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Service design for small equine business

Case Pirholan Talli

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to create a service design for company that aims to expand its business by implementing an investment for new facilities.

The objective of this case study is to develop a functional service design for horse stable that aims to provide high-quality equine care services in South Karelia. The purpose of this project is to support the potential investment by creating realistic solutions that can be used in real world. Since the target is to use this service design in practice sometime in the future, the design should be practical and reasonable. The idea for the thesis is based on case company's needs, as well as author's own interest.

Qualitative research method was used for collecting and analysing the data. The research material was collected by studying literature related to the subject, and by exploring several internet sources. The information is also based on the author's own knowledge and experience on the subject.

The work was started by creating a knowledge base that analyses the tools that were used for designing the case company's services. The thesis also explains some concepts of equine industry, such as horse services and related business, as it is necessary for creating a solid understanding about the topic. It also addresses the current situation in the equine industry.

Case company's new offering is represented in the case study. The study includes customer journey mapping, service design and productization, that are all used in the designing process. Together, they describe the services that the case company is providing and specifies them into separate service products.

Keywords

Service design, customer journey, productization, service concept, equine industry, equine business

Contents

1 Introduction

This bachelor's thesis studies topics such as service design, customer journey mapping and productization of services. The thesis involves a case study, where these design methods are utilized for developing a functional service design for the case company. The thesis also discusses about case company's operational environment, as it aims to create a comprehensive understanding about the topic.

The study is conducted by observing a case company, Pirholan Talli, that is a micro-size company located in Rautjärvi, South-Karelia. The case company operates in equine business and provides services for private horse owners. The entrepreneur of Pirholan Talli is in a situation where he considers implementing an investment which could create the new business opportunities. The investment includes building an indoor riding arena and bigger stable for horses. The motivation for this scale of investment is consequence of the current situation in the region, as well as the outlook of equine industry in Finland. Currently, the number of hobby-riders is constantly increasing and customers' wishes regarding the hobby are evolving continuously. Horses are a hobby for nearly 160,000 people in Finland, and at the end of 2020, there were 74,300 horses registered in national register. (Hevostalous lukuina 2020.)

The topic is established from the needs of the case company, as the entrepreneur wants to understand its customers better and enhance the provided services. The case company is interested how its services could be improved if it decides to implement the investment. This creates an opportunity study how the services of the equine business can be developed with help of service design, customer journey mapping and productization.

Building high-quality facilities is a large investment, that cannot be completed without profitable business. Therefore, provided services should attract enough customers in order to cover the costs of the investment. Service design and productization are both customer-oriented approaches that aim to recognize what customers need and value. These approaches emphasize customers' experience and satisfaction, as their purpose is to create services that meet the needs of the customers, as well as differentiate the supply for competitors. This thesis aims to create useful and innovative solutions that will help the case company to develop its services in a way that implementing the investment is possible.

Since business plans are always individualized, and therefore considered as private information, chapter five and appendix 1. are hidden, in order to preserve the possible competitive advantage that this thesis may create for the case company.

1.1 Thesis objective

The objective of this thesis is to develop a functional business design for case company that operates in equine business by availing service design method. The objective was established from the needs of the case company, as it considers implementing an investment for new facilities that enable a broader service offering. The objective of this this thesis is to study how service design functions and then apply the knowledge into the case company's new service design by using service design tools as well as productization. The results of this thesis will be available for the case company, and it can utilize the information for its own purposes. This thesis may also generate useful information for other small-sized companies that are operating in equine business and consider investing in new facilities.

This thesis has one main development project and several sub-projects. These projects are designed to provide valuable information about the thesis topic, as well as guide the study by delimiting the subject and specifying the focus into certain matters.

The main development project of this thesis:

- Determine case company's customer journey map

The sub-projects of this thesis:

- Build a theoretical framework to support the case study
- Gather customer insights
- Understand customer perspective

These development projects contribute a good understanding about the topic, as well as connect these subjects together in order to create clear and coherent entity.

1.2 Approach & data gathering methods

The chosen approach for this thesis is qualitative method. This method was chosen because the main information source for this thesis is academic literature. Therefore, this thesis will comply with the qualitative research method by collecting data and information from various literature sources. These sources include books, articles, previous studies, and other publications related into the subject. The qualitative approach also enables a more profound understanding of the topic studied in this thesis. (Kananen 2015.)

The thesis uses deductive reasoning for observing the thesis topic. Deductive reasoning means approach where the research moves from general knowledge into detailed information in order to create understanding about more detailed issues. Thus, deductive

reasoning contains lots of general information and its investigation (Kananen 2015). The author of this thesis has decided to use deductive reasoning, because this study aims to discover detailed information from general knowledge and information that is provided by other authors. This detailed information is used for creating a better understanding about the single case.

This thesis includes a case study that focuses on developing case company's future business. The purpose of the case study is to create a deeper understanding about the topic, as well as produce results that the case company can use in practice. Therefore, the guidelines of practice-based research are followed in this thesis: first, the theoretical framework establishes the theory and methods used, and then the practical part applies the theoretical knowledge into the case study. Practice-based research has an exploratory and improving touch, as it aims to develop working life in a pragmatic way. The functionality of practice-based research provides concrete tools for combining theory and practice together. (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003.)

The thesis also contains a small-scale interview that is meant to gather customer insights regarding the case company's customer journey map. The interview will be short, semi structured interview where customers' thoughts and attitudes concerning the case company's customer journey map and full boarding services will be discussed. However, the names of the customers are kept as a private information in order to secure their participation into this study. The results of these interviews will be analyzed by using qualitative content analysis. (Science Direct.)

1.3 Delimitations and Limitations

This thesis discusses about service design and productization that is aimed for a small-sized equine business. As this thesis intends to create solutions for the for the case company by designing its service design and service products, it examines only the existing variables that are associated with the case company. This delimitation is made in order to keep the focus on theory that relates to the case company, and its therefore valuable for this study.

The case company of this study is located in South Karelia, South-East Finland, which creates a geographical delimitation for this study. This thesis examines the operational environment of the case company, and therefore the permanent location in South Karelia affects into the results. Geographical factors also have an impact on the case company's potential customer base, and thus designing the services requires information about target area in order to create realistic information.

This thesis mainly focuses on horse riding services. All branches of horse riding are included, such as show jumping, eventing, dressage, western and trail riding. In order to analyze provided services comprehensively and to narrow the subject, this thesis considers private horse owners as the main customers, since they represent the current customer base.

Limitations of this thesis consider gathering and analyzing information, as well as making conclusions based on this information. The first limitation of this thesis is the amount of case companies utilized for this study. Because this thesis is analyzing only one case company, it creates a limitation concerning the amount of gathered and used information. Therefore, the gathered information and data may be unilateral, as the thesis includes only one perspective, from where the theories and phenomenon are viewed.

The amount of data sources is the second limitation of this thesis. The information used for this thesis is based on different literature sources, author's previous knowledge about equine business, small-scale interview, as well as statements given by the case company's owner. Therefore, academic literature is the secondary data source, and thus a limitation for this thesis. This thesis also includes a small-scale interview from customers who use full boarding services. These interviews include only customer viewpoint, which creates a limitation for this study.

The third limitation of this thesis is analysing the data, as well as drawing conclusions out of it. Since majority of the data is gathered from literature sources, author's interpretation and drawn conclusions may affect into the results, as they can lead into unilateral opinion and perspective, which creates a limitation. Also, different authors may interpret the data differently, which may result different findings and results from the same data.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five parts. The thesis structure is designed to represent the studied topic in logical order. Therefore, the structure of this thesis is divided into two parts: knowledge base and development project. The first chapter is introduction, which contains general information about the thesis, such as the thesis objective, approach and limitations of the study. The second chapter introduces the case company by presenting the investment, case company's customers as well as the business idea.

The knowledge base begins from the third chapter by introducing case company's operational environment. This part includes information about equine industry in Finland and South Karelia. The part also represents the current state of South Karelia. This chapter

is followed by theoretical framework, which introduces the tools that are used in the development project.

The fourth part encompasses the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter contains theory of customer journey mapping, service design, service blueprinting, and productization. These methods were chosen, because they all support the development project: Customer journey mapping helps to visualize series of events which customers may experience during an entire purchase or service process, whereas service design and productization help to understand customers' needs, problems, and desires, which makes the final outcome more customer oriented.

The fifth chapter contains the empirical part of the thesis. This part focuses on developing case company's services, by utilizing the tools that are represented in theoretical framework. The chapter also includes the interview that is used for gathering customer insights. Therefore, the development project results several outcomes, that are all represented in this part, and then analyzed in the conclusion chapter, which also analyses the reliability and validity of the study.

2 Case company Introduction

This thesis is studying the topic by examining a case company and its potential investment. The topic was created together with the case company, to fulfil its needs. The information concerning the case company is gathered directly from the business owner. The case company, Pirholan Talli, was established in 2010 by entrepreneur Harri Purhonen. Due to the nature of the business, he has been running the company along his main job, as private entrepreneur. The company operates in the field of equestrian industry and provides services mainly for the private horse owners.

Pirholan Talli is a small stable that offers services for private horse owners. It has ten hectares of yard, a stable with eight stalls, an outdoor riding arena, a racecourse, and big paddocks. These facilities are available for all permanent customers, as well as guests who may use the facilities against payment. Services that the company provides include full boarding for horses, supporting horse owners in the daily activities as well as training horses. (Pirholan Talli 2021.)

The case company operates in the rural area of South-East Finland. It is located in Rautjärvi, which is a small municipality in the county of South Karelia. Customers of the case company come from neighboring areas, such as Imatra, Ruokolahti and Parikkala. These customers are private individuals who own horses in training and competing purposes. The case company wants to grow its customer base, and therefore it is considering expanding the business by building an indoor riding arena and another stable.

2.1 Investment

The aim of investing is to generate income by acquiring an asset or item. According to Hayes (2021) *an investment always concerns the outlay of some capital today—time, effort, money, or an asset—in hopes of a greater payoff in the future than what was originally put in*, which demonstrates that the money is used for something that is expected to bring more income in future. Because investing aims for future growth, there is always a certain level of risk associated with an investment, it may not generate any income, or it may even lose its value over time (Hayes 2021). This chapter concerning the nature of case company's investment is based on insights given by the entrepreneur.

The region of South Karelia has many entrepreneurs, but only few indoor riding arenas. Because building equestrian centre requires a big investment, projects like this are not very common is this region. Currently, there are four indoor riding arenas, in fifty-kilometer radius from Rautjärvi: three of them are riding schools that use the arena from four to eight in the

evenings. The fourth one is quite selective when it comes to renting the arena for private use. These arenas are also either small or the condition of the riding base is not good, in worst cases both problems occur.

The case company considers investing into indoor riding arena, because it would enable training throughout the year and increase the potential business opportunities. To cover the costs of the investment in the indoor riding arena, the other facilities should also be expanded in order to increase the utilization rate. This means for example another stable for fifteen horses, new paddocks, and other infrastructure. According to Pahkala (2014) in this type of the construction project which includes stable and indoor riding arena total costs are 450 000 euros, as price of stables ranges between 130 000 – 300 000 euros and the lowest total costs of indoor riding arena are 150 000 euros.

Since the case company considers developing its business by implementing a new investment, services of the company should be planned in a way that they can cover the cost of the big investment. Therefore, service design and productization play important role in this thesis, as the supply of the company should be attractive and bring enough income into the business.

2.2 Customers

Customers are the core of business. In order to make profit and keep the business going, company should have profitable customers. Therefore, adopting the customer perspective is fundamental for the entire business design process, as observing things from customer perspective can give valuable information concerning value propositions, customer relationships, distribution channels and revenue streams. Companies may define one or several customer segments, since classifying the customers into distinct groups that have common needs, common behaviors, or other similar characteristics may result more satisfied customers. Classifying may also help to determine what value each customer segment is actually willing to pay, which enables the company to generate more revenue streams from each customer segment. (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2010.)

This chapter aims to build a comprehensive description of customers in equine industry. The case company is providing services mainly for private horse owners who live in South Karelia. These customers are women and men who are 15 to 60 years old, and their main interest in the field of equine sports is riding.

Customers appreciate different kind of things depending on the field of equine industry. Commonly, the first factor that affects on customers' minds is the stable's yard and facilities, and especially their condition, because they are seen as company's "business card". Thus,

the condition of facilities affects the reputation of the company as well as the entrepreneur. In riding schools customers value the professionalism of the riding teacher, level of training and functionality of teaching horses as most important factors, while customers that buy boarding services for horses are more interested about the cleanness of the stable and entrepreneur's customer service skills. (Asukas & Sahlström 2014.)

Customers' priorities have changed over the last few decades. The rise of new equine economy in the 21st century has increased the socio-economic role of the horse: the sport has become part of 'slow ideology' as it promotes health, well-being, and green care. Customers have also become more concerned about ethical and environmental issues like sustainability, diversity and responsibility. This kind of soft values have an influence on the entire sport, which means that entrepreneurs must adjust their businesses to follow the new trend. (Saastamoinen 2014.)

Today's horse owner requires good service and is willing to pay for it. According to the customer satisfaction survey that was targeted for customers of equine businesses in South Ostrobothnia, developing customer service and improving the flow of information is a key target for development, especially in private stables, since customers want to know how his horse is doing (Toppari & Kallioniemi 2014). Quality oriented and demanding customers value functional premises, especially what comes to the indoor riding arenas and their bases, they wish to have superior quality. Therefore, the premises should be designed in a way that they are safe and meet the needs of quality conscious customers.

2.3 Business idea

Case company considers investing into indoor riding arena because it could create new business opportunities. The central idea behind the investment is that it would enable training throughout the year, which is sometimes difficult in Finland due to challenging weather conditions. To tackle that problem the entrepreneur considers building an indoor riding arena, new stable and more paddocks. These new facilities enable developing the business and its services so that they meet the needs of quality conscious customers.

Case company's main service product is full boarding for horses and ponies that are owned by private people. Boarding for horses means that company provides horse care services and rents stalls for private horse owners. This allows horse owners to exercise independently with their own horse. Thus, horse people who are living in cities can also keep horses, even though there is no possibility for them to have an own stable. In boarding stable owner of a horse is only responsible of exercising her horse as well as individual treatments, such as taking care of the horse's tidiness. (Asukas & Sahlström 2014.)

Case company's full boarding includes the stall, taking care of the horse, mucking out the box, feeding three times a day, taking the horse outside into the paddock as well as usage of all the facilities. This service product is available against monthly payment, that lands between 500 and 700 euros, depending on the total cost of the investment. Based on thesis author's knowledge, the price is compatible with other similar service products that are available in the region.

In equine industry supply and demand don't match very often. For example, in many stables riding schools are using riding arenas in the evenings, which limits the use of private horse owners. Case company acknowledges this problem, and therefore it wants to offer a service product that is easily available, affordable, and superior quality. By accomplishing these three factors, case company's offering is more attractive alternative for private horse owners.

Investing into indoor riding arena creates also other business opportunities, which can be additional sources of revenue. These opportunities include organizing clinics, training, and competitions, as well as renting the arena for guest users. In order to keep the subject coherent, this business idea includes only full boarding services for permanent customers.

3 Case company's operating environment

Operational environment means the circumstances where the organization is operating in. It includes the micro and macro environments, that are both affecting into the business. Macro environment defines the industrial level, which includes analyzing the significance of the branch and the latest changes that have happened in the industry. The microenvironment is concerned about the company level, as well as the factors that are straightly connected into the business and can be somehow affected by the organization. These factors include demand, competitive situation, final customers, as well as cooperation partners and value chain. (Heikkilä 2018.)

The case company is operating in one permanent location, in the municipality of Rautjärvi, South Karelia. Since the case company is operating in only one location, current state of the region is an important factor, as it determines the future opportunities and possible threats that are related into the location.

3.1 South Karelia

South Karelia is part of Southeast Finland, and it consist of nine municipalities. The region is located near Russian border, which has a big impact on area's business and economy. The other significant factor in the area is the forest industry cluster, which has focused its activities into the area. These factors form a base for region's economy, as they create jobs and business opportunities, as well as secure the vitality of the region. Due to strong industrial sector and its constant development in the area, South Karelia is considered as one of the most important growth centers in Finland (Regional Council of South Karelia 2020). In the end of June 2020, 127 104 people had registered to be living in South Karelia, which is 793 people less than a year before. (Nieminen 2020.)

The business field of South Karelia is mainly formed from large-scale enterprises operating in the process industry, as well as micro and small sized corporations. Therefore, the economy of the region is reliable of industrial sector, such as forest industry, energy technology, electrical engineering, chemical technology, and hi-tech metal manufacturing. These industries are the major employers in the region, and the relative proportion of export is exceptionally high in the area. Forest industry corporations such as UPM, Metsä Group and Stora Enso have focused their research and development activities into South Karelia. Hence, the region has become a globally remarkable area as it has the top-class renewable forest industry cluster. (Regional Council of South Karelia 2020.)

South Karelian corporations are doing relatively well. The fortunate development of forest industry, as well as the positive tone in construction and service industries makes the outlook of the region quite optimistic. Most of the new jobs are arising in service sector, even though the commercial sector and travelling business have been vulnerable for changes in past years. One of the main sources of income in the region is the Russian travelers, who spend money on cross-border shopping, tourism, and other businesses (Regional Council of South Karelia 2020). In 2019, Russian travelers spent over 310 million euros in South Karelia, as they used over 268 million euros for shopping purposes and almost 43 million euros for services, such as accommodation, spa treatments and cruises (City of Imatra 2020). Therefore, changes in Russian tourism have a direct impact on the region's economy and employment situation.

Primary production is still an important industry in South Karelia. Since most of the region is rural area, agriculture and other primary production have their place in the economy of South Karelia. The current trend in agriculture is the structural change, that seems to be accelerating. In South Karelia the number of farms is decreasing, but at the time the farm sizes are growing. Entrepreneurs of the region experience the profitability of their production lower than Finnish farmers on average. However, in South Karelia farms are used for other business purposes more than in other regions. (Nieminen 2020.)

Uncertainty has an impact on the outlook of South Karelia, as the increasing dependency ratio is anticipating a tighter municipal economy. Demographic factors can cause challenges in the future, as the population of the region is decreasing: young adults are moving into other regions, and remaining inhabitants are getting older. The other challenge in South Karelia is the employment situation, as the growth of employment rate has been slower than in the national level. Even though employment rate of region is lower than general level in Finland, the situation has been evolving into better direction. In 2018, the employment rate was 71,7 percent, which was over four percent higher than a year before. South Karelia has a positive trend in the unemployment rate, as the rate has decreased nearly five percent since 2016. The lowest number of 2010s, 10,5 percent, was measured in 2019 before the Covid19-pandemic disrupted the economy and labor market. (Regional Council of South Karelia 2020.)

3.2 Equine industry in Finland

This chapter covers the basic knowledge about equine industry. Since the case company is located in Finland, this chapter is focusing mainly on Finnish equine industry and its latest trends. In 2018, Häme University of Applied Sciences published an article collection called Renewing Equine Industry, that discussed about the state of Finnish equine industry, as

well as analyzed the results of Equine Entrepreneurship 2017-study. The publication provides a comprehensive overview of Finnish equine industry, and therefore it is one of the main sources of information used in this thesis. Another important source of information are studies related to Finnish equine industry available in Theseus as they offer substantial amounts of useful information.

The business of equine industry is very versatile, and there are various types of companies operating in the industry. Equine industry means the whole branch, that includes different kind of activities and business operations that are related to horses, such as horse-breeding, training and riding school activities, as well as horse-care and travelling businesses. These examples show that business in equine industry is emphasized mainly around services. Another special characteristic in the industry is that typically the businesses begin from a hobby, and therefore part-time entrepreneurship along the main job is very common in the industry. (Pro Agria Oulu 2015.)

The number of stables in Finland is around 15 000, and fifth of them are operating professionally, which means approximately 3000 stables. The Finnish equine industry has been growing fast during past decade, and it is estimated that every year 100-200 new companies are established in the industry. Currently Finnish equine industry employs over 15 000 people, that are working either fulltime or part-time (Pro Agria Oulu 2015). Therefore, equine industry is as important employer as Lapland's tourism, according to the research conducted in 2018 by Natural Resources Institute Finland. The average turnover of full-time equine businesses in 2019 was 102 000 euros and the biggest companies generated over 500 000 euros in revenue. Thus, equine industry creates notable tax revenues for the government and municipalities. It is very common that businesses operating in the industry are buying products and services from other companies, which results major multiplicative effects that are significant for the regional economy (Kyöstilä 2019). The overall calculations represent that the financial flows of equine industry are annually approximately 0,34 billion euros. (Pro Agria Oulu 2015.)

Finnish equine industry has grown in recent years. Increasing living standards and urban lifestyle have grown the demand of equine services, and service production in particular. Therefore, the market of equine services, that used to be supply-driven, is now transferring to more market-driven direction, which can lead into tightening competition between service providers (Kallioniemi & Korpivaara 2018). Horses are a hobby for over 200 000 people in Finland. There are around 50 000 people involved in harness racing, and over 160 000 people that are actively participating into equestrian sports. Around thousand stables are operating in equestrian business: approximately half of them are riding schools and another

half is providing training and horse-care services (Pahkala 2014). It is estimated that Finnish equine industry will change during next five years, as different kind of full-boarding, riding, and experience services are becoming more popular. Horses have also become a part of rehabilitation and wellness services, as they are used for riding therapy and equine assisted social education. Harness racing and professional horse breeding have experienced a downturn during past few years. (Saastamoinen 2018b.)

Entrepreneurship in equine industry requires a strong expertise. According to the Horse Entrepreneurship 2017- study, almost seventy percent of entrepreneurs in Finnish equine industry are individual entrepreneurs. In equine industry the most common way to become an entrepreneur is to turn the hobby into business after accumulating training and practical experience. Commonly, the entrepreneurs of equine industry are labeled as passionate and enthusiastic, and they have also other incentives for running the business than just financial factors (Saastamoinen 2018b). These attractions can include things such as working with horses and living in countryside. Other objectives for running the equine business may be self-employment or desire to train more professionally. (Pussinen, Korhonen, Pölönen & Varkia 2007.)

Horses increase the interaction between city and countryside. Around 75 percent of equine businesses in Finland are operating in farms. Since agriculture is currently undergoing a structural change, equine industry creates new business opportunities into countryside. Another positive impact is its multiplicative effects: equine industry keeps the countryside alive and inhabited by purchasing local services and maintaining the public goods (Saastamoinen 2018b). Therefore, equine industry is part of countryside's livelihood, as it creates diversification and vitality in many different ways. (Pussinen et al. 2007.)

Equine industry is an interesting business field, which serves people as a hobby, recreation, and profession. It has many similar features with service industry: they are both market-driven and sensitive to economic fluctuations, and also the revenues function in a same way. Commonly, operating in equine industry requires big investments for facilities, such as stable and riding arena, that have a long payback period. Therefore, revenue and cost structures are exposed to many potential challenges, that companies should pay a special attention. (Rantamäki-Lahtinen, Rikkonen, Saastamoinen & Sipiläinen 2018). After all, the trend in Finnish equine industry stays positive, as the revenues have been growing in entire country. The biggest increases have happened in Northern Finland, where the growth has been over 20% in the period of three years (Saastamoinen 2018b). The impacts of Covid-19 pandemic have been surprisingly favorable for Finnish equine industry, as the popularity of riding has increased considerably. Thirty percent of the Finnish Riding Association (SRL)

member stables experience that the Covid-19 situation have affected positively on their business. The same impact has happened in horse trading, where the pandemic has enlivened the market into new level. (Viilo 2021.)

3.3 Equine industry in South Karelia

This chapter aims to describe the current state of equine industry in South Karelia. To provide a comprehensive understanding about regions current situation, this chapter is also discussing about the condition of Southeast Finland's equine industry. Since there is a limited amount of reliable information available, this chapter also includes analysis and observations from thesis author and the owner of the case company, as they both have been active members of South Karelia's equine community for over fifteen years.

The Southeast Finland includes two regions, South Karelia and Kymeenlaakso. It has been estimated that around 12 800 people in Southeast Finland are riding as a hobby. Lappeenranta is one of the regional centers in Southeast Finland, together with Kotka, Kouvola, Mikkeli and Harju Learning Center (Niemi 2015). According to Finnish Riding Association (SRL), there are currently 48 riding associations operating in Southeast Finland, and by the end of 2020 they had 3504 members. (Finnish Riding Association 2020.)

Lappeenranta is the main equine industry concentration in South Karelia. There are several businesses operating in the South Karelian equine industry, and they have spread all around the region. Because most of the region is rural area, there is a lot of space for equine industry and related businesses. Most of the forage, such as hay and oats, comes from near as farmers cultivate them locally. The equine industry of the region is very active - especially the popularity of riding and competitions is ascending. Therefore, companies operating in the equestrian sports have been actively investing in building new facilities. Majority of these facilities have been built into Lappeenranta and its neighboring areas. (Niemi 2015.)

Region's associations are operating very actively. Every year non-profit associations are organizing different kind of events for region's equine community, such as competitions, training and trips. These non-profit associations are providing well-being for many people by maintaining region's activity and collaborating with local stables. The most notable associations operating nearby the case company are Etelä-Karjalan Urheiluratsastajat Ry, Imatran Ratsastajat Ry, Ratsu-Karjala Ry and Rautjärven Seudun Hevosurheijat Ry.

The businesses that are operating in the region are offering different kind of services depending on their location and size. Majority of the biggest companies are riding schools that are located nearby the urban areas. Commonly, these companies have facilities for 20-

30 horses and their main occupation is riding lessons, but they may also provide horse care services as a sideline. The smaller stables are commonly located in the non-urban areas, and they have facilities for 5-15 horses. These small stables are typically providing horse boarding services for private horse owners.

Most of the South Karelia's equine businesses are small-scale. Companies that are operating in the region are commonly offering riding lessons or horse boarding services, but they do not have extensive additional services, such as training and exercising for horses. That results a problem concerning the service offering provided for private horse owners: there is no possibility to buy more services if necessary. Most of the service providers have reduced their services into a minimum, as well as transferred more responsibilities, that once were perceived as a regular service, to the customer. These services include, for instance, mucking out and other daily barn chores. Only few riding stables in the region are providing this kind of services for private horse owners.

Services remain essentially the same in all stables. Since competitors' service offering is quite limited in the region, there is no great competition between the stables. The price of the horse boarding service is determined by the location of the stable and whether it has an indoor riding arena. Because current businesses are not developing new services, region's offering is not evolving without new business ideas.

4 Tools for designing business

Having a profound understanding about customers is crucial for successful business. Reaching the success starts from defining the business idea, services, and service processes (Tuulaniemi 2011). According to Polaine (2013), successful businesses and services will have a more equal and mutual relationship with their customers in the future. People are seen as co-producers of the service, because they are part of the service delivery as they interact with service provider and thus influence the entire service process. Therefore, services should be built based on genuine insight into the people who are using the service, to be confident that the real value is delivered. (Polaine 2013.)

Defining customer value is key to success. This means describing needs and expectations that are based on customer understanding, and then utilizing the results as strategic guidance (Mitronen 2016). Rooting service experiences into company culture ensures that all employees are aware of customers' values. It also makes the service more unique and much harder to replicate, because company culture is more difficult to copy than physical elements and technology. Therefore, the quality of service delivery can make a huge difference, as it represents performance of the service: it is not just performance as experience, but also performance as a value. (Polaine 2013.)

People typically choose to use the services that are providing them the best experience for their money. This might depend on the situation, whether they choose a low-cost service or spend their money on a first-class experience. Therefore, in order to understand customers, as well as services provided, it is good to examine what people get out of the services (Polaine 2013.)

In developed nations service sector covers around 75 percent of the economy. Because the service economy has become so massive and competition on different industries has tightened, services are very often redesigned on a continuing basis in order to keep a competitive edge in the market. Service design and productization are both common tools that are used for the designing process. They both take the customer perspective into consideration, and focus on the entire service process. The author of Service Design: From Insight to Inspiration (2013), Polaine, explains that *service design involves research across all the stakeholders of a project— from the managing director to the end user, and from frontline staff to third-party suppliers*, and so it creates a profound understanding about the provided service and its customers (Polaine 2013). The productization guru Jari Parantainen represents in his guidebook that a well productized service stands out from the mass and is easy to buy, sell and produce. According to Parantainen, productization may create huge benefits, since customers tend to choose a service provider that has a

distinctive concept. Therefore, when customers are choosing from similar service propositions, unique service features may have a big significance. (Parantainen 2013.)

4.1 Service design

Service design means the design tools and methods that are used to develop and improve services, as well as make them more customer oriented. The aim of service design is to match the service or product with customers' needs by creating new services or developing the ones that already exist (Tonder 2013). The key idea of service design is to generate a logical operating model and connect it functionally with the business goals, while keeping in mind the customer perspective. Therefore, service design is a process that helps to identify, when, where and how organization can make its services more valuable for the customers as well as itself. (Tuulaniemi 2011.)

Services are known for their abstract and intangible nature. Typically, services are understood as propositions that are offered for the customers to be bought. It means that they can create value only when they are used and storing them is impossible. Some of the services are meant to be invisible, as they are operating in the background: these hidden services include actions which happen so imperceptibly, that they are noticed only when the expected actions are not fulfilled. To sell these invisible actions they need to be transformed into visible and desirable offering, that have a proof of service. With the help of service design concretizing services is easier, as it examines both, the front and backstage, of the delivered service. (Tuulaniemi 2011.)

Service design is primarily focusing into the interaction between employees and customers. According to Glushko (2008), *the quality of the "service experience" is determined by the customer during this final "service encounter" that takes place in the "front stage"*, which means that customers form their experiences based on what happened in the visible side of the business. Glushko (2008) also states, that *this emphasis discounts the contribution of the activities in the "backstage" of the service value chain, where materials or information needed by the front stage are processed*. Since the backstage operations are inevitable part of providing services, their importance should not be forgotten. Very often, using service design for designing the customer experience can make the process smoother, as it considers the entire network of services. These services take place in both, back and front stages, because together they form a service system, where information and processes of the backstage can be used to improve the front stage experience. (Glushko 2008.)

The benefit of using service design is that it is a human-centered design approach, which puts equal value on the customer experience as well as the business process. Service

design aims to create good quality customer experiences, by ensuring seamless service delivery process (Lyons-Grose 2017). Service experiences are unique events that follow a certain customer path designed by the service provider: these paths usually consist of several touch points, where the customer is interacting with the service provider. If the process is somehow failing in providing the expected experience, “a fail point” has occurred. Established businesses can benefit from recognizing these points of failure in their services, as they are able to enhance the experience after identifying customers’ unfulfilled needs. (Polaine 2013.)

4.2 Customer Journey Mapping

The fundamental idea behind customer journey mapping is simple, as it is a visual illustration of the series of events which customers may experience during an entire purchase or service process. Customer journey map aims to represent this process as a graphical representation, where all the possible touchpoints that customers may encounter during the process are recorded (Otálora, Ramirez & Rosenbaum 2016). These service moments between the customer and the company are always modelled from the customer's point of view, which means that there can be numerous touch points in multiple channels and media, resulting in more complex customer journeys. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016.)

The customer journey map assists in many situations, as it can be used for mapping an existing service or conceptualizing a completely new one. The main reason why customer journey mapping is used is that it can model the service structure in a comprehensible form that allows its critical observation. Therefore, it helps in making the intangible services visible by systematically describing the touch points that customer experiences during the service, step by step:

- what does the customer do at that point in the service?
- what is the customer's goal at that stage of the service?
- how does the customer meet our company at that stage of the service (touch points)?
- what does the customer experience at that stage of the service (customer experience)?

It is crucial to understand that customer experience is not a single contact point in the customer journey: it is the sum of all encounters, emotions and images that is formed in customer’s mind based on the interaction in touch points with the organization. In order to

develop the customer experience systematically, the customer journey needs to be understood comprehensively. (Törrönen 2020.)

Each service session consists of a set of touch points. These touch points can be concrete things through which the service is experienced: facilities, objects, people, or interaction processes. With the help of touch points, service sessions can be structured to meet the customer's needs and expectations (Innokylä 2021). However, the effect of an individual touch point may depend on when it occurs in the overall customer journey, which demonstrates that each touch point must be carefully considered and skillfully designed. It is also important to recognize which touch points are most relevant to the customer, in order to create a clear, coherent, and consistent service experience. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016.)

The formation of the customer journey depends on both, the production process set by the service provider as well as customer's own choices. The customer journey describes what customer observes on the time axis of the service, and how they experience the user interface of the service. It also includes the stages of the pre-service and after-service in addition to the actual service. Thus, the first step in creating a customer journey is to decide what its first and last touch points are. (Innokylä 2021.)

Prepurchase is the first stage of customer journey, as it is characterized in marketing literature as behaviours such as need recognition, search, and consideration. Thus, this stage includes the customer’s entire experience before purchase. The actual purchase is the second stage, which encompasses all customer interactions with the organization and its environment during the purchase event. The behaviors in purchase stage is characterized as choice, ordering, and payment. The third, and final stage, known as post purchase, refers to customer’s experiences and interactions with the organization that take place after the actual service. Touchpoints in this stage may involve behaviours such as usage and consumption, post purchase engagement, service requests or returning the merchandise. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016.)

Customers form their own individual route when they pass through the service process. No matter how specific the service process is, this happens because there are several ways to do things, but also service providers can offer customers several alternative ways and channels to consume a certain stage of the service process. The aim of the service design is to understand the most common customer journeys as a basis for planning (Innokylä 2021). The customer journey modelling is used to find the answer to the core question: how can we improve the customer experience in a way that differentiates our service and creates a competitive advantage by maximizing value for our customers, employees, and owners? (Törrönen, 2020.)

4.3 Service Blueprinting

Customer lifecycle is the basis of service process. As design thinking helps organizations to recognize what is important from customers' perspective, also understanding the process of customer lifecycle, is necessary. By identifying the touchpoints where customer interaction is happening, organization is able to comprehend customers flow through different phases in the customer lifecycle, as well as influence the customer behavior (Tonder 2013). In order to track customers' actions during the service process, companies are using a tool called service blueprint. It is a narrative, that helps service designers to see the bigger picture, as it represents the entire service process as whole. Therefore, it also shows the connections and relationships between different phases, that may be difficult to visualize without the blueprint. (Lyons-Grose 2017.)

Blueprints help businesses to discover their weaknesses. According to Lyons-Grose (2017) service blueprinting is *a key scenario that takes place across customer experience and service delivery*, and therefore it provides an end-to-end view of service experience, while being a creative way to solve problems (Lyons-Grose 2017). The idea of service blueprint was first introduced in the early 1980s by G. Lynn Shostack. Since then, blueprinting has been an essential part of service design, as it enables mapping the entire user journey: every step and phase, all touchpoints and channels, each stakeholder and action, are included in the blueprint (Polaine 2013). This results a comprehensive understanding of the provided service, resources, and processes, which may decrease the chance of poor user experiences, that are commonly consequence of internal shortcomings. As service blueprinting may help in discovering opportunities for optimization, another benefit of blueprint is the visualization of relationships, which can help to uncover the potential improvements and ways to eliminate redundancy. (Gibbons 2017.)

The content and design of blueprints may change depending on the project and its purpose. According to Gibbons (2017), *blueprinting is an ideal approach to experiences that are omnichannel, involve multiple touchpoints, or require a cross functional effort*, which demonstrates that blueprinting is most useful when operating with multidimensional projects (Gibbons 2017). As the main object of service blueprint is to provide an overview how the different parts of the service work as a whole, it also helps in breaking down the barriers between business units. Therefore, everyone involved in the designing and delivering the service should join into the blueprinting process in order to produce more seamless experiences. (Polaine 2013.)

4.4 Productization

The productization philosophy is based on market-oriented perspective, where understanding customers' needs, problems, and desires is the key. In order to create a concept that is able to fulfill the demand, the final product should correspond with customers' characteristics and market needs (Tonder 2013). Therefore, productization means the process of analyzing customers' needs, and then creating a product-like object by defining and combining suitable elements. The result of productization process should be repeatable and comprehensible, as well as possible to sell, deliver and use (Harkonen, Tolonen & Haapasalo 2017). Since the case company of this thesis is providing services, this chapter has emphasis on service productization.

The goal of productization is to develop a new service or product, and bring it into the market. To reach the goal, productization process aims to define what the service is including and for whom it is targeted, as well as how and when it is provided. It also aims to standardize the service, determine the delivery process, and create functional routines, which will all together decrease the risk of failure, because the final product and its delivery are carefully planned. Productization will increase the quality and efficiency, as the operations become more systematic, goals and quality criteria are clarified, and quality control becomes more professional. Therefore, it also helps in creating the realistic image about the quality-price ratio, which is useful in pricing the service or product. (Kajaani University of Applied Sciences 2020.)

Productization can enhance the customer experience and systemize internal processes. The enhancing of customer experience happens through external productization, which means defining and crystallizing the service elements that are visible for customers. It creates a common vision about service elements that are important for customers, and then utilizes the vision for the service descriptions and sales materials. Systematization of internal processes is result of internal productization, where the service process is first described, and then standardized. Internal productization includes determining the service process, procedures and responsibilities, while keeping in mind the customer perspective. Therefore, is essential to think how the service process appears for the customers, and what are the processes that the customer is experiencing. (Tuominen, Järvi, Lehtonen, Valtanen & Martinsuo 2015.)

Productization has a specific role in clarifying the service offering. The aim of productization is to create a service product that can be sold, delivered and invoiced, as well as enhance the understanding of the offering and create replicability. Selling services may be sometimes difficult, because services are typically abstract and intangible. Productization

can help with this issue, by concretizing the service offering and systemizing the related processes. This leads into a level of formalization, which means the standardization of service components and processes (Harkonen et al. 2017). That said, productization is not a substitute for standardization, since customizing and personalization are part of services' basic character. Therefore, productization should find a right balance between standardization and tailoring. (Tuominen et al. 2015.)

Modularization enables the customer specific tailoring, while providing productized services. This is also known as mass customization, where the customers will get a solution that is modified based on their needs. The service production becomes more efficient, because companies can provide units that consist of several smaller components that are standardized in advance, rather than tailoring services for each customer. These components are called modules, and together they form a service concept (Parantainen 2013). Modularization also systemizes the service offering and the associated processes: systematization is important, because it influences the ability to reproduce the services. (Harkonen et al. 2017.)

Productization can give some product-like features for services. One common way to add product-like features is creating service packages from existing services, by determining the content, price and terms of use. These service packages can be modified into different versions based on customers' needs (Kajaani University of Applied Sciences 2020). Pricing of these service packages can vary depending on the content. Therefore, the basic version can have a standard price, whereas the additional services may be charged with their own price. Thus, customers can choose whether they want a basic version or the luxurious package. (Parantainen 2013.)

Price, service features and required working time are tightly connected to each other. According to Parantainen (2013) using fixed pricing compels to think what the offered service should include, and what needs to be cut out. This will also help in the pricing process, as determining a fixed price instead of hourly rate is clearer for the customer as well as service provider. Service productization can also result more income, because the uniform service process will eliminate the mistakes and waste. (Parantainen 2013.)

5 Case: Pirholan talli

The objective of this thesis is to develop a functional business design for case company by availing service design methods. The objective was established from the needs of the case company, and therefore this development project should generate information and outcomes that are useful for the case company. The aim of this this thesis is to first research how service design functions, and then apply these practices into case study.

This chapter includes empirical research that uses case study as data gathering method. According to Bhat, (2020) *empirical research is defined as any research where conclusions of the study are strictly drawn from concretely empirical evidence*. In this thesis, the information is gathered from literature resources and semi-structured interviews and then analyzed qualitatively.

This thesis has one main development project and several sub-projects. These projects are all addressed in this case study. The main development project of this thesis is to determine case company's customer journey map. The sub-projects of thesis are targeted to support the main project. These sub-projects include determining customer touch points, gathering customer insights, and understanding the customer perspective. Finally, the outcomes of these projects are introduced and analyzed in the conclusion chapter. This thesis also results service blueprint, that is represented in the appendices.

5.1 Case company's customer journey map

5.2 Customer insights

5.2.1 Interview results

5.3 Case company's new service concept

5.4 Conclusions

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