

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION TRANSFORMATION FOR THAI ENTREPRENEURS BASED ON THAI SERVICE BUSINESS AS CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study is about the factors that will support the customer-centric service transformation for Thailand local HORECA (Hotel-Restaurant-Catering) industry. Focusing on service design method, both tools and frameworks are discussed to explain what factors are needed to transform Thai local organisations to create the customer-centric service that will lead to sustainable business model.

Customer journey map is the tool which is utilized in service design process. It shows the complete experiences and services which are interacting with service providers and customers. Beneath this tool, Three-stage of purchase is the concept which explains customer journey consists three stages 1) Pre-Purchase stage 2) Service Encounter stage and 3) Post-Encounter stage. WtServuction model is used for this study to explain the influence factors that affect the experience perceived by customers during the service process.

In methodology, servuction model's 4 factors are used as the guideline to select the interviewees. The interviewees give the insight experience of what are needed to create customer-centric service culture transformation. The collected information explains the best practices for the customer-centric transformation and how to maintain its development into the future.

In the summary, the customer-centric service transformation driven wheel is created. Plugging the insight data obtained from the methodology results into the service design process, the new workflow in a form of driven wheel shows relationship among customer journey, three-stage of purchase model, servuction model and the factors required to drive the whole wheel forward.

KEYWORDS: *customer-centric service, organisation culture transformation, service culture, thai smes service business, customer-centric service culture transformation wheel*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, service industry has played an important role in overall country economy. According to National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), between 2005 - 2009, manufacturing and service industries accounted for 86% of Thailand Gross Domestic Product or GDP (Manufacturing and). In 2014, the travel and tourism sector accounted for THB 1,037.3 billion or 8.6% of Thailand direct GDP and 5.8% of total employment or 2,210,000 jobs with 235.3 billion baht or 7.4% of total economic investment (Travel &, pp. 1, 2015).

In 2013, spa business generated the revenue of 22 billion baht which was almost 10% of the overall Thailand travel and tourism revenue. Supported by the study of Thai Spa Industry by Thai Spa Association (2014), 88% of the spa firms were legally registered but fewer than 30% were found to have already achieved the standard or were during under process. This seems to reflect the negligence of Thai Service business owners and the lack of understanding toward the standard and the certificate importance which will affect the development of these businesses in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Explained by Temkin from Ainsworth Article (Ainsworth, 2015), Customer service is an organisational function that partially involves customers interaction. It is only a part of the total experience (Yohn, 2015) and a set of intangible activities being performed on behalf of the customers (Pine II and Gilmore, 2011: pp. 3). This does not represent the whole process of what customers actually interact with.

Instead, mentioned by both Temkin and O'Neill (What's, 2015), customer experience is the total connection and customer impression to which companies make through all possible channels, platforms and touchpoints from pre-service (awareness, research, attraction, interaction), encountering and post-service (use, cultivation and advocacy).

If customers do not care about the individual touchpoint, they will experience the service as on whole unit or one whole experience (Polaine, et al., 2013). Nowadays, for any companies to differentiate themselves

from their competitors, the concept of customer experience must be implemented holistically and co-created by everyone in the company to give customers the best experience (Jones and Bruce, 2015). The research by Rawson, et al. (The Truth, 2013) finds out companies that can control the entire customer experience have indeed both customer and employee satisfaction with an increased revenue. Therefore, to survive and to be able to grow forward in the future market, businesses must evolve from wherever they are now to be customer-centric organisations which aim to give the best experience service to their customers.

Emphasised by one of Mercedes Benz service manager, with excellent quality products, customers are willing to leave the brand as soon as there is any little problem occurs. (Driven to, 2016, pp. 3 - 4). All of these are to secure the future winning and, once the goal is reached, such achievement will prolong toward the far further future.

2.1 Service Design

The service is a process where a service provider and a customer interact and there are other stakeholders who involve in exploring and defining the service proposition (Stickdorn, 2010). The service provider cannot deliver or produce the service value but only offer them to the customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2007). There is always a need for the one acting as offering service role and the one accepting as service receiving role. As a consequence, the service must be co-creative.

The value of the service is defined by customers rather than the output (Lusch, et al., 2006: pp. 10). The same idea is supported by Service-Center Dominant Logic or S-D Logic by F. Lush, et al. (2006: pp.10), which says values are co-created and defined by customers. No matter how good the output of the service is seem, it will always be judged based on the expectation of the customers.

2.2 Customer Journey Map

Customer Journey Map is one of tools being used for service design. According to Dijk, et al. (2010 in Stickdorn, 2010), it is a map that includes all touchpoints and whole structure of customers' experiences when they go through the service.

2.3 Three-Stage of Purchasing

The concept of Customer Journey Map can also be explained using Service Consumption Model by Tsiotsou and Wirtz (2014: 3) which clearly separates each stage of the service into three sub-stages: the pre-purchase stage, the service encounter stage and the post-counter stage. The overview of the process is shown in Figure 3.

2.3.1 Pre-Purchase Stage

During pre-purchase stage, the need triggers consumers to look for the information and to analyse the searching results, which leads to decision making that satisfies the needs. The unconscious mind (e.g. impulse buying), internal conditions (e.g. sickness) and external

conditions (e.g. advertisement) are those need stimulants.

Since there are more risks in services than in products, consumers tend to look for the information source types more than what they use in products information searching. They are likely to obtain the information from their trusted sources such as friends or trusted brands. The internet is used for the service aspect comparison such as warranty, price, location, offerings and quality. They check the service by visiting the on-site to talk with the personnels directly.

After consumers evaluate all the needed information, they are ready to make a decision and more onward to the second stage, service encounter (Tsiotsou and Wirtz, 2014: 12).

2.3.2 The Service Encounter Stage

This stage involves the consumers engaging the service firm. Consumers co-create experiences and value together with the servicescape environments while evaluating the service experience. The consumer engagement can usually be found in the services rather than products. This is because it requires more interaction between consumers and servicescape elements. Such interaction with the brand can lead to the positive behaviours such as sharing comments or introducing the service to other consumers (Tsiotsou and Wirtz, 2014: 12).

Based on S-D logic, the service is the process where two side actors, consumers and firms, exchange the skills and capabilities that benefit one another. Such benefits can mean in different way otherwise than in term of money or pleasure but also in term of learning as well (Lusch and Nambisan, 2012). Such benefits both tangible and intangible percept in consumer's mind are known as benefit concept (Hoffman and Bateson, 2008).

2.3.2.1 Servuction Model

Servuction Model, derived from service and production, is a model which describes the factors that influence customer's experience. The model has taken four important factors into account (figure 4): The Servicescape (visible), Contact personnel and Service provider (visible), Other customers (visible) and Organisations and systems (invisible).

2.3.2.1.1 Servicescape

This concept has mentioned regarding that the atmosphere and any physical elements do have effects on both employees and customers in responding behaviours. The relationships of the behaviours performed by both employees and customers are shown in the figure 5.

As the physical environment has an impact on the the behaviour, Bitner (1992) noted that the first step is to identify the goal which the organisation expects to achieve in both customer and employee aspects.

The design of servicescape will allow consumers to categorise and to distinguish the service mentally from other service by giving a label immediately in their head once seen. This helps consumers to reduce the complexity in the service environment (Wirtz, et al. 2000: pp. 350).

2.3.2.1.2 Contact Personnel/Service Providers

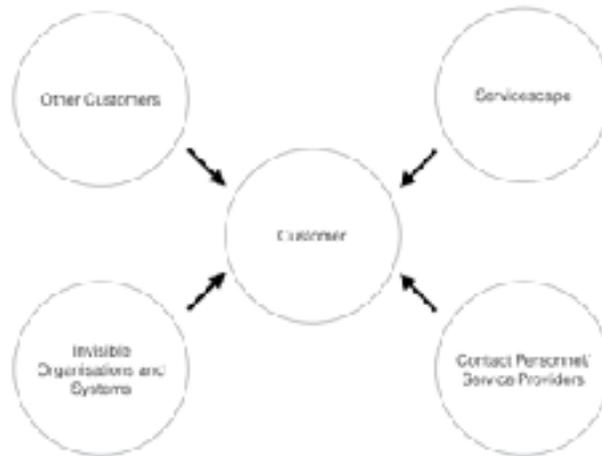


Figure 1: Adapted from E. Langeard, J. Bateson, C. Lovelock, and P. Eglie, Marketing of Services: New Insights from Consumers and Managers, Report No 81-104, (Cambridge, MA: Marketing Sciences Institute, 1981 in Hoffman and Bateson, 2008: pp. 9).

According to Hoffman and Bateson (2008:pp. 10), contact personnel is the person who briefly provides service to the consumers such as a security guard or receptionist. However, service providers have a more specific meaning in which they are the primary providers of a core service such as waiter, massage therapist, etc. It is very important to know that service personnel can be used as a differentiate factor which makes one service firm superior than another (Hoffman and Bateson, 2008: 10).

2.3.2.1.3 Other Customers

The term of other customers is a very straightforward. The impact of the other customers can be difficult to handle due to its difficulty to anticipate. Normally, this is managed by the manager to comprehend with the situation. Examples can be the situation when there are more than one customer entering into the service and expecting to receive the service all at the same time. Waiting time and the experience while waiting can immediately affect the consumers both one who is being serviced and those who are not (Hoffman and Bateson, 2008: 11).

2.3.2.1.4 Invisible Organisation and Systems

Organisation and system, though visible, are what that tie all these three factors together and create the series of the journey alternatives whenever choices are made by the consumers at every touchpoint on every stage. Some of these systems are policy, regulations, procedures, processes and etc. (Hoffman and Bateson, 2008: 11).

2.3.3 The Post-Encounter Stage

This is the last stage where consumers respond the satisfaction from their service quality perception. Even though under a high satisfaction, this does not guarantee that the consumers will return to use the same service or to the same firm again (Tsiotsou and Wirtz, 2014: pp. 23

- 24).

2.3.4 Service Quality Model (Gap Model)

As per what were discussed earlier, the success scale of service is decided by customers' expected service satisfaction. Due to Gap Model In Service Quality, expected service is influenced by the word-of-mouth, the personal needs, past experience and also by the external communication to customers. A perception gap can appear between the expected service and the perceived service.

According to Service Quality Model, figure 7, the gaps can be considered as the obstacles that hinders the attempt to deliver the service to the customer (Zeithaml, 1985: 44). On the service marketer's side, there are 4 gaps in the following:

2.3.4.1 Gap 1 - Consumer expectation and management perception gap

This is the place where rests the difference between executive perceptions of what consumers expect in the service quality. One of the example is people feels that small independent repair firms tend to have higher quality than large ones. However, executive seem to think that a large facility image shows the presence of high quality for customer perception

2.3.4.2 Gap 2 - Management perception and service quality specification gap

This gap explains the difficulty in the management which is needed to meet the consumer needs. Even though executives might already know what the problems are, it is found to be incapable of solving or comprehending effectively. Some of these hindrance factors are resources constraints, market conditions, and management indifference.

2.3.4.3 Gap 3 - Service quality specifications and service delivery gap

Despite of the existence of standard guideline or a

perfect training, it does not promise the 100% standard service quality can be attended by the employees. The human errors will always exist and it will affect the service quality.

2.3.4.4 Gap 4 - Service delivery and external communication gap

External communication such as advertisement will create the initial expectation from the customers. As people's belief and value might affect their information processing (Oliveira, 2007), this message should not exaggerate the actual quality to avoid the disappointment from the customers when the expecting service quality cannot be fulfilled. It is recommended that we should give customers the information of what special efforts are needed to be done to attend their standard service quality. This might give a picture if there are any parts which might go wrong in any circumstances. It is also found that the consumers who are aware of the steps requiring to serve for their best interests are likely to perceive a delivered service in a harmony way.

2.4.4.5 Gap 5 - Expected service and perceived service gap

This gap is located on the customer side. The quality of the service can be determined by the magnitude and direction between expected service and perceived service, as a consumer already creates the specific level of the service assumed to worth for money, leading to decision they made. The failure to fulfil expected service quality also means the disappointment in the consumer's own judgement. Such failure will initiate the self protection when consumers look for the party who they believe should be responsible for their failure.

However, by being able to fulfil the consumer's expectation, consumers have become proud of their successful decision, leading to showing off's their achievement for making the right decision to promote their own superior. This should lead to the reason of sharing with other partying as the information of this achievement and acknowledgement of this success. One of the famous methodologies used to measure the quality of this gap is SERVQUAL Methodology. It is the scale for measuring the perceived service quality introduced by Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml and Len Berry, in 1988. The scale contain of ten service quality elements: bility, Responsiveness, Competence, Access, Courtesy, Communication, Credibility, Security, Understanding/ knowing the customer and Tangibles. In 1988, the scale was later reduced to five elements: Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness (RATER dimensions). (Review of, 2005: pp. 135)

2.5 Transformation to Customer-Centric Service Organisation

It has always been the most challenging for anyone to go through change. Old SMEs organisation is very difficult to change regardless of their small sizes. "Customer for Life" is the result of the transformation toward customer experience-centric by, under Steve Cannon leading, Mercedes Benz USA (MBUSA). (Driven to, 2016 : pp. 3).

To start the transformation, it is very important to have a clear vision (Denning, 2011). The company has to know its current state and where it is heading to (Driven to, 2016 :P. 22). MBUSA created a concise and clear visual map, figure 8, believing this is way easier to be understood.

The map is divided into three parts 1) Current Stage 2) Future Stage and 3) Action Plan.

According to "Driven to Delight", MBUSA used the following steps to transform themselves toward their goal.

1. Benchmark the brands that they want to become.
2. Identify what their customer needs.
3. Create customer journey showing how our customers travel to get what they need from the company.
4. Make sure that the map is simple for everyone to understand.
5. Create customer feedback measuring gauge.

Comparing, these steps with the earlier service design process shows they are eventually similar. MBUSA was designing its own service experience.

3. METHODOLOGY

To perform the study to analyse the difference between Thai Local SMEs service organisation and International service organisation, in-depth interview is conducted to obtain the insight from all interviewees. To obtain the information needed, guideline questionnaires are created that can help interviewees understand of what to look for.

1. How much do Thai SMEs entrepreneurs understand the meaning of Service Experience?
2. What are the current problems which all service providers are facing?
3. What are their opinions to solve such problems?
4. How do they actually lead their organisation to go through the transformation?
5. How do they maintain it and secure the future great sustainable service experience?

Using Servuction Model, experience is influenced on 4 factors as the focus model for this study; all information is recorded into the memo log and later being encrypted into 4 factors for each interviewee.

These factors are prioritised using the qualitative interview method to get insight from the experts related to each factors. This method has the low productivity. Still, with well selected target people, the result is the quality information of the insight. The advantage of in-depth interviews is the allowance of complex issues can be discussed and emphasised in the richer dimensions

(Mother and, pp. 200).

6 service providing organisations of three hotels and three restaurant chains have accepted the interviews for The criteria used for interviewee selections are based on four factors: 1) they are service providing businesses 2) each organisation has more than 50 service employees 3) They are have branches and 4) each interviewee is responsible for one of 4 factors from servuction model. All interviews are conducted face-to-face. All firms are listed below:

Samed Resort Group - Interviewee: Mr. Weerasak Chunhachak, Director

Samed Resort Group was established in 1995 with well known 7 hotels and resorts on Samed Island such as Le Wiman Cottage and Spa, Party Resort, Phrao Bay Resort, Srai Kaew Beach Tree Resort and others. The group was awarded from Global Brands Magazine as the best resort hotel of Thailand in 2016.

Mandarin Oriental Hotel - Interviewee: Mr. Ittipol Witjitsomboon, Director of Human Resources

This Thailand's first luxury hotel has served many famous visitors and Thai Royalties for several generations. The hotel has been well known for its ultra excellent service experience. The culture has been engraved within the DNA of all employees from generation to generation. It has been ranked the world's best hotel for several years since 1981.

Peninsula Hotel - Interviewee: Mr. Soradej Archvarin, Director of Human Resources

This subsidiary of Hong Kong Peninsula has been chosen as Asia's second best hotel and the 22nd of the world from Travel+Leisure 2015.

Chounan - Interviewee: Kulawachara Bhurichayawarodom, Chief Executive Officer

The highly successful Japanese fast-food restaurant chain by Thai SMEs which keeps its growing pace through the bad time of Thailand economic. Chounan's slogan is "True Friend at Hungry Time". From the 2009 opening of their first store, the chain currently has expanded to 10 branches with more than 100 employees.

Pancake House - Interviewee: Mr. Wisarut Sriratanapras, Chief Executive Officer

Established in 2009, Pancake House is Thailand's first pancake restaurant that offers a variety of pancake dessert dishes with more than hundred employees in the

house. In 2016, Pancake House opened its 9th branch. They are moving forward to their service standard excellence by establishing their first Pancake House Training Centre which should finish by the end of 2016.

Penguin eats Chabu - Interviewee: Mr. Thanapan Wongchinsri, Chief Executive Officer

A one year old new fusion Thai & Japanese chabu buffet restaurant rises from using social media as its main tool. The company, after a year of operation, expands their second branch, showing the great progress of the business model.

3.1 Interview Data Analysis

The analysis of these six interviewees are recorded. All important keywords are transcribed into text and grouped, based on their similarity. All keywords are categorised into four categories based on Servuction Model influence factors: Servicescape, Other Customers, Personnel and Organisation. Factors' priority is decided based on interviewee answers. The comparison is made in text to explain the relationships between the large international organisations which are Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Peninsula Hotel Bangkok and Samed Resort Group; and Thai local SMEs organisations which are Chonun, Pancake House and Penguin Eat Chabu.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

This study is conducted using Servuction Model as the main model. Four factors: 1) Servicescape 2) Personnel 3) Other Customers and 4) Organisation and System, which create the total customer experience, are extracted from the interview dialogues.

Two main parties are interviewed. They are 1) International Service Operators and 2) Thai Local SMEs Service Operators. The objective is to reveal some of these questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in method between two different level operators?
2. Does the corporate size affect the core driven factor that lead to success transformation?
3. What are the difference in the point of view regarding to customer-centric service between large international operators and small local operators?
4. What is the process that lied under the transformation toward customer-centric service organisation?

4.1 Comparison between Professional Service Operator and Thai Local SMEs Service Operators

In this section, the summary is conducted by comparing the international service operators with Thai SMEs local service operators.

4.1.1. Servicescape

For Thai Local SMEs operators, they view servicescape as the main factor which creates the attractiveness to draw in the customers. The design must match with their target customers.

Contrary, International operators find this as second to personnels. They all agree the interior must be very clear yet it cannot be done often due to the cost. The decoration must create good atmosphere for customers as well as employees.

Due to the business difference, chain restaurant mainly relies on the shop decoration to attract the pass-by customers. While hotel requires all designed to meet their standards which all customers are always familiar with.

Penguin Eat Chabu shows that they focus on customer experience by trying to achieve the customer engagement via several tangible touchpoints such as dolls, aprons and personnels. These values are added into the atmosphere and have created more reasons for people to revisit the service besides food taste.

Hotel businesses create their position via decoration and amenities. However, they do not make these as their long term strategy to achieve great customer experience service. The personal touch is still what their customers value the most.

4.1.2. Personnels

There are no shortcuts to achieve the great customer experience service personnels. There is no difference in either large and small scale businesses. Mentioned by Mr. Ittiphol of Mandarin Oriental, with the good service culture, it is about patience, consistency and time that matter.

Turnover is the problem that both-type operators are facing. It shapes the future of the firms. For Mandarin Oriental Hotel, with the big family of the very long history, the service culture is very strong and powerful. Generation to generation, they pass their vision and passion from one to another. However, they need more than just time to achieve such result. The great leader is required at the first step.

Starting with choosing the right people that fit the culture, all trainings only involve the basic service standard and morality. The service culture is being repeatedly told and trained.

To reduce the turnover, confirmed by both-type operators, the clarity is the key toward their success.

Basic or extra benefit welfare are the basic requirements. The job description and the career path must be clearly set. Personnels must be well treated the same way we want customers are treated.

4.1.3. Other Customers

In service industry, according to interviewees of both scale firms, the problems led by other customers can be solved with personnels and the management.

4.1.4. Organisation and System

To create the great customer service experience organisation, agreed by all professional human resource management interviewees, the leaders are the most important element that will lead to the success. The service culture must be set according to the leaders' visions. These are then must be communicated thought the organisation among all managements from top to bottom.

The service culture is being applied for not only customers but also the employees. It is what makes the culture strong and all employees truly understand the service culture that should be given to the customers.

The clear career path, good benefits and welfare are required to fulfil the basic need and the clarity of all employees. However, the repeated training of the very same topic to promote the service culture into all employee traits must be conducted with consistency.

These solutions to promote the great customer experience service are the same for both international and local SMEs scale without any exceptions.

4.2. Customer-Centric service culture transformation wheel

By adopting all ideas which contribute to organisation culture changing and developing servuction factors that support organisation customer-centric service operation, the wheel of customer centric service transformation is created. This wheel shows two important information 1) how customer journey is developed from the start in the business owner perspective and 2) what are factors that drive the culture transformation toward the goal and keep it evolves through time.

4.2.1. Development of the wheel

The left wheel in figure 2 reveals the logic behind the customer-centric service culture transformation wheel development. This logic wheel represents the fundamental relationship among service design elements being viewed in any particular service process as mentioned in literature review. Supported by several ideas from interviewees, the driven core, made from passion and vision, is created. Both are the heart of

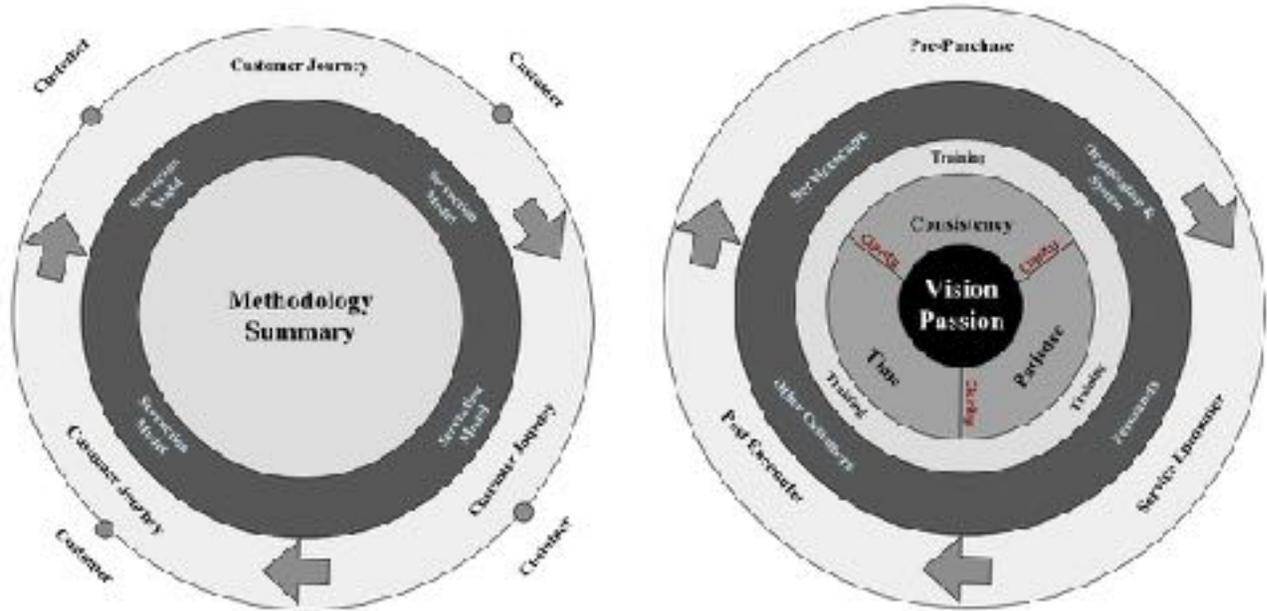


Figure 2: Customer Centric Service Culture Transformation Logic (Left), Customer-centric service culture transformation wheel (Right)

culture transformation toward service excellence that evolves through time.

The shape of circle reflect the truth that all processes are needed to operate and to evolve simultaneously. The wheel structure shows the whole process of customer journey creation in one model rather than comparing one service model to another model. It shows both tangible and intangible parts and how they are interacted with each others.

This is the true characters of what customer-centric service transformation is based on the study data.

To read this wheel, it starts from the center showing vision and passion as the main power source. It is the most important that drives the wheel forward.

Comparing the organisation as a car, the vision and passion are delivered by the owner through car key. It starts the engine with these two elements. The car is powered by fuel made of time, patience and consistency.

Through training, the driver gains his skill and be able to operate the car efficiently. The fuel powers car's parts: servicescape, organisation and system, personnel, and other customers. These car's parts work together to create the car movement which interact with the customers through pre-purchase, service encounter and post encounter. The clarity is what keeps the communication line clean. It is to make that all parts receiving the power efficiently. All hardwares and power lines are to be kept in checked and be maintained at all

time.

The end result of the wheel movement creates the experience for both driver and passengers. With Passengers as customers, the great experience is the great ride in this car throughout passengers' journey before the yget off the car looking forward to get on this ride again.

To use this wheel, it can be used as the ideal model for the new culture. Each segment is filled with the list of what can be done to achieve the goal which must be defined by the leader and stakeholders.

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PHOTOS AND INFORMATION



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