A Theoretical Approach to the Characteristics of Manual-Type Service

Derived from High-Context Service

Noriko Fukushima, Ph.D.
Professor, Faculty of International Studies
Kyushu International University
1-6-1 Hirano, Yahatahigashi-ku, Kitakyushu-shi, Fukuoka-ken 805-8512 Japan
E-mail: fukushima@isb.kiu.ac.jp

Abstract: Prosocial behaviors are occasionally observed in daily life when people have the best interests of others at heart and in the study of prosocial behaviors, there is a notion called “helping behavior” which indicates a voluntary action responding to those who are asking for help. The definition of helping behavior, however, is namely to react to verbal or non-verbal appeals of people who require assistance, so the idea naturally cannot be applied to a touristic situation in the hospitality industry where customers do not need help but simply seek for pleasure. This research aims to clarify the characteristics of individual attending service provided in the hospitality industry, utilizing the knowledge of sociopsychology and the fields of product development and business administration. In so doing, the author creates the term “considerate behavior” which is also a prosocial and voluntary behavior, which connotes not assisting people in trouble but rather providing them with a positive feeling to better enjoy their leisure time. The term implies no thought of
receiving extrinsic rewards even if it may incur extra work or financial cost on the part of the service provider.

**Keywords:** considerate behavior, high-context service, standardized service, module, service architecture

**INTRODUCTION**

A voluntarily conducted behavior, which incurs personal cost for other people but no expectation of rewards in return for the behavior, is called “prosocial behavior” by sociopsychologists. Among prosocial behaviors, a behavior to help people who require help is called “helping behavior”. A different type of behavior is also observed in the service industry. Such behavior, other than regular service actions, is basically observed when a service provider leaves customers feeling satisfied with a hospitality mindset. The author defines this behavior as “considerate behavior”, which is a prosocial behavior that is voluntarily conducted, knowing it may also involve cost, to give a positive feeling to other people with no thought of receiving any financial gain.

The purpose of considerate behavior provided in the service industry is to lead a customer to a positive emotion. The state of a customer’s emotion may be in a normal condition before receiving service but once a customer receives it successfully, a positive feeling of the customer expands and grows. Such experience may inspire a customer to
become a regular customer with the service provider after receiving the first service. When a customer receives more of considerate behavior than expected, a customer’s feeling may elevate to an excited level. A customer’s feeling, even if it is characterized as negative at first, may become positive as the customer receives the benefits of considerate behavior. Considerate behavior can be reproduced as long as a receiver asks for it, while helping behavior may be regarded as unnecessary if a receiver does not require help any more.

CASE STUDY ISSUE

Among all kinds of attending services provided individually to customers at various types of facilities, the research highlights service attended at two exclusive, luxurious compact-sized ryokans in Japan. It is a tradition that most ryokans in Japan, regardless of their levels, employ an inclusive tariff system in which the payment per night includes accommodation fees and dinner plus the next day’s breakfast. The description of “exclusivity” or “luxury” at ryokans connotes that customers should be treated as nobles who are to be greeted with a welcome drink and sweets at the gate of a ryokan upon arrival and enjoy dinner and breakfast individually served by an assigned service provider in their own guest room, as well as with regular service routines received at standard, western-style hotels. Dinner in these types of ryokans typically offer a complete course with eight to ten dishes, each of which is carried and served one by one in the guest room by the same provider. In order to maintain these service activities, customer care is a vital
factor, so naturally the size of such ryokans must be compact enough to ensure service quality. Such compact-sized ryokans provide an excellent environment which the in-depth observation of service providers is possible, due to the fact that a provider attends his/her assigned customers upon arrival as well as during dinner or breakfast. Thus, such attentive service may result in first-time customers becoming repeat visitors.

A questionnaire survey was conducted which showed images of actual service scenes taken by three video cameras with the permission of the operators at two high-level compact-sized ryokans. The purpose of the survey was to analyze considerate behavior observed at scenes of individual service providing establishments. In the making of the video, two researchers, one of whom was the author, played roles of customers at both ryokans staying one night each. A recommended veteran service provider at each ryokan attended the above-mentioned customers and every service activity was recorded on a DVD media format for the reference on the questionnaire survey (Figure 1).

The questionnaire was designed for 79 employees from 9 ryokans, including the afore-mentioned two, for employees to ascertain any observable service actions from the video data. The number of actions observed from the video scenes by all the respondents amounted to 624, with an average of 9.75 per respondent. After the process of categorization, the final number of actions was 68. The actions are:

- Holding a glass so as to leave no finger marks
- Resetting a pair of shoes for a customer to put them on easily
Looking down to create pauses, suggesting that a guided tour walk should start

(In service providing in Japan, there is a premise that customers are to be treated as nobles. It is not considered appropriate to urge customers to take actions.)

- Sit straight in traditional Japanese kiza style to answer questions in a guest room

(This is another custom that customers as nobles cannot be looked down upon and service providers must position their heads lower than their customers when conversing with customers, especially in a traditional sitting style called “kiza” which enables providers to stand up promptly so as to smoothly serve their customers.)

Table 1. Procedures of the Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ryokans</th>
<th>Ryokan A</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ryokan B</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location: Kyoto Prefecture, Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Location: Ohita Prefecture, Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capacity: 28 guest rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td>Capacity: 18 guest rooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average Room Charge: 45,000 JPY per night</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average Room Charge: 45,000 JPY per night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey Date: December 10 and 11, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>Survey Date: December 17 and 18, 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparations</th>
<th>Two tentative researchers as customers at each ryokan</th>
<th></th>
<th>A veteran service provider is recommended at each ryokan</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer A: The author</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provider A: Recommended by Ryokan A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer B: Colleague of the author</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provider B: Recommended by Ryokan B</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Camera Operation | Service scenes from checkin through checkout are taken by video camera from three different angles and recorded in approx. 60 minutes. |          |

| Survey         | The survey was conducted from January 19, 2009 through February 25, 2009 and 76 responses out of 79 employees from 9 ryokans are analyzed. Completion Rate: 96.2% |          |
| Questionnaire  | Respondents are to pick up whatever they think considerate behaviors are from every service scene observed on the screen of 60-minute video. |          |
- Serve tea from the guest of honor position of the customer's seat

(In a guest room there is always a seat or place of higher position where the guest of honor sits. Dishes or drinks must be served starting from this revered seat. These traditions and customs or actions of considerate behavior are based on cultural backgrounds which do not function without a common understanding or consensus. Considerate behavioral patterns of action derived from an a priori base are recognized among service actions fixed or overseen by the management of the organizations.)

Among 68 actions, 63 percent or 43 actions were observed in both ryokans, such as:

- Set registration forms in right direction to easily enable customers to fill out forms

Here, the idea of the action is shared with employees of different ryokans. Considering that there are no connections or communications among these ryokans, which are located in Kyoto and Oita accordingly, the action is recognized as an actual service action. It indicates that an action derived from an individual consideration can be generalized as the idea of the action becomes popular among service providers and then among customers.

The mechanism of service is discussed in section 3.
KNOWLEDGE CONVERSION FROM CONSIDERATE BEHAVIOR TO SERVICE

Polanyi reconsiders human knowledge and introduces a knowledge that cannot be expressed in words, which he refers to as “tacit knowledge”. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) introduces “explicit knowledge” as a knowledge expressed in a logical language. Tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are mutually complemented and converted to create human knowledge. Knowledge conversion consists of four modes as follows:

1) socialization – a process of sharing experiences and creating tacit knowledge
2) externalization – a process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge
3) combination – a process of systemizing concepts into a knowledge system
4) internalization – a process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge

Nonaka and Takeuchi do not refer to tacit knowledge in Polanyi’s “subception”. It is a perception to a subliminal stimulus, whereas Polanyi explains that tacit knowledge belongs to a personal subception that cannot be seen or learned by other persons. The author proclaims that tacit knowledge can be adapted if it is visualized by verbal or non-verbal behaviors of service providers in the service industry.

Figure 1 demonstrates how a considerate behavior as a personal knowledge is converted into an organizational knowledge. Tacit knowledge can be recognized as a considerate behavior, which unexceptionally concerns voluntary actions (externalization mode). When a service provider shows a sign of considerate behavior to a customer over service providing, such considerate behavior becomes “service with considerate behavior”
as shown in Stage 1 in Figure 1. When a first service provider takes a certain action of service with considerate behavior 1 at Stage 2 and a second service provider sympathizes and follows the first one's action, a considerate behavior is generated to produce a replica of the first service with considerate behavior 1 in the same organization (socialization mode). The idea of the first service with considerate behavior 1 is shared with the colleagues of the workplace and accepted as in the form of manuals, which the author defines as “service with generalized models”. It is introduced as service with generalized models 1 at Stage 2. Then at Stage 3 begins a more advanced movement when a service provider adds a brand-new type of considerate behavior 2 into service with generalized models 1 and creates a different type of service with considerate behavior 2. Now at Stage 4, the idea of service with considerate behavior 2 is accepted by other colleagues and evolves into a service with generalized model 2. Then, the next stage continues and this continuum is a mechanism of how a considerate behavior is conducted as a service with considerate behavior at service providing scenes and is converted into a service with generalized model of explicit knowledge. The possibility exists that a service provider develops a new explicit knowledge from a combination of another explicit knowledge (combination mode) or creates an original considerate behavior out of a manual-oriented service (internalization mode).
MANUAL-TYPED SERVICE DERIVED FROM HIGH-CONTEXT SERVICE

Figure 1 indicates that “standardized service” which equally provides a homogeneous quality of service to all customers can be created by collecting only service with generalized models in “high-context service” environments. In this paper, standardized service means individual attending service controlled by an organization. On the other hand, high-context service denotes service in an evolving continuum to serve customers with a wide range of flexibility. There are three different aspects between high-context service and standardized service.

First, the basis of high-context service depends on a service provider’s individual endowments or abilities to change seeds of considerate behavior into new service forms, as indicated in circle stages in Figure 1, while standardized service is based on...
organizational judgments pursuing rationality or efficiency as shown in trapezoids in Figure 1. In an environment of standardized service, such as in MacDonald’s chains where all the service activity directions and rules of the organization are strictly maintained and there is no space for employees to take spontaneous or natural actions for customers based on a mindset of considerate behavior.

Second, compared to high-context service in which three components - considerate behavior, service with considerate behavior, and service with generalized models are mutually interacted in multiple links, standardized service, generated with only service with generalized models has a simple structure of one-by-one module linkage. In a standardized service-oriented fast food restaurant, for instance, payments are made at a cashier of the restaurant, regardless of an individual customer or a group of customers, but in a high-level restaurant there are procedures reflecting considerate behavior. When a group of customers initiates payment, a service provider at a high-level restaurant finds the person in charge for payment and hands him/her the bill inconspicuously. The provider then receives a credit card from the customer and offers a pen of a famous brand, eg. Montblanc to write with as a matter of course. The series of those payment interactions exemplify high-context culture to service activities.

Third, social factors i.e. customs and habits, races, ethnicities, religions, and genders can bring about different results between high-context service and standardized service. In the payment procedures mentioned above, for example, the selection of brandname pen
may not be recognized by customers if they have no knowledge of Montblanc. High-context service requires, to a certain extent, knowledge, competence, or sensibility to recognize or comprehend the context behind the service created by a service provider. However, an organization employing standardized service style, such as at MacDonald’s restaurants, can always supply equality or homogeneity without any conflicts of social backgrounds.

As the society matures and the form of consumption becomes multiple and hybrid, it is assumed that customers’ needs are also developing from simple to more complicated in the field of individual attending service. Bryman (2004) introduces a general trend called “hybrid consumption” whereby the forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres become interlocked with each other and increasingly difficult to distinguish. With hybrid consumption systems, forms of consumption are brought together in new and often imaginative ways. Bryman asserts that labor with performance, such as so-called “Disney World cast members”, in other words, “performative labor” is a key to the differentiation of service. And service attended for customers can improve and become more outstanding in quality if there is “emotional labor” accompanied by hospitable reactions like eye contact or smile and “aesthetic labor”, as Witz et al. (2003) point out, embodying the company and what it stands for in return for wages. Those labor activities can be added to standardized service to upgrade their quality, but it does not promote any contextual links in the activities, which differentiate standardized service from high-context service. Performative labor as is seen in Disney has common backgrounds like Disney’s
world view, American history or customs, and an American sense of value that both service providers and customers mutually share, so the service seems eminently close to high-context service. Still, almost all the activities of standardized service including performative labor observed in Disney are not generated from considerate behavior but organized and determined by organizational management. It is plausible to confirm that those service performances are with no doubt high-level but not the same as what high-context service produces.

CONCLUSION

Standardized service is a field of manual-oriented service management style which only consists of service with generalized models. The field starts to be generated by decisions of organizational management. It is when a stage with fixed service system splits out from the stream of the evolutionary model of considerate behaviors, as explained in Figure 1. Once service system is fixed with service with generalized models, the system never evolves with providers' efforts even if the system can temporarily improve the level of service by strengthening service with generalized models with performances of emotional labor or aesthetic labor.

In this paper, service is discussed in two ways – high-context service and standardized service. By paralleling the characteristics of high-context service, the author clarifies the characteristics of standardized service, which emphasizes rationality and efficiency in the
service providing. The significance of the research is that standardized service is defined as a splitting stage from the spiral continuum of the evolutionary process in which considerate behaviors turn into excellent service. It is a significant issue to identify and examine the idea of high-context service which is provided in other countries or regions, and integrate its concept with the previous one to make a universal notion of high-context service.

KEY REFERENCES


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