

Report on the 5th International Seminar on Service Architecture and Service Modularity

On January 16-17 the 5th International Seminar on Service Architecture and Modularity was held at Copenhagen Business School. Twenty-five researchers from fifteen European Universities and Business Schools participated in the seminar, which was organized by Professor Juliana Hsuan, CBS and Assistant Professor Thomas Frandsen, CBS. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Otto Mønsted Fonden, The Danish Industry Foundation and CBS Competitiveness Platform in ensuring a very successful seminar.

Background for the seminar

In 2010 the 1st International Service Modularity Seminar was held in Copenhagen hosted by CBS. During two intense days senior researchers, young scholars and Ph.D. students presented and discussed their research on service modularity. Since then the seminar has successfully been held at Aalto University in Helsinki, at Brunel University in London and at Hamburg University contributing to the emerging, cross-disciplinary field of service modularity research.

Purpose of the seminar

A primary objective of the seminar has been to bring together developments in service modularity and service architecture from different disciplines in order to advance the area. The seminar has been designed for detailed discussion and reflection on the topic of Service Architecture and Modularity by researchers from multiple disciplines. Service Architecture is concerned with the design of service systems and modularity in this context is principally about maintaining efficiency in a service system designed to simultaneously allow for customization. As such Service Architecture and Modularity is principally concerned with achieving competitiveness through the service design. The topic is closely related to the issue of competitiveness of Danish commerce and industry.

Seminar program

The seminar was held as a two-day event at Copenhagen Business School. The program consisted of a short key note speech on the relation between Service Architecture and Modularity and Competitiveness by Professor Christer Karlsson, Copenhagen Business School, paper presentation sessions and discussions as well as a panel discussion. Contributing to the panel discussion were five recognized academics within the field who shared their views on the future development of Service Architecture and Modularity.

The panel consisted of Professor Dr. Tilo Böhmman, Hamburg University, Professor Chris Voss, London Business school and Warwick Business School, Professor Martin Spring, Lancaster University Management School, Professor Andi Smart, University of Exeter Business School and Assistant Professor Diego Campagnolo, University of Padova. The panel discussion was moderated by Professor Juliana Hsuan, Copenhagen Business School.

Throughout the seminar 11 papers were presented and commented on by two discussants in order to allow for detailed discussion of the content of each paper. The topics of the papers were all of current interest within the field and included both conceptual developments and empirical investigations. Please find the final program from the seminar attached from which both the topics of each paper and the full list of participants can be found.

Relevance to research and practice

In service systems, customers are a part of the production system, which means that firms need to balance the amount of demand variation (caused by the combinatorial effect of options for customers to customize and choose from) and performance. Variety can be reduced through a menu of standardized service offerings from which the customer can choose. Alternatively, variety can be accommodated through customized service offerings, created for the individual customer. Tradeoffs between specialization and customization are, therefore, important issues to be considered when designing service systems.

Identifying ways of alleviating the tradeoffs is the first step for service providers to create a strategy for innovation, and to design service systems that are capable of accommodating variety and heterogeneous demands of customers without suffering from the loss of productivity that is associated with customization. Modularity can therefore be one way to increase the competitiveness of service firms through careful design of Service Architecture.

Involved researchers

The organizers of the seminar were Professor Juliana Hsuan, CBS and Assistant Professor Thomas Frandsen, CBS. Several other international researchers have taken part in establishing the seminar including Professor Chris Voss, London Business School and Warwick Business School, Professor Tilo Böhmman, Hamburg University, Postdoctoral researcher Anu Bask, Aalto University, and Assistant Professor Carolien de blok, University of Groningen.

Future perspectives for the seminar

In the closing session an evaluation of the seminar was carried out in order to set the direction for the future perspectives of the seminar. There was general consensus that the seminar had been very successful with strong contributions to the research presented during the seminar. Furthermore the seminar series is considered instrumental in strengthening the growing research community on the topic of service architecture and service modularity within the wider research areas of service design and service operations management. There was a strong feeling that the format of the seminar supports detailed discussing among junior and senior researchers from a variety of disciplines. Furthermore there was a solid interest in bringing the seminar forward and Post-doctoral Researcher Anu Bask and Post-doctoral Researcher Saara Brax has offered to host the 6th seminar to be held at Aalto University, Helsinki in 2015.