

## Service Process in an Alternative Education of Understanding Self—A Case of Chinese Numerology Consulting Center

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to develop a blueprint of a service process that would work well to provide a good service quality, in the case of a Chinese numerology and astrology from I Ching and geomancy research and consulting center. A heuristic inquiry research design was adopted. The first two co-authors are masters of the four pillars eight characters technique, and apply their expertise in data collections and interpretations of the 8 interviews. Data analyses have shown seven steps within five categories to form the blueprint in the service process: Tangible exhibition, customer behavior, front desk service, back office service, and support system. The third step about the consulting talk is the most important part to build customers' trust during the service. The fourth step about sales of the relevant products for a change in fortune is probably the major step to produce incomes. Three other features are seen in this service blueprint among the five categories: External interactions between employees and customers, visible service versus invisible service and internal interactions among employees. The blueprint will provide useful information for managers to provide employee trainings and improve service quality.

### Introduction

Everyone on earth has his or her own birth data including the year, the month, the day, and the hour. The four components in terms of year, month, day, and hour are called "The Four Pillars (四柱 in Chinese)." The Four Pillars supposedly create a person's destiny or fate. Each pillar of the four pillars can be represented by the composition of two characters, one from the Heavenly Stems and the other from Earthly Branches. For example, a year can be represented by the composition of one of the 10 heavenly Stems (Jia, Yi, Bing, Ding, Wu, Ji, Geng, Xin, Ren and Gui) and one of the 12 earthly branches (Zi, Chou, Yin, Mao, Chen, Si, Wu, Wei, Shen, You, Xu and Hai). This year, 2018, is Wu Xu (戊戌 in Chinese). The month, the day, and the hour can be also respectively represented by one heavenly stem and one earthly branch. Therefore, a person's birth data of the four pillars can be represented by 8 characters: 2 for the year, 2 for the month, 2 for the day, and 2 for the hour. The four pillars with eight characters are used to establish Chinese numerology or astrology for personal self-understanding, fate interpretations and divination practices.

Along with the balance theory of Yin-Yang and the character theory of Five Elements (Metal, Water, Wood, Fire and Earth), the four pillars and eight characters technique may provide an alternative and informal opportunity of learning something for a person to acquire some useful and helpful information or knowledge related to self and help solve problems or overcome difficult situations occurred in daily lives. Those who are interested in this alternative education for providing information or knowledge about self can learn this technique by themselves. However, learning this technique may take time. Thus, for meeting this kind of demand, consulting masters and consulting centers appear in the market that can help apply this technique to provide relevant knowledge and interpretation information about self.

In order to enhance the consulting quality of the service, systematic methods for design and control of the service process are required. Earlier, the service of consulting usually relied on personal

experiences and situational intuitions without a systematic process. This had caused the absence of a consistent, valid, and effective service performance and outcome. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to develop a framework of a service process that would work well to provide a good service quality in the case of a Chinese numerology and astrology from I Ching (or Yi Ching) (Book of Changes) (易經 in Chinese) and geomancy (feng shui) research and consulting center.

This type of service process in a consulting center is more related to people than a mechanical approach. Prior studies [1] suggested that a blueprint for a service design could make some provision for people-rendered services more comprehensive and workable, and allow managers to work out details ahead of time. Such a blueprint with some details is likely to give managers a context within which to manage and control the service process [1].

## Research Method

### Research Design and Data Collection

A heuristic inquiry research design has been adopted. The two heuristic research authors are full-time Chinese numerologists or astrologists, and also the top managers in Taitang (太以堂 in Chinese) I Ching and geomancy research and consulting center [2] at the middle of Taiwan. Data collections, analyses and interpretations were relied on the researchers' personal experiences to acquire insights. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Eight masters who are good at the four pillars and eight characters techniques participated in the interviews. These eight numerologists or astrologists had experiences involved with the consulting services between 3 and 27 years. Their ages were between 29 and 56 years old. Five of the eight interviewees were males (Table 1). Six of the eight participants were full-time masters working with the four pillars and eight characters techniques for a living.

Table 1. Interviewees' Information.

Code	Gender	Experience	age	Code	Gender	Experience	age
A	male	27 years	56	E	male	3 years	30
B	male	6 years	33	F	male	3 years	36
C	female	15 years	45	G	male	16 years	48
D	female	5 years	29	H	female	14 years	48

### Interview Outline

The interview outline for the semi-structured interviews was developed primarily based on Shostack's idea about the use of a blueprint [1], and Michael Porter's value chain model with the primary activities and support activities [3]. The outline questions included four major parts. The first part was to ask masters' self-introduction and their stories about becoming a numerologist or astrologist. The second part of the questions asked about what tools, professional skills, and knowledge were required to deliver the service as a qualified numerologist or astrologist. The third part of the questions tempted to figure out what support activities would be helpful when providing the consulting service. Finally, the fourth part of the inquiry questions encouraged the interviewees to describe their interactions with customers as detailed as possible.

### Results and Discussion

Data analyses have shown five categories in the service process: Tangible exhibition, customer behavior, front desk service, back office service, and support system. Steps or activities in these five categories may proceed at the same time. For instance, when a customer arrives, he or she may see the physical appearance of the center; the front desk will greet the customer and take him or her to the waiting area. In the waiting area, the customer may appreciate whether other employees are well dressed and clean [4]. At the same time, the front desk employee might inquiry the birthday data of

the customer and then might bring the data to the back offices for extracting the four pillars' information from the database (Figure 1).

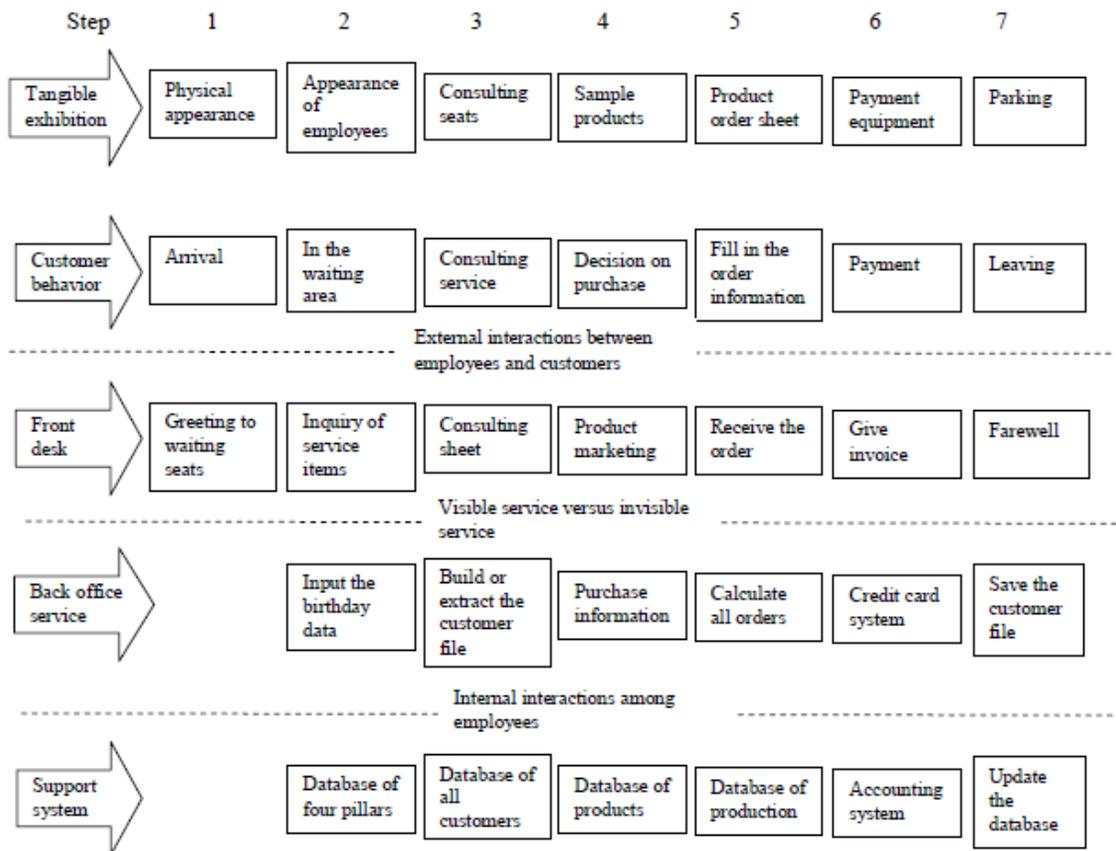


Figure 1. The Blueprint of Service in a Chinese Numerology and Astrology Consulting Center.

Next, the customer will move to a consulting seat and begin to talk with a master while the front desk may help fill in a consulting sheet with the customer's birthday data. The back office will also build up the customer's file if he or she visits the center for the first time, or extract the customer's file from the customer database. This step probably is the most important part during the service process. The master will do his or her best to win the customer's trust. One master mentioned that "At first, we will ask the customer whether he or she had a fortune-telling experience and what his or her job is about. After the eight-character slip is ready, the customer will be asked about what kind of solution or help he or she is seeking for." The master will often work as a diviner to use the numerology on divination lots. Masters usually combine more than one method in their consulting service to help customers clear their paths and disperse dark clouds [5].

After the master provides knowledge and information to help the customer seek revelation and to guide his or her fortune along more fortuitous paths, the next step is about introduction of the relevant products for a change in fortune. For the center, sales performance of these products is the major source of the income. Here, the front desk may take over to market the products and encourage customers to make a purchase decision. Then, there will be the order processing and payment through the accounting system. Finally, the front desk will try to give a warm farewell and confirm if the parking is convenient. The back office will save the customer's file and update the database.

Three other features are seen in this service blueprint among the five categories. In the two categories: customer behaviors and the front desk service, there is the first feature about the interactions between employees and customers. Between the two categories of the front desk and the back office service, there is the second feature about the visible versus invisible services. Customers will be able to see the front desk services but will not be able to see the back office services. The third

feature is about the internal interactions among services and support systems (Figure 1). For example, after taking the orders, the employees that deal with the production will follow the order description to make the products in time. The accounting employees will do the recording of payment and cost. The information employees will maintain the databases.

The blueprint of service in a numerology and astrology consulting center provides useful information for employee trainings and improvement of service quality. Based on a useful blueprint, the center may put more attention on major parts that increase business and income, and identify weak parts to improve. A well designed blueprint will be an effective tool to enhance image and earn a good reputation.

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