Hold that Thought!

Sunday morning is probably not the usual time to be thinking about supply chain, logistics and innovation. When I have the opportunity, I much prefer to sit back and enjoy a cup of tea and dunk a biscuit (chocolate hobnobs!). On these occasions, I let my mind wander, however abstract the initial thought, leading to some interesting places!

I look at the objects surrounding me and I remind myself that they all started with a thought. Although it has to be said that some of those thoughts might have appeared pretty stupid or bizarre at the time, and a far cry from the finished product before me. What they do all have in common is the imagination of someone who looked beyond the status quo, they thought "What if...?". The imagination to take that thought, formulate an idea into a vision that in turn becomes something tangible.

Whether it is to create or improve, these ideas are the basis for our evolving. Many ideas can fall by the wayside, abandoned for many reasons too numerous to mention. Then there are the ones that make it, that we are surrounded by and take for granted. The computer you are using, the light switch on the wall, the mug you are drinking from, the milk in your tea (I'll come back to that one!). The seemingly simple things like buttons and poppers. All originated from an idea.

Back to the milk in your tea and all the ideas that have come together to create the perfect cuppa. That started one day with someone looking at a cow (or maybe a goat) and thinking, "You know what, ...?". Whether the idea was due to sheer curiosity or to solve an issue we will never know.

Who would have thought whole industries would grow up as a result of that thought? But our lowly cup of tea also needed other people to have thoughts about bushes, picking the leaves and processing them into a consumable product. About clay and fires to make the porcelain. Fire and minerals for the metals to make our kettle. All this came about so we were able pop some tea into our pot, boil a kettle, pour the boiling water and let the tea steep. The milk and the tea then poured in the vessel of choice for that perfect cuppa! Such a seemingly simple thing, reliant upon a multitude of ideas and people coming together.

Quite mind boggling when you think about it, so how do we cope with all the possibilities? Life is complicated enough, so I try to compartmentalise aspects by imagining everything as a service. This helps me to be more objective and diffuse the fuzziness. Every services has a reason for being, it has an outcome. It is constructed out of lots of re-usable component services. It has its champions. It has its users. It has its benefits. It has its reasons for being. It has risks. It has a price. Through this thought process I created a framework, built on best practice, that works for the creation and management of services. Some of those services we do ourselves, some we do for others and the rest we buy in as we need them.

In life, as in business, we end up with a set of services that give us most of what we want for a price we are prepared to pay. We can all make a cup of tea, but where is the value. Is it better to stand by the kettle when we could buy it in? But of course life is not that simple or clear cut. Whether you are in the kitchen or a café, you get to meet people, you socialise, you converse and exchange ideas and values. You meet others for tea (other beverages are available!). This is what makes your selection and consumption of services a value decision.

Back to our tea, it takes a supply and logistics chain that adds no value (for me at least) to own outright, so a finished product is bought from the supermarket. Thousands like me get the same blend, for which we all expect a consistent quality in return. So what are the choices and what are the value decisions to be made?

- We take the tea home and make a cuppa for ourselves and others in the house. We know how others in the house like their tea and we tend to create something close to the way they like it. Our tea delivery is an **in-house service**.
- When you stay in a hotel, there is a cafeteria that makes tea for you and other guests, they get to know you and can still make it the way you like it, albeit with their choice of tea. Our tea delivery is a **shared service**.
- You use a supply company that drops of a flask each day. Tea is ready and waiting for you, but you have only paid for a finite supply. You may get the tea you like and you can get more, but at a price. Our tea delivery is an **outsourced service**.

As you can see, the seemingly simplest of services can become complicated when you look at it in its broadest context. For our tea, we are likely to opt for a hybrid model, between in-house and shared service (i.e. The kitchen and Costa). We can opt for other drinks and this is a low risk experience, the worst outcome is we do not like the taste and we have lost a few pounds in the process. As the scale increases, so can the risk, yet here is a model that we can scale to help us understand and make sense of the bigger picture and manage the risk. Remember kiss? Keep it simple stupid (thanks to the US Navy for that phrase!)

Eventually we settle on something preferred, although still a compromise around price, quality and availability. Sometimes we get to make those decisions, sometimes the decision is taken for us.

Take a look around you and add up all the other services that surround you and see how complicated life has become. You can't see the wood for the trees, so you lose your path. You need clarity, to organise all the services and make sense of it all.

No alt text provided for this image

Think of each service as a circle, and each circle contains all the components required to make it work. Lines are drawn from circle to circle to indicate relationships. The circles blur into each other and you forget why they are there. They become obscured by other circles and you forget they are there. Some circles become so big, they are all encompassing and block out everything else. Other circles are not quite whole and yet you still want to acquire newer, brighter, shinier circles.

This then is the point of Portfolio Management, making a box for your circles and a way to manage them. A way to visualise your circles more clearly, letting you see the circles and their interconnecting relationships, a way that helps you understand and get clarity.

Just as Scrooge had his future, present and past, so your portfolio box has 3 sections.

- The future is your **pipeline**, new circles designed to make your life better.
- The present is your current **service catalogue**, all the circles to run your life today.
- The past is all the broken or superfluous circles, **retired** but not forgotten.

There are no hard and fast rules about when you move your circle from one compartment to another, but there is a method to prioritising and managing that change. When you inspect your circles more closely, you will see even the best ones are imperfect, but that is OK. We do not need perfection, although we can improve them over time to be that bit better, what we do need are circles we can work with.

Now you have a box that gives you context and perspective. You know where you are. That next time you have a thought, take a peek into your box of circles. Do you have it already? Is this a better circle than the circle you already have? Maybe with this new circle you can replace 3 older circles, make life that little less cluttered.

And so, using our box we capture the ideas, we refine and prioritise those that make sense. We take forward the ones we need and make them work. Over time we improve. And thus we evolve.

This is Holistic Service Integration, I call it "Service Intelligence".

#serviceintelligence #holisticserviceintegration #servicemodels #servicemanagement #clarity #ideation #portfoliomanagement #itilexpert #value #servicevalue #sharedservice