

Service Blueprinting to Enhance Restaurant's Service Process

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ABSTRACT

Restaurants should provide services that enable satisfy their customers. The study was conducted in a local Taiwan restaurant. The restaurant has been running since 2015 and, so far, has not shown significant progress. Service blueprinting was used to identify where substances could be improved and where customer satisfaction problems occurred. The purposes of the study are (1) to identify the service process by service blueprinting, (2) to find the potential failure points of the existing service process, and (3) to propose possible solutions to the failure points. The results show two categories of potential failures were recognized, i.e., receiving- delivering orders and waiting for food. The substitute order mechanism is proposed as the solution.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons why customers visit a restaurant, but definitely, the main reason is to get a qualified dining experience. That is why restaurants should provide a service that enables satisfy their customers. Service quality will affect customer satisfaction in restaurant industries more than other factors such as price and food quality (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006). Customers prioritize restaurant services that are head-on and associated with their satisfaction (Pan & Ha, 2021). Satisfied customers of a restaurant will come up with high loyalty by visiting often and recommending to others to bring in new customers.

Nowadays, the food services and restaurant businesses have become promising in many countries, including Taiwan. Seewald (2021) stated that the restaurant business in Taiwan had developed continuously. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the restaurant business continues to grow. The current study was conducted in a local Taiwan restaurant that serves specialty Vietnamese food and drinks. The restaurant has been running since

2015 and, so far, has not shown significant progress. The purposes of the study are (1) to identify the service process by service blueprinting, (2) to find the potential failure points of the existing service process, and (3) to propose possible solutions to the failure points.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Service blueprinting is a tool to visualize, analyze, organize, control, and develop service processes. It shows where the interaction between customer and provider takes place and where the customer exerts influence within an overall process architecture (Gersh et al, 2011). It can be used to describe the existing state of a service experience as well as to support defining and implementing new and improved services (Remis, 2016). Service blueprinting of a restaurant is a draw to identify where substances could be improved or where customer satisfaction problems occurred. A service blueprint enables a restaurant to improve service quality.

Previous studies of restaurants' service blueprinting have been conducted for many purposes. By using service

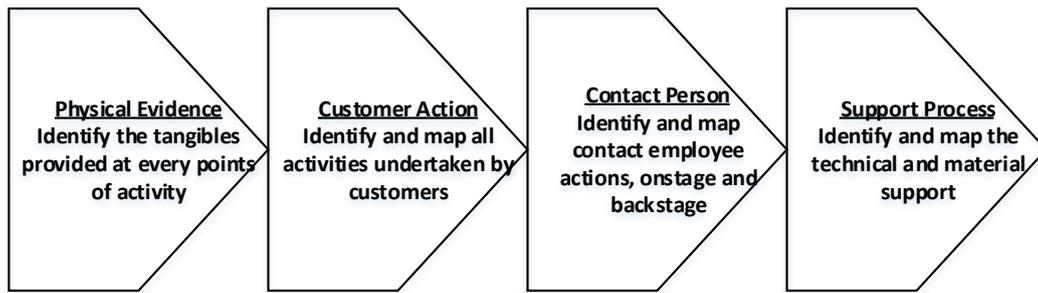


Figure 1. Steps in building service blueprint

blueprinting, the characteristics of the service systems of a restaurant can be identified to develop an important way to improve the service (Hirunopaswong & Khemarangsan, 2012). Hossain et al. (2017) used service blueprinting to recommend how to enhance the service quality as well as the efficiency level of a restaurant. A similar study was carried out by Hummel and Murphy (2011). However, this study combined a service blueprint and motion and time study to analyze the service efficiency and effectiveness of a restaurant.

Service blueprinting methodology focuses more on operations and processes than overall system analysis. The greatest advantage of service blueprinting is its versatility and flexibility (Bitner et al, 2008). The methodology is relatively uncomplicated, and the graphical illustrations are easy to learn and modify to come up with a distinct innovation. Moreover, reading blueprints through cross-disciplinary lenses enables identifying a specific joint research opportunity.

The service blueprinting method is suitable for the current service system. By clarifying and evaluating the existing service process, it is likely to identify areas of improvement within the service chain. According to Bordoloi et al. (2019), a service blueprint design consists of the following components:

- 1) Physical Evidence: show what customers will use, see and experience in the service process.
- 2) Customer Actions: all the actions that the customer involves in the service process.
- 3) Onstage Contact Person: face-to-face interaction between customers and employees.
- 4) Backstage Contact Person: all the actions conducted by employees but invisible to customers.
- 5) Support Process: all tangibles that customers are exposed to can influence their perceptions.
- 6) The person shows the line of interaction between customer actions and onstage contact.
- 7) The visibility line separates an onstage contact person from a backstage contact person.
- 8) The line of internal interaction separates all the above activities from the support process.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study was a case study approach with qualitative nature. Data were collected by observation and semi-structured interviews. An interview with the restaurant's owner was conducted to investigate and identify the evidence applied in the restaurant. It used a list of questions guide to ensure all

the important elements of evidence and keep the questions on point so bias will be reduced. However, it was carried out informally so that the owners could provide the answers in a satisfying and open manner. The points of questions consist of the way to service from arrival, process, and release the customer. A voice recorder and video camera were used during the interview process to help summarize the answers.

Subsequently, the brainstorming method was used to generate ideas and suggestions on how to improve the existing service process. The team members were involved in sharing and discussing their opinions during the brainstorming process. The outcomes of this study were the current service blueprint and the proposed service blueprint. The proposed service blueprint was developed to eliminate the failure points identified in the current service blueprint. As shown in Figure 1, the service blueprint was built in four steps according to the components detailed in the previous section.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Existing service blueprinting

The restaurant offers three kinds of services, i.e., dine-in, takeaway, and delivery. The restaurant is not a big restaurant. The chair capacity in the dining area is 20 units and 10 tables. The restaurant provides a menu list in two languages - Vietnamese and Chinese, chopsticks, sauces, toothpicks, and a box of tissue paper on each table. For takeaway packaging, various sizes of plastic bags are provided without any additional charge. To maintain thermal condition, the restaurant provides a unit of air conditioner and a fan. A restroom is available for customers and staff. A decorative wall with the terracotta theme is applied to make an attractive ambient in the dining area. Many kitchen equipments are used to support the cooking process, such as fridges, microwave ovens, stoves, and many more standard kitchen devices. There is no waiting area in the restaurant.

The customers are mostly Vietnamese. Nevertheless, many local people come to this restaurant as well. The customer section in the service blueprint defines the customers' actions in the service process. As shown in Figure 2, it consists of three rows, from top to bottom, describing the activity sequence of delivery, dine-in, and takeaway orders. For delivery service, the customer orders by phone, and then the owner delivers the order to the customer's location by motorcycle.

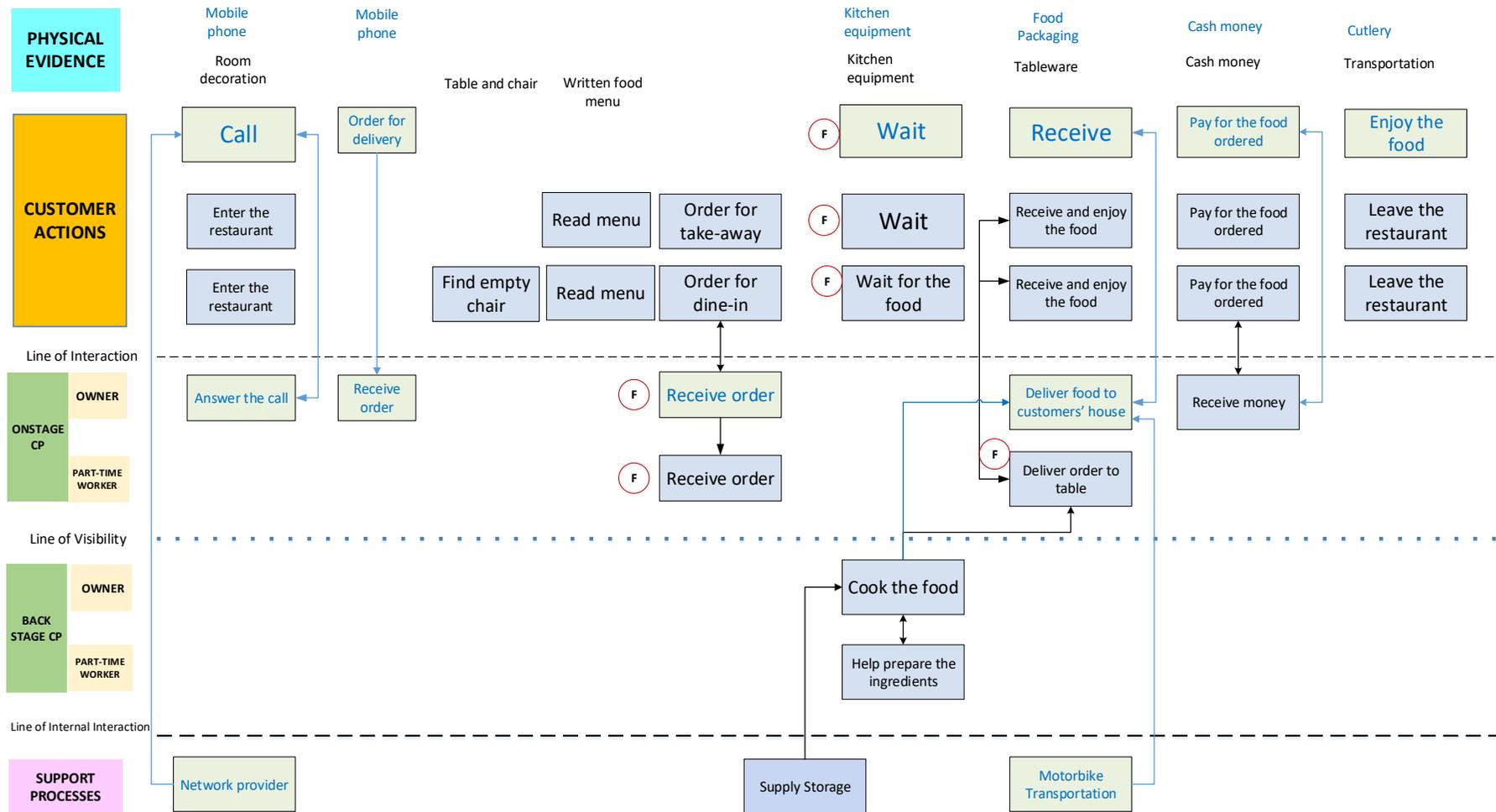


Figure 2. Existing service blueprinting

However, if the restaurant is too busy, the order for delivery will be rejected. For dine-in and take-away service, the first step is the customer's entrance. The customer enters the restaurant and submits an order for a takeaway order. Hence, customers stand in front of the counter to order and then go to the terrace to wait for the order. Whereas for dine-in, the customer comes and finds an empty chair and then places an order. Both takeaway and dine-in customers submit the order verbally. There are no notes or order sheets available. To order any menu, customers just read the menu list and tell the service person what they want to order, and the service person will memorize the customers' orders and serve them when ready.

The service personnel of the restaurant consists of the owners (Vietnamese husband and wife) and two part-time workers. The part-time workers are Vietnamese students without any cooking experience. Since the restaurant is always very busy on the weekends due to a lot of customers coming, the part-time workers are only working on the weekends. On the weekdays, only the two owners work as service personnel. As shown in Figure 2, the contact points between the customer and the service persons are receiving orders, food delivery, and payment. Once the order is received, the owner will prepare the ingredients and cook the food. Part-time workers will help the owner prepare the ingredients if idle. Once the dish is ready to serve, the staff will deliver the food to the customer's table, and the customer then enjoys the meal. After customers have finished eating, they will pay at the counter with the owner. This restaurant only receives a cash payment.

Support service is the last section of the service blueprint. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the support services for the delivery service of this restaurant are the network providers, as the order is received by phone and motorbike transportation for delivering the order to customers' houses. Next, the support system of the restaurant is supply storage to maintain the availability of raw materials and other ingredients for cooking the food.

4.2. Failure points

Detail overview of the existing blueprint recognized six failure points, as shown with the F symbol in Figure 2. The six failure points grouping into two categories: (1) Receiving and delivering an order and (2) Waiting for the

food.

4.2.1. Receiving and delivering an order

As mentioned above, the restaurant does not provide any order notes or order sheets. The service person, whether the owner or part-time worker, should memories the verbal customer's order. Therefore, the service person must well memories all the items of food and drinks ordered and the customer who submits the order. There are two potential failures of this condition. First, it is possible the foods or drinks given to the customer are incomplete or inappropriate with what was ordered. Second, it is possible the foods and drinks of a customer are given to another customer. These conditions become worst in busy times since a lot of distractions in receiving orders are experienced by a service person.

4.2.2. Waiting for the food

The potential failures regarding waiting for the food consist of two conditions. The first is a mismatch in the sequence of order fulfillment. Restaurant customers commonly expect the order is made according to the arrival order, first come, first served. Related to the failure to receive the order, there is a possibility that something goes wrong in the sequence of order fulfillment. This caused the customer who came first to wait for the food longer than the customer who came next. The second potential failure is in the process of waiting. Since the restaurant does not provide any reasonable place for waiting, probably takeaway customers will cancel the intention to buy when seeing a long queue.

4.3. Service Process redesign

The possible solutions were developed, as shown in Figure 4. A design of order sheets might be introduced to avoid service person's forgetting the customer's order. In order to accomplish the order system, every table must be numbered. The physical evidence that expanded from the existing condition is the number of tables, order sheets, and pens, as shown in Figure 4. The information contained in the order sheet at least consists of the food item ordered, the quantity, the option of takeaway, and the table number. The basic template of the order sheet that was proposed to the restaurant is shown in Figure 3.

		Table Number
Food items	Quantity	
		Takeaway <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 3. The basic template of the order sheet

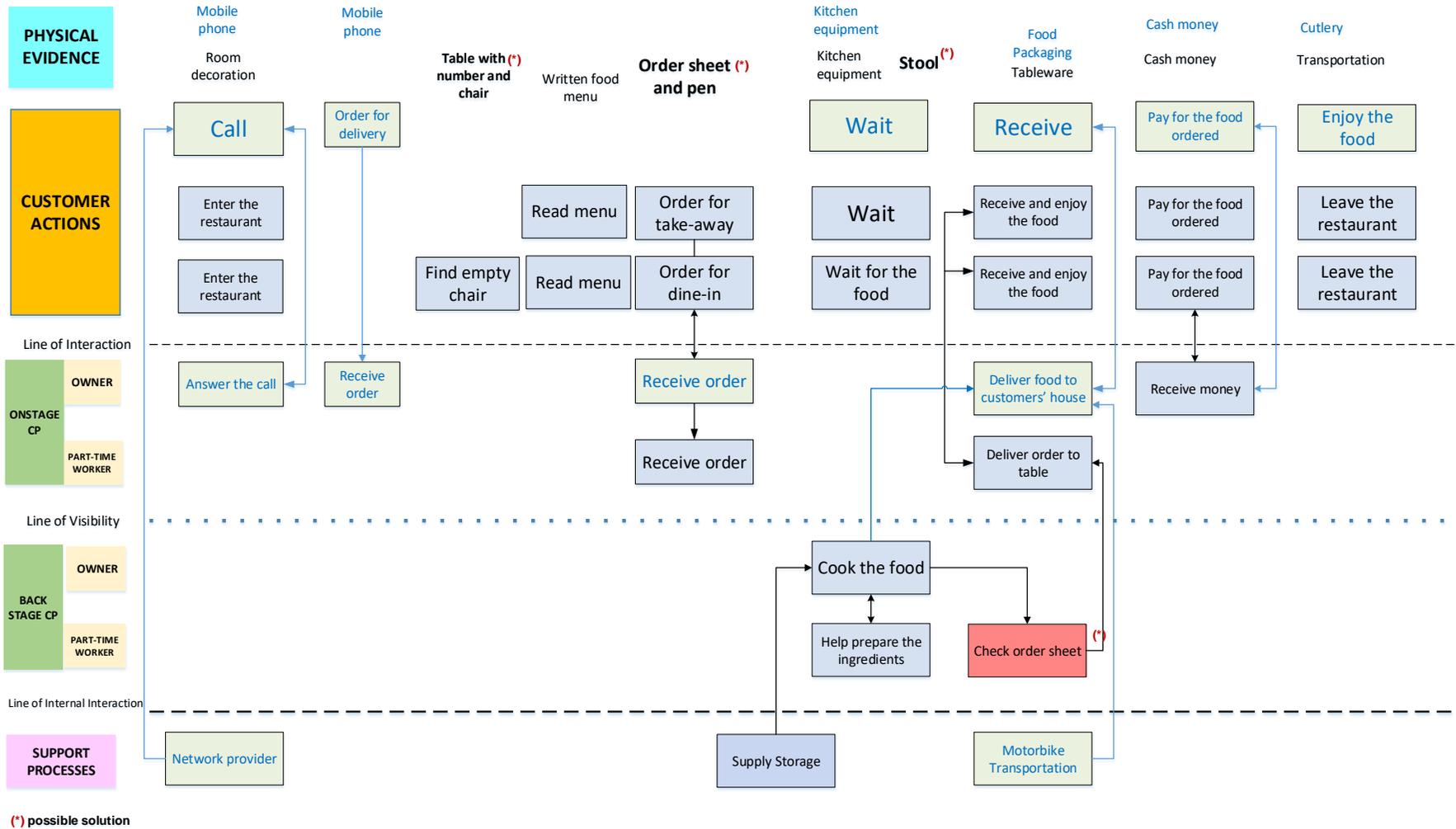


Figure 4. Redesign service blueprint

Initially, the basic model of the order sheet is suggested for implementation. The restaurant can modify the order sheet with other elements in the future. The use of an order sheet will slightly change the activities of part-time workers. To avoid the mistake in delivering the food to the customer's table, the worker should check the order sheet once the food cooking is finished, and the food is ready to deliver. Interestingly, the mismatch of the sequence order fulfillment will automatically have solved as well by the sheet order implementation.

Regarding the process of waiting for the takeaway customer, some stools acquirement is suggested. The restaurant's terrace can be used as a waiting area, and the stools are placed there. The customer can sit on a stool while waiting for the food. As indicated by Choi and Sheel (2012), the sitting service as one of the waiting services is confirmed as the most critical factor that affects customer satisfaction in waiting for the service. Providing seats and waiting areas will lead the waiting customers to perceive the restaurant well treats them.

5. CONCLUSION

Implementation of order sheets in the restaurant order system will enable increased customer satisfaction. Change verbally order to written order will improve the coincidentally of food delivery to the customer's table, whether the food items or the person received. The proposed system is more recommended than the existing service since it ensures the customer that they will get a better service.

In principle, service blueprinting is an early stage of service improvement. It allows the capturing of dynamic service processes in a visual manner. Blueprinting becomes a way to track the chronology of the process and find any potential failures. Nevertheless, we are aware that our study has some limitations. The approach used in this study was qualitative nature, so the subjective perspectives and instinctual decisions can lead to difficulty in demonstrating validity. Therefore, the findings from this study, combined with quantitative data, will lead to the opportunity for future research on the simulation of the service model development. Regardless, from this study, we learn that service blueprinting allows the enhancement of the restaurant's service process.

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