MEDDELANDEN FRÅN SVENSKA HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN
HANKEN SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS WORKING PAPERS

545
Jacob Mickelsson

Activityscape Mapping: Consumer Activity Systems as Service Context

2009
Activityscape Mapping: Consumer Activity Systems as Service Context

Key words: Service; value; activityscape; consumer activity systems; service-in-context; value-in-context

© Hanken School of Economics and Jacob Mickelsson

Jacob Mickelsson
Hanken School of Economics
Department of Marketing/CERS Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management

Distributor:

Library
Hanken School of Economics
P.O.Box 479
00101 Helsinki
Finland

Phone: +358 (0)40 3521 376, +358 (0)40 3521 265
Fax: +358 (0)9 431 33 425
E-mail: publ@hanken.fi
http://www.hanken.fi/public

Helsinki 2009

ISSN 0357-4598
Activityscape Mapping:
Consumer activity systems as service context

Jacob Mickelsson

CERS Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management
Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki

Abstract:
Activity systems are the cognitively linked groups of activities that consumers carry out as a part of their daily life. The aim of this paper is to investigate how consumers experience value through their activities, and how services fit into the context of activity systems.

A new technique for illustrating consumers’ activity systems is introduced. The technique consists of identifying a consumer’s activities through an interview, then quantitatively measuring how the consumer evaluates the identified activities on three dimensions: Experienced benefits, sacrifices and frequency. This information is used to create a graphical representation of the consumer’s activity system, an “activityscape map”. Activity systems work as infrastructure for the individual consumer’s value experience.

The paper contributes to value and service literature, where there currently are no clearly described standardized techniques for visually mapping out individual consumer activity. Existing approaches are service- or relationship focused, and are mostly used to identify activities, not to understand them.

The activityscape representation provides an overview of consumers’ perceptions of their activity patterns and the position of one or several services in this pattern. Comparing different consumers’ activityscapes, it shows the differences between consumers' activity structures, and provides insight into how services are used to create value within them.

The paper is conceptual; an empirical illustration is used to indicate the potential in further empirical studies. The technique can be used by businesses to understand contexts for service use, which may uncover potential for business reconfiguration and customer segmentation.

Keywords: Service; value; activityscape; consumer activity systems; service-in-context; value-in-context
Introduction

Due to changes in technology, consumers are getting increasingly empowered in terms of how they can interact with companies. Information is readily available, and consumers can choose, learn and contribute in ways previously unimaginable. Even though marketers have acknowledged the importance of understanding the consumer as an active participant in the market system (Normann, 2001; Stewart and Pavlou, 2002; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Beckett and Nayak, 2008), there have been few efforts to systematically understand and illustrate the consumer’s structures of activity. In order to understand consumers as active participants in the market system, marketers need new tools for understanding how service is embedded in the context of consumer activities and how the value of different activities is experienced.

There is in marketing a long tradition of writers that specify value as something that emerges within the customer’s activities (Abbott, 1955; Alderson, 1957; Boyd and Levy, 1963; Woods, 1981; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). There has recently been a renewed interest in this view (Normann, 2001; Holbrook, 1994, 2005, 2006; Grönroos, 2008). Many researchers hold that the value that emerges within activities is relativistic and context dependent (e.g. Schembri, 2006; Holbrook, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Ravald, 2008), and that it is created by customers for themselves using resources offered by a company (Normann 2001; Ravald, 2008; Grönroos, 2008; Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008). This means that the customer can be seen as an active integrator of information and services (Normann, 2001; Vargo, 2008). Because of this, the role of the company has shifted from being a producer of value to a supporter of value (Grönroos, 2008). Customers want to do certain activities, and often need (or want) to interact with companies to be able to do them. As customers use the company’s resources within their own activities, they evaluate these resources according to how well they enable or support them (Raval, 2008). According to this view, value is experiential and subjective (Sandström et al., 2008). Positive value can be said to emerge for customers when they are able to do something that they enjoy or feel that they need to do – to realize a desired activity of some kind.

Given that consumers seek to create experiences of value for themselves through activity, and that different activities are interlinked by supporting and complementing each other, we need to find ways to observe and analyze consumers’ activity systems. Businesses that know what role their services have in their customers’ activity systems can adjust their service accordingly. Current consumer activity mapping mostly focuses on tracing the direct interactions between a customer and company (through purchase data in CRM systems, for example), or on understanding the different types of scenarios that customers face when they are completing a particular task (Seybold, 2001; Bitner et al., 2008). Furthermore, such activity maps are typically only used to identify the activities, not to analyze them for their meaning or value.
This paper proposes the concept of the “activityscape” as a tool for visually depicting and analyzing the value dynamics in consumer activity systems. Inspired by Normann’s (2001) view of the customer as an active integrator of services and the network representations of the IMP-group, this paper introduces the Activityscape Mapping technique. The technique provides a structured approach for identifying and illustrating consumer activity systems from the consumer’s own point of view, thus providing context for service use. It adds upon existing activity mapping techniques by addressing the customer’s understanding of sacrifices, benefits and frequency of the individual activities, thereby indicating which part of the system drives the customer’s value creation. The graphical presentation style draws on hierarchical value mapping techniques, but instead of focusing on product- or service features, the technique shows consumer activities and how the consumer experiences their value. This paper contributes to service research by highlighting the consumer’s activity systems as context for service, and by providing a tool for analyzing them. The paper begins with a review and discussion of approaches for analysing consumer activity systems, continues with a presentation of the activityscape approach, and ends with an illustration of the technique where it is used to map the wine-related activity systems of two wine consumers.

Value-formation in consumer activity systems

Recent service research has taken an interest in the contexts of service and value formation. The terms “asset-in-context” (Normann, 2001) and “value-in-context” (Vargo, 2008) have been suggested to account for how the experience of value can vary according to the context where it is realized. Context is often defined as the situational context, such as time or place of the service encounter (Heinonen, 2004) or the physical or social setting of the encounter (Gupta and Vajic, 2000). Another way of defining and understanding the context of a service is to take a wider perspective and to look at the consumer’s life beyond the service situation (Heinonen et al., 2009). Boyd and Levy (1963) have suggested that marketers should consider the “total task” (p. 130) of consumption, which means looking beyond the core activity itself and taking into account the whole progression of activities that lead up to the final phase. Often the core of an activity system may be a single task (such as painting your room), but it may also be some ongoing concern, such as managing your personal economy.

When consumers are successfully able to engage in an ongoing concern or complete a particular task, they will experience value (Ravald, 2008). Consumers’ experiences of value are a complex issue, and one that can be tackled from many different points of view (Schembri, 2006; Sandström et al., 2009). Usually, value is analyzed on a short-term level, looking at how it is realized during the interaction between a consumer and a product (or a consumer and a service) (Holbrook, 2006). When stringing together many such encounters and interactions, we shift to viewing value creation from a relationship perspective. But from the consumer’s own point of view, service- or product encounters are only a part of all the

Jacob Mickelsson – Hanken School of Economics
activities that they do in order to arrive at some desired end-state. If we add the related activities that consumers do independently – the ones that happen beyond the interactions with a company – our perspective shifts to what Sawhney (2006) calls an ‘activity chain’ or ‘activity cycle’. This broader approach focuses on understanding what the consumer does before and after he interacts with a company or its offering, and the cognitive structures that guide this action. The challenge then becomes to understand how the consumer thinks about a particular task. Sawhney (1999) call this the ‘metamarket’ approach:

Metamarkets [...] are clusters of cognitively related activities that customers engage in to satisfy a distinct set of needs. They are markets in the minds of customers. (Sawhney, 1999, p. 119.)

From the metamarket point of view, value emerges throughout the interplay between different related consumer activities. Every activity contributes, and the full experience of value slowly forms over time. Ravald (2008) summarizes the process as follows: The customer carries out activities, which may or may not be assisted (or enabled) by a company. The customer’s activities will result in experiences of value, which are both subjective and context-dependent. Over time and through a sequence of events, the customer’s overall experience of value will accumulate and change. From this perspective, marketers should identify the system of activities through which the consumer creates value for himself, and then consider how their service fits into this system. In order to understand this dynamic system, marketers need to investigate what related activities customers carry out outside individual service encounters, i.e. by mapping the customer’s activity systems.

Approaches for mapping consumer activity systems

Currently, there are three approaches within service research for mapping and illustrating customer activity systems: Customer action mapping (Bitner et al., 2008; Patrício et al., 2008), website use and purchase data analysis (Nasraoui, 2008; Sumathi and Sivanandam, 2006) and customer scenario mapping (Seybold 2001, Sawhney 2006). These approaches reflect two different perspectives on activity: A service encounter-focused perspective and a customer goal-focused perspective.

Service research has traditionally focused on service encounters. Within encounters customer activity is most easily understood in terms of actions. Service blueprinting (Bitner et al., 2008) employs customer action mapping, which aims at identifying all the individual actions that a customer typically carries out while using a service. This map is used to develop blueprints for the company’s service system, which ultimately should support a favorable

---

1 Metamarkets are also mentioned in Kotler and Keller 2006, p 12.
customer experience (Bitner et al., 2008; Patrício et al., 2008). Action mapping allows only for limited customer agency and is kept strictly within the boundaries of the company’s own service system. The same is true for online services, where customer activity typically is monitored with tools that keep track of how customers use a website (Nasraoui, 2008; Hofgesang and Patist, 2008). Information technology has also made it possible to monitor customer activity from a relationship perspective (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000). Individual customer activity can be tracked over time through purchase information stored in databases (Sumathi and Sivanandam, 2006). The drawback with electronically monitoring customer activity is that it only shows interactions between the consumer and the provider in terms of clicks and buying, and as such provides no insights into what the customer ultimately tries to achieve. Rather, it shows what parts of the existing website or offering that customers use.

Customer scenario mapping (Seybold, 2001; Sawhney et al., 2004; Sawhney, 2006) has tried to address this problem by analysing what customers are trying to achieve with their activities. Interviews with customers provide material for creating generic scenarios of the activities that a customer needs to carry out to be able to get to a particular end state. These scenarios are typically presented as linear sequences of separate activities, where the customer moves from one activity to the next. Sawhney (2006) has presented customer activity as a cyclical process, where the final activity in the sequence eventually leads back to the first one. The customer activity cycle begins with “pre”-activities (such as seeking information, deciding what to do and purchasing), “during”-activities (such as using or operating), and finally “post”-activities (such as reviewing, renewing or extending). The activity system presented in Figure 1 shows an overview of a generic activity cycle as described by Sawhney (1999, 2006) (in this case car ownership), where the consumer combines the services of many different service providers to complete one task. Thus, Sawhney (1999, 2006) analyses consumer activity chains as a part of some cognitive structure, while service blueprinting, website use and customer purchase data analyses the customer’s actions within some particular service setting or relationship.

![Figure 1: The Customer Activity Cycle (adapted from Sawhney, 1999 and 2006)](image-url)
Levels of analysis

The aforementioned approaches reflect two different levels of analysis: Customer actions and customer activity. A framework for understanding these levels can be found in B-to-B research, where company relationships are analyzed in terms of sequences that consist of episodes. Within episodes, actors carry out individual actions (Holmlund, 2004). If applied to a consumer context, an episode could be “going to the store”, while a corresponding action could be “standing in line at the store's cashier”.

![Cognitive structure, activities and individual actions (adapted from Holmlund 2004)](image)

Figure 2: Cognitive structure, activities and individual actions (adapted from Holmlund 2004).

Figure 2 illustrates Holmlund’s (2004) framework, as adapted to a consumer perspective. In this paper activities are defined as customer-initiated episodes that consist of individual actions. The activities are part of some cognitive structure (Sawhney's “metamarket” [1999]), and can be carried out either independently, or may demand company interaction. From this perspective, the context of a service is the constellation of cognitively related activities that a service is being used in.

The themes of activity systems

To be able to map out a consumer’s activity system, its theme or focus must be decided. As indicated above, the classical way of understanding the theme of an activity system is to consider it as a series of steps oriented towards fulfilling some goal or task (Boyd & Levy, 1963), or as an activity cycle that facilitates the use of a particular type of service or product (Sawhney, 2006). The motivations for these activities have generally been explained in terms of means-end chains (Gutman, 1982). According to the means-end view, consumers seek out
products or services with certain attributes, which will render consequences that are compatible with the consumer’s values. This view has mainly considered consumer activity in terms of purchase and use, which delimits the activity system to linear task fulfillment: The activities form a chain where each activity builds upon the previous, until the task is completed. But if we instead delimit the boundaries of an activity system in terms of striving towards more general goals than fulfilling a single task, we need to stop thinking in terms of chains and start thinking in terms of activity constellations. As consumers engage themselves in goals, they carry out particular tasks. Tasks are often repeated and may become reoccurring and stable parts of the consumer’s ongoing activity structure.

Pieters et al. (1995) have divided consumer goals into hierarchical levels, and argue that consumer activity can be understood by investigating what consumers are trying to achieve, how they are doing it and the reasons why. For the purpose of delimiting activity systems, the focal goal (“what?”) and subordinate goals (“how?”) are directly related to the types of activity a consumer is involved in, and can be used for delimiting activity structure. Table 1 shows how the chosen level of analysis in of Pieters’ et al. (1995) goal hierarchy is reflected in activity system types.

Existing activity mapping techniques (Bitner et al. 2008, Seybold, 2001; Sawhney et al., 2004; Sawhney, 2006) are at the first level of table 1. They employ a linear mindset and are usually concerned with a single task, such as a service encounter or the purchase and ownership of a product. But if we move up a step in the goal hierarchy, we need to shift from a linear perspective to a structural perspective, where consumers maintain a set of activities that support the focal goal, and are executed whenever it fits into the rest of the consumer’s life. This can be said to form an activity constellation. The structure is not linear, because the activities can be carried out in any order. An exercise constellation could, for example, consist of going to the gym, reading health blogs, jogging etc. From this perspective, the question of delimitation becomes a matter of deciding the level of generality of the goal that is investigated. The goal of “jogging regularly” belongs to the goal of “exercising”, which belongs to “taking care of your body”, which in turn belongs to “feeling good about yourself”. The more general the goal, the more complex the activity system will be. From a manageability point of view, too general goals may be difficult to investigate, which is why activity mapping probably will work best on a subordinate goal level. Furthermore, as shown in research on consumer values (Sheth et al., 1991), consumers can maintain many parallel, sometimes even conflicting values and goals. Exercise can, for example, besides health goals also have social dimensions. To reflect this, models that allow marketers to see beyond the traditional single-goal, linear activity sequences are needed.
### Delimitation of activity systems (adapted from Pieters et al., 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delimitation</th>
<th>Type of activity system</th>
<th>Graphical illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Focal goal
  *Ex.: Losing weight*   | **Groups of activity constellations** that support the focal goal (“what?”)             | ![Focal goal diagram](image) |
| Subordinate goal
  *Ex.: Dieting or excercising* | **Activity constellation** that supports ongoing work on subordinate goal (“how?”)     | ![Subordinate goal diagram](image) |
| Task
  *Ex.: Acquiring gym membership* | **Activity chain** that is required for completing a particular task that supports the subordinate goal. | ![Task diagram](image) |

**Table 1: Delimitation of activity systems (adapted from Pieters et al., 1995)**

Alternative models can be found in the B-to-B literature. Business-to-business research has a long tradition of non-linear approaches. Within the research tradition of the IMP-group, business networks are analyzed by creating maps of market actors, their activities, and the resources exchanged between them (Anderson *et al.*, 1994, Håkansson and Snehota 1995). This type of illustration has already been applied to a business-to-consumer setting with
Normann’s “value star” (Normann, 2001), Gummesson’s “C2B networks” (Gummesson, 2004) and Vargo’s “customer supply chain” (Vargo, 2008). But the focus has in these cases been on actors, not activities. To fully capture the consumer’s ‘metamarkets’, the actor perspective must be changed to an activity perspective. This means mapping out the relationships between a consumer and a set of activities instead of a set of actors.

**Identifying value in activity systems**

Consumer value is in this paper defined as the mix of perceived sacrifice and benefit that a consumer experiences in connection to carrying out a desired activity. The outcome of this experience is an understanding of value, which arises over time and is relative to a context of other activities that support same overall theme. A company’s offering is evaluated mainly according to how well it works as a resource within the desired activity context – how well it supports or enables what the customer wants to achieve.

How can we then identify the value that arises within an activity system? The challenge becomes to bring value to an appropriate level of abstraction and simplicity. The dominating definition of perceived value describes value as a trade-off between benefits and sacrifices (Zeithaml 1988, Monroe 1990, Oliver 1997, Flint, Woodruff and Gardial 2002). Negative and positive aspects of an activity are weighed against each other and the more consumers end up on the positive side, the more value they experience. But research has shown that the matter isn’t entirely straightforward. The relationship between benefits, sacrifices and perceived value is in fact complex, and cannot be calculated simply by subtracting sacrifices from benefits (Graaf and Maas 2008). Perceptions of benefits are subjective and context bound (Schembri 2006, Vargo and Lusch 2008) and so are perceptions of sacrifices. Sacrifices are usually thought of in terms of monetary cost, but besides money, customers also sacrifice time, energy and effort to enable their activities (Zeithaml 1988). These types of sacrifices are interchangeable but – as noted by Ravald (2008) – the “exchange rates" may vary from person to person.

Thus, sacrifices and benefits are both multi-faceted and subjectively interpreted by the consumer. Heinonen and Strandvik (2009) take the argument even one step further, criticizing the a priori categorization of what constitutes a sacrifice and a benefit, arguing that a decrease in benefit can be experienced as a sacrifice by the customer (and vice versa). So, to truly capture consumer or customer value, activity maps need to be in line with research that specifies the customer’s experiences as the ultimate outcome of service (Carú and Cova, 2003, Schembri, 2006, Sandström et al., 2009).

**Experienced benefits.** Benefits have been classified in many different ways (Holbrook, 2005; 2006), and it is challenging to find specific dimensions to display in an activity map. Due to this, it may be easier to measure benefits on a general level. One basic and general division that could be used is Alderson’s (1957) division into congenial and instrumental value, later
referred to as the division between *hedonic* and instrumental value (Batra and Ahtola 1990, Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann 2003). This basic division is arguably valid across most cases of consumer activity. To capture the hedonic and instrumental dimensions of activity, consumers could be prompted to evaluate their activities on the dimensions of “importance” and “fun”. The combination of these two should give a basic reflection of the experienced benefits of an activity. An activity that is only seen as important but not fun is likely to have a strongly instrumental function, while activities that are experienced as fun have hedonic qualities. Measurement of importance and fun can for example be done by using a relative approach, where the consumer is asked to compare activities with each other.

**Experienced sacrifice.** Money is a symbolic way to store sacrificed time and effort, and because of this all three can be analyzed more or less on equal terms (Zeithaml 1988, also see Okada and Hoch 2004 and Johnson 2008). Furthermore, every consumer experiences costs and sacrifices according to individual and situation-bound reference points. This means that it from a consumer perspective is misguided to try to measure any “objective” cost of doing an activity (such as measuring the exact amount of money spent or length of time used). From the consumer’s point of view, the only important thing is whether an activity *feels* expensive or effortful. A map that shows experienced sacrifice should thus show the mental “obstacle” in the consumers mind to doing this activity. How distant does fulfilling a particular activity seem in terms of what the consumer needs to sacrifice?

**The frequency of activities**

The frequency of an activity can be seen as a multiplier for value. Every time an activity is carried out, the experience of value produced by the activity is repeated. The current discussion of value is mostly focused on understanding experiences of value as individual occurrences and does take into account repetition (Holbrook, 2006). A relationship view demands a time dimension, and thus a map showing the relationships between a consumer and a set of activities should contain some indication of frequency. Furthermore, an activity which is done frequently is likely to have a salient place in the consumer’s mind. The more times it has been completed, the more entrenched it is in the consumer’s brain (Pirolli and Anderson, 1985). Behavior that has been repeated many times is likely to continue in a similar manner, unless changes in life context happen (Ji and Wood, 2007). By understanding how often and since when a consumer has been doing an activity, we get a picture of how entrenched this particular behavior pattern has become in the consumers mind. Thus, the frequency dimension can be seen as mirroring the concept of relationship strength, but from a consumer activity perspective.
The activityscape mapping technique

This paper introduces a new approach to capturing and visualizing the consumer’s systems of activity and the value emerging within these activities: The “activityscape” technique. The term activityscape is inspired by Strandvik and Törnroos’ “relationscapes” (1997) from the B-to-B network literature. Relationscapes are a firm’s view of its relationship landscape, and include both active as well as potential business relationships. Transferring this logic to a consumer context, we can investigate the consumers’ activity landscapes; the mental maps of activities that they do within a certain context area. Sawhney (1999) described these mental landscapes as ‘metamarkets’, markets that are not present in the physical world, only in the head of the consumer. These cognitively related activity systems can be illustrated by combining IMP-style network maps with the visual presentation of Klenosky and Mulvey’s (1995) value maps.

To visualize how value is realized for consumers, researchers have traditionally used hierarchical value maps (Gutman 1982, Gengler et al., 1995). These maps show product- or service features, the attributes of these features, and how they are connected to the terminal values of the consumer. This article departs from hierarchical value mapping by proposing that IMP-like maps are combined with the style used in Gengler, Klenosky and Mulvey’s (1995) improved Hierarchical Value Maps. This way we can draw activity maps that contain more information than traditional activity maps, which usually only list the activities and then put them in some sort of chronological order. In Gengler, Klenosky and Mulvey’s (1995) representations of consumer-reported values, the more frequently reported values and consequences are given bigger circles than the less common ones. A similar principle can be applied to visualizations of consumer activity, but brought down from an aggregate to an individual consumer level, so that the activities that a consumer considers more important have a larger circle than the less important ones.

Method

The methods normally used for this type of consumer research are either qualitative interviews designed to lay out linear processes of consumption and how the consumer feels about them, or standardized tests designed to understand the consumer’s relationship to some particular product, service or other object. The activityscape technique combines these two methods into a hybrid, where a consumer’s activities first are identified through an interview, and then are individually measured on a set of pre-determined dimensions using a questionnaire. The questionnaire provides numeric data for relating the consumer’s activities to each other.

The interview is done in a structured manner, keeping the focus firmly on activities that the consumer does on a regular basis. The respondent is asked to try to think of all the activities
he does that are relevant to some goal or theme chosen by the researcher. The informant can be assisted by asking about activities where she buys something, activities where she reads about things related to the theme (either online or offline), or whether she talks or writes about it. The aim should be to get an overview of the system of relevant, reoccurring activities within the context.

Having identified the significant activities, the next step is to quantify the differences between them. The respondent is presented with a set of identical questionnaires, one for each activity. Every activity is to be evaluated by the respondent on four separate dimensions: The first dimension concerns sacrifice, the second concerns benefit (reflecting the Zeithaml [1988] sacrifice/benefit view of value), while the third dimension measures time/intensity. By allowing the respondent to rate each activity within the consumption context separately on these dimensions, we get insight into the roles of the activities in the consumer’s activity system. The questionnaire template can be viewed in Appendix 1. Items are graded on a seven point Liekert-like scale.

**Dimension 1: Sacrifices associated to the activity.** The first six items on the questionnaire address sacrifices in terms of money, time and effort. The first question concerns the monetary sacrifice of doing the activity once, while the second concerns monetary sacrifice for doing the activity in the long run. Similarly, time is split up into two different items: One concerning how much time it takes to do the activity once, and another concerning the amount of time needed for travel in order to do the activity. This helps in highlighting the difference between activities that you can do at home and activities that you have to travel to be able to do. Finally, a measure concerning overall effort is also included to account for cases where the activity is both cheap and quick but still feels bothersome.

**Dimension 2: Benefits gained from the activity.** The next two items in the questionnaire address benefits gained from the activity by measuring perceived importance and fun. Importance and fun are measured by asking the respondent to place all his activities in a field between two extreme positions: First between the words “fun” and “not fun” and then between the words “important” and “not important”. This forces the respondent to relate the activities to each other.

**Dimension 3: Frequency of the activity.** The final two items are intended to measure the historical bond that the consumer has with the activity. By asking how often and since when the consumer has been doing the activity, we get an approximate idea of how entrenched the activity has become in the consumer’s mind. This also means that we are provided with a snapshot of the activities that the respondent sees as relevant at the moment, but the history of the activities are viewed from the perspective of the respondents whole life.


**Drawing the activityscape map**

When data about the individual activities has been gathered, a graphical representation can be drawn. The proportions in the activityscape picture represent the sacrifice, benefit and frequency dimensions and are presented in a way similar to the IMP-approach, as circles connected with lines. The activityscape places the consumer as a circle in the middle, while the activities are placed around it, thus forming a centralized network (Baran, 1964). The length of the lines between the consumer and the activities signifies the sacrifices they require. Line length is calculated by adding together the values from items 1-6 in the questionnaire. To show importance, the sizes of the circles are made bigger or smaller. The data for determining the diameter of the circles is obtained by measuring how the respondent has placed the different activities between the extremes “very important” and “not at all important” in item 9 in the questionnaire. The more to the right the activity has been placed, the more important the activity, and the bigger the circle in the activityscape. The thickness of the lines connecting the activity to the consumer shows frequency, i.e. the number of times the activity has been carried out. The more traffic a path has had, the wider it has become. The thickness is obtained by multiplying item seven (time since first occasion) with item eight (frequency).

**Empirical illustration of the technique**

The approach was tested on a wine consumer. The respondent was an urban male, about 40, who saw wine as an important hobby. The respondent was interviewed with the aim of identifying the wine-related activities that he does on a regular basis. (This means that wine-related activities that only had been done once were left out.) He was assisted in thinking about his activities by questions regarding activities where wine plays a part, whether he reads about wine and how he gets his wine. During the interview, the respondent mentioned eleven different wine-related activities that he does regularly. Based on this set of activities, eleven questionnaires were created using the template in Appendix 1 and given to the respondent. When the questionnaires had been answered, the obtained data was used to calculate the proportions in the activityscape presented in Figure 3.
Figure 3: The activitiescape of wine consumer 1
This picture contains all the activities mentioned by the respondent in the interview. The circle in the middle of the picture represents the consumer. The properties of the different activities – as they were seen by the respondent – have been illustrated by the shapes and hues in the picture. The length of the lines show the perceived sacrifice needed to complete the activity. In the activityscape we can see that the respondent experienced the planning and realization of dinners with wine as one of the most demanding parts of his activity system. This activity requires a lot of time, money and effort, and is repeated about once a month. Because of this, the activity becomes expensive both on a long-term aggregate level as well as when viewed on individual terms. On the other hand, the respondent sees these dinners as his most important wine-related activity. Importance is shown by the size of the circle. In contrast, reading wine reviews and buying wine at passenger ferries (where the circles are small) are seen as the quite unimportant activities.

The hue of the circles shows whether the respondent considered the activity to be fun or not. Visiting the state monopoly store was not seen as much fun, while taking part in wine courses is quite a lot of fun. But not as much fun as the self-arranged dinners, which really seem to be the centerpiece of the system. Dinners scored high on both fun and importance, which indicates that they are highly benefit-bringing. This is balanced out by the high sacrifices required. The thickness of the lines connecting to the circles shows how many times a certain activity has been completed. The path to the state monopoly alcohol store is the most travelled of all in the system (regularly since the respondent turned 18), while the line connecting the respondent to vineyard visits is quite thin, as these visits happen quite seldom (about once every second year). The exact specifics of calculating the proportions will not be described here, as the activityscape only is a visual aid. Minimum and maximum sizes and thicknesses can be calculated as seen fit, as long as the proportions between the representations reflect the data.

The hues and proportions of the activityscape allow us to see the division between congenial and instrumental activities as described by Alderson (1957). Activities that are light are seen as fun, and can be assumed to have a strong congenial or hedonic element. The self arranged dinners seem to be the most congenial type of activity, implying that there is a direct relationship between the degree of instrumentality and the degree of fun of the activity as the consumer perceives trips to the state monopoly alcohol store as an undesirable chore instead of an enjoyable experience.
Figure 4: The activityscape of wine consumer 2

Figure 4 shows the activityscape of another wine consumer. This respondent is also male, but about ten years younger than the first one. Comparing the first activityscape with this one reveals differences. The second activityscape contains fewer activities than the first one, but many of the existing activities have been completed more frequently than in the first case. The reasons for the differences might be found in the respondents’ differing relationships to wine: The first respondent has wine as a hobby, and thus consciously maintains a set of activities that support this hobby, even though they might not be carried out very frequently. The second respondent seems to have a more mundane and everyday relationship to wine, something that is emphasized by the family vineyard. Thus, the wine-related activities are cheap, frequent, and not very varied. The two activityscapes presented can be seen as two different types of context for service. If we view the state monopoly’s services in context, we see that both consumers seem to dislike using them, treating them as simply utilitarian enablers, not as sources of congenial or hedonic experiences. If the state monopoly knew the different types of contexts that its services are used in, it might be able to find new ways of supporting the consumer’s own value creating processes.
Contribution

The purpose of this paper was to analyze how consumers create value for themselves through their own activity systems. The activityscape technique was introduced and used to illustrate the wine-related activities of two wine consumers. The technique revealed the general shapes of the respondents’ activity systems, as well as the perceived differences in value between the activities. The technique, as it was presented in this paper, is primarily suited for understanding consumption of services on a long term level. Activityscape maps provide us with four insights. They help us to:

1. Identify activities that the consumer sees as relevant
2. Visualize the differences between how these activities are experienced
3. Understand the systemic whole
4. Identify the role of service within this system

If we view value creation as the consumer’s process of carrying out activities with the help of different resources, maps of activity systems can help us understand how different activities support each other. This opens up the concept of value-in-context to not just incorporate situational contexts, but also long-term contexts for service. The value that arises within an individual activity may often only make sense within the system of related activities. Services may in some cases be the centerpiece of an activity system, and in other cases have a merely supportive function. The wine-consumption cases showed that the services of the state monopoly were required but not seen as producing valuable experiences as such. Indeed, many activities in the system were carried out regularly, even though they were not seen as being much fun or very important. This indicates that they have a more instrumental than hedonic function in the system. With this method it may be possible to discover different types of activity systems, and identifying the activities that consumers consider as central within them.

Comparison to other methods

Due to its different focus and methodology, the activityscape approach captures different types of information when compared to others approaches. Service blueprinting (Bitner et al. 2008) chooses the service encounter as arena for customer actions and is designed for analyzing service functionality. The activityscape takes a much wider viewpoint, stepping outside the service encounter and instead analyzing how the service fits into the customers long-time activities. Thus there is a difference in scope, time perspective and understanding of customer agency. The consequences of this are that service blueprinting is a method that can be used in service design, while the activityscape approach is more suited for strategic
decision-making.

The Activityscape approach has more in common with the approaches of customer scenario mapping (Seybold, 2001; Sawhney et al., 2004; Sawhney, 2006), where the timeframe includes many different service encounters. The difference is that customer scenario mapping is focused on some particular task or product life-cycle, while the activityscape is focused on a goal, life theme or area of interest. Thus, the main contribution, when compared to other methods, is that activityscapes focus on the customer’s own contexts, while other methods disregard them. To truly understand the role of a service and the value made possible by it, a customer focus is crucial.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

The activityscape technique as described here only addresses two types of information: It identifies activities and provides rough measures of how the activities are experienced on a set of pre-determined dimensions. This means that information about the reasons for activity is omitted. The activityscape map does not show what drives consumer activity; it could be compared with an electrical circuit map that shows a system’s voltage potential, but not the reasons for it. The activityscape technique also omits the flow of resources in the activity system. In the wine-consumer case, for example, the state-monopoly store provides wine, which is used in social situations such as a dinner parties, where it is combined with the information gained from reading books and magazines. This can only be indirectly inferred from the activityscape map. Due to these limitations, further iterations of the activityscape technique should address reasons for activity and the resource flow within activity systems.

Future studies could use electronic versions of the activityscape technique in online surveys in order to get large-scale overviews of consumer activity. This might provide insight into different consumer activity styles, and could in the long term help categorize services according to how they fit into activity patterns. Furthermore, the method could be used in longitudinal studies to see how activity patterns form and change according to the life situation of the consumer. This would provide marketers with valuable information on how to communicate with their customers during different parts of their life-cycle.

Managerial implications

The activityscape opens up new ways for businesses to understand what contexts their services are used in. The traditional focus on the consumer-company dyad may not provide all the information that the company needs for making strategic decisions: in fact it may give
the company a false sense of self-importance. The activityscape provides decision-makers with a quick but efficient overview of what their customers are doing. When aware of this, the companies can adjust their offerings accordingly. The activityscape illustrates the customer’s activity system by highlighting both actors and use situations, and thus lets the companies understand where they are needed and used. The activityscape may also open up companies' eyes for the potential for value reconfigurations as described by Normann and Ramirez (1993). By seeing where the company’s offering fits into an activity system, managers have better chances of understanding potential for expanding or reorganizing the offering so that it better suits the customer’s contexts and needs.

The activityscape does not just identify activities but also shows how they are experienced. Companies often let customers evaluate their services through questionnaires, but gain little useful information. Only when evaluations put into a context such as the activityscape do they make sense and become useful. Imagine that the customer uses the services of two different providers and combines their services within his activity system. Evaluations of how the customer sees the two companies as parts of his activity system provide valuable information about how the companies are doing. Businesses need to identify the general shapes of the activityscapes of their customers. By carrying out studies of the general shapes of customers’ activityscapes, businesses can create activity based segmentation – not just segmenting by the transactions and contacts between customer and company, but segmenting according to what related activities the customer does outside the boundaries of the company.
References


Baran, P. (1964), *Introduction to Distributed Communications Networks*, Rand Corporation, CA, USA.


Grönroos, C. (2008), "Service logic revisited: who creates value? And who co-creates?", 


Schembri, S. (2006), "Rationalizing service logic, or understanding services as experience?", *Marketing Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 381-392.


Appendix 1: Questionnaire

[The following 8 items concern one particular activity in the activity system and are to be modified accordingly]

1. How much time do you need to set aside from your everyday routines in order to complete this activity once? (In minutes, for example) ______________

2. How much time do you need to use for traveling outside your everyday locations and routes in order to be able to do this activity once? (In minutes, for example) ______________

3. Compared to the amount of money you usually spend in a week, do you consider it to be expensive to do this activity once?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is free of charge</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>It is very expensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. Is this activity expensive for you in the long run? Please consider how much you pay for doing the activity during a typical year. Compare this to your other expenses. How does the activity compare?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is free of charge</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>It is very expensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Do you sometimes feel like you would want to postpone doing this activity because it feels tiresome?

   Never | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Often

6. How much effort do you feel it takes to do this activity?

   No effort | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | A lot of effort

7. How long is it since you did the activity for the first time?

   ____________________________________________

Jacob Mickelsson – Hanken School of Economics
8. Approximately how often have you done this activity since you started?

(times a year, month, or week, for example)

_____________________________________________

[The 8 previous items are repeated for all activities. The following two are presented only once]

9. Place the following activities into the field below according to how important you feel that they are relative to each other. Place the activities so that the important ones are on the right side of the field, while the less important ones are placed more to the left.

Activity A, B, C, D etc.

Not at all important | Very important
---------------------|-------------------

10. Place the following activities into the field below according to how fun you feel that they are. The most fun ones go into the right side of the field, while the less fun ones go into the left side.

Activity A, B, C, D etc.

Not at all fun | Very much fun
----------------|-----------------
Meddelanden från Svenska handelshögskolan

Hanken School of Economics. Working Papers.

2007


529. Pura, Minna & Gummerus, Johanna: Discovering Perceived Value of Mobile Services.


531. Wägar, Karolina, Björk, Peter, Raval, Annika & West, Björn: Exploring Marketing in Micro Firms.


2008

535. Tandefelt, Marika: Reklamsvenska i Finland speglad genom varuhuset Stockmanns tidnings-annonser under det 20e seklet. Projektets bakgrund, syfte, material och metoder. Swedish advertising language in Finland mirrored by the newspaper advertisements of the Stockmanns department store during the 20th century. Background, purpose, material and methods.


537. Ahlgren, Niklas, Antell, Jan: Cobreathing of Stock Prices and Contagion.


2009


543. Leppänen, Hanna & Grönroos, Christian: The Hybrid Consumer: Exploring the Drivers of a New Consumer Behaviour Type.
