is a complex function of the correct match between the expectations of the customer in terms of the role enacted by the server and how it is played out in the actual transaction. To reach this consensus, deliberate efforts must be undertaken to educate the customer regarding the service person's role and vice versa.

Role skills

A skill may be defined as a physical and psychological readiness to perform some task to some given level of competence. Role skills refer to those characteristics possessed by the individual which result in effective and convincing role enactment. All roles contain some carry forward from the learning conditions of early life, the quality of those experiences are important in the development of role skills. Role skills may be subdivided into three specific types or forms.

Conceptual skills. Conceptual skills, in part, refers to the ability of the service person to accurately perceive cues emanating from the customer so that he may be able to determine what his own role(s) should be throughout each stage of the transaction. Effective use of conceptual skills is necessary to successfully complete the dyadic relationship between the customer and service employee.

One of the most important aspects of effective conceptual skills is the construct of perception. The service employee must have strong perceptual abilities to accurately assess what roles will be required throughout the entire service transaction. To illustrate the importance of this perceptual ability consider the following: in the process of approaching the guest's table

in a restaurant, the service person needs to assess the mood of the customer and prepare himself to 'play' the role that is demanded of the interaction implicit in the mood identified. Once the employee has accurately assessed the appropriate imperatives of the dyadic encounter, the appropriate responses must be generated and enacted.

Behavioral skills. In the enactment of the role(s) called for by the transaction, the employee must successfully utilize a wide range of behavioral skills. The range begins with basics such as manners and courtesies and extends through to such complex behavioral skills such as anticipation, empathy and affection. As should be intuitively obvious at this point, the job of the service person is extremely complex calling for a comprehensive understanding of the human interaction in the context of the dyadic service encounter and the determination of the appropriate responses to the idiosyncrasies inherent in all transactions.

Specific considerations for hospitality operators seeking employees with strong behavioral skills are two-fold. In the first instance, general intellectual ability may be, but is not necessarily related to, cognitive skills. Thus, prospective employees with high I.Q. scores may not necessarily be good service employees. Other, more appropriate selection criteria, related to cognitive skill identification, need to be developed. A second consideration is that individuals differ not only in their ability to detect and discriminate cues in a service interaction, they differ in their ability to make accurate perceptions and inferences on the basis of these cues. In selection of service personnel therefore, there is need to emphasize both perception and interpretation skills.

Technical skills. Another component of this scheme is technical skills. Technical skills can be further subdivided into mechanical and service skills. In the case of the restaurant service person, service, clearance, flambe, etc., are all examples of technical or procedural skills. Since different job positions require the performance of different technical tasks, persons better able to perform these tasks would be judged as more skillful role performers.

Inasmuch as these skills form an important complement to the behavioral and interpersonal skills mentioned above, their presence alone cannot guarantee the positive outcome of a service encounter.

Training for service: a dramaturgical perspective

An approach to role learning that is assuming increasing importance is the use of the dramaturgical model. This may provide a meaningful framework in which to approach the task of service training. The dramaturgical model can best be described as follows: like an actor in a play, the service person must learn their roles in terms of the optimum service delivery expectations in a wide variety of customer interactions.

The learning process has two dimensions that need to be understood in order to prepare the person to play the role. The first is the script. The service person must learn the verbal responses as well as the actions and gestures appropriate to the interaction. The second is the scenario. The importance of the scenario in service training cannot be overemphasized. Scenario building can be an integral part of the teaching of customer contact employees.

Role repertoire

The scenario building component of the learning process can best be accomplished by utilizing the development of appropriate role repertoires for each customer contact employee. A role repertoire is little more than an actor's script in a play. It is a repertoire of scripts. In other words, a role repertoire can be said to contain a taxonomy of roles that the service person can draw upon in response to various customer interaction situations (Olsen and Dev, 1986). It is the authors' contention that the number of roles in a service person's repertoire is an important determinant of the outcome of the service encounter. The absence of a sufficient role repertoire can lead to ineffectual professional performance.

There are some considerations that need to be taken account of when framing this repertoire. The first is the effect of expectation levels and role consensus on the customer-server dyad. A study of human relations in restaurants (Whyte, 1948) examined the waitress-customer dyad. It concluded that the customer-server relationship varied with the standing of the restaurant. In lower standard restaurants, the customer-waitress relationship was on a highly informal basis. In higher standard restaurants, the relations were more formal. The normative behavior of the waitress was largely determined by the social status of the customer. The higher the perceived social level of the customer, the less personal the waitress acted. The obvious implication is that the conformity to customer expectation, on a formal-informal continuum, is fundamental to a positive service encounter.

The second consideration in framing a repertoire of roles is the evaluation and interpretation of the customers' 'state of

being- their characteristics, quality and inner states. The observation and inferences drawn are strictly psychological. In the case of more than one customer, we need to assess certain psychological qualities of relationships between people such as love, friendship or business. The classic perception procedure of defining the phenomenon in terms of the stimulus defined in physical terms is of limited use when dealing with people, partly because one is dealing with a set of complex cognitive processes (Tagiuri, 1968).

A third aspect has to do with recognition of the emotion of the consumer. This has a couple of interesting implications. The first relates to the perception of a cue on the part of the service person. What is required of the server in this case is the ability to identify the emotional state of the consumer and draw inferences from it. The second relates to judging the emotional state from the expression. This may be deceptive unless the interpretation has taken into account the state of expression preceding the emotional expression being judged. One expression does not turn into another in random order. A smiling face following a grimacing one represents one cue sequence (perhaps 'relief') and a smiling face following a rather calm, expressionless one is quite another kind of cue (perhaps 'pleasant surprise') (Tagiuri, 1968).

Yet another consideration in the development of a repertoire is the function that eye contact and distance play in dyadic encounters, of which the most important is gathering feedback on the other person's reactions. Eye contact also places a person under some obligation to interact. Thus, when a waiter allows his eye to be caught he places himself under the power of the eye-catcher (Goffman, 1961). The implication for

the development for role specifics has to do with the amount of intimacy that is appropriate in a given service encounter. It is suggested that, for any dyadic relationship, there exists an equilibrium level of intimacy which is a function of eye contact, physical proximity, intimacy of topic of discussion, amount of smiling, etc. (Argyle and Dean, 1965).

In view of the above considerations, developing a framework for the service person's use in a set of service encounters seems a daunting task. The nature of the complex cognitive processes contained within the service interaction make it extremely difficult to pinpoint and document variables that impact on the process and, in effect, to optimize its level. In attempting to tackle this effort at behavior modification, service scenarios may provide the answer to effectively working with role repertoires.

Service scenarios

The concept of service scenarios is founded in the role play method of behavior modification. The idea of using a game to reflect the problems of the real world goes back at least as far as 3000 B.C. to the Chinese game of Wei-Hai-now known by the Japanese name of Go-and other more recent games such as chess which represent the beginnings of war games (Ments, 1983). The simulation of realistic service sequences through scenario building can greatly assist the training process.

With the use of audio-visual methods, the trainer can assemble a set of service scenarios to cover the various roles that the service person will be expected to play. The trainer and service personnel then view each of the scenarios and discuss each step in the service sequence. The trainee is

encouraged to identify the stimulus and response sets that exist in each scenario and comment on their interrelationships and appropriateness.

Athletic coaches have used the method of motion picture and videotape playback techniques to increase the efficacy of team play and to correct the faulty playing of particular athletes. With slow motion photographs, the subtle missteps of baseball, football or track athletes can be highlighted and discussed with them before corrective measures are undertaken. The same can be applied to service encounters equally successfully. If we conceive of a service encounter as a series of carefully orchestrated steps or 'plays', each step in the process can be perfected using this method.

Initiating the service training program

The constructs of the role theory perspective and the dimensions of the role repertoire and scenario can be combined to create an effective training program for customer contact employees. How this can be accomplished is suggested in the following four stages. Before these stages are presented, a point of qualification is necessary. Since the major focus of this paper was to present a perspective on role theory and its application to improving the level of service quality in hospitality organizations, an in-depth discussion of each stage of the practical application is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, what is only briefly outlined here is an abbreviated illustration of the practical application of theoretical constructs to actual organizational environments.

At the first stage, we would need to define our service mission and overall quality expectations. This can be done in

two parts. One relates to the stages of the service delivery system (Fig. 1). Here we would need to enumerate clearly the steps and expectations in the service delivery process, frequently referred to as blueprinting the service transaction (Shostack, 1984). Based on an accurate definition of these steps, a repertoire of roles could be developed for the service person at each stage of the process. This repertoire definition process then forms the core of the development of the training program. It identifies the array of requirements that each service employee must master.

A second stage is determining the ideal degree of interaction or service intensity, at each stage of the service delivery. For each role, a degree of intensity (high, medium, low) and expertise for the skill requirements in the conceptual, behavioral and technical areas needs to be defined. This is essential in meeting the requirements for role consensus inherent in each customer transaction. To assist in seeing how this is accomplished, Fig. 3 presents a hypothetical foodservice operation for which the level of intensity at each stage has been identified. All the cells in the framework should be scored by management as to the level of intensity based upon the service standards established.

A third stage involves the diagnosis, taking of an inventory of roles presently existing in the operation and the level of quality expected as each role is actually played out. Having established the ideal level above, we now need to determine what the current situation in the operation is with regard to service levels at each stage of the delivery. By means of Management of customer interactions 31 various direct and unobstructive methods, often with the assistance of persons

unknown to the service staff, the management must determine the existing level of service intensity at each stage of the service delivery, for each role. This would require that the person making the assessment go through each stage of the service delivery as a regular customer and score the cells, referred to above, based upon their experience.

A fourth stage would then entail the matching of the ideal roles and role intensities (as defined in the matrix-stage two) and quality standards with the existing levels of the same (stage three). This would lead to an identification of 'gaps' and help determine the necessary emphasis for training.

Summary and conclusion

Behavioral scientists have generally concentrated upon 'bottom line' measures of worker participation in organizations. The notion of efficiency and effectiveness is readily understood in terms of quantitative inputs and outputs. The emphasis on numbers as determinants of individual effectiveness in service organizations is unrealistic. The quality of service, the other measure, remains an enigmatic construct; complex to implement, difficult to control and too nebulous to measure.

The emphasis needs to shift from that of a product orientation to a service orientation if all organizations are to keep abreast of their competitors. In the process of this orientation, recognizing and appreciating the importance of managing the service encounter is the key to successfully competing in today's business environment.

Understanding the nature of the customer interaction in service businesses is a necessary prerequisite to effectively managing it. Role theory provides a useful framework for the

understanding of customer interactions in service businesses. The nature and scope of service encounters make them readily adaptable to a dramaturgical interpretation of the process. Formulating a script or a repertoire for the service person to use in these encounters can help the chances of a positive service encounter. Development of service scenarios to complement the script can be a powerful behavior modification tool for service employees.

Mention must be made here of the importance of the management-employee congruence as fundamental to the processes described above. Employees in service organizations desire to give good service when fulfilling those desires are made easy by management support. In that case, both employees and customers are likely to react positively (Schneider, 1980).

The importance of support systems, to back a service person's efforts on the firing line, cannot be overemphasized. The organizations' commitment to the service standards it sets needs to be rooted in its operating philosophy. The nature of service at all its levels needs to fit together to build realistic role expectations on behalf of its personnel and, thus, maximize customer satisfaction.

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Figure 1. A model of the hospitality service transaction.
 Source: Barrington and Olsen, 1987.

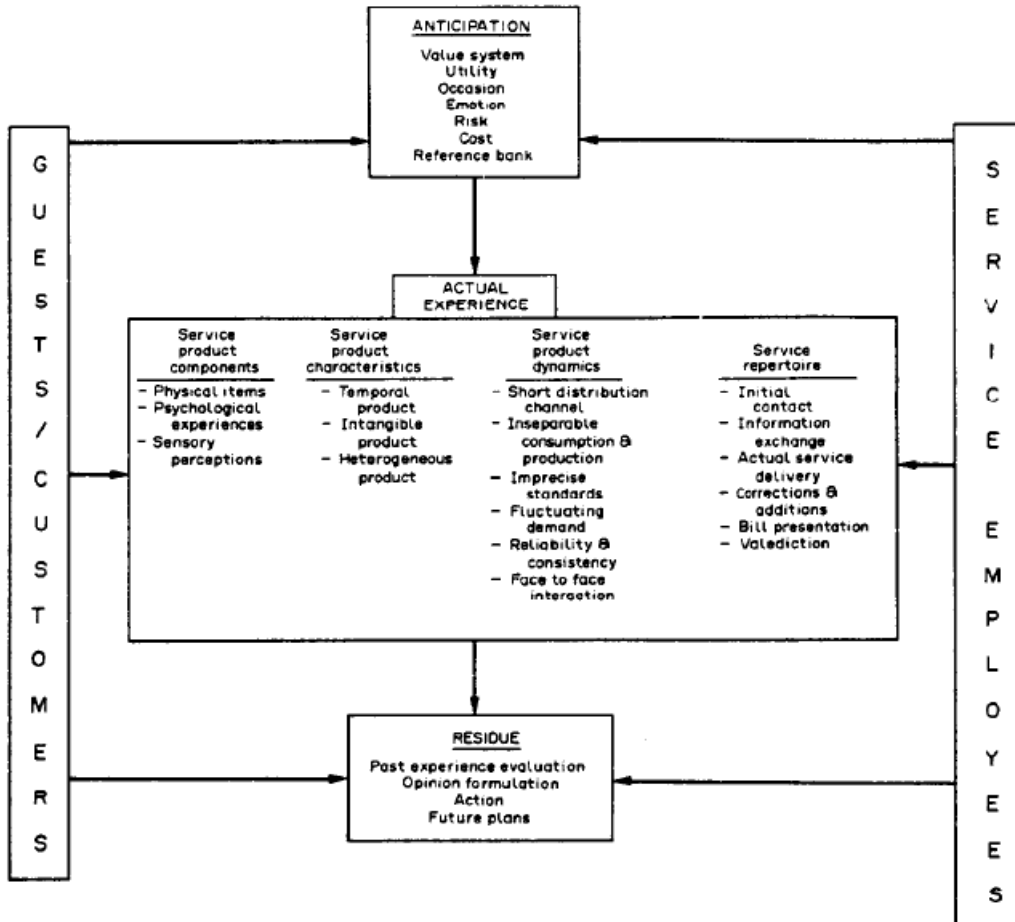


Figure 2. Scale representing dimensions of service involvement. Adapted from Sarbin, T. R. and Allen, V. 1. (1968) Role theory. in the Handbook of Social Psychology, Gardner, Lindsey and Elliot

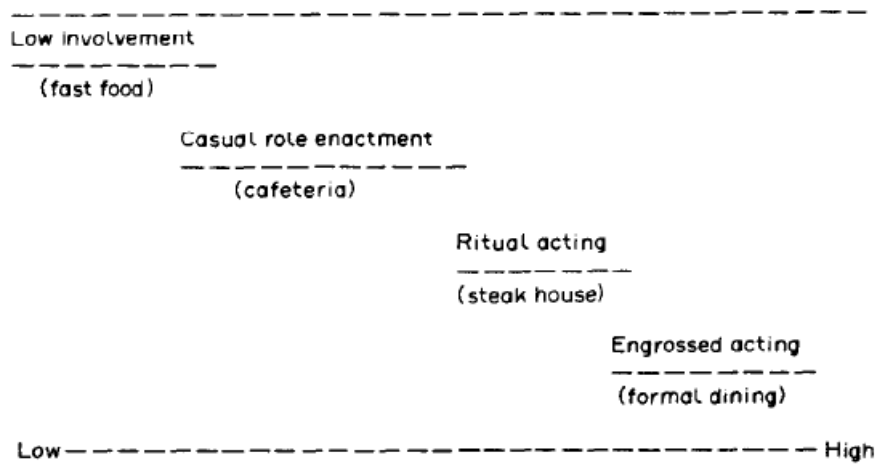


Figure 3. A framework for service training.

Stages in the service sequence	Types of possible roles in the repertoire	INTENSITY LEVEL		
		Conceptual	Interpersonal	Technical
ANTICIPATION	Salesperson	High	High	Low
	Guide	Medium	High	High
	Order taker	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Consultant	High	High	High
INITIAL ENCOUNTER	Host (ess)	High	High	Medium
	Expert	High	High	High
	Friend	High	High	Low
SERVICE DELIVERY	Server	High	High	High
	Instructor	High	High	High
	Entertainer	High	High	High
	Guard	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Trader	Medium	Medium	Medium
RESIDUE	Recorder	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Well wisher	High	Medium	Medium
	Salesperson	High	High	Medium