Creating a framework for co-creating value and new services
Case: Company X

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Abstract

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The focus of this study was to develop for Company X a framework for co-creating value and new services that helps its employees and clients to develop new services during the year 2020. Consequently, the aim was to help Company X’s employees to deliver better results for the clients and differentiate Company X from its competitors.

The theoretical framework is constructed around contemporary studies and theory regarding service design, co-creation and value creation, such as Stickdorn & Schneider’s (2019) framework and methods for service design, and Yu & Sangiorgi’s (2018) multidimensional new service development model for value co-creation.

The study approach includes subjectivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology due to the nature of the research, which includes studying social interaction. The research approach is inductive, and the research strategy is single holistic case study. The research was conducted as a mixed-method research and as a cross-sectional study. The needed data was collected with semi-structured interviews and it was triangulated with secondary data. The data was analysed qualitatively by summarising and narrative analysis as the qualitative analysis processes.

The results suggested that the case had been successful from the stakeholders’ perspective as the case was beneficial for Company X’s business, its employees and its clients. When comparing the case with the theoretical framework similarities were found with the models presented in the theoretical framework.

As a conclusion a framework for co-creation value and new services for Company X was constructed and introduced to the organisation. The recommendation of the research is to begin utilising the framework in order for Company X to serve its clients better and differentiate itself from its competitors.

Keywords
Service design, value co-creation, new service development, case study

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to create a framework for co-creating value and new services that can be utilised by Company X's (Company X) employees and clients.

Company X is Finland's biggest IT-focused recruitment agency, which also operates in Sweden, Denmark and Poland. It was established in 2006 and it is a part of Company Z, which is a Nordic HR company. The services Company X offers to its clients are recruiting, staffing, recruitment marketing, personnel outsourcing. In 2018 Company X's turnover was above 20M €'s and it found a job for over 1000 people. Company X's services are sold and delivered by ca. 30 internal employees consisting of business and service managers, account managers, recruiters, and HR and marketing personnel.

Operating in the IT recruitment and staffing industry is getting increasingly challenging because there aren't enough IT professionals in the job market to meet the demand. EVA (1, 2018) predicts that by 2025 the Finnish job market lacks 25 000 - 40 000 IT professionals compared to the number of available vacancies. The situation in other Nordic countries isn't significantly different. On the other hand, the competition in the IT recruitment and staffing industry is increasing with new competitors entering the market and existing ones developing their services. In addition, companies are setting up in-house recruitment teams, which decrease the need to buy services from service providers.

The focus of this study is to develop for Company X a framework for co-creating value and new services that helps its employees and clients to develop new services. Consequently, the aim is to help Company X's employees to deliver better results for the clients and differentiate Company X from its competitors.

This report is structured so that the chapter 1 describes the needs and objectives of the research project. Chapter 2 establishes and presents the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 is the empirical part of the research, presenting the research target, objective and problems, and the development task. In addition, it presents the methodology and methods, collected data and analysis, implementation and its results. Chapter 4 discusses the findings and results giving considerations based on them. Validity, reliability and ethics are also discussed, as well as further development ideas and suggestions for further research. Finally, I have discussed my own learning and self-reflection.

1.1 Needs and objectives

Company X, a business unit within Company Z, is the biggest IT-focused recruitment agency in Finland and it has offices also in Sweden, Denmark and Poland. It's a company aiming for growth similarly to the whole Company Z, which consists of several industry-focused business units. Being already the biggest in its field in Finland, the focus there is to grow moderately and find new revenue sources. In Denmark, Sweden and Poland Company X is still a very small player and the aim is to have a high turnover growth. In all of Company X's markets the IT industry is rapidly growing, there aren't enough IT professionals to fill the open positions and the IT recruitment industry is highly competed. Based on my experience the competition in the IT recruitment industry is continuously increasing and the key to keep up with the competition is differentiation from your competitors.

I work as an IT recruiter at Company X in Helsinki and my job consists of finding the needed professionals for our clients, as well as being the account manager for clients assigned to me. Because of this I'm in the front line observing the needs of the IT professionals and employers. I think the recruitment industry is still very conservative and I'm extremely interested in changing it to the better and improving Company X's position in this market.

With the results of this R&D project Company X should be better equipped to compete against its competitors in all the markets it operates in. Furthermore, this project will improve also Company X's employees' competences, thus contributing to their professional development.

1.2 Research problems and questions

The research problem and questions arise from my work experience at Company X (Company X) and the goals and plans Company X has for the future.

The main research question of the study is:

> **How can employees and clients co-create value and new services with a service design framework?**

Sub-questions for the main research question are:

> **1. Why should new services be created utilising service design?**

2. Which service design methods and processes should be utilised in a framework developed for Company X's needs?

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is described in four subchapters. The first subchapter presents key concepts that need to be defined in order to understand the theoretical framework. The second subchapter presents a framework for service design. The third subchapter provides a complementing alternative for the service design framework by introducing the multidimensional new service development model for value co-creation. The fourth and final subchapter of the theoretical framework presents eight service design methods.

2.1 Key concepts

This chapter defines key concepts that are critical to understand the frameworks described later in the theoretical framework.

2.1.1 Service

Service is commonly defined as an intangible and non-standardised good that cannot be stored away in an inventory. Delivering a service requires the customer to participate and get involved with the delivery process. Essentially a service is intended to meet the customer's needs and consequently make them use the service frequently, and warmly recommend it to others. In other words, service emerges when people sharing a commonly recognised value, cooperate and interact to create that value. However, contemporary service research defines service as "perspective on value creation" or as "a business logic" without making a distinction between physical products and services as that is considered irrelevant. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 36; Manzini 2009, 45; Wetter-Edman, Sangiorgi, Edvardsson, Holmlid, Grönroos & Mattelmäki 2014, 109.)

2.1.2 Value

Value is the client's relative and subjective perception of the balance between the cost or sacrifice (e.g., time) for the client versus the benefit received in change of the cost or sacrifice. Understanding how value is built and perceived by the client are fundamental elements of service design. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 16-17.) Yu & Sangiorgi (2018, 40) argue that value is solely defined by customers in the situations they use the service and it is created jointly by the service providers and customers. Yu & Sangiorgi (2018, 40) argue that value is either co-created in social context by customers' value-creating practices or customers create value individually. In the latter situations Grönroos (2008 in Heinonen, Strandvik, Mickelsson, Edvardsson, Sundström & Andersson 2010, 8-9) describe the service provider's role to be a value facilitator that can support to customer to create themselves higher value than they could without the facilitation of the service provider.

Value-in-use is also a critical concept to be understood in this research. It stands for the process of value emerging instead of value being delivered to a client. Value-in-use is thus created in an interactive process, consisting of either direct or indirect interaction. (Heinonen & al. 2010, 9.)

2.1.3 Service Design

Moritz (2005, in Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 30) defines service design as a multi-disciplinary, holistic, and integrative new field aiming at innovating new or improving existing services, which customers perceive useful, usable, and desirable while being efficient and effective for service providers. Mager (2008, in Koivisto 2009, 15) defines service design similarly adding that the designed services are addressed from the client's perspective and the design process includes approaches that are explorative, generative and evaluative. Service design generally requires an interdisciplinary approach involving specialists from fields such as marketing, business strategy, business administration, human resources, and IT. Service design also involves co-creative work, visual thinking, and a mindset open to challenge the existing even in radical ways, all this leading service design to be a truly inspiring approach to work with. Simply put, service design is a commonly shared way of thinking and operating, and a common language for people from different fields of expertise who aim at developing services together. (Mager 2009, 34, 37-38; Tuulaniemi 2011, 30.)

2.1.4 Co-creation

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, in Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 11) co-creation is a new way to create value. It is about the customer co-constructing a service experience that suits her context with the help of service design methods. Mager (2009, 38) goes further claiming that co-creation is about thoroughly integrating the client in exploring and creating new services. Co-creation takes place in a consciously generated environment that facilitates idea generation and evaluation withing heterogeneous stakeholder groups. It is at the core of the service design philosophy. Service design urges service designers to adopt a genuinely empathetic and people-centred approach, because of the high importance of co-creation in services. The service users are a vital source of information, creativity and innovation. Involving the personnel responsible for delivering the service for the clients is equally important. These are the people who have detailed information about what creates value for clients and what is beneficial for the business. Involving personnel also increases their engagement and help implement the change, as they've participated designing it. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 38-39; Van

Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2019, 198.; Ojasalo & Ojasalo 2009, 102; Reason, Flu & Løvlie 2016, 12.) Grönroos & Ravald (in Wetter-Edman et al. 2014, 107) support these views as they argue value co-creation to only occur in direct interaction of the client and service provider. However, Edvardsson & al. (2011 in Yu & Sangiorgi 2018, 41) offer an alternative view, arguing that service providers can also enable value co-creation with resource integration mechanisms that align their aims and resources to customers' value creation processes.

2.2 Framework for Service Design

Service design is a discipline focusing on solving the right problem with the mindset and workflow of the design process. It can be used for improving existing services or to develop completely new value perhaps, for example based on new technology or new market developments. It combines an active and iterative approach with a set of tools adopted from marketing, branding and user experience, among others, aiming at a flexible and relatively lightweight process. Service design and its processes are by nature iterative and nonlinear, but it is still possible to outline a typical framework for these. (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence & Schneider 2018, chapter 1; Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 124-125.)

Several frameworks can be found literature and practice, which all essentially share the same principles. Stickdorn & Schneider (2019, 34) define the five underlying principles as user-centricity, co-creativity, sequencing, evidencing and holism, whereas Mager (2009, 39) argues the five principles to be holism, interdisciplinarity, co-creativity, visual thinking and a radical approach. Design Council (2015) names the service design core principles as “put people first”, “communicate visually and inclusively”, “collaborate and co-create”, and “iterate, iterate, iterate”.

From process perspective service design is still finding its form and there will still be variation between different frameworks even in the future. What is critical, is to design the service design process before starting the actual service design and to tailor the process to match the context of the design project. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 124-126; Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 13.)

The UK Design Council introduced in 2004 a service design methodology named as the Double Diamond. At its heart are four processes, namely discover, define, develop, and deliver (Design Council 2015). Stickdorn & Schneider (2019, 122-123) identifies the service design framework to consist of four separate processes, namely exploration, creation, reflection and implementation, which are described in this chapter. As the latter mentioned is more a more recently published framework, it will be used in this research.

2.2.1 Exploration

The exploration phase epitomises in identifying the real problem to be solved and understanding current and potential customers, the users, business environment and technologies that could be applied. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 128; Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 14.)

In the exploration phase the first task is to comprehend the culture and goals of the service providing company. More importantly, this phase should reveal the problem that the service providing company has and articulate the problem from the perspective of the service provider's customer. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 128.)

Secondly, the problem identified in the first phase should be defined from the current and potential customers' point of view. It is critical to understand the true reasons behind customers' behaviour and, for example, ethnographic approaches can be employed to gain these insights. This can include observing and profiling the customers and creating empathy for them. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 128-129; Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 14.)

The third task within the exploration phase is to visualise the findings and the structure of the existing services. The aim with is to depict complex and intangible processes in a way that allows the designer and other service stakeholders to understand the situation and identify parts of the service that currently are not functioning optimally. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 129.)

2.2.2 Creation

Creation phase consists of creating ideas and concepts, evaluating and re-iterating them based on the feedback received from a variety of stakeholders that should be included in the process. Critical for this phase is to try exploring as many mistakes as possible, since finding them during the design process is considerably less costly than discovering them in the service after its launch. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 14; Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 130.)

The ideas, prototypes and solutions created during this phase are generated and developed based on the identified problems and insights gained in the exploration phase. These can be for example identified customer needs, motivations and expectations, or issues in the service providers' existing processes or an illustrated customer journey. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 130-131.)

It is critical for this phase to include all key stakeholders and perform the work in interdisciplinary teams including customers, users, employees, management, engineers, designers and any other stakeholder relevant for the designed service. The service designer’s task in this phase is to enable co-creativity within and between these teams. The ultimate aim of this phase is to achieve an end-result that follows the five principles of service design. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 131; Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 14.)

2.2.3 Reflection

Reflection phase consists of building prototypes based on the ideas and concepts generated in the Creation phase. Given the intangible nature of services, distinctive methods exist for such prototyping, as methods for physical product design cannot be applied. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 14; Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 132.)

Proper reflection and evaluation of the service prototypes requires the stakeholders to have a good mental picture of the suggested service concept. In addition, the emotional aspect of the service must be taken into consideration and the prototyping should take place in reality or in circumstances close to it. Consequently, the prototypes cannot be plain descriptions of the services, but the designer must apply service prototyping methods, such as staging and roleplay approaches, which generate the emotional engagement necessary for the stakeholders to be able to evaluate the service prototypes. Visualisation is another effective tool for this phase. Even simple illustrations and outlines can help in clarifying ideas, convincing relevant stakeholders and supporting communications. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 132-133; Reason & al. 2016, 9-10.)

2.2.4 Implementation

The implementation phase boils down to implementing, maintaining and further developing the designed service. Critical for this phase to succeed is a process of change, including planning the change, implementing it and reviewing the change. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 14; Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 134.)

The basis of the implementation phase is a consistent service concept that has been formulated and tested during the previous phases. This concept should be clearly communicated not forgetting the emotional aspects and the desired customer experience of the new service. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 134.)

Another critical factor for the implementation phase to succeed is to understand the importance of employees as critical actors of the service from this point onwards. Without their motivation and engagement, the service cannot be sustainably implemented. Having included them earlier in the development process will help implementing the service successfully. Various tools and methods exist for communicating the new concept and employees should be accompanied during the implementation process. Arising problems must be solved quickly and creatively with management showing continuous commitment regardless of the issues. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 134-135.)

Once implemented the change must be reviewed to assess its success. The iterative nature of service design manifests itself in this phase, as ideally the implementation phase would be followed by another exploration phase, during which the progress of change would be evaluated. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 135.)

2.3 Multidimensional New Service Development Model for Value Cocreation

Service design has not been widely distinguished as an integrative approach to collaborative and cross-disciplinary service innovation. Neither has the contributions of service design been used to reframe new service development through a service or customer-oriented perspective. Based on these observations a multidimensional new service development model has been introduced as seen in figure 1. The model links service design, new service development and value co-creation. The model supports organisations and their practices in users' value creation in three dimensions, namely stage, activity and capability. (Yu & Sangiorgi 2018, 41, 52.)

The model has six stages, namely exploration, design, analysis, development, implementation and evaluation. The exploration stage is the starting point for new service development. During this stage users' value-in-use information is generated, providing insights into how users determine value. Based on this a guiding vision should be formulated for the other stages. In the design phase the purpose is to design potential value-in-use, which is followed by the analysis stage. The following development phase focuses on developing resources and processes for potential value-in-use, after which there is the stage of implementation of potential value-in-use. Finally, there is the evaluation stage, which is meant for bridging the implementation and exploration stage. This stage should expose a potential gap between the developed and implemented value-in-use and actual value-in-use. If gaps exist, the organisation should continue with consecutive loops of service improvement and development. This makes the new service development model to be a continuous user-centric and value-supporting process. (Yu & Sangiorgi 2018, 52-53.)

The second dimension, activity, helps bridging continuously the provider-centric new se-vice development activities with the value-in-use information. The activity dimension includes utilising ethnographic and empathic design research for accessing contextual and holistic user experiences and based on those develop value propositions that fit users' perceived value-in-use. Another activity within this dimension is codesigning, which empowers users to boost their creativity and competence by including them in the service designing process. The activity dimension also contains prototyping, which helps explore and test iteratively how to optimally configure providers' resources, processes and outcomes so it supports value-in-use. The fourth and last activity is mobilising actors toward user experiences. This makes service delivery actors understand better their role and responsibility in facilitating users' value-creating processes. (Yu & Sangiorgi 2018, 52-53.)

Capability is the third dimension of the model and a core attribute for it. It highlights the need for continuous building of organisational capabilities for user-centred innovation. Value co-creation capabilities can be increasingly developed and nurtured by facilitating employees' participation in user-centred activities throughout the organisation. (Yu & Sangiorgi 2018, 52-53.)

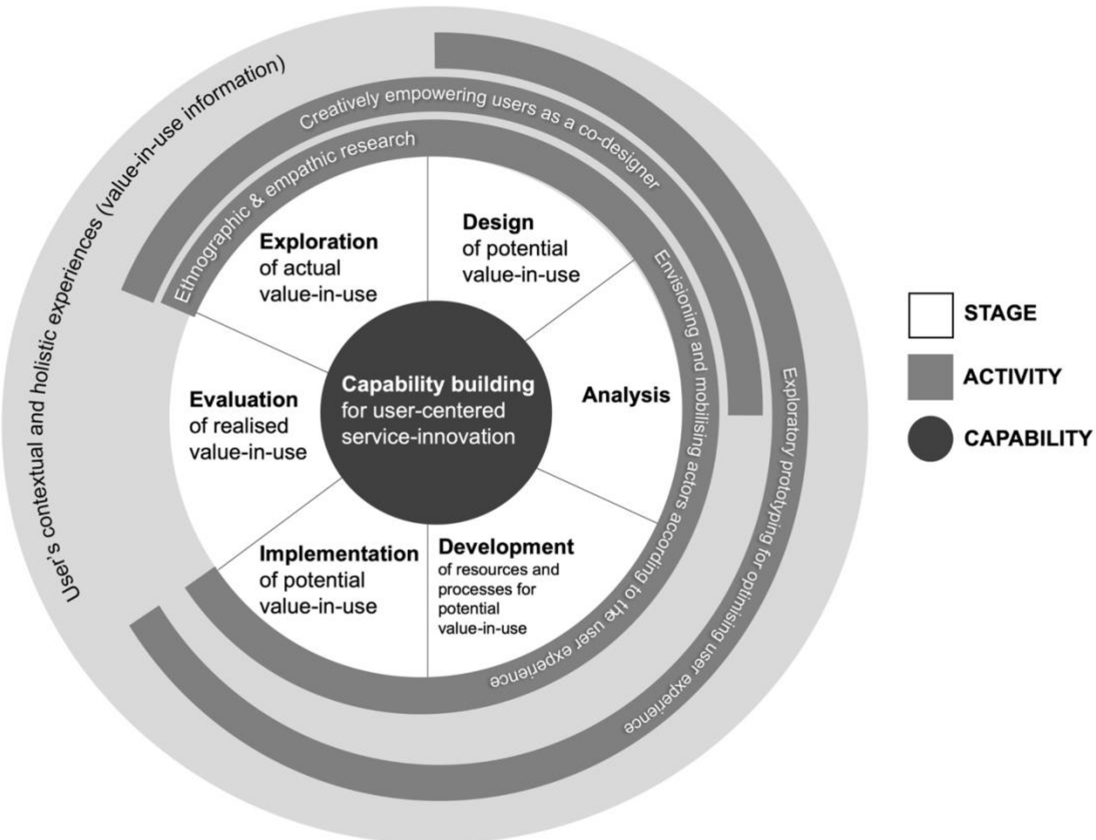

Figure 1. New Service Development Model for Value Co-creation (Yu & Sangiorgi 2018, 53)

2.4 Methods for Service Design

This chapter presents a selection of eight service design methods that can be easily understood and applied in the context of Company X. According to Van Dijk & al. (2019, 148) the described tools and methods are resources that can be used for constructing tailored and iterative projects.

2.4.1 Five whys

Five whys is a method for identifying, discovering and understanding the service context and users of the service. The purpose of the method is to find the real root causes of the problems by starting to dig below the outward symptoms of the problems. In practice it is a chain of five questions starting with “Why”. It is used because of its simplicity: it does not require much preparation and it is an easy way for quickly gaining an understanding of complex issues, without settling for superficial explanations for the detected problems. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 20; Van Dijk & al. 2019, 166.)

2.4.2 Personas

The personas method is used for identification, discovery and gaining understanding of the service context and users of the service. Personas are fictious user profiles that are based on research data and intended as tools for understanding people. Personas may include names, personalities, behaviours and goals and shared interests of a particular group of persons. The tool provides a scale of various research-based perspectives, thus embodying genuine perceptions of the service in question. Personas help service designers to have the client in mind while designing a service, thus allowing the creation of standardised services and processes without losing touch of the humans, that consume those services. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 21; Van Dijk & al. 2019, 178; Reason & al. 2016, 162, 164.)

2.4.3 Scenario-based design

Scenario-based design is a prototyping method for the creation, generation and modelling of new service features. The purpose of scenarios is to visualise the main service concept for customers, and to define the future customer experience and its impact on business and operations. Visualisation makes it possible to discuss and assess each stage the service, at this point being still an abstract idea, in a chronologically proceeding process of interactions between the service and client. They depict in a story format how people act in particular situations and environments. Scenarios can be presented for example as plain text, storyboards or videos. They can help reviewing, analysing and understanding the driving factors ultimately defining a service experience. Scenarios are often created in groups of different stakeholders, which encourages knowledge exchange and helps expressing their requirements in a format easily understandable by other stakeholders. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 22; Reason & al. 2016, 173; Hämäläinen & Lammi 2009, 189; Van Dijk & al. 2019, 184.)

2.4.4 Storytelling

Storytelling is a method for creating, generating and modelling new features for services. Stories are helpful in explaining an idea, a product, service or an opportunity. They improve the design process by capturing in detail the real-world context in which the service will be used. The stories can include compelling storylines that include aspects from the customers' lives, staff's experiences and the service experience that the service is intended to provide. The power of stories lies in their feature of maintaining their relevance even when presented to people that are unfamiliar with the service, thus making the service proposition more compelling. In other words, a good story enables effective collaboration between stakeholders by making ideas accessible and easily understandable. Thus, it can be said that good service designers are good in storytelling. (Miettinen & Koivisto 2009, 24; Van Dijk & al. 2019, 202; Samalionis 2009, 130.)

2.4.5 Idea generation

Idea generation is a method used for creating structure and inspiration for group brainstorming sessions. Different techniques exist, which all have their own motivations for their use. Some can be used as icebreakers for relaxing the participants, thus helping the attendees participate the session more fully. Others inspire the participants' imagination or generate pointers, that can be used for structuring the discussion. The ultimate goal for each tool is to ensure smooth group work sessions. (Van Dijk & al. 2019, 180.)

2.4.6 Agile Development

Agile development is a method that allows design projects to grow and develop iteratively over time, based on evolving needs of the customer and research-based insights that may be generated during the project. Instead of emphasising processes and tools, agile development focuses on individuals and interactions. This method accommodates input from various stakeholders allowing the project to adapt and evolve as it progresses. The benefit of agile development is its ability to keep the project in tune with its key objectives even if situations, the environment or involved personnel change. (Van Dijk & al. 2019, 196.)

2.4.7 Co-creation

Co-creation is an approach that can be used in combination with several other service design methods, most of them being designed specifically to be used in a co-creative setting. It can be used for examining and innovating service experiences collaboratively by involving for example staff members, designers, executives or clients. This approach brings up ideas and solutions that will be iteratively filtered until the most resonant ideas are left to be developed into new innovations and prototypes by the core design team. Another benefit of co-creation is that by bringing groups together it creates a feeling of shared ownership of the developed concepts and innovations, thus also facilitating future collaboration of the different stakeholders. (Van Dijk & al. 2019, 198-199.)

2.4.8 Business model canvas

Business model canvas is a tool that can be used in the service implementation phase to clarify the match between the business strategy and designed service. It is a tool that can be used to describe, analyse and design business models. The tool is a printed large canvas divided into nine sections, which combined represent a successful business model. The sections are intended to be filled in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. Once filled it creates clarity about the core aims of the organisation, and helps identifying its strengths, weaknesses and priorities. In short, it provides a snapshot for organisations that aim at implementing the outcomes of a service design project. (Van Dijk & al. 2019, 212.)

3 Foundation of the framework

This chapter presents the target of the research, its objective, research problems and the development task. This chapter also describes the methodology and methods, as well as data and the types of analysis used for its analysis. Finally, the foundation for the resulting framework is laid with the implementation part and the presentation of its results.

3.1 Target of the research

The target of this research project is to equip Company X to better serve its clients and compete against its competitors in all the markets it operates in. Furthermore, this project will improve also Company X's employees' competences, thus contributing to their professional development.

3.2 Objective, problems, development task

The objective of the research is to create a framework for Company X that can be used for co-creating value and new services for Company X's clients. This should enable Company X's business growth and differentiate it from its competitors.

The main research question of the study is:

How can employees and clients co-create value and new services with a service design framework?

Sub-questions for the main research question are:

1. Why should new services be created utilising service design?
2. Which service design methods and processes should be utilised in a framework developed for Company X's needs?

The development task is to create a framework, based on the case project, that Company X's personnel could use in co-creating value and new services for their clients, without the need to have previous experience or expertise of service design and its methods. The framework should include the processes and tools that should be followed when co-creating value and new services with the client, and the format should be easily understandable and executable by Company X's personnel.

The case project was delivered between March 2019 and January 2020, just as it was planned with Company X's client. The rest of the thesis was originally agreed with my employer and my thesis supervisor to be done between January and August in 2020. The work proceeded according to the plan until March 2020, when the world was hit by COVID-19. This stalled also my work till late August 2020. I made a new schedule for the remaining work and I was able to keep the schedule:

- Theoretical framework: weeks 37-39/2020
- Empirical part: weeks 40-44/2020
- Discussion: weeks 45-46/2020
- Finalising: weeks 46-47/2020

3.3 Methodology and methods

The methodology and methods are described in subchapters starting with the ontology and epistemology, continued with describing and arguing the chosen research approach and strategy, and finally the methods and time horizon are presented.

3.3.1 Ontology and epistemology

As my research will focus on creating a framework that enables Company X's employees and clients co-creating new services, the ontology I chose is subjectivism. Subjectivism views customer service as a phenomenon that is produced as the result of the social interaction between the service provider and customer. Furthermore, individual customers and the employees producing the service perceive different situations and the social actions differently depending on their own view of the world. For this reason, the researcher must focus to understand in a meaningful way the motives, actions and intentions of the customers and employees. Thus, succeeding in this project requires me to understand the different realities of the employees and customers, and their social interaction that should result as new services. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 109-111.)

Epistemology, or theory of knowledge, concerns how things are known and what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a particular discipline. The epistemology that I chose is interpretivism, and more specifically symbolic interactionism. Interpretivism urges the researcher to take into account humans' roles as social actors, their differences and implications in their behaviour. People's subjective perceptions of the surrounding reality are influenced by their preconceptions, beliefs and values. This research philosophy requires me as the researcher to empathise with the involved social actors, namely Company X's employees and clients, in order to be able to interpret their actions, which are based on their own interpretations of their actions and social roles. It is argued that this perspective is well suitable for business and management research. This is the case especially within human resource management, marketing and organisational behaviour, in which the situations are both complex and unique, and the actions and results are a function of the circumstances and individuals' common behaviour and interaction within a specific time. Within this epistemology the sense of identity of the individuals are derived from interacting and communicating with others. These actions lead to the individual responding to others, and adjusting her understanding and behaviour, as a collective sense of order where reality is a result of 'negotiations' with others. (Walliman 2010, 17, 22; Farquhar 2012, 19; Saunders & al. 2009, 116, 290.)

3.3.2 Research approach and strategy

The research approach is inductive. With this approach theory is formulated as a conclusion of data collected and analysed during the research. The inductive research approach allows the researcher to develop a deep understanding of both the cause-effect link between the studied variables and the context in which the studied phenomenon occur. For this reason, inductive approach is commonly used in the field of social sciences and within case studies. The reason for this is that case studies often study new phenomenon, and thus it might not be clear beforehand what the theoretical point-of-view should be. Thus, the choice is frequently done at a later phase. Inductive approach puts emphasis on attaining an understanding of the meanings that individuals attach to events, thus requiring the researcher to understand the research context and to collect qualitative data. (Walliman 2010, 17; Saunders & al. 2009, 126-127; Laine, Bamberg & Jokinen 2015, 29.)

The research strategy is single holistic case study. A case study is an empirical investigation of a specific contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, which requires evidence to be collected from multiple sources. The findings of case studies produce insights of how the studied phenomenon occur within a given situation. In case studies the borders between the studied phenomenon and its context cannot be clearly distinguished, which emphasises the importance of the context and understanding it. Case studies are preferred particularly when the research aims at finding out when, how or why something has occurred and when studying a contemporary phenomenon. Case studies frequently include multiple data collections techniques, such as interviews, observation, documentary analysis and questionnaires. These can and often are used in combination in order to achieve triangulation. This is a process that is used to confirm that the collected data indeed tells what the researchers thinks it does. Case study is a particularly suitable research approach when the researches wants to attain a deep understanding of the context of the research and the enacted processes. (Saunders & al. 2009, 145-147; Farquhar 2012, 6.)

Within case study strategies four different strategies exists, namely single case versus multiple case, and holistic case versus embedded case. Single cases can represent either critical or unique cases. Alternatively, single cases can also represent typical, or such cases that have not been widely studied before. Typically, single case strategy is applied when students conduct the research for the organisation they work for. Holistic versus embedded cases refer to the number of units of analysis. Holistic case is concerned for example when studying an organisation as a whole, instead of probing its logical sub-units, such as departments or teams, separately. (Saunders & al. 2009, 146-147.)

3.3.3 Methods and time horizon

The research choice for this research is mixed-method research. Research choice is defined as the chosen set and combination of techniques used for collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed-method research involves using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect and analyse data either parallelly or sequentially, but not in combination. The need for triangulation is one of the reasons mixed-method research choice is made. The use of mixed methods generates a richer and more comprehensive picture of the studied phenomena. (Saunders & al. 2009, 151-152, 154; Farquhar 2012, 22.)

In terms of time horizon this study is a cross-sectional study. Cross-sectional studies take place at a specific time focusing on a distinct phenomenon occurring during that time. While the chosen time horizon is not dependent on the chosen research strategy, many case studies are cross-sectional studies. (Saunders & al. 2009, 155.)

3.4 Data and types of analysis used

The case which my research will focus on is a service concept that was co-created and implemented by me, three of my colleagues, B, R and U, and one of Company X’s clients. B’s main competence and tasks are in sales, mine in recruiting and sales, U’s in marketing and software development and R’s in HR and competence development. Based on the collected data and its findings and comparing them with service design literature, I was able formulate a theoretical framework on which the service design framework is based on.

In order to answer the research questions, I described how the service concept was developed and how the different stakeholders perceived the actions and processes that lead to the creation and implementation of the service concept. Furthermore, I needed to know whether the delivered service was considered valuable both from Company X’s and client’s perspective. Semi-structured interviews were used for collecting this data. Triangulation was needed for knowing whether the developed and implemented service concept was successful. This was done by complementing the findings from semi-structured interviews with secondary data.

The collected data was analysed qualitatively with the aim of understanding what processes and actions added value in the creation of the service concept. Analysing qualitative data is based on meanings that are expressed through words. The purpose is to find out the meanings the individuals give on the phenomenon and social reality that is being studied. I chose summarising and narrative analysis as the qualitative analysis processes. Summarising involves compressing interview transcripts into shorter statements that rephrase what was said in the interviews. The aim is to distinguish the principal themes of the interviews and to be able to identify apparent relationships between themes. For analysing the summaries, I chose to utilise narrative analysis as it provides means for exploring linkages, relationships and socially constructed explanations that by nature occur in narrative accounts. Narratives, or stories, have plots, include characters and generate emotion in the storyteller and audience. Briefly, it’s a natural method to gain understanding of people’s thoughts and actions. Semi-structured interviews can be used for collecting narrative data and the main priority is to find out points that symbolise for example organisational politics, culture and change. In other words, narratives provide meanings to facts. (Saunders & al. 2009, 482, 490-491, 514; Kiviniemi 2018, 66; Heikkinen 2018,145.)

These findings, presented in chapter 3.5.2 Interviews, and the case project were compared with service design methods described in literature. Based on this analysis I was able to construct a service development framework suitable for Company X, thus answering the second research question.

Interviews are meaningful discussions between two or more people, that are useful for gathering valid and reliable data relevant to the research, especially when collecting qualitative data. Several types of interviews exist, and the choice of interview type should be made based on the adopted research strategy and purpose of the research. Semi-structured interviews are frequently used in qualitative research as the data gathered from them can be used for revealing and understanding not only what and how, but also why did something occur. For these the researcher defines themes and questions, which can eventually vary between the different interviews. Depending on who the interviewed person is, some questions can be omitted, or additional questions can be presented to explore the topic more thoroughly. Due to the nature of the questions and discussion followed by them, the interview should be audio-recorded, or notes should be written by the interviewer. (Saunders & al. 2009, 318, 320-321; Walliman 2010, 99.)

Ensuring that the data collected for example from semi-structured interviews are telling what the researchers thinks it does, the data must be complemented with data collected by other means. This process is called triangulation and it often is a critical part of a case study design. The triangulation method most often used in case studies is between-method triangulation, which combines using two or more research methods. (Saunders & al. 2009, 146; Farquhar 2012, 44-45.)

One useful source for answering research questions, fully or partially, is secondary data. This is data that have already been collected for other purposes than answering the research questions being studied. Such data can include both published summaries and raw data, including for example data that organisations collect and store for supporting their operations (e.g. accounts of sales of goods or services). Secondary data can be both quantitative and qualitative and its often used as a part of case study. Raw data is processed little or not at all, while compiled data are selections or summaries of data. One particular sub-group of secondary data is called documentary secondary data, which among others include administrative records and organisations' databases (e.g. personnel or production). Documentary secondary data can be analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and they can be used as means of triangulation of primary data collected for example through interviews. Secondary data is never collected by the current researcher, making the collection of the data time and cost efficient. (Saunders & al. 2009, 256, 258-259; Bajpai 2018, chapter 6.2.)

3.5 Implementation

This chapter presents how the case project was implemented and how it was analysed with the help of interviews and secondary data.

3.5.1 The case

The case which my research will focus on is a service concept that was co-created as a project and implemented by me, three of my colleagues, B, R and U, and one of Company X's clients. The timeline of the case is pictured in figure 2 and it shows that the case consisted of 14 distinguishable steps.

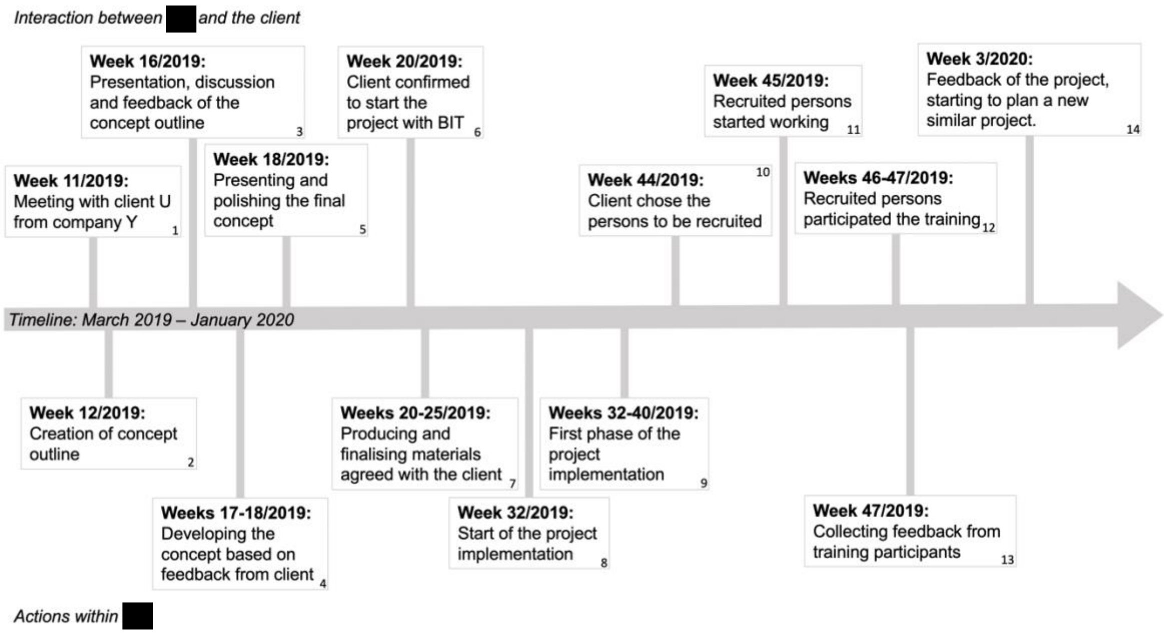

Figure 2. Timeline of the case.

The process started in March 2019 on week 11 when me and my colleague B had a meeting with a Company X's client V, from company Y. V gave us positive feedback about the cooperation there had been between Company X and company Y. During the meeting V pointed out that although the cooperation had been excellent, a larger problem existed, which had not been solved during the existing cooperation. During the next 12 months V would have to find several software developers for the teams he led, with a skillset that was difficult to find from the job market. V had envisioned that he needed a service that would enable him to find several qualified software developers whose existing skills could be upgraded with the help of tailored training focused on equipping them with the lacking competences that would still be needed in order to succeed in V's teams. At that time Company X didn't have such a service and in fact such a service didn't exist anywhere else in the market either. During the meeting we concluded that we would prepare a suggestion for how we could create service that would solve V's challenge.

After the meeting with V we set up a meeting between me, B and two other colleagues, U and R for week 12. This was a multidisciplinary team as B's main competence and tasks are in sales, mine in recruiting and sales, U's in marketing and software development and R's in HR and competence development. With the four of us we were able draft a rough concept combining Company X's existing services and capabilities and new service elements that earlier hadn't been a part of Company X's services. Next we set up a follow-up meeting with V, and K, one of his team members, for week 16. During the four weeks before this meeting we were able to further develop our concept and find out answers for questions that rose from the initial meeting.

For the meeting on week 16 we reserved 1,5 hours to have enough time to go through the concept we had created and to get feedback from the client. From the client there were T and K present in the meeting. The participants from Company X were me, B, R and U. Overall V and K were impressed about what we had put together and they saw that in the big picture it would solve their challenge. We also discussed about details could still be changed and improved in order for the concept to match their need even better. At the end of the meeting we agreed to have another meeting in two weeks during week 18 where we would present the final concept for V, K and two of his colleagues, S and N.

During weeks 17-18 we did the last changes together with B, R and U. In the last planning meeting on week 18 the discussion was about polishing the very last details and planning how to start the project based on the concept we had developed together. After final considerations the client confirmed on week 20 that they would start the project based on the concept we had developed together. The concept included hiring a number of software developers as Company X's consultants who would work for the client for 6 months. Once they started Company X would provide them a technical training so that they would be fully equipped to work in the client's project. After the 6 months the client would hire these persons on its own payroll. Finding these people would include Company X's regular processes and in addition extensive digital marketing. During weeks 20-25 me, U and R would produce and finalise all the materials that were agreed with the client.

The implementation of the project started on week 32 by publishing job ads and beginning other activities that had been agreed on during the planning phase. This phase of the implementation lasted until week 40 and by week 44 the client had chosen the persons that they would like to join their teams.

The chosen persons started working for the client by the week 45 and on weeks 46 and 47 they participated the training that Company X had organised. After the training we sent a feedback questionnaire for the participants in order to understand if the training had been successful and what could be improved for similar trainings in the future.

With the client we agreed to have a meeting on week 3 (2020) to go through the feedback from the participants and from the client representatives V, K, S and N. Furthermore, it was agreed that we would start planning a second similar project for the year 2020. The feedback from the client was extremely positive. We had been able to recruit the kind of people they were looking for and the training had provided them with the needed new competences. Most of the discussion during the meeting was around the client's future hiring needs and thinking how a similar new project could help them fulfil those needs.

3.5.2 Interviews

I chose semi-structured interviews as the method for finding out how the different stakeholders perceived the actions and processes that lead to the creation and implementation of the service concept. I chose to interview two of my colleagues, U and R, who were closely involved in developing and delivering the case project. In addition, I interviewed one of the client representatives, K, who was most involved with the case project from the client's side. U's main competence and tasks are in marketing and software development and R's in HR and competence development. K's main competences are in leadership and IT consulting. These three persons were, in addition to myself, most closely involved in developing and implementing the case project and interviewing them could provide data and insights that would help me answer the research questions.

Due to COVID-19 the interviews had to be conducted as online meetings with Microsoft Teams online meeting software. Figure 3 summarises the interviewees backgrounds and interview times.

Interviewed persons			
	U	**R**	**K**
Role	Colleague	Colleague	Client
Main competences	Marketing, software development	HR and competence development	Leadership, IT Consulting
Interviews			
Time and date	10.18-10.29, 16.10.2020	14.04-14.12, 20.10.2020	13.02-13.14, 21.10.2020
Place/Method	Online meeting with Microsoft Teams	Online meeting with Microsoft Teams	Online meeting with Microsoft Teams

Figure 3. Interviewed persons, times and places.

I formulated two sets of interview questions, one for my colleagues R & U and another for the client representative K. This way I was able to gather insights from the employee perspective and client perspective with interview questions, that took into consideration the different roles these two stakeholders had in the case project. The interview questions are presented in figure 4.

Interview questions
For the client
Do you think [redacted] created value for you with the way the project was developed and delivered? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
Do you think you would have been able to find a service that would have delivered the same or better value/result from another service provider or if you had done everything by yourself? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
Do you think you and your colleagues were a critical part of the process that led to the creation of this service? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
Do you think that the way the project was developed affected the way the implementation succeeded? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
How did this project affect your opinion about Company X as a service provider?
For the colleagues
Do you think [redacted] created value for the client with the way the project was developed and delivered? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
Do you think the client was a critical part of the process which led to the creation of this service? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
Do you think you were a critical part of the process that led to the creation of this service? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
Do you think participating this project improved your personal capabilities of creating user-centred innovation? If yes, could you describe how and why? If not, why not?
How did this project affect your work motivation?

Figure 4. Interview questions

As described in chapter 3.4 the interview data were summarised into three narratives so that they could be compared with each other, with secondary data and the service development models presented in chapter 2.

Summary: Interview with colleague U

U said he firmly believes that the case delivered value for the client with the way it was developed and delivered as, as he described “the solution was designed based on the client’s needs and those requirements that they had” while Company X’s expertise lay in deep knowledge of the job market and the experts that the client wanted to recruit with Company X’s help. U pointed out that the concept emerged partly from the cooperation that had existed with the client in other forms previously. U also saw that Company X created value by combining the insights that emerged by further exploring the target group’s motivations for changing jobs with the help of third party studies and interviews, and the experience Company X’s personnel had on this topic, and by putting all this together in the form of preliminary service concept.

U considered that the client's role was central in the process of creating the service as they gave plenty of feedback and insights on what kind of people they would like to find for their teams, what kind of technological skills they should have and what kind of recruitment services would fit their needs. U described the client's role as a "sparring partner". In addition, U noted that the software developer's looking for a new job were also seen as one client group.

U saw his role as critical member of the team in the process that led to the creation of the service concept. In the designing phase several areas had to be considered, namely recruiting, recruitment processes, sales processes and marketing and putting all this together resulted in a comprehensive service concept.

For U this was one of the first major projects where he had the chance to be involved in all the different aspects and phases related to it. Because of this he thought that his personal capabilities for creating user-centred innovation had improved. He has seen it later when working with other projects, where he has been able to deliver better results by taking into consideration things that he had learned during this project.

When asking whether this project had affected U's work motivation, he replied that this kind of projects were the reason that made him want to work in the recruitment field adding that "this has concretised my dream of how recruitment should be and what we should be doing all the time."

Summary: Interview with colleague R

R saw that Company X succeeded in creating value for the client and its business with the service concept we developed together with them. R described the service as an easy way for the client to acquire the talent they needed and that the service was tailored to match their needs. Company X's role was to take care of the marketing, finding the right persons, organising the trainings and managing the whole project. In addition to these the client gained positive visibility as an employer.

When discussing about the client's role R said that "the client was in an important role in creating the concept and process, and developing the concept started specifically from the need of the client." Another factor R pointed out is that the concept we developed also took into account the situation in the job market of software developers, where there is a much higher number of jobs to be filled than the number of skilled software developers available for them. R said that with this project Company X and the client created a service with which we were able to find developers that could be further educated to fill the requirements for this kind of open jobs. R described that the process started with an active dialogue with the client, continuing with Company X’s team discussing with potential training partners regarding what they could offer, which lead to the formulation of a preliminary concept.

In the interview R considered her role to be bigger in implementing the training and recruitment phases of the project. R told that she joined in the project quite early in the process, at the point when Company X’s team started to screen potential training partners and build the preliminary concept.

R said she considered the case project to have improved her capabilities and understanding of how new and user-centred services can be created. She pointed out that the project has taught her to listen, lead an active dialogue with clients and consequently have the capability to reshape the concept and plans even with fast response times. R also said the project improved her stress management skills.

Participating this project increased R’s work motivation as she said being a part of this tightly knit team was a really pleasant experience “also from the point of view that this project is an important part of Company X’s business and it made me feel my work purposeful.”

Summary: Interview with client K

K said that this project absolutely did create value for them, as they were able to recruit the kind of experts that they would not have been able to find otherwise, be it with their own recruitment team or other recruitment service providers. According to K, the main reason for this was the fact that the service concept was developed specifically and exactly to match the specific needs and circumstances that the client had. K emphasized the novelty of the service and he imagined a similar concept could have demand also among Company X’s other clients.

When further discussing about K’s views on whether the client’s team or another service provider could have provided similar value and results, K repeated that he didn’t believe that it would have been possible. Another service provider had offered them a partly similar service earlier, but that provider wasn’t willing to modify or tailor the service to match the specific needs that K and his colleagues had.

K acknowledged that they participated the design of the service on quite a detailed level. In addition, they were involved with the implementation phase more closely than with the earlier cooperation with Company X and K described this was a vital part of the implementation. When asking K to describe the beginning of the project from his point of view, he said that there were few meetings at their office where we presented them with suggestions, and they gave us feedback and ideas about how to modify them to better match their needs.

K's opinion was that the project was planned well, which he could tell from the fact that during the implementation phase we did not have to change the plan. K mentioned that at the final phase of the implementation there were few matters that should have been done differently from K's point of view. He added that these were taken into account, however, when we started a second similar project later in 2020.

When asking about how this project affected K's thoughts about Company X as a service provider, he replied that "the depth of cooperation with Company Z got a on an entirely new level. We found a completely new way of recruiting specialists." K also stressed once more that a similar service had not been offered for them previously and it was developed in a nice and close cooperation with Company X's team. K concluded that the trust he had in Company X grew even higher and Company X's commitment to the project also was visible for him in the way Company X shared part of the business risks that were involved in the project.

3.5.3 Secondary data

Company X is an employment agency and its main business is to recruit and staff personnel for its clients. Consequently, its revenues depend mostly on how many persons it manages to recruit or staff for its clients. Therefore, the most relevant performance indicator for assessing the case project's success compared to Company X's overall business is to compare how many persons got recruited in the case project and how many persons on average Company X recruits per assignment. These statistics are shown in appendix 1.

As seen in appendix 1 the number of people that were recruited during the case project is considerably higher than the average of persons hired per assignment during the year 2019. Based on this it can be concluded that the case project was extremely successful from Company X's business perspective.

3.5.4 Synthesis of the implementation

The narrative summaries of the interviews of colleagues U and R, in chapter 3.5.2, show that they shared similar views about the value Company X created for the client and about their role in it as individuals. Both also said that participating the case project had increased their professional capabilities and their work motivation.

The narrative summary of the interview of client K, in chapter 3.5.2, shows that from his point of view Company X did create value and they as a client also co-created the value together with Company X. The case project positively affected Company X’s and the client’s relationship and trust towards each other, and clearly distinguished Company X from its competitors.

The conclusion of the three interviews is that the stakeholders that participated the case project shared the same views about the value that it created for the client. Combining this with the secondary data, discussed in chapter 3.5.3, it is clear that the case project created considerable value also for Company X, in the form of higher results compared to the results that Company X’s assignment on average deliver.

3.6 Results

This chapter presents the results of comparing the case with the service design frameworks and methods described in the theoretical framework in chapter 2. The interviews and secondary data are also used for supporting and evidencing the findings of the comparisons.

3.6.1 Case compared to Service design framework

This chapter makes a comparison of the case and service design framework. This is divided into two dimensions. One has to do with the service design principles and whether the case followed them. The other dimension is related to the service design processes and whether they were followed in the case project, which is also illustrated in figure 5.

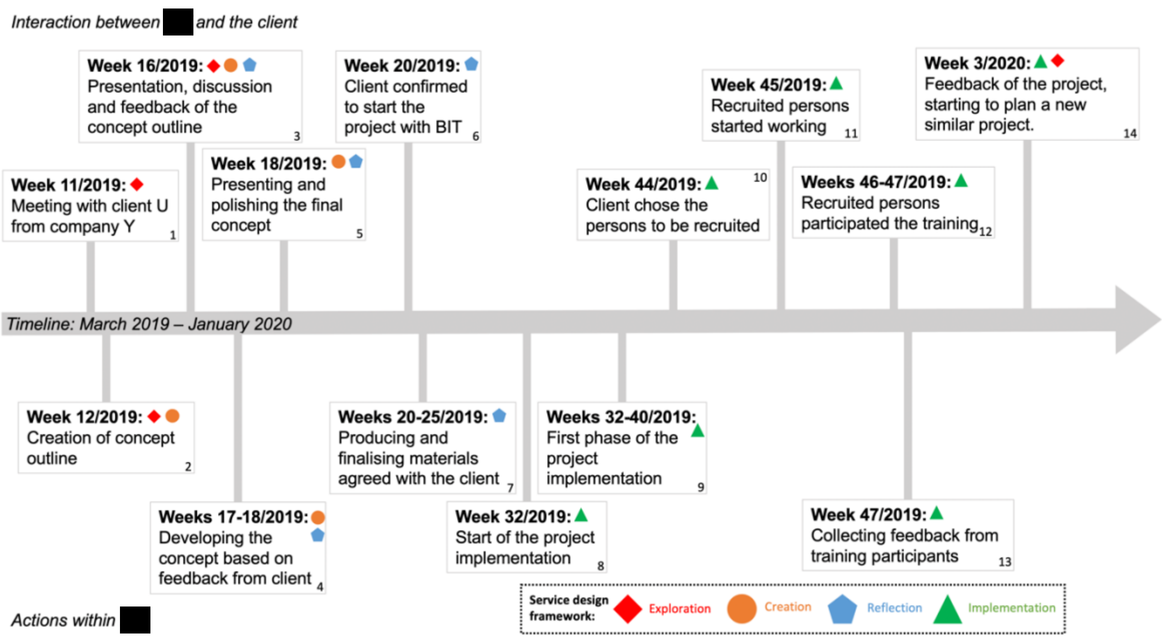

Figure 5. Case phases compared to Service design framework

As described in chapter 2.2. some service design practitioners consider the five service design principles to be user-centricity, co-creativity, sequencing, evidencing and holism; while others argue them to be holism, interdisciplinarity, co-creativity, visual thinking and radical approach. As both are used in the field, I decided to compare the case project with both sets of principles.

User-centricity: Stickdorn & Schneider (2019, 36-37) defines user-centricity as the act of putting the customer at the centre of the service design process, which includes applying tools and methods that allow the designer to gain a genuine understanding of the customer's needs and the perceived service experience. Figure 5 shows that with the case project this was the case, as the design process included three separate sessions where the client participated the process and three sessions where Company X's team continued the design process internally based on the insights and feedback collected from the client. This can be seen also in the interview findings, where colleague U distinguished actually two customer groups that had to be taken into account in the design process. Colleague R stated that "the client was in an important role in creating the concept and process, and developing the concept started specifically from the need of the client.", which was supported by client K's views on how they would communicate their needs in the form of feedback and modification ideas.

Co-creativity: Co-creativity is more extensively described and defined in chapter 2.1.4. Shortly put it is about the client co-constructing a service experiences and integrating the client in exploring and creating new services. Figure 5 shows that this co-creation took place in the case project, as the first three sessions with the client included this kind of actions. This view is backed by the interviews as colleague U described the client's role as central in the process of creating the service process. Client K also acknowledged in his interview that they participated the design of the service on quite a detailed level.

Sequencing: Sequencing is the deconstruction of services into pre-service period (getting in touch with a service), the actual service period (actually experiencing a service) and post-service period. These should form a whole, which the customer can perceive and form expectations about. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 40-41.) Figure 5 shows that sequencing in the three period exists and this is supported by client K's interview as in his answers he makes clear distinction between the design (pre-service), implementation (experiencing the service) and evaluation phase (post-service).

Evidencing: Evidencing refers to making services concrete with physical evidence or artefacts aiming at prolonging the service experience from the service moment into the post-service period. This can potentially increase customer loyalty and make customers recommend the service to others. (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 42-43.) This is something that was not particularly considered or present in the case project. However, we did design and produce T-shirts with the brand of the service concept for the persons that got recruited by the client. The T-shirts were given to the participants at the beginning of training as a "souvenir" of having participated the training. From this perspective evidencing did occur in the case project, although more by coincidence than deliberately.

Holism: According to Stickdorn & Schneider (2019, 44-45) holism in service design summarises in as the cooperation of multidisciplinary teams that share the same goal of business success through enhanced customer experiences, employee satisfaction and integration of sophisticated technological processes that pursue business objectives. Mager (2009, 37) on the other hand argue that holism has to do with service design looking at systems and subsystems of relationships and interactions, taking context into consideration and being aware that services are living systems. Sophisticated technological processes were applied in the case as one part of it was to develop a website that was used for reaching and getting suitable applicants. For other factors of holism, the interviews with colleagues U and R, and client K are the most suitable way to assess whether its principles were present in the case project. U and R both agreed that the case project had improved their work motivation and K's interview proves that the customer experience was also on a high level. Finally, the secondary data concludes that this also led both Company X and to reach its business objectives.

Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity as described in chapter 2.1.3 was strongly present in the case project, as it can be seen in the composition of the team that participated the project. The participants were professionals from the fields of HR, marketing, recruiting, sales, software development and IT consulting.

Visual thinking: Mager (2009, 38) defines visual thinking as transforming ideas into visible dimensions, such as mock-ups, prototypes and storyboards. In the case project this took place in the form of presentations including visual timelines of the project and prototypes of the website and advertisement that Company X could design and create during the project.

Radical approach: Mager (2009, 38-39) argues that service design should adopt a radical approach, meaning that the existing should be challenged, the given problems should be reframed, and the end result should be complete reinventions instead of minor decorative improvements. Radical approach was indeed adopted in the case project, which is best described by client K in his interview as he concluded that “we found a completely new way of recruiting specialists”.

Figure 5 illustrates how the case project was done and how Stickdorn & Schneider’s (2019, 122-123) service design framework’s processes, namely exploration, creation, reflection, and implementation can be reflected to the way the case project was done.

Exploration: As described more thoroughly in chapter 2.2.1 the exploration phase consists identifying the problem to be solved from the client’s perspective, understand the client and its business environment and visualising these findings. Figure 5 shows that in the case project the first three steps of the project included actions that match the goals of the exploration phase in the service design framework. The case project’s exploration phase focused especially on understanding the problem and the client’s business environment. K brought this up in his interview, describing that the service concept was developed specifically and exactly to match the specific needs and circumstances they had.

Creation: The creation phase, as described in chapter 2.2.2, is about creating ideas and concepts, evaluating them and re-iterating them in multidisciplinary teams that consist of a variety of stakeholders. Figure 5 shows that in the case project the steps 2-4 consisted of actions that belong to the creation phase. In her interview colleague R described how the preliminary concept was created based on the active dialogue we had with the client, continued by Company X's internal discussions that also involved discussions with potential training partners.

Reflection: The reflection phase, described more thoroughly in chapter 2.2.3, consists of building prototypes that are based on the ideas and concepts that were generated in the creation phase. Figure 5 shows that the kind of actions, described in the reflection phase, were taken in the case project during steps 3-7. Client K described these in the interview as a series of meetings where Company X's team presented them with suggestions, which they would comment and give suggestions for developing them further.

Implementation: Besides the actual implementation of the designed service, this phase also consists of maintaining and further developing the service. Implementation also includes change management practices and engaging employees in the process, as further described in chapter 2.2.4. As seen in figure 5, the steps 8-14, that is, the majority of the steps of the case project were such, that can be considered to belong to the implementation phase in the service design framework. Client K described in the interview how they were closely involved in the implementation phase and he saw this as a vital part of the case project's success. Both colleagues U and R pointed in their interviews that participating the case project improved their motivation and taught them new skills, which suggests that they were also highly engaged during the implementation phase.

In conclusion, the analysis of the case project and comparison of it with the service design framework, supported by the interview summaries and secondary data, it can be said that the case project did mostly follow the principles and processes of the service design framework.

3.6.2 Case compared to New Service Development Model for Value Co-Creation

As described in chapter 2.3 the NSD model supports organisations' value creation practices by linking service design, new service development and value co-creation. This chapter makes a comparison of the case and New Service Development Model for Value Co-Creation (NSD model). This is divided into three dimensions. The first dimension is the comparison of the NSD model's stages and the case. The second dimension is the comparison of the NSD model's activities and the case. For the sake of clarity, the stage and activity comparison are combined, as they are more easily understood together due to their close interconnectedness. Finally, the NSD model's capability building dimension is compared with the case. Figure 6 illustrates this comparison.

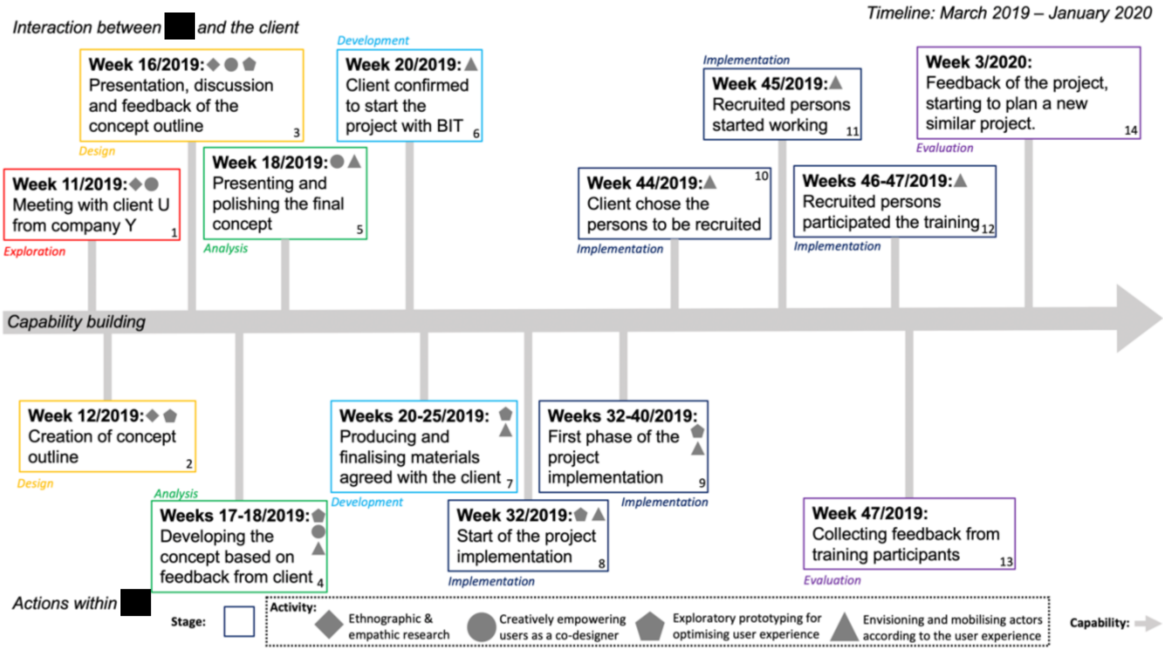

Figure 6. Case phases compared to New Service Development Model for Value Co-Creation

Stage and activity: As described in chapter 2.3, the NSD model has six stages, namely exploration, design, analysis, development, implementation and evaluation. The first five stages consist of activities that can be classified under four types of activities depending on their goal. The activities are ethnographic & empathic research, creatively empowering users as a co-designer, exploratory prototyping for optimising user experience, and envisioning and mobilising actors according to the user experience.

Exploration stage starts the new service development process, generating users' value-in-use information and providing insights into how users determine value. At this stage a guiding vision is formulated for the other stages. *Ethnographic & empathic research* refers to activities that give access to contextual and holistic user experiences, based on which value propositions can be developed. The activity of *creatively empowering users as a co-designer* is about including the users in the service designing process. These are further described in chapter 2.3. Figure 6 shows that the first meeting with the client corresponds the exploration stage and related activities of the NSD model. Colleague R described in her interview that "developing the concept started specifically from the need of the client", which is backed up by colleague U's interview as he noted that "the solution was designed based on the client's needs and those requirements that they had".

The *design stage* consists of designing potential value-in-use with the activities of ethnographic & empathic research, creatively empowering users a co-designer and *exploratory prototyping for optimising user experience*, that helps exploring and testing optimal configurations of providers' resources, processes and outcomes for best support for value-in-use. These are further described in chapter 2.3. Figure 6 visualises the two steps of the case project that correspond with the NSD model's design stage. Client K told in his interview that Company X's team presented them with suggestions on which client K and his colleagues would give feedback on. He also added that they participated the design of the service on a fairly detailed level. In his interview colleague U described Company X's inner workings during the design stage by explaining how the preliminary concept was designed by putting together insights regarding the target group's motivations for changing jobs, the client's needs and Company X's existing experience and knowledge on this topic.

The design stage is followed by the *analysis stage*, which consists of the activities of creatively empowering users as a co-designer, exploratory prototyping for optimising user experience, and *envisioning and mobilising actors according to the user experience*. The latter makes service delivery actors understand their role and responsibility in facilitating users' value-creating processes. These are further described in chapter 2.3. The two steps of the case project that correspond with the NSD model's analysis stage are demonstrated in Figure 6. Client K described in his interview the activities during this stage as a close cooperation where they would give Company X feedback, which would then be taken into account and the concept would be modified to better match the client's need. The activity of mobilising actors was also present as colleague U described how he saw his role as a critical member of the team and that he had the chance to be involved in all phases of the case project. Colleague R brought up similar views in her interview describing that "this project is an important part of Company X's business and it made me feel my work purposeful."

The *development stage*, that follows the analysis stage, focuses on developing resources and processes for potential value-in-use. This stage consists of the activities of exploratory prototyping for optimising user experience and envisioning and mobilising actors according to the user experience. These are further described in chapter 2.3. In the case project there were two steps that corresponded with the NSD model's development stage, which can be seen in figure 6. The service concept that was developed as a result of this and the previous stages was described by colleague R in her interview as an easy way for the client to acquire the talent they needed. Client K mentioned in his interview that they were involved with the following implementation phase more closely than during previous cooperation between Company X and the client, which evidences that the development phase genuinely included developing resources and processes for potential value-in-use.

The *implementation stage*, as the name suggests, consists of implementing the potential value-in-use. The activities for achieving this are exploratory prototyping for optimising user experience and envisioning and mobilising actors according to the user experience. These are further described in chapter 2.3. Figure 6 illustrates the case project’s steps that correspond with the NSD model’s implementation stage, revealing also that the implementation phase contained most steps in the case project. In his interview, client K pointed out the importance of this phase describing how they were closely engaged during this phase and that it was a vital part of the implementation. Client K also told that he considers the earlier stages having been successful, as during the implementation there weren’t reasons or needs to deviate from the initial plan. Colleague R described that her role was bigger especially in the implementation stage in the form of organising the training and participating the recruitment phase together with me.

The *evaluation stage* aims at exposing potential gaps between the developed and implemented value-in-use and the actual value-in-use. Possible gaps are then taken under scrutiny by continuing the process with a new exploration stage. This makes the NSD model a continuous loop of development and improvement. This is further described in chapter 2.3. Figure 6 shows that in the case project the last two steps correspond the NSD Model’s evaluation stage. The last step of the case project also marked the beginning of the next similar project, in the same way that the NSD Model suggests. In his interview client K pointed out that during the end of the implementation few things could have been done differently, which was taken later into account in the next similar project with the client. This further demonstrates, that the case project corresponds to the NSD model.

Capability: Capability dimension, as described in chapter 2.3, underlines the need for organisations to continuously build its capabilities for value co-creation and creating user-centred innovation. This can be done by facilitating every employees’ participation in user-centred activities. Figure 6 illustrates how in the case project the element of capability building, as defined in the NSD model, occurred throughout each step of the project. This was described by colleague U in his interview as he described how he considers his personal capabilities for creating user-centred innovations had improved during the case project. This has later helped him with other projects, in which he has been able to deliver better results thanks to what he learned during the case project. Colleague R brought up similar experiences in her interview, telling that participating in the case project improved her capabilities and understanding of how new and user-centred services can be created. She also described how the case project had taught her to listen, lead an active dialogue with clients and consequently have the capability to reshape the concept and plans even with fast response times.

In conclusion, the analysis of the case project indicates that it closely corresponded to the NSD model. This conclusion was supported by the interview summaries.

3.6.3 Case compared with methods for service design

This chapter makes a comparison of the case project and the eight service design methods presented in chapter 2.4. The methods are five whys, personas, scenario-based design, storytelling, idea generation, agile development, co-creation, and business model canvas. The purpose of the comparison is to recognise if the methods used during the case project corresponded with the service design methods found in literature. Figure 7 illustrates the findings of the comparison.

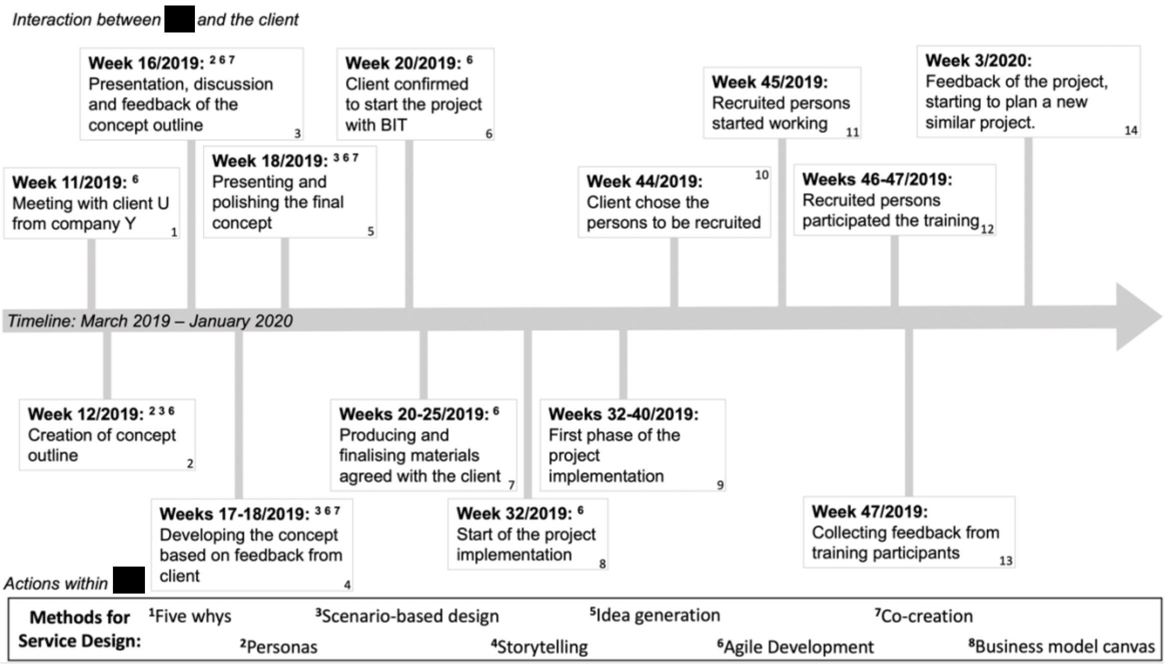

Figure 7. Case phases compared with methods for service design

Five whys: As described in chapter 2.4.1, the five whys is a simple method for gaining quick understanding of complex issues and the root causes of the problems that need to be solved. As seen in figure 7, this method was not used during the case project. The time when it could have been used would have been during the first 1-2 meetings with the client. As described by colleague R in her interview, the client’s problem was recognised through an active dialogue instead of a structured approach such as the five whys method. Had the client been completely new for Company X or the problem more complex, this method could have been proved to be highly valuable.

Personas: Personas are used for identification, discovery and gaining understanding of the service context and users of the service, as further described in chapter 2.4.2. Figure 7 shows that this method was used in the case project in the second and third steps. During the case project three different personas were distinguished, defined and used as the basis for creating the service concept. These personas concerned the experts that the client wanted to recruit with the service concept. Colleague U described this process in his interview, as he explained how Company X's team put together insights that emerged from exploring the target groups' motivations for changing jobs with various methods.

Scenario-based design: This is a prototyping method for visualising the main service concept for customers, that can be used for creating, generating and modelling new service features. The method is described in more details in chapter 2.4.3. In figure 7 it can be seen that this method was used during the case project in its second, fourth and fifth steps. In practice me and colleagues U and R created initially a visually rich presentation that included the personas, suggested timelines and mock-ups of the marketing that could be done during the project. The initial scenario was then further discussed with the client and during the case project's fourth step the client also shared their ideas for modifications to better match their needs.

Storytelling: As described in chapter 2.4.4, storytelling is a tool for capturing in detail the real-world context, in which the service will be used in the format of a compelling story. This method is suitable for creating, generating and modelling new service features. Figure 7 shows that this method was not used during the case project. Utilising this method during the case project's steps three and five could have been justified hadn't Company X had previous cooperation with this client. Utilising storytelling could have in that situation been valuable in creating trust between Company X and the client.

Idea generation: Idea generation, described in more detail in chapter 2.4.5, is a method for creating structure and inspiration for group brainstorming sessions aiming at ensuring smooth group work sessions. As figure 7 shows this method was not used during the case project. If the people involved in the case project hadn't been familiar to each other before, and wouldn't have closely worked before, utilising this method could have been extremely valuable. This method could have been utilised in the case project's steps 2-4.

Agile development: As further described in chapter 2.4.6 agile development is a method for growing and developing projects iteratively over time, focusing on individuals and interactions instead of processes and tools. Figure 7 shows that the way the case project was designed follows the principles of agile development in steps 1-8. Colleague R described this approach in her interview as she explained how the project involved an active dialogue with the client, which led into reshaping the developed concept and plans. Client K, in his interview, said that the concept was developed in a nice and close cooperation with Company X's team in a series of meetings. In those meetings they would give feedback and ideas on how the suggested concept could better match the client's needs.

Co-creation: Co-creation is a method for examining and innovating services in a collaborative and interdisciplinary setting, which aims at distinguishing the most valuable ideas and creating a feeling of shared ownership of the resulting concepts. This is further described in chapter 2.4.7. Figure 7 shows that in the case project co-creation was utilised during the steps 3-5. Colleague U described that during this phase the client's role was central, as they gave plenty of feedback and insights, which was taken into account when further developing the concept. In his interview client K told that "the depth of cooperation with Company Z got a on an entirely new level. We found a completely new way of recruiting specialists." This proved that the client not only participated the creation, but a strong feeling of shared ownership also emerged during the project.

Business model canvas: Business model canvas, as described in chapter 2.4.8., is a tool that can be used for clarifying the match between business strategy and the designed service in the service implementation phase. This tool can help identify strengths, weaknesses and priorities. As figure 7 shows, the business model canvas was not utilised during the case project. A suitable time for having used this could have been the beginning of the implementation in the case project's step 8. This could have helped me, and colleagues U and R notice the factors that client K considered as something that could be done differently during the implementation phase for an even better end result. The business model canvas could be a valuable tool for Company X when internally analysing the success of this kind of a project.

In conclusion, the comparison of the case project and service design methods described in chapter 2.4 indicates that methods that correspond with personas, scenario-based design, agile development and co-creation were used, while five whys, storytelling, idea generation and business model canvas weren't utilised. Having utilised all of the presented eight service design methods deliberately could have resulted in an even more successful end result. This conclusion was supported by the interview summaries.

3.7 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to study the case project and compare it with the theoretical framework so that the research questions could be answered and based on them considerations could be given for Company X.

The comparison of the implementation and results revealed that the case project had numerous similarities with both the service design framework and the new service development model for value co-creation. In addition, the comparison of the methods used in the case project and methods for service design, presented in chapter 2.4, revealed that several of the case project's methods corresponded with the service design methods described in literature. The results also suggest that the case project was successful from the point of view of the stakeholders that were involved with the project, and triangulation with the secondary data supports this conclusion.

The considerations based on the findings of this and the second chapter are discussed in chapter 4.

4 Discussion

The objective of this research was to equip Company X to better serve its clients and compete against its competitors by creating a service design framework for co-creating value and new services. The subchapter 4.1 provides answers for the research questions by presenting the results, how they were achieved and based on the results considerations are given for Company X. As a part of this, the framework for co-creating value and new services is presented and considerations are given on how it could be implemented for Company X. The subchapter 4.1 also includes feedback from the commissioning organisation. Next, subchapters 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. discusses validity, reliability and ethics of this research are discussed, after which in subchapter 4.5 development ideas and suggestions for further research are given. Finally, the discussion ends with subchapter 4.6. that consists of self-reflection and evaluation of my own learning.

4.1 Consideration of results

As discussed in chapter 3, it can be concluded that the case was successful as it was beneficial for Company X’s business, its employees and its clients. Furthermore, it closely corresponded with the theoretical framework discussed in chapter 2. Based on these findings I constructed a framework for co-creating value and new services for Company X, which is fully presented in appendix 3 and abstracted in appendix 2. My recommendation is that Company X begins utilising the framework as a guideline whenever its employees identify situations or client needs that could benefit from a new approach for solving them.

The results discussed in chapter 3.6 and 3.7 suggest, the case project was successful from the point of view of the stakeholders that were involved with the project, and secondary data supported this conclusion. This forms the answer for the first sub-question, that is, why should new services be created utilising service design. The reason is, that it is beneficial for Company X’s business, its employees and its clients.

Subchapter 4.1.1 answers the main research question, that is, how can employees and clients co-create value and new services with a service design framework, and the second research sub-question, that is, which service design methods and processes should be utilised in a framework developed for Company X’s needs, by presenting the framework for co-creating value and new services and how it is intended to be utilised. Subchapter 4.1.2 gives recommendations on how the framework could be implemented for Company X and its personnel. Finally, subchapter 4.1.3 presents feedback received from the commissioning organisation.

4.1.1 Framework for co-creating value and new services for Company X

Appendix 2 shows that the framework for co-creating value and new services recommended for Company X is constructed based on a similar timeline and structure as the case described in chapter 3.5.1. As the findings in chapters 3.6.1 and 3.6.2 showed, the structure was closely similar with the two theoretical frameworks, namely the service design framework and new service development model for value co-creation (NSD model), with which the case project was compared with. Of the two theoretical frameworks the NSD model turned out to be a more detailed approach, and for that reason I decided to incorporate the six stages of the NSD model with the structure and timeline of the case project. In the full framework, as seen in appendix 3, the purpose of each stage is explained. The framework consists of 11 individual steps, which all belong to one of the six stages.

For each of the 11 steps of the framework, I distinguished service design methods that would be suitable for that particular step and stage, as seen in appendix 2. These methods are presented in more details in chapter 2.4. The full framework, presented in appendix 3, defines under each step which tools can be used during that specific step. In addition, the framework has detailed descriptions of each method and it also consists of literature references from which the user can find out more information about how to utilise a specific method.

In addition, the framework developed for Company X includes another dimension adopted from the case project. The framework, as seen in appendix 2, makes a clear distinction between the actions that are taken in interaction between Company X’s personnel and the client, and actions that should be taken by and among the personnel of Company X. This is indicated also in the detailed instructions in the detailed framework presented in appendix 3. The intention of this is to create clarity and guide the user of the framework to take appropriate actions in appropriate context.

The developed framework, shown in appendix 3, being a synthesis of the theoretical framework of chapter 2 and the results of the research results summarised in chapter 3.7, provides the answer for the main research question, that is, how can employees and clients co-create value and new services with a service design framework. In addition, the framework, presented in appendix 3, provides the answer for the second sub-question, that is, which service design methods and processes should be utilised in a framework developed for Company X’s needs.

4.1.2 Recommendation for how to implement the framework

As stated in chapter 3.2, the objective of the development task was to create a framework that would not require previous experience or expertise of service design and its methods. This guided the creation of the framework that was eventually formulated and presented in Appendices 2 and 3. The purpose was to create a simple and self-explanatory framework that could be utilised by any of Company X’s employees.

As within the given timeline it is not possible to collect and analyse feedback from Company X’s employees on whether they consider the framework as self-explanatory, I recommend that Company X’s personnel would be given a 1-2 hours long introduction and training for utilising the service development framework. Such training could include presenting the case that was discussed as a part of this research. After that the framework for co-creating value and new services could be presented to them and walked through each phase. As the personnel is not familiar with the tools and methods described in the framework, they could also be explained one by one during the training session. This should ensure each employee would have an overview on how to use it and when it could be useful in their work with the clients.

After employees would have had the change to utilise the framework, feedback should be collected on whether they have been able to utilise it. Based on the feedback the instructions could be for example made more detailed.

4.1.3 Feedback from the commissioning organisation

Due to some organisational changes I had two supervisors during this project, L who was the original supervisor until the end of August, and O who became my supervisor from September onwards. For this reason, I solicited and received feedback from both regarding the framework for co-creating value and new services that I developed for Company X. The feedback was received in written format with Company X’s the internal communication tool called Slack on Wednesday 11.11.2020 from both supervisors. I them asked to write their spontaneous feedback regarding the service development model, which I had sent them on Saturday 7.11. The feedback is summarised in this chapter.

Supervisor L’s overall feedback was positive. He had observed that the case was built based on the client’s specific need and that such approach had not been taken earlier at Company X, when trying to develop new services. For this reason, he saw that the biggest benefit of the framework is the change in the mindset of how Company X’s clients should in the future be served. Instead of approaching the clients and their needs from a product-based view, they should in the future be approached with a client-centric approach, which starts genuinely from the client's needs. Supervisor L also brought up that he thinks utilising this framework will clearly differentiate Company X from its competitors and as such it is highly valuable for Company X's business. A concrete proof of this is the fact that as a result of the case a completely new service category was created for Company X, which its competitors don't offer at the moment. He also had observed that my own competences had grown during the thesis process and the resulting framework supports the capability development of everyone at Company X.

Supervisor O's feedback was similarly positive. He considered it extremely valuable that the framework that I developed adopted methods that have already been widely and for a long time used in software development. The framework and its phases seem to be well-thought. He highlighted especially the importance of the initial stages of the framework, which focus on finding out the right needs and problems to be solved. Supervisor O concluded that it is not often that he has seen a master's thesis that combines theory and practice in such a balanced way and that is so valuable for business. He looks forward to start utilising the framework with Company X's clients and to see how it can improve Company X's services and as a result increase client satisfaction.

4.2 Validity

When assessing validity, it refers to the extent to which the chosen data collection methods measure what they were projected to measure, to which extent the research findings actually represent what they proclaim to represent, and whether the reader of the study can see that the data has been critically investigated. In case study research one way to argue validity is through triangulation. Semi-structured interviews have high level validity when conducting the interviews carefully, as the interviewer is able ask clarifications and ensure during the interview, that the interviewer has understood the interviewee correctly. A part of validity is also external validity, which refers to whether the research findings can be applicable in other research settings, such as other organisations. In case studies results often are not generalisable, as the purpose of the research is not to produce a generalisable theory. When utilising secondary data collected by private organisations, it must be assessed whether such records are reliable, consistent and accurate, and whether the data has been collected precisely. (Saunders & al. 2009, 327, 603, 158, 274; Farquhar 2012, 101.)

This research collected data through semi-structured interviews and secondary data produced by Company X. The data collected from the interviews had high validity as the findings between the interviews were consistent with each other. The secondary data supported the findings of the interview data.

High attention was paid in describing transparently the methods the data was investigated and how conclusions were drawn from the data.

The secondary data that was used can be deemed to have a high validity, as the primary use of the data is to function as one of the most important performance indicators at Company X. Consequently, the importance of the reliability, accuracy and consistency of this data is high for Company X.

The purpose of this study was not to find generalisable results and as such, the results are not generalisable, but valid only in the context of Company X.

4.3 Reliability

Reliability discusses the absence of random error and the degree of consistency of the results of the research, with the chosen data collection techniques and analysis procedures. Essentially it measures three factors, namely, whether the research methods yield same results on other occasions, will other observers reach similar observations, and are the conclusions from the raw data made in a transparent and carefully documented way. (Farquhar 2012, 102; Saunders & al. 2009, 156.)

Semi-structured interviews can have reliability issues due to the lack of standardisation of the interviews. Additionally, there are two types of bias that need to be considered and mitigated. First one of these is interviewer bias, which refers to the interviewer creating bias to the way the interviewee responds, for example though non-verbal behaviour. Interviewer bias can also be demonstrated in the way the interview responses are interpreted. The second possible bias is interviewee bias, which can be caused by the interviewee not willing to reveal certain aspects, or interviewee answering certain questions in a way that puts the interviewee in a socially desirable role. Reliability issues must be tackled with careful research design and documentation of the research process during research. With the use of secondary data, it must be assessed whether the data has been affected by measurement bias. Measurement bias can be caused by distorting data intentionally or deliberately, or by changing the way data are collected. (Saunders & al. 2009, 326-328, 277-278.)

The reliability of the semi-structured interviews that were done as a part of this research seem to have been consistent based on the analysis that was made of the interviews. The answers that the interviewees gave were consistent and supported each other. This suggests that the research did not suffer from interviewee bias. I paid attention to avoid interviewer bias by asking each interview question with a similar tone and in a similar way, as neutrally as possible. As the interviews were done via Microsoft Teams only with audio, the possibility for interview bias caused by non-verbal behaviour is inexistent.

The secondary data that was used in this research can be deemed reliable, as the nature of data is such, that cannot be subject to measurement bias. If measurement bias would have affected the data, this would have been noticed as the data is crucial for measuring Company X’s financial performance.

The research was carefully designed and documented in this report and as a conclusion similar results with similar consistency should be yielded in another occasion or by another researcher.

4.4 Ethics

The ethics of the research boils down to honesty and treating the people involved with the research with respect. One major aspect to this is acknowledging and correctly citing the sources that have been used during the research, thus not committing plagiarism. From the ethical point of view research design must not subject the research population to embarrassment, harm or cause any other material disadvantage. Another ethical issue to consider is whether the research population is aware of them being subjects of research and if they have consented it. (Walliman 2010, 42, 44; Saunders & al. 2009, 160.)

In this research rigorous attention was given to correctly acknowledge and cite the sources that have been used along the process. This research project has not subjected the research population to embarrassment, harm or any other material disadvantage. When assessing the research design, I have not detected sections where a risk for this would have existed. To further reduce the risk of this, the individuals that were interviewed and who participated the case project are carefully anonymised and they cannot be identified. The individuals who were subject to the research were also aware of this and had consented to this. The data concerning them was collected with semi-structured interviews them being fully aware of the interviews and why they were conducted.

4.5 Development ideas and suggestions for further research

The given timeline for conducting the research and creating the framework for co-creating value and new services was such, that it did not allow implementing the framework and collecting feedback on whether the framework serves Company X's employees as intended. Due to this, one suggestion for further research would be to study if the implementation of the framework will deliver the intended results. Such study should also bring up ideas on how to further develop the original framework to better suit Company X's and its clients' needs.

Another suggestion for further research would be to study what would be the most suitable way to implement such a framework. Such a study should address at least change management practices and ways people learn new methods in an organisational setting.

4.6 Own learning and self-reflection

Conducting this research and finally finishing this project has been a long an enlightening journey, that has taught me especially about service design, conducting research and self-management.

When I began working with the case project it felt already then that along the way it would teach me a lot. Based on the deep commitment of the people who participated the case project I could also tell that the end result would most likely be successful. This eventually led me to realise that it would be an excellent topic for my master's thesis. In addition, it would be an excellent reason for me to delve deeper into service design, which had interested me already for some years.

Now, looking back I am satisfied that I managed to successfully finalise my thesis, and equally importantly learn about service design and its methods so much that I will be able to utilise them in my work from this point onwards. Something especially eye-opening was to find out that service design and its methods can be rather intuitive, but the best results are reached through a systematic and well-thought use of them.

This process also taught me to conduct rigorous research and put the findings in use in a corporate setting. At this point the different research approaches and methods are clearer to me and I understand their importance. Only through a transparent choice of methods it is possible to conduct research that delivers credible and well-argued results.

From a learning and self-management perspective this process was truly eye-opening for me. There are several reasons why finding a suitable thesis topic and being able to start the process took me much longer than what it should have been. At this point I am contented as the results and their importance are such, that I would not have been able to reach had I done it for a different organisation or from another topic.

Another major factor affecting my learning of self-management is the year 2020 in itself, which will be remembered of COVID-19. I started writing my thesis in January 2020 and it proceeded as originally planned until March 2020, when COVID-19 hit Finland and left everyone working from their homes. This was the case also for me and the thesis project stalled until the end of August 2020. As the situation with the virus got a bit easier and as I had started to get used to living and working in a new kind of a situation, I felt that I could continue working with the thesis. At that point there was much less time left to finish the thesis and I had to make a new plan with a much tighter schedule. It also meant that I had to take a part-time study leave, which I hadn’t originally planned. All this paid out, as I was able to write my thesis in a tighter schedule and I am satisfied with the end result. Even in tough and changing situations one can learn more and adapt to a new reality.

Finally, it is time to acknowledge and thank the people that have supported me and been involved with the case project. I want to thank my colleagues involved with the case project, my managers for having supported me along the way, the client and their team, my thesis supervisor, friends and my family that have fully supported me during this long process.

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