

Playful Customer Experience

Examining the Integration of Playful Aspects into the
Experience of Waiting at Family Physicians' Offices

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ABSTRACT

Playful customer experience is an interdisciplinary Dissertation that examines the interplay between the three disciplines of play studies, customer experience, and design for services, and does so with a design-thinking view. The theoretical bases are studied and developed so that they can be applied to design solutions. After providing an overview of the current literature on the disciplines concerned, it focuses on examining various aspects of integrating playful characteristics into customer experience and provides a theoretical framework for playful experience design. Based on the theoretical findings, the application of these characteristics is examined by conducting a multiple-case study in a real service situation. The area chosen to analyze the experience of waiting was family physicians' offices: How can playful aspects be integrated into the experience of waiting? As waiting is a typical case in everyday experiences, the results of the study can also be applied to other areas. The findings of the theoretical and empirical studies result in principles and practical considerations regarding how to improve the experience of waiting by means of a playful design approach. The playful design approach concentrates on ways to increase the playfulness of an experience. At the same time it applies playful characteristics to improve aspects of customer experience according to the particular requirements of the service situation. The main recommendations are discussed under five categories, explained as playful experience components. These categories are: *the presence of children*, *the play zone*, *the playful breeze*, *playful active waiting*, and *the waiting oasis*, each of which demonstrates aspects of the playful approach to the enhancement of the customer experience. Finally, the research introduces the concept of *design for play-ception* (playful perception) as a rich and human-centered approach to the designing of customer experience.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Spielerisches Kundenerlebnis (playful customer experience) ist eine interdisziplinäre Arbeit, die das Zusammenwirken zwischen drei Themenbereichen: die Theorien des Spiels, die Kundenerfahrung und das Design für Dienstleistungen mit dem Design-Thinking-Ansatz untersucht. Dabei werden theoretische Grundlagen erarbeitet und so verarbeitet, dass sie für gestalterische Lösungen verwertbar werden. Nach einem Überblick über die aktuelle Literatur zu den betreffenden Themenbereichen konzentriert sich die Arbeit auf die Untersuchung derjenigen Aspekte, welche die Integration von spielerischen Eigenschaften in Kundenerlebnisse/ Kundenerfahrungen ermöglichen. Dies ergibt dann den theoretischen Rahmen für die Erstellung von spielerischen Kundenerlebnissen. Auf der Grundlage dieser Theoretischen Erkenntnisse wird durch eine Multiple-Case Study die explizite Verwertbarkeit innerhalb einer realen Service-Situation untersucht. Als Anwendungsbereich wird das Warten in Hausarzt-Praxen gewählt: Wie können spielerische Aspekte in die Erfahrung des Wartens integriert werden? Warten ist ein typischer Fall in Alltagserfahrungen, die Ergebnisse lassen sich deshalb auf viele andere Bereiche übertragen. Die Ergebnisse der theoretischen und empirischen Studien führen schließlich zu Grundlagen und praktischen Überlegungen für mögliche Verbesserungen der Erlebnisse/Erfahrungen bezüglich des Wartens durch einen spielerischen Design-Ansatz. Der spielerische Design-Ansatz konzentriert sich auf verschiedene Möglichkeiten, die dabei helfen, die Spielerischen Eigenschaften einer Erfahrung zu erhöhen, und untersucht zugleich auch, wie die Anwendung von spielerischen Eigenschaften dazu beitragen kann, Kundenerfahrungen gemäß Erfordernissen bestimmter Service-Situationen zu verbessern. Die wichtigsten Empfehlungen werden unter fünf Komponenten diskutiert: die *Anwesenheit von Kindern*, die *Spielzone*, die *spielerische Brise*, das *spielerische aktive Warten*, und die *Warten-Oase*. All diese Aspekte des spielerischen Umgangs zeigen Verbesserungen der Kundenerfahrung. Letztlich stellt die Arbeit das Konzept des *Design für Play-ception* (von Playful Perception) als einen nachhaltigen und menschenzentrierten Ansatz für die Gestaltung von Kundenerlebnissen/ Kundenerfahrungen vor.

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation

Looking at the evolution of the design discipline from giving form to design thinking, we find a significant development in the role of design in companies as well as in people's lives. Today, we see a growing attention to the abilities of design not only in creating forms, functions, interactions and experiences but also, as in transformative and socially responsible organizations, in creating solutions to support society's well-being and facilitate dealing with future challenges. The growing scope of design makes more expanded and complex interdisciplinary research in the field necessary and, at the same time, provides a basis for generating more creative research ideas. This dissertation is shaped by an interest in studying the interplay of design with two other disciplines namely 'play studies' and 'customer experience'. The motivation to conduct this research started with my interest in the experience of play. I became engaged in the issue of play while studying for my bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial design, during which I concentrated to a large extent on designing for children. I often studied the literature on play as an inseparable part of childhood in order to design more attractive and more effective products for children. The experience of play attracted my attention from three aspects; firstly, because of the pleasure in the activity itself; secondly, because of its positive affects on the well-being of children and adults at an individual and social level; and finally, because of its impact on increasing the effectiveness of other experiences. Another topic that attracted my interest for further research was the increasing emphasis on the human-centered approach to service experience design. We are constantly consuming different forms of services and our daily lives are affected by service experiences in many ways. Our experiences are shaped as users of public and governmental services or as customers of business services to various extents and at various levels of interaction. The expanding interaction with different forms of services has led to a focus on the significant role that service experiences can play in influencing people's lives and well-being beyond the direct interaction. Based on this emerging view, socially responsible services are striving to improve service quality by creating and

delivering service activities and customer experiences that consider not only the economic outcomes and financial benefits but also the social outcomes and their impacts on the customer's quality of life. The potential of play in producing positive and effective experiences on the one hand, and the growing emphasis on the importance of the issue of experience in people's interactions with services on the other, inspired me to conduct research involving these fields with a design-thinking perspective. My aim in doing so was to gain a deeper understanding of playful experience and, applying this knowledge, to examine how to meaningfully adapt and integrate playful qualities into service interactions in order to improve people's experiences. "Playful customer experience" with a focus on examining the integration of playful aspects into the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices is interdisciplinary research that involves the interaction of three fields, namely play studies, customer experience, and design for services. The theoretical significance of this study can be summarized under three main aspects. 1) the selection and development of the research topic with an outside-in approach 2) research orientation toward the topic throughout the research, in the sense that playful experience is examined both as a way to improve customer experience and as a way to expand the positive experience itself 3) the practice of interdisciplinary research in the field of design with a focus on the role of the researcher's own disciplinary perspective and the integration of other experts' perspectives into the research process. From a practical perspective, this dissertation will help practitioners (e.g. designers, managers and marketers) to enhance the customer's engagement in the co-creation of experiences. The study offers suggestions for turning unexpected delays and interruptions into hidden leisure time in the middle of everyday serious routines instead of unpleasant idle time. In addition, it suggests changing the traditional image of particular service interactions and enabling customers to behave in a less restricted way. It contributes to enhancing people's everyday experiences as customers and as citizens by offering a fresh and creative approach to physical movement in non-playful activities.

Research questions and scope

One central question of this research was how design can approach the integration of play into customer experience. Accordingly, I chose to study play by looking at pure

play. By pure play I mean, in this context, a general approach to the topic without predefining the research focus to refer only to one particular component or form of play (e.g. the competition factor as in sport, the external rules factor as in games, or the profit factor as in gambling). Instead, the approach extracts various characteristics of the activity of play that provide a positive experience and examines aspects of the effective integration of play into the customer experience. As Roger Martin explains, design thinking is a dynamic process of *delving into mysteries* and developing the creative idea through the *knowledge funnel* (Martin, 2009), and the present dissertation went through a similar process. The research was motivated to begin with by a number of general questions, and these were carefully refined to identify and set the borders of the dissertation. Work began with an overview of the literature on the topics involved. After extracting the required information, I focused on examining the integration of playful characteristics into customer experience based on the theoretical findings and by exploring the literature for connections and meaningful relations between the areas. This analysis resulted in developing a theoretical framework for the creation of playful customer experience, and this framework is examined further in a real service situation, namely the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices. The data gathering phase focused on two specific questions: First, how do people perceive their experience when they are waiting at their family physicians' offices? And second, how can the waiting experience be improved by integrating playful aspects? To answer these questions, an empirical qualitative study was conducted in the form of a multiple-case study in family physicians' offices in Wuppertal. Waiting to see the family physician as a familiar and frequent service interaction provided access to studying the experience and the appropriate basis for studying the integration of playful aspects. The case study was carried out in six offices. Four data gathering methods were used, namely field observations, participant observations, expert interviews and individual interviews, and the aim was to gain a deep and realistic understanding of the current situation and experience of waiting at physicians' offices. After obtaining the required knowledge about the current experience of waiting at family physicians' offices, the research used the findings of the theoretical analysis of the dimensions of playful customer experience and of the empirical analysis to examine various aspects of

integrating playful elements into the experience of waiting, and in particular of waiting in family physicians' offices. This analysis investigated the quality of waiting time, comparing it to work, leisure and idle time, and offered practical considerations to improve people's experience of waiting in physicians' offices as customers (with a focus on developing a more effective service experience) and as human beings (with a focus on expanding the experience of play for the pleasure of the activity itself and its positive influences on people's well-being). The main recommendations are listed under five categories, explained as playful experience components. These categories are: *the presence of children*, *the play zone*, *the playful breeze*, *playful active waiting*, and *the waiting oasis*, each of which demonstrates aspects of the playful approach to the enhancement of the customer experience. Playful experience components are developed with regard to particular qualities, potential and opportunities of the present service and with regard to the possibilities offered by playful characteristics. They are oriented around ways to improve the experience of individual service users and aim to go beyond the customers' expectations. Accordingly, they issue challenges for playful design of the experience. Finally, the study introduces the concept of *design for play-ception* as a new approach in the creation and improvement of rich and human-centered customer experiences.

The structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters and the conclusion as described below:

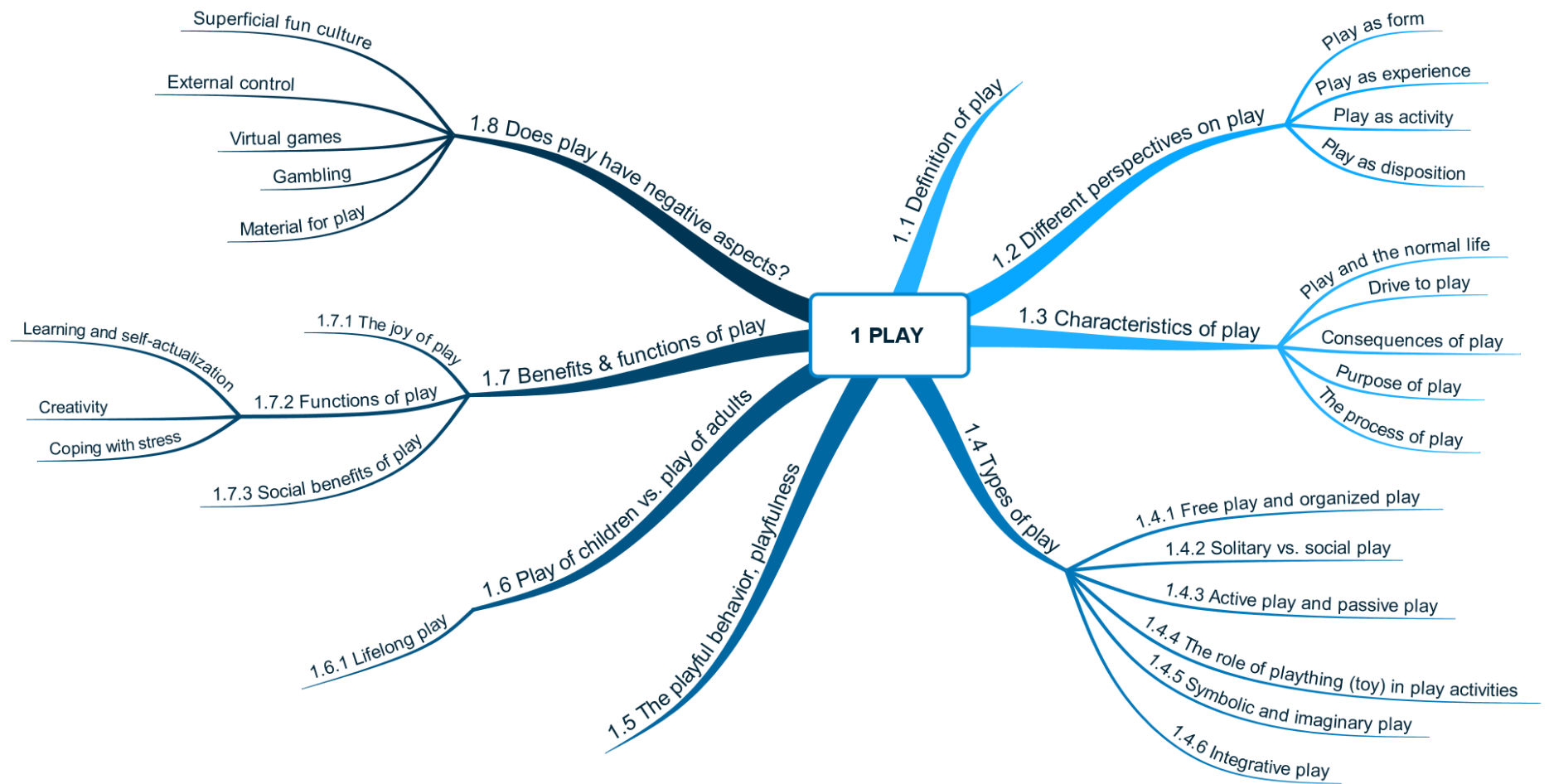
1. Chapter 1 is concerned with the issue of play. This chapter attempts to provide a close understanding of playful activity and its experience. In accordance with the research objective, this chapter provides an overview of the issues, including different ways the term has been viewed and defined, its core characteristics, components, different types of play, playful behavior, and the play of children vs. the play of adults. This is followed by an examination of the functions and benefits of play both in and beyond the activity itself and at an individual and social level, including a consideration of negative aspects and approaches to play.

2. Chapter 2 is concerned with the issue of customer experience. This chapter provides an overview of the literature on customer experience. It begins with a general explanation of the term and its background in business and marketing and then concentrates on its various aspects, including the characteristics, components and dimensions of customer experience, the customer's and the company's level of involvement in creating the experience, issues regarding the customer, and important factors in the creation and delivery of a successful customer experience.
3. Chapter 3 provides a more focused view of issues related to service experience and design for services. This includes defining services and referring to particular characteristics which distinguish the experience of services from that of products; examining different types of services based on what the service offers, the service purpose, the level of customer contact and the service delivery process; and also providing an overview of the various phases of service interactions and the issue of waiting for services. This is followed by an examination of the role of design in services. The research focuses on various aspects of service design, the process and methods concerning the use of design thinking in improving service function and interactions and creating service experiences.
4. Chapter 4 concentrates on studying opportunities for the integration of playful characteristics into customer experience based on theoretical knowledge. The analysis explores ways to strengthen the general playfulness of an experience as well as opportunities that playful characteristics offer to improve customer experience according to the particular requirements of the service situation. This is followed by an overview of an example of aspects of play in present customer experiences. Having provided the theoretical analysis, this chapter continues by discussing the research approach to playful customer experience from the perspective of design practice in organizations, and establishes the theoretical basis for the empirical analysis of playful waiting experience by focusing on current approaches to the design of waits.

5. Chapter 5 is concerned with the empirical part of the research. It concentrates on examining how people perceive their experience when they are waiting at their family physician's office by referring to a multiple-case study conducted in six family physicians' offices in Wuppertal. Chapter 5 provides a detailed description of the research method, the data gathering process and the various stages, as well as of the process of analyzing the data. Finally, it discusses the results of the case study and gives important insights into the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices, including interactions, activities and behaviors during the waiting period, feelings, opinions and desires regarding the quality and duration of the wait, the physical environment and the ambience of the waiting area, and also the office staff's view and role in the patients' waiting experience.
6. Chapter 6 concentrates on examining various aspects of integrating playful elements into the experience of waiting in family physicians' offices, based on the findings of the theoretical and empirical studies in the previous chapters. The analysis includes defining prerequisites for introducing a playful level into the service. It examines also the quality of waiting time in comparison with work, leisure and idle time. This chapter continues with an analysis of playful design of the waiting experience that expands the positive impacts of existing playful elements in the waiting room. This playful design uses service potential to improve the experience of waiting by arranging playful interactions among patients. It goes beyond what the customers expect by examining their desire for play as revealed in their behavior and reactions during the case study. Chapter 6 then suggests a series of playful solutions to improve the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices and specifies various components of the playful approach to the design of customer experience.
7. In this chapter the issue of playful customer experience is discussed at a more general level. This involves determining conditions for applying playful opportunities, defining general principles for applying playful experience design in services, and introducing design for play-ception approach to designing customer experiences. Chapter 7 will also discuss the contributions of this dissertation to the practice of customer experience design.

- Conclusion: the final chapter concludes the dissertation by providing a summary of the research and continues by discussing the contributions of the dissertation to the design research. The chapter closes by suggesting directions for future research in this field.

At the beginning of each chapter a mind map is presented. The purpose of these mind maps is to provide an overview of the main topics discussed in that chapter.



Mind map 1 Play

1 PLAY

Play is a widely used term. It is used in a variety of contexts and in each of them can be understood more or less differently. The particular perspective on play, be it the activity itself or play as a framework for activities or as experiences and feelings in the course of the activity, influences where the emphasis is placed when defining the term. This chapter will give an overview of various approaches to play, aiming at a thorough understanding of the term according to the research requirements. It begins by examining current perspectives in defining play and continues by illustrating characteristics of playful activities, elements of play, types of play, a consideration of the play of adults in comparison with that of children as well as by examining individual and social functions of play. Finally, a review of the positive and negative aspects of play activities will be provided.

1.1 Definition of play

Although it is not difficult to know when we are playing, explaining play is not easy. As Fink (1957) states, “each person knows play from inside” (p.9). Brown (2009) considers play “a thing of beauty best appreciated by experiencing it” (p.26). He compares defining play with explaining a joke in that “analyzing it takes the joy out of it” (Brown, 2009, p.26). Nevertheless, many scholars have worked on the issue of describing human play. A collection of the definitions of play is provided below to show the diversity of focuses:

Lenore Terr (psychologist):

Play is an activity aimed at having fun. (Terr, 1999, p.21)

Eugen Fink (philosopher):

Human play is the pleasurable production of the imaginary play-world and the wondrous enjoyment in the appearance or illusion¹. (Fink, 1957, p.38)²

¹ German: Schein

² Author’s translation. Original: „Das menschliche Spiel ist lustvoll gestimmte Produktion der imaginären Spielwelt, ist eine wundersame Freude am „Schein“.

John H. Kerr and Michael J. Apter (psychologists):

Play can be thought of as a way to create another world [...]. This world is one in which, temporarily at least, nothing outside has any significance, and into which the outside world of real problems cannot properly impinge. (Kerr and Apter, 1990, p.14)

Alan Radley (social psychologist):

At the centre of the playful activity lies the transposition of the mundane by the imaginary, and of the imaginary on the basis of the mundane. (Radley, 1991, p.15)

Thomas Henricks (Sociologist and anthropologist):

Play is activity exhibiting the subject's efforts to control or transform the conditions of its existence. Such activity is guided and comprehended by purposes, consequences, and characteristics confined to the space-time frame of the event itself. (Henricks, 1999, p.265)

Joseph Levy (Social psychologist):

Play offers us the opportunity to transcend the ordinary organic and ego levels of functioning, and to experience the world of wonder, peace, love, and anguish at the very intuitive level. (Levy, 1978, p.2)

Johan Huizinga (Sociologist and cultural theorist):

Play is a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being not serious, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. (Huizinga, 1955, p.13)

The above definitions illustrate some key aspects of play. For example, Kerr stresses the factor of fun as the inseparable essence and the immediate outcome of play in all forms. Fun is, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica³, "what provides amusement or arouses laughter". "Fun, usually implies laughter or gaiety but may imply merely a lack of serious or ulterior purpose"⁴. Similar to play, fun or having fun is used with an

³ <http://www.britannica.com/bps/dictionary?query=fun>

⁴ In German the word fun can be expressed, to some extent, by a combination of the two words "Spaß" and "Witz" (see Huizinga, 1977, p.3).

expanded meaning in everyday life. Thus, fun is not limited to play, but the fun of play is a particular experience of amusement and pleasure which can be better clarified by exploring characteristics of the process of play.

As well as fun, the above mentioned definitions show other important features of play by putting emphasis on the special relationship between play and normal life. In Huizinga's definition, play occurs outside *ordinary life*, Fink explains it as the production of the imaginary play-world, and Kerr and Apter define play as a way to create another world in which nothing outside has any significance. In other definitions, the use of words such as transcend, transpose, or transform expresses a similar idea. Based on these definitions, play seems to occur generally as a kind of distancing or detaching oneself from reality or normal life.

Being fun and unusual are two key qualities of play. However, there are a number of other characteristics that can help to shape a clearer, deeper and more comprehensive picture of play. These characteristics show the boundaries, similarities and differences of play in comparison to other activities.

1.2 Different perspectives on play

Before focusing on play characteristics, it is helpful to examine different ways to view play. In the definitions given above, play is often explained as an activity. There are also other definitions that view play not as a particular activity but rather a quality or the way of doing an activity:

Play refers to a certain quality of behavior, rather than to any particular activity; and "serious" behavior can be performed playfully. (Butterworth et al, 1994, p.139)

Play is a state of mind rather than an activity. We have to put ourselves in the proper emotional state in order to play (although an activity can also induce the emotional state of play). (Brown, 2009, p.60)

Not what is experienced is play, but rather the way of experiencing what one is doing in playing. (Apter, 1990, p.14)

These statements argue that play should be seen as a way of doing activities or as a set of characteristics rather than as a particular activity. Hence, an activity can be playful or play-like to the extent that it contains these characteristics. Henricks

(1999) adds other perspectives on play, including play as form and play as experience, and describes the four possible perspectives on play as follows:

1. Play as form: In this view the emphasis is on play as a framework for activities, in the sense of being “a set of material and symbolic forms that guide the activity of individuals. Games like monopoly or festivals like carnivals are examples of this kind of play. Words such as ‘game’ or ‘fair’ are commonly used to illustrate this view of play” (Henricks, 1999, p.260).
2. Play as activity: In this view play is not seen as a framework for action but as the activity itself; an activity which is practiced not for the sake of the result or a functional purpose but rather as a pastime and for entertainment and pleasure. Play is understood here as a way of interacting with the surrounding objects and people or “a process or mode of relating to the world” (Henricks, 1999, p.260). In comparison with other views, the aspect of physical movement is focused in play as activity (Heimlich, 2001, pp.18-19).
3. Play as experience: Play is about discovering excitement. This approach views play as some quality of experience that involves active and deep engagement, generated and sustained by certain actions. This is the experience we have when we are fully engaged in play, something that leads to a diminished consciousness of self and total psychic fulfillment (Henricks, 1999). This is what Csikszentmihalyi explains as optimal experience or the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).
4. Play as disposition: Play as experience is about what people feel, and play as disposition is about what people do. In this perspective, the emphasis is on the players in the sense that play is not considered as something that happens to people but rather as an activity created by the players through the pursuit of their own interests, motives or purposes. Play as disposition emphasizes the aspect that some people are more playful and bring more to the event than others (Henricks, 1999).

Each of the above perspectives describes play by focusing on particular aspects. Play as form can be better recognized through its social characteristics and rules that are agreed prior to the activity. When play is studied as activity, the attention will be on

the course and on the process of play. Play as experience emphasizes mostly inner experience and an individual's feelings during play. Finally, in play as disposition the focus is more on the playful behavior of people. To sum up, a *playful disposition* initiates *play activity*, and as the result of full engagement in the play activity, excitement and the the "flow" will be *experienced*. These views show characteristics of play that can be viewed not simply as separate parts but rather as interrelated qualities or layers of play that develop in the process of playful activities.

1.3 Characteristics of play

Play scholars have defined play in terms of its characteristics. These characteristics, although not always expressed in a similar way, often share similar ideas. Below, a chronological summary of these qualities is given according to the four play scientists, Johan Huizinga (1955), Josef Levy (1978), Thomas S. Henricks (1999) and Stuart Brown (2009). This represents a comprehensive illustration of the main characteristics of play.

In his book "Homo Ludens" (man the player), Huizinga (1955) analyses the play elements of human culture. He lists five characteristics for an activity to be defined as play, which include:

- Play is a voluntary and free activity.
- Play is not "ordinary" or "real life".
- Play is distinct from ordinary life both as to locality and duration.
- Play creates order. Play demands absolute and supreme order.
- Play is connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it.
(Huizinga, 1955)

Levy (1978) identifies three aspects to illustrate play, namely "intrinsic motivation", "suspension of reality" in the sense of freedom from the real self and the real world, and "internal locus of control" as the full authority of the player to control the activity. He defines these aspects as follows:

- Intrinsic motivation relates to the drive to become involved in an activity originating from within the person or the activity; the reward is generated by the transaction itself.

- Suspension of reality refers to the loss of the “real self” and the temporary acceptance of an “illusory self” or “imaginary self”. Through this form of *make-believe*, individuals achieve freedom from the real world (rules, roles, expectations etc.) to experience their inner egoless personality.
- Internal locus of control refers to the degree to which individuals perceive that they are in control of their actions and outcomes. (Levy, 1978, pp.6-12)

Henricks (1999) mentions similar characteristics to Levy’s, however in a more detailed manner. According to him, play is characterized through elements of separation and control. He gives examples of different components for separation and control and states that activities are “play-like” to the extent that they include these aspects. The following is an overview of Henricks’s description of separation and control in play:

Separation

- Separation from external consequences: Play activities are notable in that the scope and intentionality of consequences are restricted.
- Separation from external purposes: Goals and end-states of play are located within the time-space frame of the event itself.
- Separation by distinctive cultural elements: Play is separated from other activities by special norms that guide the action or otherwise regulate the demeanor of participants.
- Separation by awareness: Both in social and in solitary play, there is often an awareness that the player has moved to a special zone. The players permit themselves (or are permitted) to be intrinsically involved. (Henricks, 1999)

Control

- Control of access: Players have freedom to enter and exit the playground.
- Ability to initiate action sequences: This refers to the ability of players to control the pace and pattern of their action.
- Ability to control the activity: This is the ability to direct the course of action once it has begun. (Henricks, 1999)

Finally, Brown (2009) defines an activity as play if it contains following five characteristics:

- Apparently purposeless: Play activities don't seem to have any survival value. Play is done for its own sake.
- Voluntary: Play is not obligatory or required by duty.
- Inherent attraction: Play is fun. It makes you feel good. It provides psychological arousal (it is exciting). It is a cure for boredom.
- Freedom from time: When we are fully engaged in play, we lose awareness of the passage of time.
- Diminished consciousness of self: We stop worrying about whether we look good or awkward, smart or stupid. In imaginative play we can even be a different self.
- Improvisational potential: In play we are not locked into a rigid way of doing things and we are open to serendipity, to chance. The act of play may be outside of 'normal life' activities. The result is that we stumble upon new behaviors, thoughts, strategies, movements, or ways of continuation desire. (Brown, 2009, pp.18-19)

The above descriptions provide a range of characteristics to distinguish play from other human activities. These involve the nature of play, the drive to play, the purpose of play, the process of play and consequences of play:

The nature of play: Generally speaking, suspension, separation, or freedom (see also Corte and Weinert, 1996, p.306) from what dominates normal life (the life outside play) has been seen as the main quality of play. This includes temporary freedom from social and cultural roles, rules, norms and behaviors.

The drive to play: When considering the drive to play, the focus has been on awareness as well as the freedom to decide to begin or participate in play activity. An activity cannot be play if it is done under external pressure. Brian Sutton-Smith emphasizes this: "Play is for the satisfaction of personal or collective desire, rather than for personal or collective obligations" (Sutton-Smith in Reifl, 1999, p.241).

Consequences of play: In terms of consequences, it is important that what is done under the label of play is protected from negative consequences beyond the activity, or what a person could possibly face by doing the same activity outside play.

The purpose of play: With regard to the purpose of play, it has been found that in play people follow other purposes than in normal life. Fink (1957, 1968) states that while other human activities are conceived as a “task” to achieve the final goal of life, play has a goal that ends in the activity itself (Fink et al, 1968, p.20). If play is done as a task or to pursue other purposes, it cannot be referred to as play anymore but rather as an exercise. Thus, the goal of play is defined and valid in the framework of the activity.⁵

The process of play: When considering the process of play, it is regarded as important that rules and conventions of ordinary life cannot control what is done as play. Play follows its own rules, which are free from external constraints. Fink (1957) and Huizinga (1955) both stress that there are some commitments and rules in play but that these can be changed at any time during play with the players’ agreement. This is similar to Brown’s explanation mentioning the ability of players to improvise in the course of play (Brown, 2009). Hügel states in this connection that play can cast doubt on, reverse or caricature rational workflows (Hügel, 2003). The other focus in describing play activities is on a player’s control of the activity. In play, the players have full control over the process and sequences of the activity. A player is free to decide to engage in play, define or change the process of play and to stop play.

1.4 Types of play

Playful activities can be done in different forms. According to Heimlich (2001), particular qualities of interacting with people, objects and the environment shape various forms of playful activity (Heimlich, 2001). A summary of these play types is provided below:

⁵ According to Fink, all human activities are geared to achieve ultimate happiness. Play, in contrast, has this ultimate happiness in itself (see Fink, Oase des Glücks, 1955).

1.4.1 Free (childlike) play and organized play (games)

Play activities can be divided into two general categories according to the extent that they are done freely or include specific rules and skills. Caillios (1958) defines these categories as *paidia* and *ludus*. *Ludus* relates to what is known mainly as a game and is based on strategies and rules that are defined in advance. Games require certain skills, patience and mastery of operation. The other category, *paidia*, relates to more spontaneous forms of play. This is known mainly as childlike play and is based on joy, gaiety, physical movement and free improvisation. Thus, rules and skills play a less important role in free or childlike play (Cailliois, 1958, in the English translation, Barash, 2001, pp. 27-35).

1.4.2 Solitary vs. social play

Playful activity can be done alone or in a group. With regard to the notion of playmate(s), Fink (1957) puts emphasis on the social nature of play and states that it cannot be an isolated activity. "Play is open to fellow men as playmates". Accordingly, in any play activity there is a real or an imaginary playmate (p. 30). Note that social play can be "contending" and occur between two or more parties, but it can also be in the form of playing together for a shared purpose such as the game of cat's cradle⁶ (Huizinga, 1955, p.47).

1.4.2.1 The element of winning and its role in solitary and social play

The element of winning is particularly significant in games and forms of social play. Winning refers to the desire to show superiority over other players and to gain honor, esteem and prestige for that in the group. In addition, delight and satisfaction over a victory will increase if play is watched by other people (Huizinga, 1955). The positive aspect is that play provides an opportunity for all the players to win and lose every time a game is played, or at least protects them from real consequences of both victory and losing (Fritz, 1991). The important point is that winning should be subservient to the play activity. As Apter and Kerr (1991) point out, if losing a game results in a feeling of having wasted your time, or that the game was not worth playing, then it means that the goal has become more important than the activity

⁶ German: Fadenspiel

itself. This is what we often see in professional sport, and it means that the activity has lost its playful quality (Apter and Kerr, 1991, p.16). In the case of solitary play, winning has no meaning as victory. When there are no real playmates, winning is rather the mastery of the challenge. In accordance with the issue of mastery, Csikszentmihalyi points out that the ultimate joy of the activity will arise when the player finds it a challenge and at the same time feels confident about his/her ability to succeed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

1.4.3 Active play and passive play

All forms of play involve the players' active engagement in their activity (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p.189). This means that in play, people don't react to their situations – they “change from being passive victims of the situations” (Freud in Kazdin, 2000, p.215) – and start to have active influences on their surroundings (see also Heimlich, 2001). In the case of passive or mental play, the player is mainly mentally active, as in imaginary play and board games for example, while active forms of play require physical engagement in the activity, as in movement play, which is the basic form of play that begins in early childhood. Movement play involves the joy of moving itself. Note that physical exercises with a functional purpose cannot be counted as movement play (Burghardt, 2006, p.84). Mental play is a “*non-physically oriented*” transformation and abstraction in which play materials have a role that is not essential or no role at all (Colarusso, 1993, pp.233-234). Colarusso mentions mental play as being the most persistent form of play in human life (Colarusso, 1993). In a large classification, Sutton-Smith (2001) includes under passive play activities such as daydreaming and fantasy as “mind or subjective play” and watching television or reading comics as “vicarious audience play” (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p.5). Rubin et al (1983) in contrast, put emphasis on what players do with objects, people and the environment in play and accordingly exclude from play activities such as daydreaming, aimless loafing and relaxing (Rubin et al, 1983 in De Corte and Weinert, 1996, p.308). In accordance with this view, activities such as watching television, in which the audience hardly plays a role in shaping and controlling the activity, seem to be better defined as entertainment activities. The term entertainment refers to

activities that entertain people in the sense of “keeping a group of people interested or enjoying themselves”⁷ without involving any role for the audience in creating the situation. Comics provide an example of passive play and entertainment. The creator of the comic plays with reality and provides funny imaginary connections and shares them with the reader. The reader becomes interested and is entertained by watching the result, without being involved in the process of creating it.

1.4.4 The role of playthings (toys) in play activities

Although the term toy is mainly used in connection with children and pets playing⁸, it covers an expanded area in play. Toy refers, in fact, to any item that is used in play. The German word is “Spielzeug” or “plaything”. In an analysis of the phenomenon of play, Fink (1957) argues that as in other areas of life in which people need instruments and tools, human play requires playthings. However, playthings are not limited to a distinct group of objects. As Fink states, any artificial or natural object carries far more meanings than the obvious one. These new meanings are unfolded in play and in the eyes of the players. He calls it the “magical” characteristic of the plaything, of having a mysterious reality beside the everyday reality (Fink, 195, pp.32-34). Therefore, ordinary objects can be used in play and acquire new meanings to suit the players’ play purpose. Generally, playthings can function in two ways. One way is the symbolic function of the object, and the other concerns active object play and includes the manipulation of objects. Unlike the symbolic function, here the pleasure of playing with an object is more in the physical activity itself, such as kicking a ball, or in manipulating the object to produce something new, such as putting a puzzle together (Brown, 2009, p.87; Burghardt, 2006).

1.4.5 Symbolic and imaginary play

“Play absorbs the reality and represents it in a symbolic way” (Fink, 1957; Fink et al, 1968, p.22). Symbolic play refers to the creation of new imaginary combinations based on reality in which everyday objects stand for other things to suit the wish of the player. In symbolic play the emphasis is on the mental process, namely the imagination, rather than the physical activity (Butterworth et al, 1994, p.140). As

⁷ http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/entertain_1?q=entertain

⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/601284/toy>

Brown (2009) states, imagination – or the capacity to have mental images (see Baldwin, 1905) – provides an opportunity to create simulated reality and to explore it without losing access to the real world (Brown, 2009, p.86). When engaging in symbolic play, the player can try out new experiences and different roles, free from the obligations and consequences of real life.

1.4.6 Integrative play

The above-mentioned types of play suggest frameworks to categorize and distinguish playful activities. However, these are not separate play forms with clear boundaries. Different kinds of play can overlap and can integrate and shape other forms.

1.5 The playful behavior, playfulness

Playfulness is defined as a certain quality or orientation of behavior such that with this orientation, serious behavior can be performed playfully (Piaget, 1950; Butterworth et al, 1994). From this perspective, play is seen as “a way of looking at the world” (Maxwell et al, 2005, p.224). When talking about playfulness, the focus is on what players contribute to the activity, based on the idea that some people are more playful and can bring more to the experience than others (Henricks, 1999, p.261). Glynn & Webster (1992) define playfulness as a “predisposition to define and engage in activities in a non-serious or fanciful manner to increase enjoyment” (p. 83), and Barnett (1990) defines it as an “intrinsic tendency toward playful encounters with the surrounding people, places or objects” (p.333). Lieberman (1966) lists five dimensions to explain playfulness as a personality trait, which are physical spontaneity, social spontaneity, cognitive spontaneity, sense of humor and manifest joy (Lieberman in Barnett, 1990). In addition, highly playful individuals prefer social interaction over solitary action, and for them, a lack of excitement and something to respond to lead to the unpleasant experience of boredom, stress and anxiety (Apter and Kerr, 1991; Glynn & Webster, 1992).

1.6 Play of children vs. play of adults

Compared with research on play activity in childhood, research with the focus on adults' play has been the subject of less study. However, interest in and emphasis on the notion of such studies is growing (see Van Leeuwen, 2008). Generally speaking,

maturity means that an adult's play can be more abstract, more complex and more demanding than the play of children. Colarusso (1993) compares the play of adults and children from a psychoanalytic view and states that adults and children may be motivated to play for similar reasons. He mentions, for instance, that both can face new challenges, tasks and roles. However, while children play in such situations to master and practice challenges of the future, the play of adults is related to their current external conflicts. In comparison with children, "adults can play for longer uninterrupted periods of time" (Colarusso, 1993, p.228). However, the majority of children can distinguish better between play and the real world. Adults are more likely to lose their capacity to pretend and to slip into reality during a play episode. The problem of such behavior is that it can result in real consequences, for example when aggressive feelings appear and play ends in a real fight among the players (Colarusso, 1993; Levy, 1978). Stevens (2007) analyzes the play of adults in urban environments and concludes that although adults play less often than children, they have greater opportunities for play because adults have greater knowledge and because there are more places and opportunities available for adults than for children (p.27).

1.6.1 Lifelong play

Because it is a form of activity familiar to all human beings, from the youngest child to the oldest adult, play provides an important framework, a crucible in which human relationships can be forged and maintained (Colarusso, 1993, p.241).

Play as an essential factor in the emotional, mental and physical development of children has gained considerable attention and is accepted and encouraged. Play scholars often mention that play shouldn't be limited to childhood, as a lifelong approach to play will have various positive impacts on people's well-being (Brown, 2009, p.24-51; Terr, 2000, p.40; Maxwell et al: 2005, p.216; Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.159; Stevens, 2007, p.28 and Baptiste, 1995, p.33; Levy, 1978, pp.183-189). However, it seems that as people grow, they engage less in unadulterated play and focus rather on order and routines. With regard to the importance of lifelong play, Kazdin (2000) found that typical negative aspects of the absence of play in adulthood are "aberration and breakdown, psychosis, maladjustment, obsessiveness, and some forms of criminality" (p.217). Baptiste (1995) sees the lack of play as being a result of

various stresses in adult life such as in the family, at work and in society in general. In particular, the author lists a number of reasons why individuals may lose their playfulness in adulthood, including the following: negative experiences in childhood play, not remembering their childhood play, having forgotten how to play, a feeling of requiring permission to play as an adult, or the view that as an adult one must devote his/her time to serious responsibilities. As a result, play may be pushed to the bottom of the priority list (Baptiste, 1995, p.33-34).

1.7 Benefits and functions of play

1.7.1 The joy of play

“True happiness may have deeper roots in play” (Burghardt, 2005, p.402). In accordance with Burghardt’s statement and what was mentioned earlier in this chapter, fun, enjoyment and happiness are inseparable essences of any playful activity and can be counted as immediate outcomes of play. Levy (1977) explains this as follows: “The goal of each of us is happiness. We are happy when we become one with ourselves, others, the immediate environment, and the universe in general. Play certainly provides the opportunity for this cosmological unity” (p. 183). Play is rewarding in itself (Burghardt, 2005). Many playful activities may have no benefit or function beyond the activity, but play is fun, pleasurable and joyful. As Fink (1957) states in his book *“The Oasis of Happiness”*⁹, perhaps the most important benefit of play is that it is pleasurable. Sutton-Smith (1997) supports this view and describes this pleasure at a micro- and a macro-level. The micro-level refers to the immediate joy of the activity such as the moment of hitting a ball, and the macro-level relates to the anticipation of winning the game or mastering the challenge (p.47).

1.7.2 Functions of play beyond the fun factor

Research on play shows that positive influences of play exceed the space-time boundaries of the activity. According to Fritz (1991), although the activity of play concentrates on the present, from an external view play is not without causes in the past and consequences in the future (p.24). Apter and Kerr (1991) provide a comprehensive description of the functions and benefits of play activities for

⁹ German: Oase des Glücks

individuals as well as for society. According to these authors, individual level play functions include:

Learning and self-actualization: “Play allows people to practice the art of encounter in a pleasant and safe context” (Blatner and Blatner, 1988, p. 154). Play provides a protective framework in which individuals can practice new behavior and skills, develop new perspectives and undertake risky experiments without fear of serious negative consequences if something goes wrong. They will, moreover, gain the competence and confidence to deal with the real version of the problems (Apter and Kerr, 1991, pp.168-170). Brown (2009) states that play offers a safe framework in which experiences can be tried out without threatening the physical or emotional well-being of the player (Brown, 2009, p.34; see also Fritz, 1991, p. 25).

Creativity: Creativity in play is not the same as creativity in life outside play. Creativity in everyday life is purpose-oriented and is used as a means to produce novel ideas and unusual solutions to overcome problems or to increase productivity. In sum, “creativity tends to be defined in terms of usefulness” (Glynn and Webster, 1992, p.86). In play however, the pleasure lies in the process of creating unusual connections and actions itself. In play, original discoveries can be achieved, because thinking is not controlled by any important and urgent goal (Apter and Kerr, 1991, p.171). Play involves practicing and improving creativity in a free context, without focusing on any need.

Coping with stress: Play reduces stress. Stressful activities of ordinary life can be experienced as pleasurable challenges in play (Apter and Kerr, 1991, p. 172; Terr, 1999, p.40). On the other hand, when experiencing stressful situations, engaging in playful activities helps to direct attention away from the concrete situation and reduce pressure.

1.7.3 Social benefits of play

Fagen (1981) states that “in a world continuously presenting unique challenges and ambiguity, play prepares us for an evolving planet” (Fagen, 1981 in Terr, 1999, p.40). Brown (2009), refers to play as an opportunity to experience improvisation and a variety of thoughts, behaviors, movements and strategies (p.19; see also Gould, 1997). Apter and Kerr (1999) put emphasis on the impact of encouraging playful

activities in society in the sense of expanding the range of behaviors. It is argued that a large range of behaviors in a social system will increase flexibility and provide a variety of ways to respond to changing conditions. Play in the form of rituals and symbolic ceremonies such as Christmas, Halloween or Carnival helps to maintain aspects of internal stability in society (Apter and Kerr, 1991, p.173).

1.8 Does play have negative aspects?

A large number of benefits and positive influences have been identified in play for individuals and society. However, play scholars also believe that by “going too far in pushing the limitations” or “bending the social rules” and taking games too seriously, play may become addictive, dangerous and have negative consequences for the players as well as for others (Brown, 2009, pp. 175-193; see also Burghardt, 2006, pp.385-393). Henning Haase, psychologist and marketing specialist (2003), criticizes some forms of play as posing threats to society in various ways, especially by increasing superficial play and fun culture. He lists five harmful aspects of the current approach to play in popular culture. A summary of these dangers is given below:

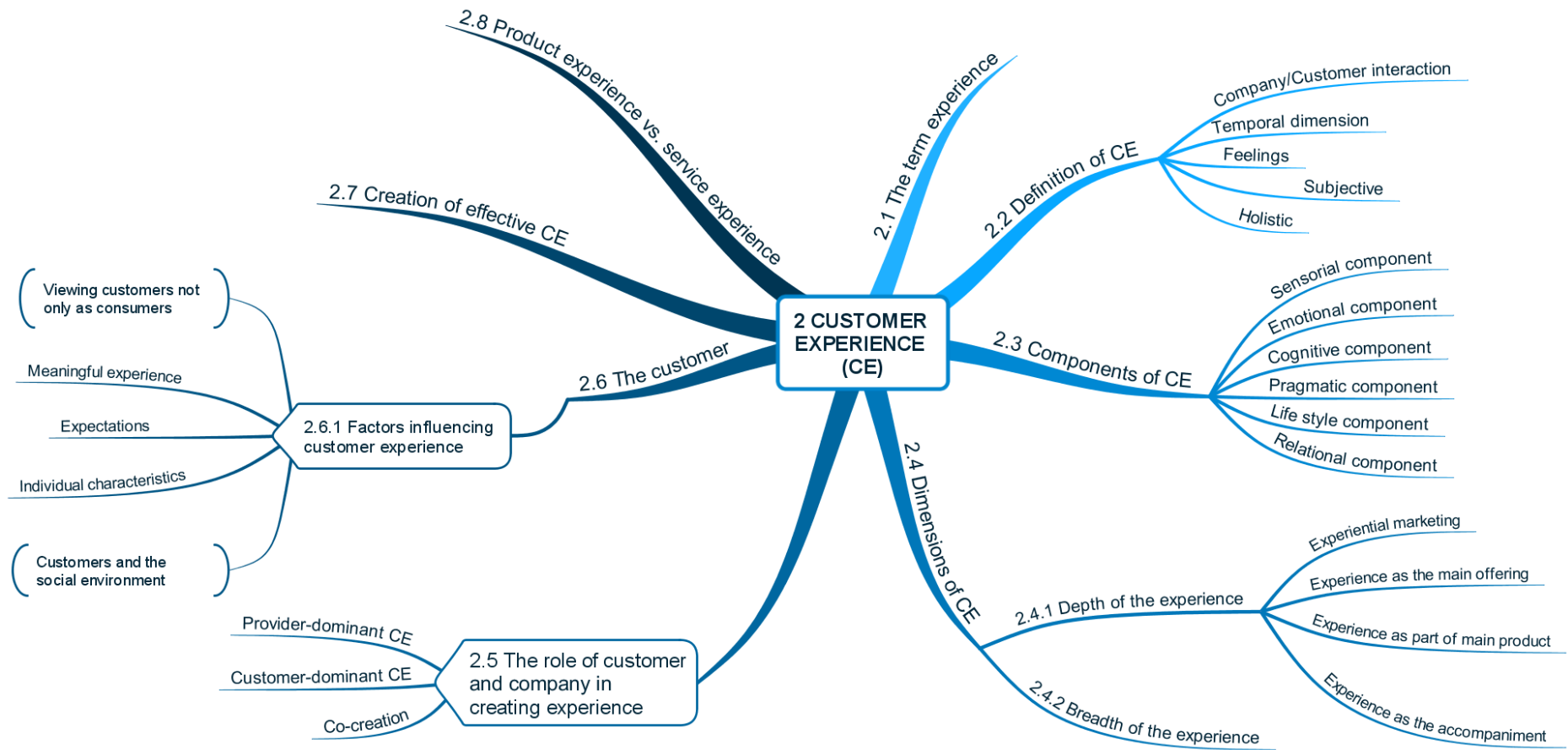
1. Haase’s first threat is the growth of a play and fun culture in societies. Together with a superficial view of life, this level of play can go beyond having fun. This may be threatening because it can undermine traditional social structures, orders, and work ethics and can damage the performance-oriented basis of civilization.
2. Another negative aspect is the increase of external control on people’s play in the sense that play as a free and creative expression of self is replaced by selecting from a range of commercial offers (Haase 2003).
3. The other problem is seen as the influence of computers and virtual games. Video games, despite some positive aspects, reduce the amount of physical movement, which is one of the important and positive elements of play (Haase 2003).
4. One form of play that can pose dangers concerns gambling, games of chance and video games. The number of such games offered and the extent to which they are engaged in can lead to serious addiction problems according to Haase

(2003). Addiction to video games can result in losing the grip on reality (Brown, 2009, pp.177).

5. Finally, Haase criticizes the lack of “good taste” in providing martial elements in games. He argues that some games do not serve self-development, but instead encourage aggressiveness, violence and even war. (Haase in Hügge, 2003, pp.418-420)

1.9 Concluding summary

Play has a range of characteristics, which according to the extent that an activity possesses these characteristics, can be more or less play-like. The main characteristics that distinguish play from other types of activity concern the emphasis on the process rather than the purpose of the activity, the particular and unusual relationship of play to normal life and the factor of fun and pleasure as the immediate outcome of the activity. Play can be studied under different aspects, such as the activity the experience and the framework, and it can be practiced in different forms. These forms include free and organized play, solitary and social play, active and passive play, symbolic and imaginary play, and integrative play. Each play type emphasizes particular aspects of play, which accordingly define qualities such as the importance of winning in play or the role of play objects in the activity. At another level, play can be explained as a type of behavior that refers to an inner tendency to approach the surrounding environment and people in pursuit of fun and pleasure. Engaging in play is found to have positive impacts on the well-being of children as well as adults at an individual and social level. However, the wrong approach to play may produce negative outcomes or even pose dangers for the individual or society. The next section will focus on customer experience as the next key concern of the research, providing an overview of the relevant issues and factors influencing this topic.



Mind map 2 Customer experience

2 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The following pages are concerned with the issue of customer experience. This chapter provides an overview of the literature on customer experience in product and service organizations. It begins with a general explanation of the term and its background in business and marketing and then focuses on various aspects of the approach, including characteristics, components and dimensions of customer experience, the customer's and the company's level of involvement in creating the experience, issues regarding the customer, and important factors in the creation and delivery of successful customer experience.

2.1 The term experience

Before concentrating on customer experience, it is appropriate to look at the term experience. The term experience is defined, in general, as the “practical contact with and observation of facts or events”. Experience as a verb means “to encounter or undergo an event or occurrence”¹⁰. Experiences are the result of actions and consequences. Dewey (1930) provides a comprehensive definition of experience by explaining it in terms of active and passive elements combined in a special way. According to him, the active element of experience refers to the process of trying something out or acting upon something, and the passive element is the process of undergoing the result or the consequences of that action. In German, the active and passive elements of experience are distinguished by using different words, namely Erfahrung/erfahren as the active experience, and Erlebnis/erleben as the passive element (Palmer, 2010, p. 197; Tengelyi, 2007, pp.8-10).

2.2 Customer experience; background, definition and characteristics

The issue of customer experience gained attention in business and marketing with Holbrook and Hirschman's paper (1982) on experiential consumption. The authors argued that subjective aspects of consumption had been ignored and should be considered when studying consumer behavior, together with the traditional

¹⁰ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/experience?q=experience>

information process view. This view regards the customer as a logical thinker who solves problems when he/she makes purchasing decisions. The need for a more effective competitive advantage has increased the attention given to the issue of experience. It is recognized that competing services and goods are becoming increasingly similar in functionality, and therefore the problem-solving properties can no longer be effective to compete in the market. Paying attention to intangible values and offering a combination of functional and emotional benefits is considered to be the effective way to compete (Haeckel et al, 2003, p.20). Based on these facts, the customer experience approach has gained attention because of its ability to provide the most effective competitive advantage as well as a sustainable differentiator for companies (Shaw and Ivens, 2002; Palmer 2010).

Following Holbrook and Hirschman, Pine and Gilmore (1999), and Schmitt (1999; 2003) helped to develop this view significantly. Pine and Gilmore introduced the term “experience economy” as the next economic aspect of products and services. According to these authors, when a person purchases services to carry out a set of intangible activities on his/her behalf, (s)he pays for the experience of spending time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages. Here, the experience is compared with a theatrical performance that engages the customer in a personal way (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.2). Schmitt (1999) introduced the concept of customer experience into marketing and examined different aspects of involving and managing customer experience in a company with a holistic view. He defines experience as a private event that occurs in response to some stimulation which results from direct observation or participation in a real or virtual event. In the context of marketing, the service or product company provides the stimuli for customer experience (Schmitt, 1999). The various other definitions of customer experience since 2000 include:

Gupta and Vajic:

[Customer experience is the] interaction with different elements of a context created by the service provider. (Gupta and Vajic, 2000, p.34)

Shaw and Ivens:

Customer experience is a blend of a company's physical performance and the emotions evoked, intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact (Shaw and Ivens, 2002, p. 6).

Meyer and Schwage:

Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs in the course of purchase, use and service, and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representations of a company's products, services or brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews, and so forth. (Meyer and Schwage, 2007, p.2)

Diller, Shedroff and Rhea:

From a marketing and design perspective, an experience is an engagement delivered to the customer through an integrated system of "touch points" – product, packaging message, customer service and so on – that conveys or evokes a consistent sense of its essence. [The goal is] to reflect the company's effort to be consistent in its value proposition and its expression in every contact with a consumer. (Diller et al, 2008, p.19)

Based on the above-mentioned definitions, customer experience can be understood as the result of the interaction between customers and the company during the time that customers spend with a company. The customer experience approach concentrates on the role of companies in shaping the customer's feelings about the overall interaction. The main characteristics of customer experience are as follows:

- Customer experience is an interaction which is created as the result of the company's action (the company takes the first step) and the customer's response to it.
- Customer experience has a temporal dimension which results from the entire set of contact moments between the customer and the company and develops over time (see Addis and Holbrook, 2001; Caru and Cova, 2007; Lasalle and Britton, 2003).
- Feelings play an important role in shaping customer experience. How the experience is perceived is closely connected with the emotions evoked during a customer's contact with the company (Caru and Cova, 2007).

- Customer experience is personal. It means that each person perceives, feels and thinks of it in his/her own way. The subjective experience continuously changes according to the changing environment (Addis and Holbrook, 2001, p.52).
- Customer experience is holistic. It is created in different phases of a customer's interaction with the company, in direct and indirect contacts (Brakus, 2001; Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al, 2007).

Companies that decide for the experience-oriented approach in their business aim to gain their customers' trust and loyalty by providing them with favorable experiences; experiences that make customers want to come back to the company to repeat them (Macintyre et al, 2011, p.7).

2.3 Components of customer experience

Interactions with a company or its offerings can engage customers in different ways. As Schmitt (1999) states, companies provide stimuli for particular customer experiences that affect the customer in various dimensions and at different levels. Schmitt lists five types of customer experience components including *sense, feel, think, act, and relate* (Schmitt, 1999, pp.63-69). Gentile et al (2007) add one further type and assume six components for customer experience. These are:

Sensorial component: a component of customer experience whose stimulation affects the senses and aims to provide good sensorial experiences, through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, to arouse aesthetic pleasure, excitement, satisfaction, and a sense of beauty (Schmitt, 1999).

Emotional component: an offering that involves a customer's affective system through the generation of moods, feelings and emotions. Emotional experience aims at creating an affective relation between the company and the customer through emotions "ranging from mildly positive moods to strong emotions of joy and pride" (Schmitt, 1999).

Cognitive component: a component of customer experience connected with thinking or conscious mental processes. It engages customers by using their creativity or problem-solving abilities through surprise, intrigue, provocation (Schmitt, 1999).

Pragmatic component: This component refers to the physical or practical act of doing something. The concept of usability is one part of the pragmatic component. According to Gentile et al, this type of experience is about aspects of human-object interaction (Gentile et al 2007).

Lifestyle component: Lifestyle experience relates to the affirmation of the customer's beliefs and system of values, often through the adoption of lifestyle and behavior. An offering may provide such experience when the product and its consumption become a "means of adhesion to certain values the company and the brand embody and the customers share" (Gentile et al, 2007, p.398; Schmitt, 1999).

Relational component: This type of experience involves the customer in a relationship with the social context, with other people or his/her ideal self. The offering can include encouraging consumption together with other people, or a shared passion that can lead to the creation of a community or a group of fans. It can also be a means of affirmation of social identity, such as a sense of belonging to a social group. The latter is however closely linked to the lifestyle component of customer experience (Gentile et al, 2007).

Different components of customer experience will provide a complex but unitary feeling in the customer so that in the actual experience they are hardly distinguishable (Gentile et al, 2007). However, from the company's perspective, being aware of different types and components of customer experience will help to provide a holistic and harmonious overall experience of the company and its offerings.

2.4 Dimensions of customer experience

2.4.1 The depth of the experience

As well as being a tool in marketing to be offered as the main product, customer experience can be applied at different levels in the company. According to the company's approach, customer experience is currently used in four forms as explained below:

1. **Experiential marketing:** In experiential marketing, customer experience is used as a tool to increase sales. This involves, as Voss et al (2008) mention, sampling, test-driving or the sponsorship of events and sport. It is especially

providers of consumer products that take advantage of experiential marketing to highlight their products in the market.

2. Experience as part of the main product: One approach to customer experience is the use of experience together with the main product or service. Here, customer experience is part of a company's offering. An example of this can be seen in Starbucks cafés, which offer, beside the usual drinks and snacks, a cozy home-like atmosphere to spend time, surf the Internet and engage in personal activities.
3. Experience as the accompaniment for the product: Customer experience can also be integrated into the "portfolio" of the product; this is the case when a set of events are offered with the main product. Examples can be seen especially in automotive companies such as BMW, which organizes driving and other tours and competitions in various countries.
4. Experience as the main product: The most intense use of experience today is to offer experience as the main product of the company. Voss et al call it "service as destination" and define this as a "place where people visit for an extended period of time to engage in multiple activities for a range of target customer groups, and where people want to return not only to repeat the experience but in the anticipation to see and do new things" (Voss et al, 2008, p.254). This category includes *extraordinary experiences*. Extraordinary experiences are a feature particularly of the leisure and tourism market, and customers expect emotional outcomes such as joy, absorption and happiness without knowing about the offerings that can produce them. The provider of the extraordinary experience may give the customers something that they don't know how to ask for but that makes them very happy. Examples of this kind can be seen in jungle and canoe tours or the emerging experience of space tourism. The actual experience of such offerings is not fully predictable and is highly influenced by the situational variables and interpersonal interactions during the experience (Arnould and Price, 1993, pp.25-27).

2.4.2 The breadth of the experience

The extent to which experience is integrated into the company's main offering is described as the depth of the experience, and the spread of its integration into different phases of customer-company interaction can be called the breadth of the experience. As mentioned before, customer experience has a holistic characteristic. The overall experience is produced not only in direct interactions but goes beyond it. The borders of overall customer experience often exceed the actual interaction moments. As Verhoef et al state, customer experience begins with the process of search and purchase and continues in after-sale phases (Verhoef et al, 2009, p.32; See also Zomerdijk et al. 2010, p.68). According to the type of offering, different interaction moments can play a greater or smaller role in affecting a customer's experience. For example, service interactions have more importance when the core offering is a service, as in the case of a product as the main offering (Meyer and Schwager, 2007, p.3).

2.5 The role of customer and company in creating experience

Earlier in this chapter, experience was described by referring to active and passive components. Being active refers to *doing* an experience and the term passive describes *having* an experience. Caru and Cova (2007) explain this in the context of customer experience with the level of a customer's participation in creating his/her own experience with a company. The passive component of the experience is here the company-driven experience, in which the customer comes into contact with external circumstances that he/she has less influence over creating or controlling. Passive customer experience is related to the "provider-dominant" logic in business. In this view, the customer is to lesser or greater extent involved in creating the experience, but it is the company that controls the creation of the customer experience. In "provider-dominant" logic, customers play the role of passive participants involved in creating the value that the company wants (Heininen et al, 2010, pp.540-542; Caru and Cova, 2007).

Active experience is, in contrast, the case when the customer and the company interact to develop the experience, which can occur at different levels. Caru and Cova note that regardless of the level of participation in creating the experience, it is the

customer's intention that makes the difference in experience and categorizes it, because experiences acquire meaning only through the interpretive activity of the mind (Caru and Cova, 2007, p.55). Active experience is related to the "customer-dominant" logic in business, which gives customers the ability to control their experience and create their own values. Here, the company is involved in the customer's activities, it tries to understand the customer in his/her context and it seeks a role in the customer's life (Heininen et al, 2010, pp.542-543). Active customer experience is also explained as co-creation experience, which was introduced by Prahalad and Ramasmawy. Co-creation refers to "experiences that are defined by individual customers" (Prahalad and Ramasmawy, 2003, p.17). This is possible if the company attempts to provide an environment in which a variety of combinations are possible to create personal experiences. Finally, the customer is the one who creates his/her own experience out of the whole (Prahalad and Ramasmawy, 2003). Smartphones can be seen as one example of active experience, since smartphones provide various options and applications for individual use and in connection with other services.

2.6 The customer

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, one of the reasons why the concept of customer experience has gained attention is the change in the way customers are seen from the traditional view in marketing that viewed people as message receivers, highly analytic beings, and rational decision makers. The rational customer calculates his/her decisions constantly to achieve "most utility with least effort or expenditure" (Merholz et al, 2008, p. 40). In this context, Merholz et al (2008) argue that the term utility, although typically defined as relative happiness or satisfaction, is used today more in relation to the return of investment (ROI) of time or money, or the number of features that can be measured qualitatively (pp.40-47). The way customers are now seen doesn't reject these traditional ideas but finds them insufficient to understand people and suggests additional considerations to be taken into account, such as viewing customers not only as consumers, considering the influence of emotions as well as situational factors on a customer's behavior, being aware that customers look for meaning and that consumption can be far more than mere purchasing (Caru and Cova, 2007, p.5).

2.6.1 Factors to consider about customers and their experiences

Viewing customers not only as consumers: A true image of customers is gained by understanding them as people rather than buyers and target segments. Companies need to understand people in their environments, try to find their real needs and desires and see how they can play a role in their customers' everyday lives. One major step to gain a closer understanding of customers is the development of empathy with them. The term empathy refers to the attempt to bridge the gap between self experience and the experience of others, to share feelings, thinking and experiences with others. It means understanding other people by imagining and putting yourself in their situation. (Merholz et al, 2008, p.52; Hodges and Klein, 2001, p.438)

Customer and meaningful experience: Making meaning is an emerging topic in marketing and design, emphasizing the role of meaning in the life of humans. Meaning is a very abstract word; if something is meaningful to you it is connected as an "important or worthwhile quality"¹¹ to your life. This can be better understood if adjectives, associations, impacts and emotional ties clarify the meaning. For instance, an Internet social network can create a particular meaningful experience of the network for a person away from his/her hometown by providing a sense of closeness and connection with the family and friends. By introducing the issue of meaningful experience, Diller et al (2008) found that "people have the strongest ties to products, services and brands that evoke meaningful experiences for them," that are integrated into their real everyday life (p.22). Examples include the home-like feeling in Starbucks cafés and pleasant childhood memories connected with the Kinder surprise egg. Note that meaning should not be confused with value. As Diller et al explain, the clear distinction between value and meaning is that values involve preferences and choices between opposing modes of behavior and beliefs that are not only shaped by the individual person but also by others in the immediate environment. Meanings, in contrast, like the sense of security and harmony, are things that everyone creates for himself/herself (Diller et al, 2008, Chapter 3).

¹¹ See <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/meaningful?q=meaningful>

Customer expectations: How customers experience their interactions with a service or product provider is also related to their expectations. Expectations are often created over time and by previous experiences with the same or similar companies or offerings. Expectations are influenced by factors including the costs of the service, word of mouth, advertising, and the brand (Johnston and Kong, 2011, p.8; see also Shaw and Ivens, 2002).

Customer experience and individual characteristics: The way customers perceive their experience is also related to an individual's characteristics. In general, customers can be divided into the two large groups task-oriented and experientially oriented, based on their goals when buying a product or service (Verhoef et al, 2009, p.34). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) describe some experientially relevant aspects of personality that influence the way the individual customer perceives a particular experience. These include "sensation seeking" as the tendency to enjoy more complex entertainments, "creativity" for people who seek novelty, variety and psychological arousal, "pleasure seeking" customers, and finally aspects related to people's perception of time pressure that affect how they divide their time between work and leisure activities (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p.136).

Customers and the social environment: It is not only an individual's personality, mood and situation that influence a customer's experience with a company but also his/her social environment. This means that the way people perceive their interactions with a company and its offerings can be influenced by their family and friends. For example, when visiting a retail outlet, an accompanying person can affect a customer's experience. Customer-to-customer interactions can also have positive or negative influences on a fellow customer's experience. For instance, attracting similar customers to a service may enhance the experience and increase customer satisfaction (Verhoef et al, 2009, pp.34-35).

2.7 Creation of effective customer experience

In order to create successful customer experience, two major steps come into play. The first step is to determine what kind of experience to deliver and the second step is to clarify how to deliver the experience. In connection with these two steps, scholars in the marketing and design field have during the past ten years identified a

series of characteristics for creating effective customer experiences. Based on the existing literature, 15 factors have been seen as essential steps in the creation of effective customer experience (the main sources for this part include Diller et al, 2008; Shaw and Ivens, 2002; Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Haeckel et al, 2003; Voss et al, 2008; Palmer, 2010; Caru and Cova, 2007; Gentile et al, 2007; Prahalad and Ramasmavy, 2003):

1. Deciding for effective experience will be successful if companies attempt to understand their customers as people, to determine their real needs and desires and find out what meanings their customers want them to deliver.
2. Customer experience needs to be defined clearly. Successful customer experience requires an experience statement in which the company defines the message it wants to deliver to the customers, as well as all the elements of the experience.
3. Successful customer experiences are designed with an “outside-in view and not an inside-out view” (Shaw and Iven, 2002, p.11). This means that the experience is shaped from the customers’ perspective and involves them in creating their interactions with the company.
4. Effective customer experience is developed in accordance with the company’s brand. The brand shapes a customer’s expectations and, as mentioned, customer experience should meet all the expectations and the promises offered by the brand.
5. Effective customer experience engages customers in different phases of interaction. The more the particular experience is spread throughout the different encounters with the company, the more effectively it can impact the customer.
6. It is emphasized that the beginning and the end of an experience will have the most memorable impact on the customer. Like a piece of music, in which the beginning and the end provide lasting impressions, customer experiences need great attention at the beginning and the end phases of the interaction.

7. Effective customer experience cares consciously about all of a customer's senses and uses them effectively during the interactions with the company to deliver its message (Haeckel et al, 2003, p.21).
8. Effective customer experience pays attention to a customer's physical and emotional needs in a harmonious way.
9. Successful customer experience pays attention to refreshing its stimuli and cues.
10. Successful customer experience is created with an awareness of the context of the experience and the situational variables in the course of the interaction that influence customers.
11. Memorable customer experience is more successful.
12. Customer experiences are better differentiated if they evoke particular emotions in customers.
13. Successful customer experiences pay attention to a customer's emotional state.
14. Successful customer experience is developed beyond the customer's expectations.
15. Successful customer experience views technologies not as functions and features for the product but as facilitators of the experience (Prahalad and Ramasmavy, 2003, p.17).

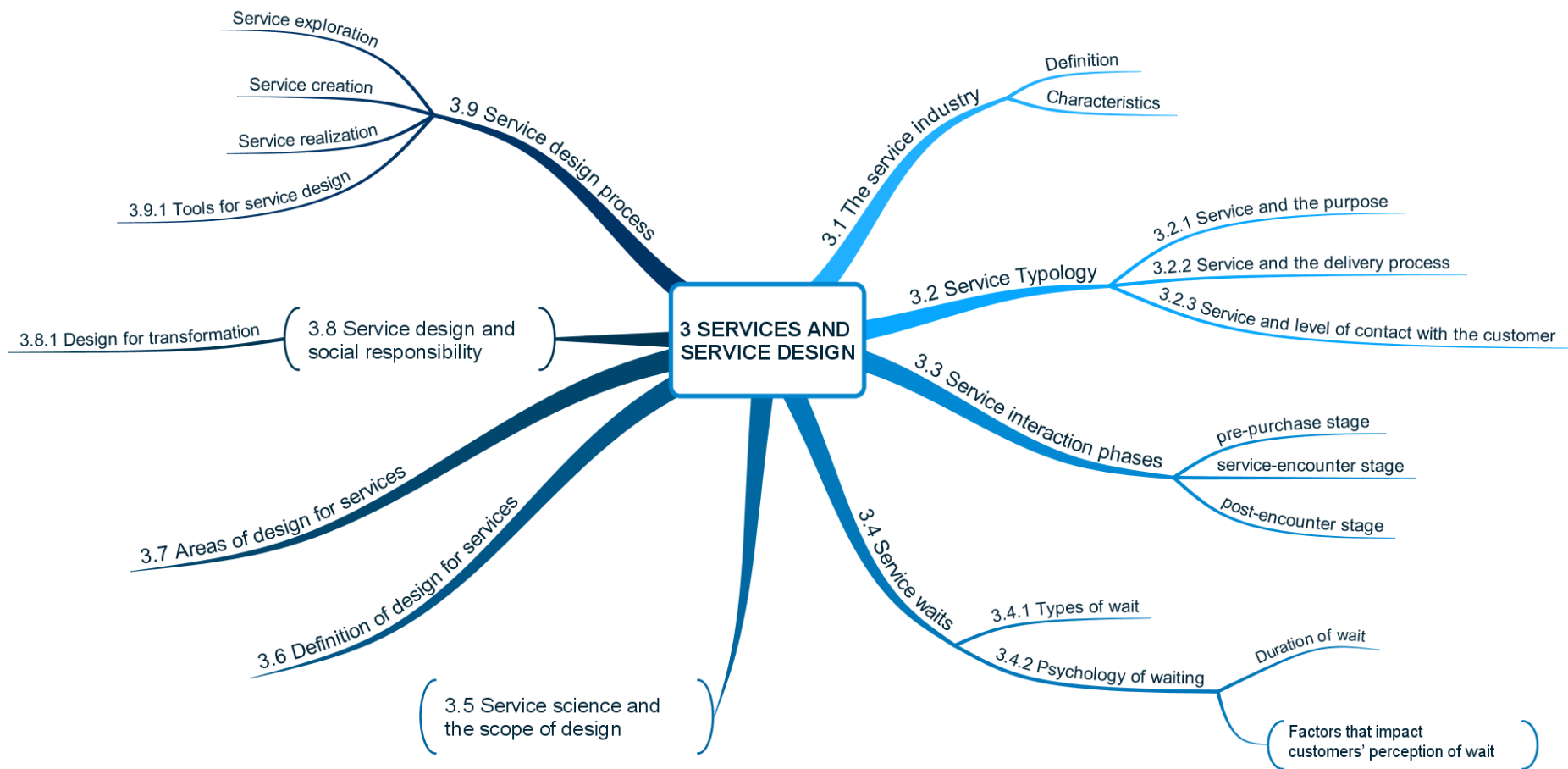
2.8 Product experience vs. service experience

Customer experience is influenced by the type of company and its offerings. Basically, companies can be classified as pure product or pure service providers. In between these two groups there are various forms of Product Service Systems (PSS) or "hybrid offers" (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008, p.626), which means that they offer a combination of services and products to meet customers' needs more appropriately (Viladas, 2011, p.27). A product is a physical and tangible object that satisfies a need. Products have typical characteristics such as providing ownership rights, being exchangeable and tradeable on the market (Macintyre et al, 2011, p.20). Services, in

contrast, are intangible and have characteristics that distinguish their experience from that of products considerably. In the next chapter a more detailed account of service, the experience of service and design for services will be given.

2.9 Concluding summary

Since the 1980s the issue of experience has received more and more attention as an effective factor in gaining a customer's loyalty and acquiring a competitive advantage in the market. The customer experience approach puts emphasis on understanding how customers feel their overall interaction with a company and its offerings, and on attempts to improve their experiences through meaningful performance. Companies employ customer experience to different depths and breadths in their business and accordingly engage customers in different aspects and at different levels in order to deliver the company's message and to evoke particular emotions. Experience-oriented companies put the emphasis on getting a deep and real understanding of their customers as people, their expectations and desires, and try to go beyond their customers' expectations. A meaningful customer experience is successfully created and delivered by applying various factors, including the use of effective stimuli, paying attention to a customer's physical and emotional needs, providing memorable interaction moments, shaping the experience from the customer's perspective, and involving customers in creating their interactions with the company. One important factor influencing customer experience is the type of offering. Whether a company offers an intangible service or a physical product determines the issues to be considered in creating the customer experience. The next chapter will address these issues from the research focus, namely a customer's experience of service organizations, and will provide an overview of different aspects and particularities of service experiences, and will then concentrate on service design and explain its characteristics, areas, processes and tools.



Mind map 3 Services and service design

3 SERVICES AND DESIGN FOR SERVICES

As the main emphasis of this research is on the customer experience of services, a more focused view of the related issues in the service industry is provided in the following pages. This includes defining services and mentioning particular characteristics which distinguish the experience of services from that of products; examining different types of services based on service offerings, service purpose, the level of customer contact and the service delivery process; as well as providing an overview of the different phases of service interactions and the issue of waiting for services. This will be followed by an examination of the role of design in services, focusing on various aspects, processes and methods related to how design thinking can improve service function and interactions and the creation of service experiences.

3.1 The service industry: definition and characteristics

Service is defined as “any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another, which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product” (Kotler et al, 2008, p.624). Services are often time-based performances that provide a change in the condition of a person or a good with the agreement of the customer (Crespi et al, 2006, p.565; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.37). Services are described using four main characteristics that distinguish them from products, namely service intangibility, service inseparability, service variability and service perishability (Kotler et al, 2008, p.626).

1. Service intangibility: Unlike products, services cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before they are bought. According to Kotler et al (2008), in order to decide for a service, people judge the quality of the service from what they can see, including the place, people, price, equipment, and communications. Therefore, service providers attempt to make their services tangible in different ways to send the right “signals”, or to provide the “essential evidence” about the quality (Kotler et al, 2008, p. 626; Viladas, 2011,

- p.22). How the service communicates its message through tangible signals is one important factor impacting customer experience.
2. **Service inseparability:** Unlike physical goods that are first produced, then stored, later sold and still later consumed, services are first sold, then produced and consumed at the same time. Here the service provider is in fact the product. On the other hand, the client and the provider often interact in delivering the service, and therefore both of them can influence the service outcome. Service inseparability means that services cannot be separated from their providers, whether the providers be people or machines (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010, p.628; Viladas, 2011, p.23). In the context of service inseparability, Crespi et al (2006) mention service “jointness” as an important aspect in the process of production and consumption. Service jointness concerns different levels of customer participation and cooperation in producing the service, which, depending on the service activity, can occur at different levels. The authors mention as an example the amount of customer work in using a high-street travel agent in comparison with an Internet travel agent (Crespi et al, 2006, pp.565-566). In accordance with service inseparability, one important aspect of customers’ experiences of services lies in their perception of their role in influencing and controlling the service delivery process.
 3. **Service variability:** The quality of services depends on the provider as well as when, where, and how the service is provided. Usually, a combination of different factors such as service staff, time and place are involved in delivering a service. Thus, the way each individual experiences the service will be a matter of subjective perception of these factors and their combinations (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010, p.629; Viladas, 2011, pp.24-25).
 4. **Service perishability:** Another characteristic of services is perishability, which refers to the fact that services cannot be stored for later sale or use. Service perishability provides one of the most important aspects of service management, which is the ability to predict and provide the required capacity to fulfill customers’ needs at the real moment of demand (Kotler and

Armstrong, 2010, p.269; Viladas, 2011, p.23). This aspect is one of the main factors in service waits, and is a topical issue in shaping a customer's perception of the service experience and performance. The issue of service waits will be examined more closely later in this chapter.

3.2 Service typology

The number of contacts with services during daily activities and the increasing demand on new services illustrate the increasing growth of the service industry in recent times. People encounter different services in their daily activities. It seems that everyday life is to a large extent connected with services and dependent on using different types of service. This includes essential services such as health care and education organizations and those of lesser importance such as hairdressers and travel agencies. Each type of service has particularities regarding its purpose, activity and delivery process as well as the kind of encounter with the customer, which provide a combination of factors to pay attention to when analyzing customer experience with a particular service.

3.2.1 Variety of services according to the service purpose

According to the service purpose, service organizations can be divided into three general categories of public service, i.e. those provided by the government and which usually have to be available to all citizens; private non-for-profit organizations that offer services involving culture, education and charity; and business organizations which include a large number of services from financial organizations to retailers, consulting, and entertainment services (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010. P.268).

3.2.2 Variety of services according to the service delivery process

Lovelock and Wirtz (2011), who have provided an extensive source on service science, define service delivery as the final assembly of the service product and its delivery to the customer (p.70). The process of service delivery varies with different types of service activity. Some services are based more on people's interactions, while other services are mainly machine-based. The four main types of service according to Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) are listed below:

- People-processing services are based on interaction between people, and result in tangible actions on customers' bodies, e.g. haircuts.
- Possession-processing services involve tangible actions on an object, e.g. car repairs.
- Mental stimulus processing services provide intangible actions on people's minds, e.g. education.
- Information-processing services provide intangible actions or intangible assets, e.g. computer programming. (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011)

3.2.3 Different types of service according to the level of contact with the customer

According to the particular service delivery process, services require different levels of contact with customers. A customer's level of contact refers to the extent that service delivery involves direct contact with the customer in the service environment. From this perspective, service organizations can be classified on a continuum from low-contact to medium and high-contact services:

- High contact services are those in which service delivery occurs in the service environment, i.e. customers need to be physically present at the service organization to use its offerings, e.g. restaurants, hotels and hospitals (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.69).
- Low-contact services are not based on direct contact with the customer and thus require little or no physical presence of the customer in the service environment during the process of service delivery, e.g. information processing services and online retailers (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.69).
- Medium-contact services include service organizations which involve some degree of direct contact with the customer. This can be in the form of a few visits to the service in the early interaction stages in order to establish the relationship or to define the problem, e.g. retail banking and dry cleaning (Lovelock and Wirtz, 1996, p.50).

3.3 Service interaction phases

In section 2.4.2 “The breadth of the experience”, it was mentioned that overall customer experience is shaped by more than direct interactions with a company and its offerings. With regard to service organizations, the conscious process of interaction begins with the pre-purchase steps, including the awareness of a need, gathering information and deciding for a specific service among existing alternatives. Direct interaction with the service occurs in the process of delivery and consumption or in the service-encounter stage. The service encounter stage provides perhaps the most important phase for the service provider to impact customers and deliver its message to them in an effective way. Following that, in the post-encounter stage, customers evaluate service performance based on their experiences of the overall interaction and determine whether to come back to the same company in the future or to recommend it to the others (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).

3.4 Service waits

The issue of waits is a pervasive element of services. Services by their nature cannot be stored for later use but rather have to be produced at the actual time of the demand (see “Service perishability”). As a consequence, waits can occur if the demand is greater than service capacities at a particular moment. Experiencing waiting time is often the result of service delay or an imbalance between demand and supply, but it can also be the result of the inevitable period of time required for the service process (Taylor et al, 2000, p. 172; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.260).

3.4.1 Types of wait

According to the kind of service organization and its approach to customer wait management, customers may experience waiting in different forms, including:

Pre-process and in-process waits: Customers may need to wait for the service to begin (pre-process waiting) or during the service for the process to complete (in-process waiting). Pre-process waiting can occur when a customer arrives early for a scheduled appointment, when there is a delay in the service starting time, and when there is waiting in line (queues) (Taylor et al, 2000, p.173). Pre-process waiting is often found to be more annoying to customers than in-process waiting (Hui et al,

1998, p.477). Maister (2005) argues that people feel more impatient before the first contact with the service organization, but once the service has begun and the customer knows that his/her request is being processed, (s)he can wait more patiently (p.4).

Physical vs. virtual wait: Physical waiting refers to situations in which customers have to stay at the service environment during the waiting period, while for virtual waiting the customer's presence at the service environment is not necessary. In the latter case, the customer is informed about the estimated waiting time and is therefore aware of his/her place in the "virtual queue" instead of spending waiting time in a real queue (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.264).

3.4.2 The psychology of waiting

Duration of wait: Duration of wait must be studied by considering objective and perceived waiting time. Objective waiting time is real waiting time. Research on duration of wait shows that a customer's perceived waiting time often doesn't match the objective time but is believed to be considerably longer (Taylor et al, 2000, p.176). Research on public transportation shows, for instance, that travelers perceive time spent waiting for the bus or train as passing up to seven time more slowly than the time spent traveling in the vehicle (Lovelock and Witz, 2011, p.265).

Factors that impact customers' perception of waiting: Researchers have found a number of factors that influence the customer's perception of waiting time. The main aspect influencing the customer's perception of the service in general is said to be the relationship between the customer's expectation and the service's success in meeting it. The more the service organization manages to exceed the customer's expectations, the more it is likely to meet with his/her satisfaction (Maister, 2005, p.2). Other factors that influence the perception of waiting time in a pleasant or unpleasant way include (the main sources for this part are Taylor et al, 2000, pp.176-185; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, pp.265-267; Norman, 2011, pp.184-194; Maiser, 2005):

- The value of the service: Customers can wait longer for a service that they find important and valuable.

- Occupied waiting time: People can wait longer if the waiting period is filled with some kind of occupation.
- Equity: Perceived lack of equity and fairness between the length of time spent waiting and the time spent being served makes the wait seem longer.
- Physical comfort: Waiting in an uncomfortable physical state seems longer.
- Anxiety: Waiting in stressful situations is perceived as longer than in a relaxed state.
- Uncertainty: Waiting time is perceived as passing more slowly when the customer cannot estimate how long the wait will be.
- Unexplained wait: Lack of explanation about the cause of a service delay makes the wait seem longer.
- Solo waits: Waiting time is often perceived as passing more slowly when waiting alone than when in a group. However, Pruyn and Smidts (1999) argue that waiting in a group is perceived more positively only in short waits, while in longer waits the presence of other people increases an individual's intolerance toward waiting¹² (Pruyn and Smidts, 1999, p.215).

3.5 Service science and the scope of design

The concept of service design originates from the broad definition of design. Design is a lively discipline that has been defined and improved gradually over the past years; a journey from giving form to creating experiences and sustainable societies. While in the traditional view design concentrated mainly on developing the appearance of tangible products, today it is viewed as a way of thinking, a strategy, or an approach in dealing with different types of problems, and it uses methods and processes that can be applied in a variety of areas. In accordance with this view, design capabilities are used to improve tangible and intangible aspects of services, to enhance service models, service experience, and even to strengthen the role of services in contributing to society's well-being. Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011) explain dimensions

¹² The authors refer here to the "social facilitation theory", which concerns the influence of the presence of others on strengthening the dominant performance of individuals (see e.g. Zajonc, r.b. 1965. "Social Facilitation" Science, vol.149, pp269-274).

of the emerging role of design in services with reference to the following aspects: developing new innovation models; creating new service offerings and experiences; creating services that support a sustainable society in contrast to the traditional manufacturing-based orientation; putting emphasis on people as the focus of the approach; and finally, developing services for transformative changes. The last-named considers services as a means to provide solutions so that people can better adapt their behavior to the essential changes in society (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, pp.11-14).

3.6 Definition of design for services

Although the issue has been gaining attention during the past decade, there is still no single definition of service design. The variety of definitions may on the one hand be due to the interdisciplinary nature of design, and on the other hand to the variety of focuses in applying design for services. Generally speaking, service design is “a process of researching, envisioning and orchestrating for experiences that happen over time and multiple touch points” (Oliver King in Visser, 2013, p.12). A more comprehensive description of service design is that of Mager and Gais (2009), who define it as the design of the form and function of services from the customer’s perspective, aiming at creating an interface for intangible products that is “useful, usable and desirable from customer’s view” and “effective, efficient and different from the provider’s view”¹³ (p.42). Despite the diversity in definitions, design for services has been described in terms of common characteristics that help to gain a clearer understanding of its activities. Stickdorn and Schneider (2010) have compared the views of experts on service design in academic and business institutes and accordingly define the following five principles for service design activities:

1. User-centered: Service design is based on a true understanding of customers and their needs beyond statistical information, and uses this knowledge as a common language – the customer language – in interdisciplinary teams throughout the entire design process.

¹³ Author’s translation from the German original

2. Co-creative: The process of design includes interaction with all the people involved in the service.
3. Sequencing: Service design includes communicating a harmonious rhythm of creative moments during actual service interaction as well as effective impacts on customers in the post-consumption period. It provides a sequence of interrelated actions.
4. Evidencing: Service design provides tangible evidence of the service's intangible elements in different forms, in order to enhance the customer's perception of the service.
5. Holistic: Service design includes a holistic approach to customer experience in the entire service environment.

(Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010, pp.34-45)

3.7 Areas of design for services

Design thinking is currently applied at different levels and in different areas of service, for example in management, process and delivery, marketing, and communication. Literature on design for services and various case studies demonstrate the use of design capabilities and methods in areas that include:

- developing service strategy,
 - analyzing and improving existing services,
 - introducing innovative service offerings and processes,
 - increasing service competitive advantages,
 - providing co-creative solutions,
 - creating the interface and effective service evidence, and
 - designing service interactions and human-oriented customer experiences.
- (See e.g. Mager and Gais, 2009, pp.58-59; Moritz, 2005, pp.48-55; Stickdorn, 2010)

Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011) sum up the implications of design in services in the two general categories of service function and service interaction, as described below:

Design for service function considers *what* services represent. This includes providing innovative service offerings with ideas based on a function-oriented approach instead of the traditional product-oriented one. Thus, design for service function suggests sustainable strategies for service production and consumption.

Design for service interaction concerns *how* services are performed. Service interaction design deals with innovative and effective solutions to enhance the customer's experience of the service at different interaction stages (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, pp.16-18).

3.8 Service design and social responsibility

Design thinking-oriented approach to services puts customers, or to be more accurate people, at the centre of service activities. This means that the design broadens its focus beyond the direct experience of customers with the service and its offerings, and expands the presence of the service in the customer's life to play a role in enhancing his/her well-being. In accordance with this view, the overall quality of the service function and interaction can be evaluated by considering dimensions not only of the economic outcome but also the social outcome of services. While the economic outcome provides financial benefits and influences the customer's behavioral intention, the social outcome of the service impacts the customer's perception of the quality of life (Dagger and Sweeney, 2006). Dagger and Sweeney emphasize the significant role that service organizations can play in impacting the customers' perception of the quality of life due to the interactive nature of service processes (2006).

3.8.1 Design for transformation

In the service design literature, the social outcome of services has been studied mainly under the aspects "transformation design" and "transformative services". Sangiorgi (2007; 2010; 2011) defines transformation design as the emerging focus in service organizations that approaches services not as an *end* in itself, but rather as a means or as an engine for wider social transformations. Here service design seeks ways to support "a more sustainable and equitable society" (Sangiorgi, 2010, p.30). The main principle in employing transformation design is the importance of people's active role in creating their well-being. In this view, transformative services help

people to shape their behavior in harmony with social changes by offering co-creative solutions. A further value of design for improving people's lives is what Morelli (2007) emphasizes as "providing them with solutions for a lifetime". He argues that the duty of design is more than concentrating on fulfilling the customer's needs as service receivers and involves using customers' capabilities and being a facilitating tool that suggests to people how they can satisfy their own needs (Morelli, 2007, p.19). When talking about transformative service, the design approach also includes concentrating on the designer not as the sole creator of ideas but rather as someone who facilitates analyzing the ideas of others by involving professional designers as well as amateur designers in the design process. Design is seen here as a living process that reconfigures over time. Finally, transformation design doesn't put the focus on "good design" but rather concentrates on finding a diversity of solutions that work and can lead to achieving the desired result (Burns et al, 2006, p.26).

3.9 Service design process

Design for services occurs in a creative and flexible process using a combination of tools and methods. The current state in the knowledge of service design has been improved to large extent in the course of real projects. Service design scholars have defined the process as involving from three to eight phases, three of which are core stages to be considered in any service design task whereas the other five clarify sub-considerations within each stage. A summary of these stages is provided below under the main headings of service exploration, service creation and service realization (the main sources for this part include Mager and Geis, 2009; Moritz, 2005; Stickdorn and Schneider 2010; Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011):

Service exploration refers to the process of gathering comprehensive information and providing a deep and holistic understanding of the current service situation, including the service context, all the stakeholders involved, the customer's perception of the service and, based on these investigations, defining the direction of design. The knowledge gained in the exploration phase also determines the tools required for service creation.

Service creation includes the process of idea generation, filtering and reflection. In this phase, a variety of tools are applied to provide creative solutions with a

collaborative, human-centered approach. Professional designers as well as amateur designers (non-designers) are involved in the process of creative idea generation to achieve a great variety of ideas. Then the ideas are filtered, based on the service orientation as defined in the exploration phase, and finally, during the reflection phase, solutions are tested using service prototypes and concrete experiments to estimate their effectiveness and customer acceptance.

Service realization or service implementation is the last stage in the service design process. This phase includes using all the service capacities and the engagement of all the service disciplines involved to make the service happen. Taking advantage of new technologies, marketing strategies and educating service staff can be included to effectively realize and deliver the required service.

3.9.1 Tools for service design

Design teams make use of a diversity of tools at different stages of service design. These are selected or created with regard to the particular project requirements. The tools and methods currently used for designing services have been developed by service designers in practice or borrowed from other relevant disciplines such as sociology and marketing. The tools serve the service design process in different phases to identify the current situation of the service environment and process (e.g. the service landscape, the service blueprint and the stakeholder map), as well as to understand and explore customers' opinions and behavior (e.g. interviews, observations and story collecting). In the service creation phases, tools are used for the facilitation and optimization of idea generation (e.g. brainstorming, co-creation), and later in the course of filtering and reflection in order to find the most appropriate solutions (e.g. design scenarios, idea reflections). Finally, during the service realization process, tools serve to find the best approach to implement the new service solution (e.g. service prototypes, style sheets). Figure (3-1) shows some frequently used tools in the process of design for services. Note that tools listed at a particular stage are not restricted to being used in that phase and can be applied, if required, in other phases as well.

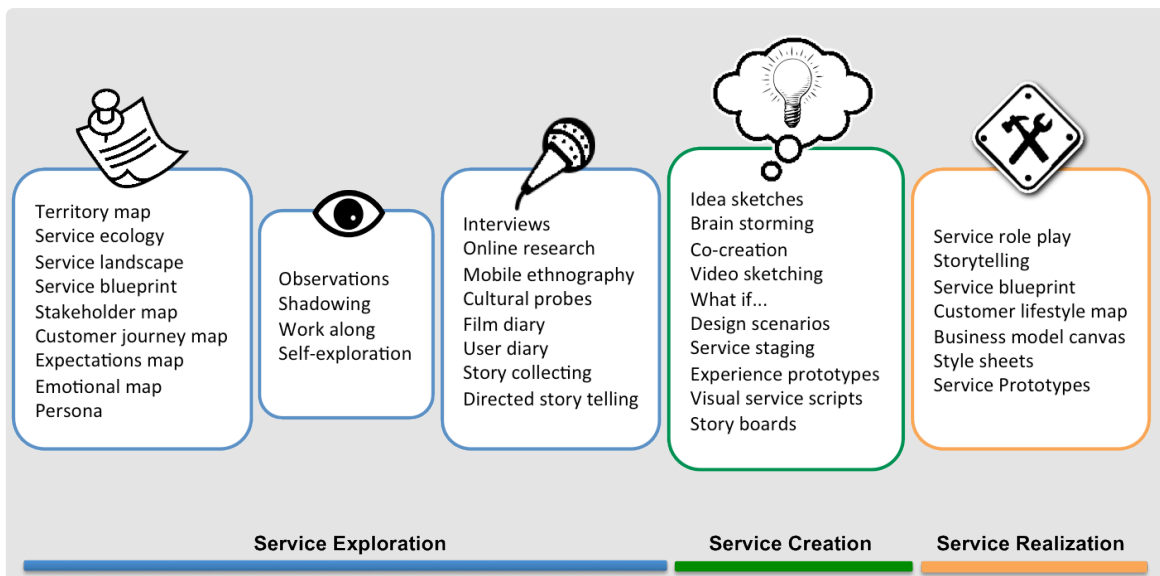


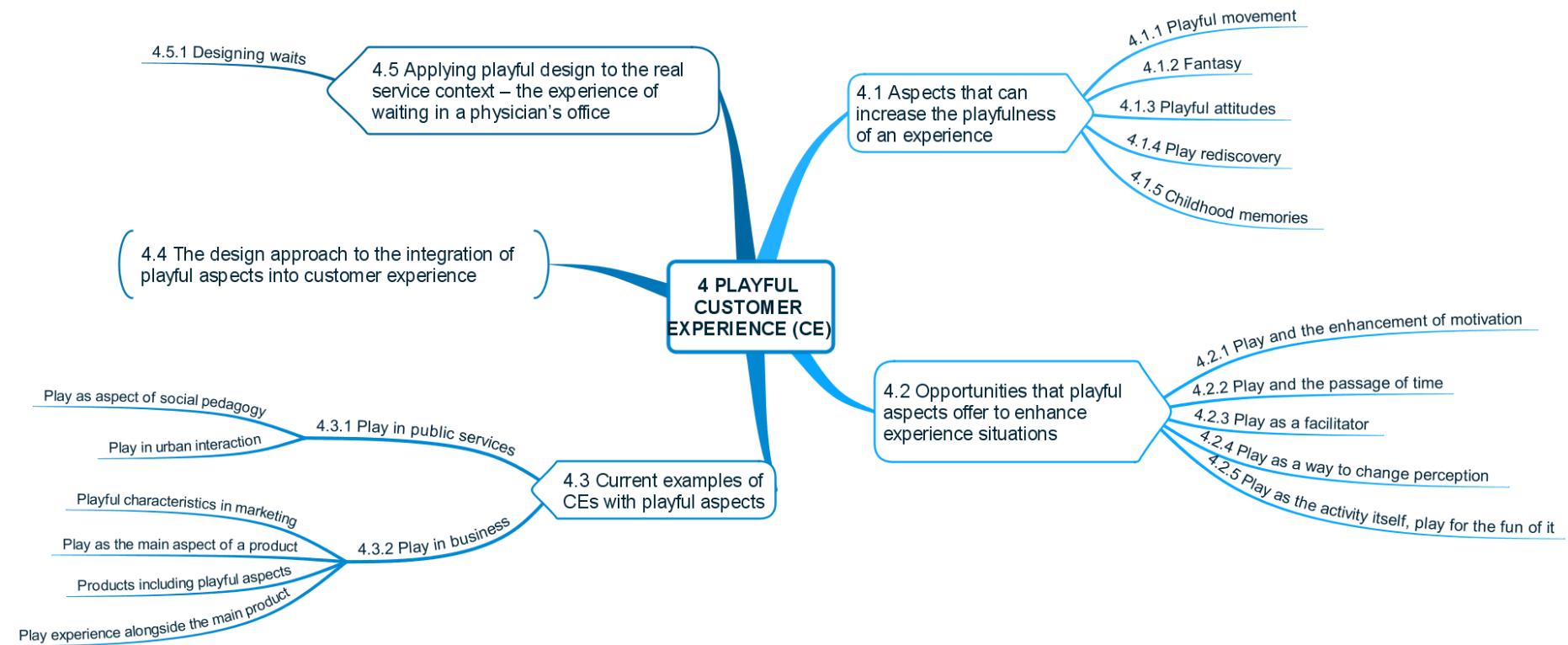
Figure 3-1 Service design stages toolbox

3.10 Concluding summary

A service is an offering in the form of an intangible activity or benefit. Beside being intangible, services have the characteristics of inseparability, perishability and variability that distinguish them from physical and tangible products. The notion of services and interest in their offerings have grown increasingly during recent years. Today, services are available in different forms that can be categorized according to the type of offering, the process of delivery and the level of contact with the customer. All types of service are experienced in three main interaction phases, beginning with pre-purchase interaction, continuing in the direct service-encounter stage and ending with the post-encounter phases. The overall experience of the service is shaped by all of these interaction phases. One pervasive experience in all service phases is the experience of waiting for services. Service waits occur mainly due to the imbalance between the customer's demand and service capacities to meet it at the moment of demand. Although service waits can be seen in all service interaction phases, the pre-process wait is considered to be more annoying. The customer's perception of the duration and the quality of the wait differs from the objective waiting time and is influenced positively or negatively by a number of factors.

One emerging interest of service science concerns the use of design capabilities in different aspects of services. Design for services puts emphasis on providing usable and desirable services for customers and effective and differentiated services in the

market. Service design has a user-centered, co-creative and holistic approach that can be applied in the creation and improvement of service functions and interactions at the levels of management and service strategy, the process, service delivery, and service appearance. At a different level, transformative services take advantage of design solutions to support society's well-being and facilitate future challenges. Service design is a creative process that involves the three main phases of service exploration, service creation and service realization. This process is carried out using creative methods and tools. Current tools are developed in the process of service design practice or borrowed from other related disciplines. The next section will focus on opportunities for the integration of playful characteristics into customer experience and will examine their effects on each other on the basis of the knowledge obtained from the study of play, customer experience, service science and design for services.



Mind map 4 Playful customer experience

4 PLAYFUL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

In the previous chapters current literature was reviewed that addresses issues of play, customer experience, service and service design. Having provided the required theoretical information, the research will now focus on ways to integrate playful characteristics into customer experience and will examine their mutual effects. This includes examining possible sites to increase the playfulness of an experience, followed by analyzing opportunities that playful characteristics can offer to improve customer experience according to the particular requirements of the situation. The analysis continues with an overview of current examples of customer experience with playful aspects. Then, playful customer experience will be explained from the perspective of design in organizations, and finally the research will focus on the experience and the design of waits and will further examine playful customer experience in the real service context.

4.1 Aspects that can increase the playfulness of an experience

In this research, play is defined in terms of a series of characteristics. Activities can be more or less playful according to the extent to which they include these characteristics, each of which can influence an interaction in a particular playful manner. Thus, by being aware of these characteristics and their capabilities, meaningful and effective integration of playful experience into the design of different service interactions will be possible. Following the knowledge gained from the literature review, the general playfulness of an experience can be improved by means of the aspects described below.

4.1.1 Playful movement

The playfulness of an experience can be increased if it involves kinds of free active movement. Here, the experience is improved by integrating the joy of physical movement into the activity as one of the basic forms of play (see Chapter 1: “Active and passive play”). People create such playful experiences during their serious everyday activities, for example when throwing screwed up paper into the waste bin, walking and balancing on the curb or riding the office chair. A similar approach can

be applied to create alternatives for service interactions that enrich or facilitate the process.

4.1.2 Fantasy

The playfulness of an experience can be increased by involving levels of temporary separation from the situation and providing a context where unusual interpretations can occur, new combinations can be produced and fantasies can develop. The fantasy aspect of playful experience is based on a key quality of play, namely the ability to create the desired imaginary world out of present reality (see Chapter 1: “Play characteristics”). People engage in fantasy experiences to different extents when visiting theme parks and museums, playing computer games, watching 3D films and reading comics. The same approach can help to improve experience phases when the customer requires detachment or distance from the usual service process or environment.

4.1.3 Playful attitude

The playfulness of an experience can be increased by allowing and encouraging a playful approach and attitude toward a common situation. Through a creative way of interpreting and reacting to events, the playful individual is able to reduce everyday tension and increase his/her moments of joy in serious activities. Highly playful individuals can find play opportunities in non-leisure interactions (see chapter 1, “Playful behavior, Playfulness”). Less playful individuals can be inspired to playful interaction in the appropriate context, for instance on occasions such as April Fools’ Day¹⁴, the Carnival season, or by being among highly playful people. In the service context, the playful attitude can be an opportunity for every customer to improve his/her own experience and even help his/her fellow customers, especially in services with a high degree of contact, to have more pleasant moments of interaction in a particular situation.

¹⁴ German: Aprilscherz

4.1.4 Play rediscovery

The playfulness of an experience can be increased by connecting it with one's personal favorite play activity. As mentioned earlier, play scholars put emphasis on the necessity of lifelong playing (see chapter 1, "Lifelong play"). Play discovery is an approach that suggests on the one hand supporting adults' play activities and hobbies and on the other hand providing a context for experimenting with new activities and sharing them with others. This kind of playful experience can be developed among family and friends, for example, in the form of game evenings. However, in the service context, the play rediscovery aspect leads to the creation of services that offer similar contexts – services that support and encourage the customer to experience a favorite play activity with the service and during his/her service interaction, and help the group of customers to experience more and share their common play interests.

4.1.5 Childhood memories

The playfulness of an experience can be increased by recalling childhood memories or by connecting adults with childlike play or by providing opportunities to express their inner child. Play is an inseparable part of children's life and thus closely associated with this period in their development. Spending time with children or being in environments that are marked by childlike playfulness can evoke positive emotions connected to childhood playfulness and, more importantly, can lead the adult to think about how to recreate those pleasant experiences in the present (see Brown, 2009, pp. 206-210). Such experiences may occur during daily life while we watch children playing in the playground or going round a toyshop. This aspect of playfulness can result in influencing customer behavior and achieving a creative service atmosphere.

4.2 Opportunities that playful aspects offer to enhance experience situations

As discussed above, regardless of the outcome required, characteristics of play can be applied to increase the playfulness of other experiences in various contexts. The need and the appropriateness of applying the playful approach to improve particular service situations can be examined by comparing the service interaction

requirements and particular outcomes of playing. Research on playful characteristics reveals qualities that influence specific factors required to improve the experience and the effectiveness of other activities. Therefore, integrating playful characteristics into the service can contribute to the aspects of customer experience described below.

4.2.1 Play and the enhancement of motivation

Play activities contain intrinsic motivation. Based on this quality, increasing the playfulness of activities and processes can increase their attraction and accordingly people's level of engagement in them. It was mentioned earlier that one significant aspect of services is service jointness, which concerns different levels of the customer's – physical and emotional – participation and cooperation in producing services (see chapter 3, "Service inseparability"). Without the customer's active and constant participation, some services can hardly proceed – think of the waste management service for instance. With regard to the above points, the integration of playful aspects into service processes, in harmony with customers' needs, can contribute to the customer experience by facilitating interaction and cooperation.

4.2.2 Play and the passage of time

"Time flies when you are having fun"

Play offers liberation from time. Engaging in playful activities influences the players' perception of the passage of time. As Brown (2009) emphasizes, "while playing we lose the passage of time" (Brown, 2009, p. 17). The passage of time can be experienced in different qualities and forms in service interactions. Perhaps one of the most important issues in services is waiting, be it waiting for the service to begin or waiting for the actual service process. The quality of waiting differs between high-contact services (waiting at the physician's office, waiting in a queue) and low-contact services (waiting for computer data processing, call center wait time). Regardless of the form and quality, according to the *inseparability* characteristic of services, it seems hardly possible to eliminate waiting time completely. Based on the impact of play on the perception of time, the meaningful integration of playful aspects into service situations can contribute to the customer experience and improve the

experience of waiting by transforming waiting from wasted time into a recreation activity.

4.2.3 Play as a facilitator

“In play we are able to try out things without threatening our physical or emotional well-being” (Brown, 2009, p.34)

Play provides a safe context for experimenting, for learning, and for becoming prepared for new tasks. One important quality of play is the certainty that players will not face any negative consequence from their actions, and accordingly don't need to be worry about doing something wrong. Therefore, a playful atmosphere provides opportunities to become familiar with or to master new situations and tasks, which is often the case, for instance, in transformative services (see chapter 3, “Service design and social responsibility”). Meaningful integration of play as a facilitator can contribute to the experience in situations in which people need to change their behavior (e.g. new rules at pedestrian crossings and the compulsory use of seat belts in cars) or have to deal with new technologies (e.g. automatic pay stations, online services) or tasks (e.g. waste separation).

4.2.4 Play as a way to change perception

“Spielen ist verwandelnd: es bewirkt des Lebens Leichtwerden”¹⁵ (Fink, 1955, p.38)

The special relationship between play and reality has often been mentioned in earlier chapters. In the play phase, people find themselves in a special frame of mind that allows them to interpret their non-playful surroundings in a new way. This is a conscious decision to modify the perception of a certain situation in order to reduce or prevent negative emotions and replace them with pleasant ones. Here, the meaningful integration of playful aspects into services can contribute to customer experience and improve the perception of particular situations, activities and processes by changing mundane experiences or what is expected to be serious, boring and stressful into unexpected fun and an exciting and agreeable experience. Such experience atmospheres can be found in our everyday service encounters, such

¹⁵ Play is transforming. It makes life easier. Author's translation

as during serious and boring public service processes or stressful and unpleasant stays in hospitals and clinics.

4.2.5 Play as the activity itself, play for the fun of it

Immediate pleasure is the core outcome of play. Regardless of the possible outcome or function expected from the activity, a playful experience evokes positive emotions of happiness and enjoyment during the activity itself. This is why Fink (1955) calls play the “oasis of happiness” (see Chapter 1, “The joy of play”). In accordance with this idea, the integration of playful aspects into a service – or to put it better providing a play-friendly and play-rich service environment – can enhance the customer’s overall experience of the service interaction. As a result, customers in a good mood can have a positive impact on their fellow customers’ perception of the service experience. Consequently, this group of customers will perhaps be more cooperative in their interactions with the service staff, and more tolerant of possible service deficiencies. A positive experience will in the end result in gaining the customer’s trust and loyalty toward the service company, which is an important goal of experience-oriented organizations. Table (4-1)

Aspects that can increase the playfulness of an experience		
Playful aspect	Characteristic	Outcome
Playful movement	The joy of physical activity	Enriching and facilitating interactions
Fantasy	Temporary separation from the ordinary situation	Creating the desired imaginary world out of actual reality
Playful attitude	Encouraging a different attitude toward a common situation	Reducing tension, and enhancing moments of joy during serious activities
Play rediscovery	Connecting the serious experience with one’s personal favorite play activity	Atmosphere to experience and share creative activities
Childhood memories	Connecting adults with childlike play	Atmosphere to express and recreate childlike play
Opportunities that playful aspects offer to enhance experience situations		
Playful aspect	Characteristic	Outcome
Play and the enhancement of motivation	Increasing the internal motivation	Improving the customer’s engagement in service interaction
Play and the passage of time	Improving the perception of time	Transforming wasted time into recreation time
Play as a facilitator	Providing a safe context to learn and experiment	Helping people to change their behavior
Play as a way to change perception	A special frame for unusual interpretations of the non-playful situation	Transforming the mundane into something exciting, and a stressful experience into a pleasant one
play for the fun of it	Evoking immediate pleasure and positive emotions	Increasing trust and loyalty through positive experience

Table 4-1 Integration of playful aspects into other experiences

4.3 Current examples of customer experience with playful aspects

This research found aspects of using play in the creation of customer experience in some current public and business organizations. Playful elements have been applied in some areas of marketing and the leisure industry, mainly since the issue of customer experience gained attention. Some other areas, such as play as a tool in social pedagogy or as part of the product experience, are examples of recent and emerging fields. A summary of the current use of play in shaping customer experience is provided below.

4.3.1 The use of play in public services

Play as an aspect of social pedagogy: In social pedagogy play is applied as a tool to help change society. Social pedagogy aims at preparing people for new and different forms of behavior in their everyday activities that will enhance the well-being and sustainability of society. In this sense, play is used more in connection to its ability to facilitate change and as a way to attract people to participate and become involved themselves in the process. One ongoing example in this emerging approach is an initiative by the Volkswagen Company in Sweden, namely “the fun theory” project, started in 2009, in which the company invites ideas and innovations with the intention of changing people’s behavior for the better in a ‘fun’ manner. These ideas include a way to increase commitment to recycling glass bottles by providing a bottle bank machine with game-like interaction, or a similar interactive trash can in order to motivate people to put their trash in the can and not on the floor.¹⁶

Play in urban interaction: The issue of play in urban design is one that can influence public policies for play and leisure activities in the specific context of urban spaces. Quentin Stevens (2007) introduced the term “Ludic City” and explores the issue as a counterpoint to the instrumental pragmatic view of urban spaces, and he argues that public spaces have potential for non-instrumental interactions. Through the introduction of the “Ludic City”, Stevens aims at expanding people’s experiences in urban interactions (see Stevens, 2007).

¹⁶ see: <http://www.thefuntheory.com/>

4.3.2 The use of play in business organizations

Although there has not so far been any research on playful customer experience in this area, aspects of playful characteristics in the design of customer experience can be found in business companies in different ways and at different levels. The main areas of application of playful experience are illustrated below. The list is adapted from Voss and Roth's (2008) categories of types of customer experience in business.

Playful characteristics in marketing: The most frequent use of playful characteristics can be seen in the field of marketing. In this approach, playful aspects are used to support product selling and marketing, following Schmitt's (1999) "experiential marketing". Playful aspects are often used in advertising, mainly with regard to their ability to create fantasies that communicate a special message about the product. The purpose is to associate the product with particular emotions beyond its actual use and accordingly to impact on the customer's image and feelings about the product and the company. Examples can be found above all in the marketing of food and drink companies. Coca-Cola is one of the companies that has been taking advantage of this approach. In one of its successful TV spots from the year 2007, the company presents an imaginary special world in each Coca-Cola vending machine, where every bottle of the classic drink is carefully prepared for an individual customer in a magic process by funny creatures in the so-called "happiness factory". Coca-Cola creates a special emotional link to the customer by communicating pleasure, care and uniqueness together with its product.

Play as the main aspect of a product: In this approach, engagement in play activities is offered to the customer as the main product of the company. Play is used here more in connection with fantasy and movement. Leisure service destinations such as adventure and theme parks are typical examples that offer active and imaginary play activities as the core product. Play destinations provide challenges for body and mind in an imaginary world within which people can experience their environment and themselves in unusual ways beyond ordinary life, beyond age limits and beyond social limitations. The most famous examples of this kind are perhaps Disney World parks, where people of all groups are invited to experience Disney fairy-tale movies.

Products including playful aspects: In this emerging approach, a playful activity is offered as part of the company's main product in the sense of combining the experience of the actual service with a play activity. Play is used here more in connection with games and theater. Examples of this kind can be seen mainly among less serious services, above all in the catering industry. One recent example is the mystery murder dinner, where restaurants offer a combination of a murder play and dinner. In this experience, diners at the tables become involved in a mysterious murder story in the course of the dinner and are invited to solve the mystery murder during the dinner.¹⁷

Play experience alongside the main product: In this case, the company sponsors or initiates entertainment or sports events alongside but separate from its actual product. Activities are often selected that have a meaningful connection to the company's main product. Examples of this kind use play to a large extent in connection with sports activities, as in the Land Rover Experience of the Land Rover Company, in which customers are invited to take part in adventure driving trips, or as in motor racing events that the Red Bull energy drink company organizes.¹⁸

4.4 The design approach to the integration of playful aspects into customer experience

In the above-mentioned examples, current forms of play in which organizations create customer experience are illustrated. Playful elements in marketing and advertising and in leisure services have been used for some time – since attention on the issue of customer experience increased. In contrast, play as an aspect of social pedagogy or as an additional experience alongside the main product are more recent approaches. In social pedagogy, play is used to change or improve people's behavior; in marketing, aspects of play are used to increase the sales of a product. Play as an aspect alongside or with the main product could be a strategy to increase a customer's experience of the company. The question is: How will design approach the integration of play into customer experience? Answering this question requires

¹⁷ This experience is known as "Krimidinner" in Germany. See: www.dinnerkrimi.de

¹⁸ See: <http://landrover-experience.de>; <http://www.redbull.com>

clarifying the way this research views design. Tim Brown defines the new design practice as:

“collaborative in a way that amplifies, rather than subdues, the creative powers of individuals; focused but at the same time flexible and responsive to unexpected opportunities; and focused not just on optimizing the technical, social and business components of the products but on bringing them in a harmonious balance”. (Brown, 2009, p. 37)

Brown puts emphasis on the designer’s responsibility to pay attention to unexpected opportunities, to bring together and harmonize ideas from technology, business and society. He argues that in this way the next generation of designers will play a significant role in a broad range of organizations and problem areas. With regard to Brown’s considerations, this research sees the major potential of design in organizations – beyond being company-oriented or customer-oriented – in creating the appropriate context in which great experiences can take place through harmonious cooperation between people as customers and as organizations. The creative way of thinking provides designers with the ability to find new areas, to search for what makes people feel good and to draw meaningful connections in order to integrate more positive experience into everyday experience. Based on this idea, this research considers the three following areas to define the role of designers in organizations:

- Designers detect problems and initiate new discussions from a human-centered perspective.
- Designers facilitate the communication and cooperation between people and organizations.
- Designers propose innovative and effective function and interaction models for the organization.

Following this explanation, the approach of design to playful customer experience involves considering the role of playful interactions in improving a customer’s experience of the particular service, as well as the role of both the service and the customer in discussing and expanding playful experience as a pleasant and positive aspect in general. How these considerations can be applied to a real customer

experience will be the focus of the research in the following sections. Figure (4-1) illustrates the relationship and the interaction between the designer, the service organization and people in connection with playful experience.

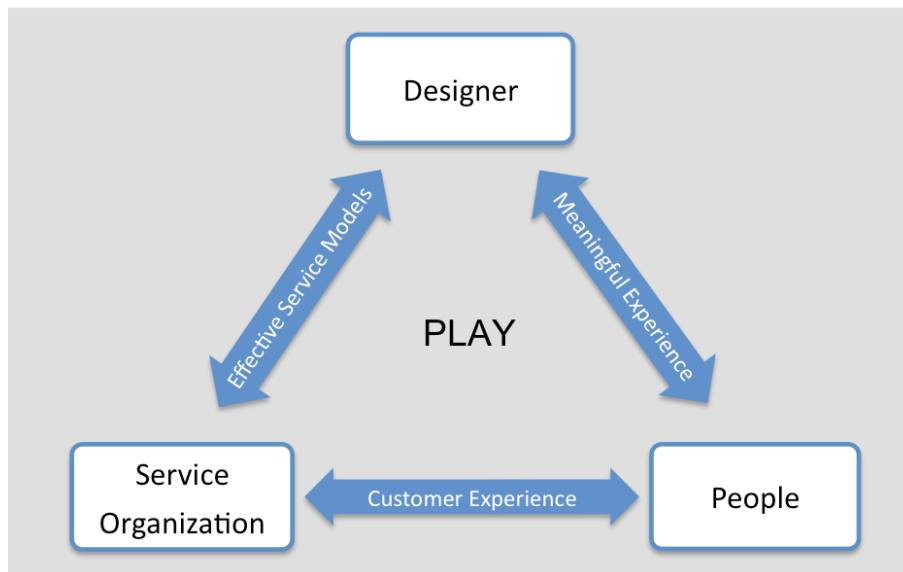


Figure 4-1 The relationship between designer, service organization and people in connection with playful experience.

4.5 Applying playful design to the real service context – the experience of waiting in a physician’s office

Waiting for services is a common and frequently experienced phase in service interactions. Having provided the required background, the research will focus on examining how people’s experience of waiting at their family physician’s office can be improved through a playful approach to customer experience. The purpose is to examine the process, influencing factors, relevant areas, and the extent to which playful aspects can help to enhance the design of customer experience.

The previous chapter has given an overview of waiting for services (see “Service waits”). Below, an explanation of designing service waits according to the existing literature is provided. Detailed analysis of the experience of waiting within a real service context will be discussed further in an empirical study in later sections.

4.5.1 Designing waits

Generally speaking, service organizations should attempt to implement strategies for strengthening positive factors influencing the customer’s perception of waiting and

for reducing the negative effects, in order to enhance the experience of waiting (see chapter 3 “The psychology of waiting”). Studies have been done mainly with regard to managing waiting lines, suggesting how to design queues, how to explain service delay at different stages of waiting, how to reduce uncertainty, and how to enhance the customer’s subjective experience (Hui et al, 1998; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011; Norman, 2011; Areni and Grantham, 2009; Pruyn and Smidts, 1999). In the design literature, Norman (2011) addresses the issue of designing waits. He mentions six principles for designing waiting lines:

1. to provide a conceptual model
2. to make the wait seem appropriate
3. to meet or exceed expectations
4. to keep people occupied
5. to be fair
6. to end strong, starting strong (Norman, 2011, pp 185-193)

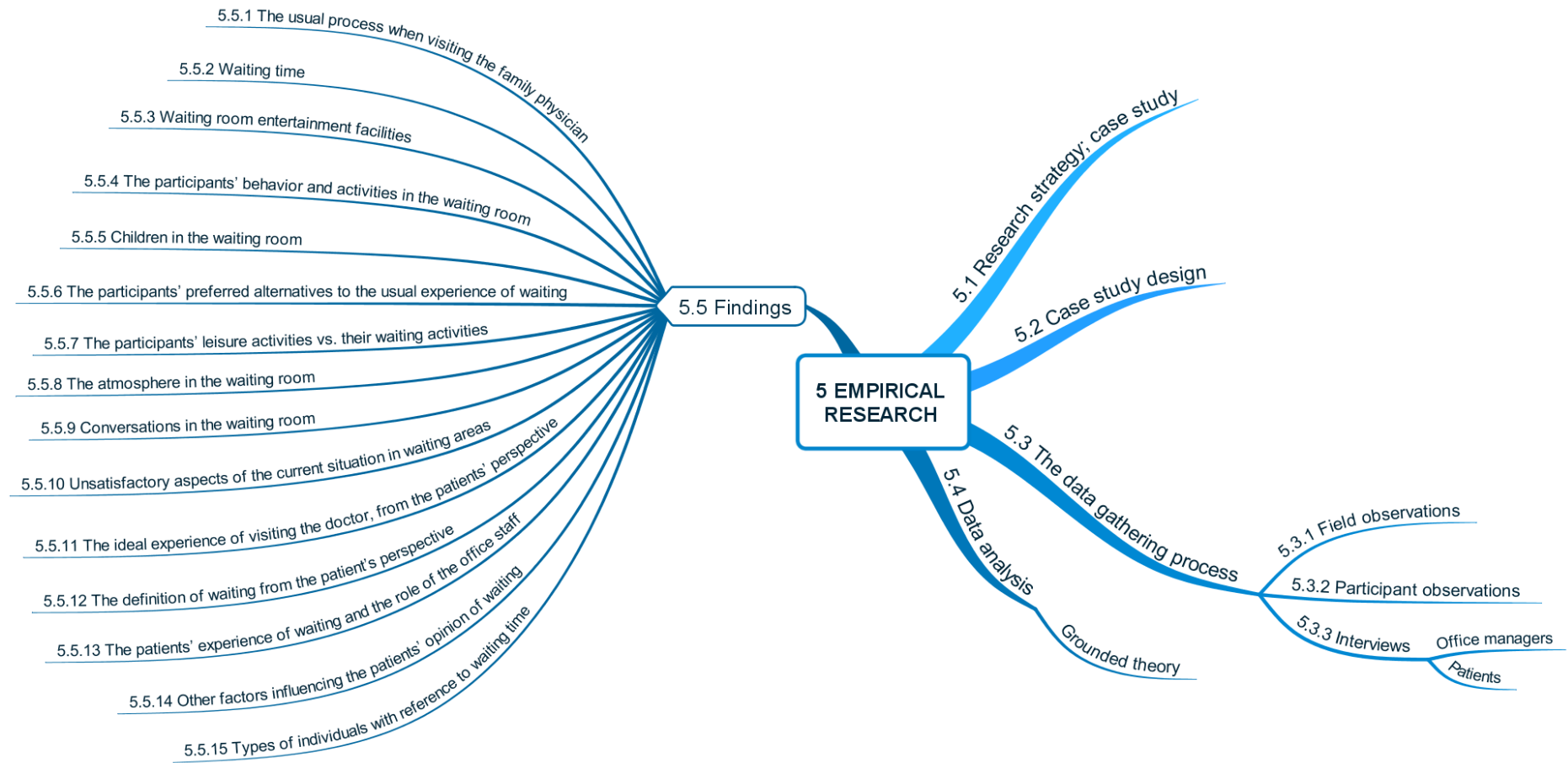
Beside the factors just-mentioned, Norman considers two other principles that shape the customer’s perception of waiting. He suggests designing a clear model of waiting, and communicating enough information about the service process in order to provide customers with a precise understanding of the necessity and appropriateness of the wait. The author also puts emphasis on the strong impact of a pleasant beginning and ending to the experience of waiting, mentioning the effective role of these phases in shaping the customer’s memory of the event and thus of the overall experience of the particular waiting experience (Norman, 2011, pp 185-193).

The principles Norman considers for designing waiting lines obviously share factors with those explained earlier as shaping effective customer experience (See chapter 2 “Creation of effective customer experience”). It seems that providing a pleasant experience of waiting for services should follow, in general, similar considerations as those noted for any other phase of customer experience. However, special attention needs to be paid to understanding characteristics and requirements of the particular service interaction stage by also considering the type of service, what it offers, the

process, and the customer. This seems to be the appropriate approach to succeed in delivering a meaningful and effective customer experience.

4.6 Concluding summary

The studies of play illuminate a series of factors that can be used to strengthen the playful quality of non-playful activities. These can be explained in terms of playful movement, fantasy, childhood memories, play rediscovery, and playful attitude. Studying play with a purpose-oriented perspective with regard to possible service experience situations suggests aspects of play that can enhance the outcome of the particular interaction. These are explained as: play and the enhancement of motivation, play and the passage of time, play as a facilitator, play as a way to change perception, play as the activity itself, and play for the fun of it. With regard to the characteristics of playful interactions, aspects of using play in the creation of customer experience can be found in public services today, including play as an aspect of social pedagogy and play in urban interaction. Play is also used in business organizations, including playful characteristics in marketing, play as the main product of a company, products including playful aspects, and play alongside the main product. The approach of design in applying playful aspects in customer experience depends on the particular view of the role of design in organizations. This research defines the role of design in three areas – detecting new human-centered discussions, facilitating the communication and cooperation between people and organizations, and proposing innovative and effective function and interaction models for the organization. With this approach, playful customer experience design considers both the use of playful opportunities for the enhancement of the service experience and the interaction of people and the service to improve the playful experience as a positive and pleasant aspect in general. Based on the knowledge gained, the research will focus on examining the integration of playful aspects into the experience of waiting for services. The design of service waits has so far been concerned mainly with queues and ways to improve the experience in terms of models of waiting, the acceptance of waiting and the process of waiting. The research will use this basis to conduct an empirical study on the integration of playful aspects into the experience of waiting in a family physician's office.



Mind map 5 Empirical research

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In the previous chapters, issues of play, customer experience, services, and design have been explored separately and in relation to each other. Connections and relationships between different disciplines and aspects of meaningful integration have been examined from an experience design perspective to determine how the interplay between these disciplines can enhance people's everyday experience of service interactions and playful activities. The empirical part of the research in this chapter aims to examine the application to a real-life situation by focusing on the integration of playful aspects into the experience of waiting for a particular service, namely in the family physician's office. Central research questions are:

1. How do people perceive their experience when they are waiting at their family physicians' office?
2. How can waiting experience be improved by integrating playful aspects?

5.1 Research strategy; case study

For the research purpose, conducting a qualitative case study is considered an appropriate strategy to obtain the required data. Case studies are often used when a phenomenon needs to be studied in a context with many conditional variables of interest (Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2003), doing case studies is a useful method when "how" and "why" research questions are asked and when contemporary events and real-life situations are investigated over which the researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2003, p.9). In service and experience design projects, case study is a frequently used method, especially when exploring new design fields and creation phases. This study aims to examine how people perceive their experience when they are waiting at their family physician's office. The type and the purpose of this research question matches the required criteria for applying the case study strategy in that:

- the research asks "how" questions.
- the subject has to be studied in a real-life context.

- the research topic – the experience of waiting for services – cannot be separated from its context.
- the researcher is not able to control a participant’s behavior¹⁹.

Case selection: The research aimed at conducting an empirical study of playful experience while waiting for a service that provides the appropriate environment to meet the criteria given below:

- Being an everyday service interaction with a common waiting condition. Extraordinary services were excluded from the study to avoid exceptional waiting situations.
- Ease of access; a common and frequently offered service that permits several visits for the observations.
- A high-contact service, where waiting for the service occurs in the service environment (physical wait).
- Comparability; a service which offers appropriate opportunities for comparison of cases.
- A service including a “wait” as an inevitable phase of the interaction.

These criteria were found to be met, to a large extent, in family physicians’ offices. In Germany, family physicians’ offices are often the first place people go to with minor medical issues or for preventive and regular check-ups. Unlike countries in which patients need the family doctor’s referral to be able to see a specialist, in Germany it is possible to schedule appointments directly with specialists for serious problems. Therefore, waiting at a family physician’s office is not usually experienced in cases of serious health problems, pain and stress; and if a patient does need emergency care, (s)he is not sent to the waiting room but is allowed to see the doctor immediately. Thus, the service often provides the required situation, namely the experience of waiting in ordinary circumstances. This was confirmed in preliminary observations and informal interviews at selected offices. Being a frequently used service, family

¹⁹ The ability to systematically manipulate participants’ behaviour and control the situational variables would be a rationale for conducting *experiments* or *quasi-experiments* instead of a case study. (see Yin, 2003)

physicians' offices also provided opportunities for several visits and for comparison. Based on these considerations, family physician's offices were selected for the case study.

5.2 Case study design

Multiple-case design: A multiple-case design approach was adopted for this study. Generally speaking, multiple case studies – involving more than one case – have been preferred as a more advantageous method than single case studies, apart from the rare or radical case that simply doesn't allow for multiple-case design (Yin, 2003). Multiple-case design avoids to a large extent the risk of investigations based on a single case that may have a unique or artificial context. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to compare the findings of several case studies, which increases the reliability and robustness of the research (Yin, 2003).

5.3 The data gathering process and case study stages

Data was gathered in a four-stage process from April to July 2012 in six doctors' offices, and a combination of observations and interviews was employed as follows:

- Fields observations
- Participant observations
- Expert interviews with office managers
- Individual interviews with patients

An overview of the general process of case study preparation, data gathering and data analysis is given in figure (5-1).

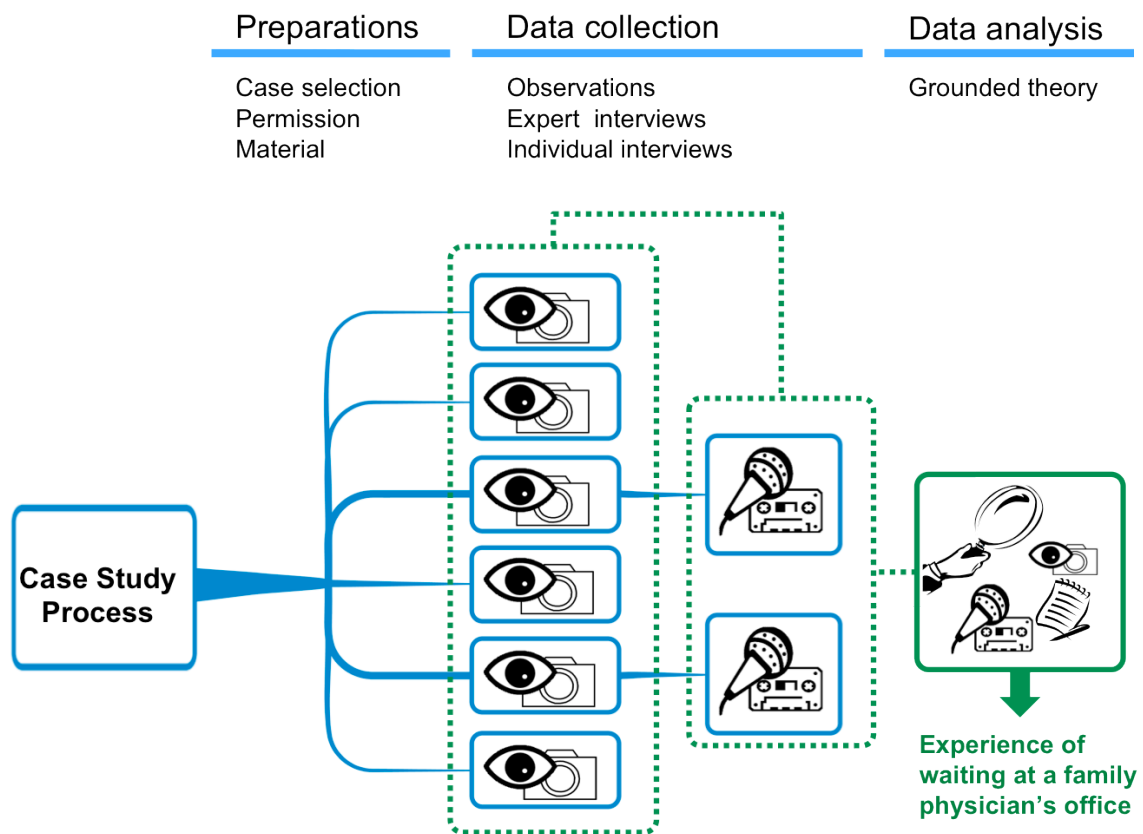


Figure 5-1 Case study process

Access, permission and preparation: During the two-month process of preparation and field selection, the offices of several family physicians in Wuppertal were visited and discussions were conducted with doctors and/or office managers in 16 doctors' offices in two districts of the city. Obtaining permission for the study usually required two or three visits. During the first visit, an introduction to the case study was handed over in written form and an appointment with the doctor was arranged. During the second visit, details of the process were discussed. In the majority of cases, permission for the case study was obtained after assuring the physician that the research concerned the experience of waiting in general and was not interested in issues regarding the medical service at the physician's office or in the patients' medical problems. Nevertheless, 10 out of 16 physicians refused to cooperate, mainly because of concerns to do with their office and their patients' privacy, or for personal reasons. Finally, six physicians gave their permission to conduct participant observations and field observations, including taking photos of the waiting room. Photos were taken outside the consultation hours. An important requirement for undertaking the interviews was the question of office facilities and the provision of a

room for individual interviews scheduled during consultation hours. In two cases, doctors agreed to allow individual conversations to be conducted with their patients and also provided an interview room. Figure (5-2) gives a visual overview of the complete data gathering process.

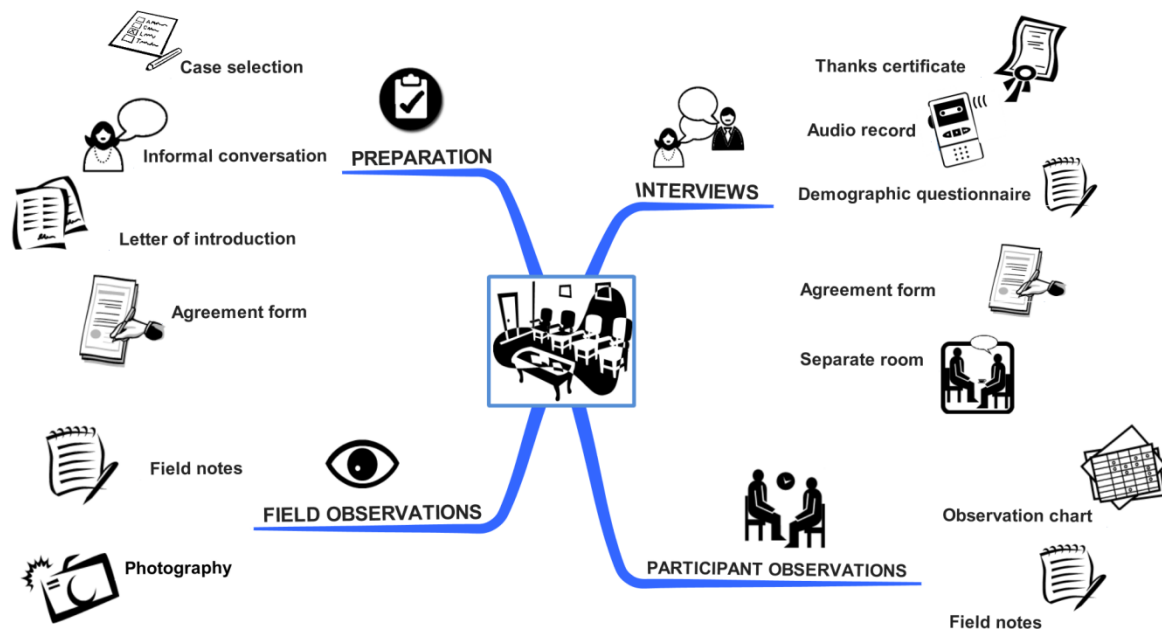


Figure 5-2 Data gathering stages in each family physician's office

5.3.1 Field observations

Selected offices were visited prior to the participant observations in order to study the location and examine characteristics of the waiting area that could affect the waiting experience. These included:

- The position of the waiting area, also in relation to other rooms in the practice and the reception desk.
- The interior environment of the waiting room: room setting, furniture and decorations.
- Entertainment facilities and medical information provided in the waiting area.
- Lighting, sound and other elements that could influence how people perceive their experience of waiting.

The purpose of the office observations was first, to become familiar with the current situation in doctors' waiting rooms, and second, to prepare for the participant

observations. Office observations were documented using site notes and photography. Table (5-1) gives an overview of the main areas covered during field observations.

5.3.2 Participant observations

Participant observation with a complete participatory approach was adopted in this phase of data gathering in order to achieve a relatively exact understanding of patients' natural behavior and interactions while waiting. A complete participatory approach means that the researcher "disappears completely into the setting and is fully engaged with the people and their activities" often without informing them about his/her research agenda (Angrosino, 2007, p.55). Doctors and office staff had been informed about this participant observation, but participants remained uninformed. In a few cases, there was an individual conversation with patients after the observation session.

Observations protocol: Observations were conducted to examine the patients' experience of waiting, with the focus on studying the real and natural atmosphere of the waiting room. This was approached by considering a series of general questions, designed beforehand, to guide the observation and at the same time by noting everything and studying the situation as exactly as possible. The questions covered the following topics:

- The general ambience of the waiting room
- Participants' activities during waiting time
- Changes in the participants' behavior over time
- The extent that participants used the entertainment facilities available
- The participants' interactions with their surroundings
- The participants' interactions with each other

Observations were undertaken in two sessions in each doctor's office, during which the observer spent approximately two hours in the waiting room with other patients. Observations were documented at the site using observation charts and free notes. Additionally, reflections in the form of memos were written during and after the visits

Waiting room Characteristics	Sample "A"	Sample "B"	Sample "C"	Sample "D"	Sample "E"	Sample "F"
Wall color	White & light yellow	White & light yellow	White	White	White	White
Floor	Light cream parquet	Light cream floor tiles	White floor tiles	Dark grey laminate	Brown stone tile	Dark brown laminate
Waiting room chairs	Black leather armchairs with silver legs	Wooden chairs with silver legs, some with deep blue textile seats, wicker chairs with black metal legs, dark blue leather armchairs with silver legs.	Black leather chairs with wooden frames, wooden chairs with silver legs	Dark blue, red and yellow leather (airport) seating with black and silver frames	Light brown rattan armchairs with red cushions and dark brown rattan chairs with white cushion	Black leather chairs with silver legs
Pictures	Wassily Kandinsky's "Red, yellow, blue" (only in blue shades)	1) Japanese Sakura in light colors: pink and white, 2) Woman dancing in a white kimono on a dark green background with blue and red lights (painting)	No picture	A view of Wuppertal in warm shiny colors on a white background (in the style of an illustration in a book for children)	Mediterranean street views (painting)	Two small abstract paintings in orange and olive green tonalities
Most eye-catching item in the room	Black armchairs	Green painting	Plants	Colorful chairs	Brown stone-tiled floor	Colorful children play corner
Waiting room facilities	Magazines, medical information, drinking water	Magazines, medical information, drinking water, mirror	Magazines, radio, music (jazz and country)	Magazines, radio	Magazines, Tea making set	Magazines
Magazines	"Echo Der Frau", "Apotheken Umschau", "Wuppertal", "Kurier"	"Focus", "Gala", "Season", "Living"	"Creative", "Urlaub Ahoi!", "Residence", "Pinguinal", "Du und das Tier", and ...	"Stern", "Gala", "Neue Post", "MAC'FE", "Auto", "Living"	Welt der wunder", Petra, Auto Bild, Wuppertal, "ikarus tours"	"Nahdran", "Focus"
TV, monitor	-	Out of use due to high cost and little positive feedback	-	-	-	-
Background sound/noise	Talking, breathing, coughing, patients whispering	Page turning, deep breathing, feet tapping, talking, woman complaining about her long wait, stomachs rumbling, noise of printer printing prescriptions, clear voice of the doctor's assistants talking on the telephone or to other patients	Jazz and country music, deep breathing, coughing, page turning, mother reading book to her child, baby crying softly from outside, telephone ringing, whispering, unclear continuous noise from the street	Radio (for a short time), page turning of magazines,	Turning page, doctor's assistant talking (from outside)	Children playing, child talking to mother, two adults talking Russian (quiet)
Children's play zone and facilities	Blue wooden children's table and two chairs	Story books, two colorful wooden stools, box of building blocks, bead maze	Story books, wooden building blocks, bead maze	Anima-themed furniture, bead maze, picture of "Tigerente" from "Janosch"	Rattan children armchairs, stools, table, locks box, dolls, puzzle, story books, pictures of children	Children furniture
View	crowded pedestrian area	Wide view of a green area	Main pedestrian area of the city centre	If curtains are open, view into a garden	Buildings	Buildings

Table 5-1 Field observations

to record the researcher's thoughts about and impressions of the situation (see e.g. Rosenthal, 2008, p.112). One important advantage of participant observation is that the observer is not perceived as a passive investigator but instead has the opportunity to play an active role and can examine everything from the point of view of the participants. One danger is that this can, on the other hand, result in not having sufficient time to record all the data (Yin, 2002, pp. 93-96). Video recordings or using abbreviations and shorthand when writing field notes have been suggested as strategies for addressing this problem. Shorthand serves to increase the speed of note taking and facilitate the process of recording the information during the course of an observation (Beer, 2003). Techniques such as videography were not possible in this research due to access problems. Being part of a medical office, a doctor's waiting rooms count as an example of *closed access groups*, which do not allow video recording (Heath et al, 2010). For the purpose of this study, an observation checklist were designed containing short statements to be checked and codes to describe a participant's actions and behavior (Table 5-2) gives the observation checklist). Field notes were completed and reviewed immediately after each session. Additional details and further description was integrated and then put into Word format.²⁰

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST								
OBSERVATION Nr.	OFFICE		BEGIN		END	DATE		
BASIC INFORMATION								
Participants No.	Sex	Age	Arrival time	Leaving Time	Appearance	Accompanying person	Additional points	
Facial expressions		Sitting position		Movements/behaviors				
Sad	∩	Legs: Open		∧	Tapping the foot/feet	F"	Reading	Ш
Happy	U	Legs: Closed		∏	Drumming the fingers	A"	amagazine	SШ
Nervous	~	Legs: Crossed		×	Eating/drinking	∩"	Reading own book	†
Bored	⊖	Arms: Crossed on chest		A∩	Rubbing the eye(s)	⊖"	Using cell phone	W
Angry	M	Arms: Relaxed		∩∩	Looking around	⊖	Walking	T
Unexpressive	—	Arms: Behind head		∇	Closed eyes	Zzz	Talking	

Table 5-2 Observation checklist

²⁰ Reviewing the observations and typing the data was often undertaken in the cafe nearest to the medical office.

5.3.3 Interviews

Interviews with office managers (expert interviews): The Interviews with office managers were conducted following two objectives: first, to examine the situation from the perspective of the office staff, and second, in order to be prepared for the interviews with the patients. An open conversation approach was chosen to allow the interviewees to explain freely their viewpoints and experiences. Interviews were conducted after office hours and took approx. 45 minutes.

Interviews with patients: Patients were interviewed in two family physician's offices. Like the observations, the interviews were carried out in two sessions for each office – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Appointments had been pre-arranged in consultation with the office secretary so that at least one interview session in each office took place during crowded office times. The purpose of the individual interviews with the patients was:

- To get a deep understanding of how participants perceived their experience of waiting, and
- To provide a foundation for the next step, namely the study of the integration of playful aspects into the experience.

Open-ended focused interviews were conducted with participating patients. Open-ended focused interviews are often used in case studies when a limited period of time is available and a certain set of information about the situation or interaction is required. Here, the approach was to elicit answers to the research questions as well as to be open for additional information (Yin, 2003, p.90; Rosenthal, 2008, p.131). Accordingly, some of the interview questions were designed in advance and some arose during the conversations with participants. In addition, participants were asked to complete a complementary questionnaire containing general demographic questions.

The process of interviews with patients: Interviews were conducted with 23 patients, 12 women and 11 men of an age range between 20 and 70. At the end of their visit to doctor's office, the patients were asked to participate in a conversation about their experience in the waiting room. Interviews were then performed in a separate room. After informing participants that the conversations would be

recorded, they were asked to sign the agreement form and complete the demographic questionnaire. The length of the conversation differed according to the participant's mood and interest in the topic. However, on average 15 minutes were required to discuss the main issues. After the interview, participants were thanked and given a certificate from the University of Wuppertal.

Interview questions: The Interviews were designed to serve the research in different ways. First, by developing an understanding of patients' perceptions, opinions and feelings about their waiting experience. Second, by facilitating the interpretation of participant observations, and finally, by exploring the potential and need to integrate playful experiences. Participants were not informed about the ultimate purpose of the research, namely the integration of playful elements into the experience of waiting. The focus was rather on understanding their thoughts and feelings about the playful experience of waiting by asking indirect questions. The interviews covered the following topics:

- How participants define wait in general.
- How participants spend their waiting time at a medical office.
- How participants perceive the atmosphere in a waiting room.
- What they would like to do instead.
- Their hobbies.
- How participants could imagine an ideal experience of waiting at a doctor's office.
- What they would like to change about the situation.

Interview data preparation: In order to assist the qualitative interview data analysis, audio-recorded interviews were transcribed using F4 transcription software²¹ with a detailed and annotated approach. The transcription of each interview session began on the same day in order to ensure the naturalness of the transcripts and make them as close as possible to the language of the interviews.

²¹ F4 is a free software program for transcribing conversations. See <http://www.audiotranskription.de/english>

Interview sources were labeled with letters of the alphabet to indicate the interview location as office “A” or office “B”, followed by the informant’s identification number. The paragraphs of the transcripts were numbered (e.g. B1: 15 means Office B, participant No. 1, paragraph 15) (Gibbs, 2007; Mclellan et al, 2003).

5.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that “uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Grounded theory was first introduced by the two sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in the 1960s. However, the different philosophical positions and academic backgrounds of Glaser and Strauss resulted later in the development of different versions of grounded theory. This study was inspired by a constructivist grounded theory approach that is based on the following assumption:

“Reality is multiple, processual and constructed, but constructed under particular conditions; the research process emerges from interactions; it takes into account the researcher’s and research participants’ personalities; the researcher and researched construct the data, data are the product of the research process, not simply the observed object of it”. (Charmaz, 2000, 402)

Grounded theory method studies qualitative data based on a systematic coding and analysis process that begins parallel to data collection. The coding process has three levels, namely open, axial and selective coding. Open coding is the process in which data are grouped, examined, compared, categorized and assigned “conceptual labels”. During the axial coding process, new connections and relationships between categories and subcategories are examined, and categories are also compared with the new data being gathered. The selective coding process focuses on selecting a *core* category as the *central phenomenon* around which other categories can be integrated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In addition to the coding process, grounded theory researchers use also reflexive strategies during the analysis process such as memo-writing and theoretical sampling. Memo-writing is an intermediate step between data collection and writing-up that involves the researcher’s ideas, thoughts and

interpretations. Writing memos provides the opportunity to become actively engaged in the material, develop ideas, and analyze the data and codes early in the research process (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). Theoretical sampling refers to gathering additional data after the development of the initial categories in order to form new categories or refine the existing ones (p. 96).

For the purpose of this study, I used Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory, which views the method as a set of "flexible guidelines instead of methodological rules" that are applied to qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p.9). Coding and the analysis process were done using MAXQDA software and Microsoft Excel²². Interview text materials were encoded with a thematic coding approach. The process of categorizing data segments followed both inductive and deductive approaches, i.e. a series of pre-determined labels were used for coding the data while new codes emerged during the analysis process (Kuckartz, 2010). Interview materials were analyzed in the original German. Data gathered from office managers and data from the patients participating were analyzed separately and then integrated. The interviews were then reviewed several times, and codes were analyzed, compared with each other and refined. Then the pertinent data were sorted again to improve the categories. In this phase, new categories were developed based on the codes that were suggested, and at the same time, the findings from expert interviews and participant observations were integrated. Related data were sorted and the categories were reviewed again, until at the end a homogenous structure of information resulted. The data analysis process was shaped gradually over three stages; in the doctor's office in the course of observation and interviews by writing direct notes and memos, after each interview and observation session by adding complementary notes, and finally after completing the data collection process. The direct notes were particularly helpful for a more exact interpretation because they added participants' body and facial expressions. Case study data were first analyzed with a within-case emphasis (see Yin, 2003). After completing the data collection of all the cases and finishing the analysis of individual cases, all the data were analyzed with a cross-case approach. The purpose of this analysis was to find cross-case

²² MAXQDA is a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (see www.maxqda.com)

relationships as well as differences and similarities, mainly concerning cases in which both observations and interviews had been carried out. The findings of the cross-case analysis on the whole supported the findings of the within-case analysis and helped to explain the current situation and the patients' behavior more precisely. The cross-case analysis did not reveal any major differences between cases nor did it result in the identification of special or exceptional elements in the cases concerned (Al Qur'an, 2010; Yin, 2003).

During the analysis of individual interviews, the particularly important and challenging part was the interpretation of a participant's real opinion on the research questions. A participant's real ideas on particular topics did not emerge until their statements on the issue in the whole interview had been compared. For instance, in order to discover a person's real perception of waiting, his/her statements about the term wait in general, about the opposite experience to waiting, about the particular doctor's office, the particular waiting room and waiting in the group had to be examined and compared, in addition to paying attention to the way they were expressed in the recorded conversation. At the end of the data analysis phase, various aspects of the experience of waiting at the doctor's office were summarized under 15 headings that will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

5.5 Case study findings

Based on the analysis of the observation and interview materials, the case study question "*How people perceive their experience when they are waiting at their family physician's office*" can be discussed with reference to the following topics:

- The usual process when visiting the family physician
- Waiting time
- Waiting room entertainment facilities
- The participants' behavior and activities in the waiting room
- Children in the waiting room
- The participants' preferred alternatives to the usual experience of waiting
- The participants' leisure activities vs. their waiting activities

- The atmosphere in the waiting room
- Conversations in the waiting room
- Unsatisfactory aspects of the current situation in waiting areas
- The ideal experience of visiting the doctor, from the patients' perspective
- The definition of waiting from the patient's perspective
- The patients' experience of waiting and the role of the office staff
- Other factors influencing the patients' opinion of waiting in the family physician's office
- Types of individuals with reference to waiting time

The above topics are explained in detail below:

5.5.1 The usual process when visiting the family physician

The usual process of visiting a doctor, particularly a specialist, includes pre-arranging an appointment. However, patients can see general and family physicians without a prior appointment as well. Some family physicians reserve certain consultation hours for such visits, among other reasons to avoid long waiting periods. The procedure when visiting the family physician in the doctor's office is as follows:

Each patient reports his/her arrival at the reception desk and waits his/her turn in the waiting room. He/she is then called either directly to the examination room or to a room where he/she waits until the previous patient leaves the examination room. After the consultation, patients receive a prescription or arrange the next appointment at the reception desk. Figure (5-3)

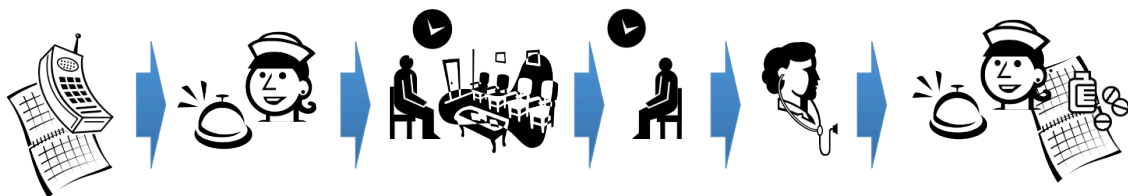


Figure 5-3 The usual process when visiting the family physician

5.5.2 Waiting time

How long patients have to wait in a physician's office cannot be predicted (A, office manager). Observations demonstrated a range of waiting times from 5 to 90 minutes. Waiting times of 5 to 10 minutes are typical for tasks such as taking a blood sample that can be undertaken by the physician's assistants and therefore don't require the doctor. A waiting time of around 30 minutes was more frequently. In interviews with office managers, a similar duration of about 30 to 40 minutes was given as the normal waiting period. 10 to 15 minutes was regarded as a short waiting time. However, this is seldom the case, and quite often people have to wait hours to see the doctor, despite having an appointment. (A, office manager)(B, office manager).

In a conversation with a general physician regarding long waits, the doctor pointed out that when patients wait for a long time, they expect the consultation to take a similarly long time and therefore ask the doctor more questions. The long wait gives them time to prepare a long list of questions. As a result, the consultation sessions take increasingly longer, as do the waiting periods for the other patients. The office manager mentioned the above point as a factor that can positively influence people's reactions to long waits:

“Most patients wait patiently, because they know that the doctor will then devote time to them as well” (B, office manager: 16).²³

5.5.3 Waiting room entertainment facilities

Reading is supposed to be the main entertainment activity in waiting rooms. According to the case observations, booklets and flyers with medical information and a selection of magazines can be seen in any medical office waiting room. These consist of a number of less serious magazines, mainly celebrity and fashion magazines such as “Gala” and “Petra”, illustrated automobile magazines and also more serious German news magazines such as “Stern” and “FOCUS”. In some waiting rooms a larger range of magazines can be seen, including mainly home, creativity and travel magazines, or local magazines. A female participant in her early thirties stated her opinion with regard to the variety of magazines usually found in waiting room as:

²³ The original statement in German can be found in the appendix

“There are always some magazines for men and some for women. It would be better to have a larger choice of magazines, especially more neutral ones, for example about gardening or interior design so that one could read something a little different” (B12: 40).

Many patients spend time looking at magazines during their wait. However, skimming through the illustrated magazines is more often the case than focusing on a particular article. Participants mentioned lack of concentration or lack of interest in the topics as the main reasons for their unwillingness to read an entire article. To this we can add personal reasons – for example, an elderly woman stated that if she could predict that the stay in the waiting room would be a long one, she would bring her glasses to be able to read the magazines (A6: 7).

In addition to the above mentioned entertainment facilities for adults, every waiting room had a small play zone for children. This play zone was usually recognizable from the colorful small furniture, illustrated storybooks and often a toy box containing some toys such as wooden building blocks and sometimes dolls and cars.

5.5.4 The participants' behavior and activities in the waiting room

Waiting areas in family physician's offices are usually isolated rooms located, as far as possible, not close to the reception desk or examination room. Patients first report their arrival at the reception desk and then enter the waiting room. It is usual in Germany for the newcomer to greet the group in the room, hang up his/her coat on a hook or hanger and look for a place to sit. Waiting room seats are often placed close to each other. Most patients try to find a seat at some distance from the other patients. In a crowded waiting room however, they may have to sit very close to each other, surrounded by “unknown faces”(A7, B10, A3).

As observations show, during the waiting period people often change from one activity to another after a rather short time. They may skim through illustrated magazines for some minutes and then use their mobile phone for another 10 minutes. Then they may start tapping a foot or drumming their fingers while looking around and observing the other patients. It is rare for someone to read a book during the entire waiting period. Some people just stare into space. Others think about their plans for the day during the waiting period and some other try to relax and prepare mentally for the conversation with the physician. There are also patients who cannot

do anything but concentrate on the passage of time. The posture of sitting motionless, often with hands clenched together, and staring at the floor is common in waiting rooms. According to Pease (2006), the locked-fingers position is in general a negative signal that can indicate frustration or some degree of anxiety (Pease, 2006). Staring down to the left or to the right can be a signal that the patient is mentally talking to himself/herself or recalling a feeling or emotion (Pease 2006, p. 187).

A list of people's behavior and activities in the waiting room is given below:

- Sitting silently and waiting
- conducting a conversation, usually with an accompanying person or someone they know
- Looking around or out the window; observing other patients
- Thinking, planning the day's activities, preparing mentally for the conversation with the doctor
- Using or playing with their mobile phone, texting
- Relaxing, unwinding, regenerating
- Reading or skimming through the magazines available
- Reading a book they have brought with them
- Spending time outside the doctor's office
- Tapping the foot, drumming the fingers, playing with fingers, fiddling with clothing

5.5.5 Children in the waiting room

The presence of children in the doctor's waiting room influences the behavior of adults to some extent. Observations showed that unless they cry and scream all the time, children influence the ambience in a positive way. When they enter the waiting room, they usually start to play with the toys in the play zone or other objects immediately. Some adults try to communicate with them by means of a friendly smile or spend their time watching the child or children play. If a child talks to its mother in the typically silent environment of the waiting room or if the mother reads her/him

from a storybook, other people listen. Observations revealed that adults are more likely to interact with children than with other adults. This interaction can be in the form of friendly eye contact, a smile or a brief conversation. The presence of children often stimulates similar interaction among adult patients as well, and more smiling faces and eye contacts among adults can be seen in a waiting room where children are present than in one where they are not. In some cases, children's behavior and play provide topics for conversation among adult patients.

5.5.6 The participants' preferred alternatives to the usual experience of waiting

In order to examine the way participants' dealt with waiting time free from the influences of the medical office environment, they were asked to describe how they would like to spend the same amount of time as they waited, assuming they were free to choose. In their answers to this question, the participants named a variety of activities that can be clustered into three main categories, namely: tasks, indoors and outdoors. Doing something outdoors was referred to most often (14 of 25 statements in their answers). Taking a walk in the countryside or in the city center were the most frequently mentioned of all activities. Other outdoor activities included doing sport, going shopping, eating in the city center or cycling. Other participants preferred less active indoor activities, which included reading books, watching TV, surfing the Internet and taking a nap (7 of 25 statements). A third group of participants would have preferred working in their usual job, doing some task or something they had planned (4 of 25 statements).

5.5.7 The participants' leisure activities vs. their waiting activities

Participants were asked about activities they usually like to engage in during their leisure time. This question was asked to provide information about whether the participants' activities during the waiting period corresponded to their leisure activities, and also to get a better understanding of how participants feel about spending time on their hobbies in non-leisure time, such as during a waiting period at a doctor's office. In answer to this question, a male professional in his fifties stated:

"I know that every moment I have to wait here I will miss in my leisure time. This is because I have to work a certain amount of time daily and if I wait here say for an hour,

then I have to work one hour longer. It means for me that after the work I'll have less time for [...] myself and to spend with my wife, to do sport or simply to watch TV" (B8: 21).

It was noticed that some of the leisure activities mentioned by the participants could be done during the waiting time, for example reading a book, listening to the radio or to a smartphone, painting, or surfing the Internet. However, despite the fact that this is possible, people don't usually engage in their favorite activities in the waiting room, and the following reasons for this emerged from the case study:

- One group of participants found it embarrassing. These people don't feel comfortable doing what they enjoy in front of people they do not know. A 56-year-old man stated that he would like to bring (in-ear) headphones and listen to the radio on his mobile phone, but he didn't. The reason was that during his childhood it was "not done" to use headphones in his neighborhood, as he said, and accordingly he thought it would look strange and stupid for someone of his age to do so (B8: 17).
- The second group could not concentrate on any activity, because of the environment and its atmosphere or because of inner anxiety. One male student stated that despite the environment, he indeed engaged in his favorite hobby –surfing the internet – during the waiting period. However, he couldn't really enjoy it, as he said, because he would have preferred to work on a text for the university instead, but this was not possible in the waiting room atmosphere. This caused him to worry (B5: 14-16). Another male participant, who mentioned reading books as one of his favorite activities, stated that he would read a book if he knew he would have enough time to be able to finish at least one chapter, but was worried this might not be possible. In the physician's waiting room he did not expect to have enough time, but on the other hand, he said that when the wait took longer than expected, he always got nervous and was then not able to concentrate on anything but the passage of time. He then looked at his watch *every 30 seconds* and counted the seconds (B8: 15).

- The third group of people could not imagine enjoying their favorite hobby in a waiting room environment. They found this unusual or inappropriate behavior for the situation. An elderly woman expressed her feelings in this regard as:

“Do you mean I should paint or something like that in waiting room? Look! I would only do that in a different atmosphere than in the waiting room at the doctor’s office.”(A5: 32-34)

5.5.8 The atmosphere in the waiting room

Case observations demonstrated a common picture in physicians’ waiting rooms. An ordinary adults’ waiting room can be characterized as a passive and silent environment with a relatively depressing atmosphere, where interactions among patients rarely occur. Each person is there by himself or herself. Patients talk to office staff, but conversations in the waiting room occur mainly between people who know each other. Case study interviews led to results similar to these observations. Participants expressed their perception of the ambience of a doctor’s waiting room in two main categories. One concerned the ambience and the social environment and the other concerned the physical environment of the waiting room.

The ambience and the social environment: Participants perceived the waiting rooms at doctors’ offices as being strange, cold and to some extent depressing; an atmosphere in which every individual is by himself or herself (A9: 11) and everybody sits alone and stares into space (B2: 9). An elderly male participant described the ambience as follows:

“A waiting room is like a museum or church. You say nothing, you are quiet and you are not allowed to whistle or sing... If people who have some connection to each other talk, everybody listens, because it is something uncommon.”(A11: 26)

Another male participant in his fifties found the depressing ambience a result of the visit being connected to the issue of illness and people’s sufferings. He said:

“In general, I find the atmosphere in waiting rooms a bit depressing. Why? Because you assume that all the people there are ill. This assumption can be wrong in general. For example, I am here today for a check-up and not potentially ill, but you think that the other people are all sick and as a result, you are a little afraid to begin any interaction in

case you hear about someone's terrible illness, and then you don't know how you should behave. As a result, you try to escape to anonymity."(B9: 13)

In a similar vein, another participant described the ambience in doctors' offices and hospitals as weird and cold and unpleasant, mainly because of the presence of many sick people. He stated:

"You don't think that there are that many sick people, and then you see several of them all at once". (B3: 32)

The physical environment of the waiting room: Participants mentioned cleanliness, an agreeable temperature and good ventilation as important criteria for doctors' waiting rooms. A male participant described the unpleasant atmosphere as being the result of too many patients in a closed room as follows:

"It (how I feel) depends on where I am and what (health problem) the people have. If everyone is sneezing around me or if it is winter and the time of a flu epidemic, I don't feel happy in a waiting room. In such situations I prefer to be a little separated from the other patients. I prefer to have a seat near the window and get some fresh air". (B8: 23)

Other physical characteristics mentioned regarded room size and furnishings. Generally, people find it unpleasant if the waiting area is a closed room without much space and a lot of people have to sit close together. When they have to sit between *strangers*, they can lose their personal space and therefore feel uncomfortable. Personal space or personal territory is the area that each human needs around himself/herself to feel comfortable and secure. The amount of personal space depends on one's condition and culture (Pease, 2006). Generally speaking, people from cultures such as Germany, Great Britain and Australia, which have an emphasis on individualism, need a larger personal space in comparison with collective cultures (Samovar et al, 2010). A female participant stated in this regard:

"There are doctors offices, let me put it this way, where patients sit like chickens in barn! Here it is fine. It doesn't mean that I would stay here for an hour, but at least there are comfortable seats. In some waiting rooms you have only chairs or something like that." (A7: 15)

5.5.9 Conversations in the waiting room

Conversations seem to be unusual in doctors' waiting rooms. Interviews with patients and office managers show that unwillingness to talk to other people can be a matter of personality. Some people don't like talking to other patients in general for personal reasons such as having no interest in talking to "strangers" (B10). An office manager explained this as follows:

"We have patients that communicate easily with other people. If these patients find someone in waiting room who is also willing to talk, then they begin a conversation and talk about their illness or other topics. Its is a matter of personal characteristics whether patients have a conversation with each other or not." (B, office manager: 28)

A second group of patients mentioned that they would personally be glad to have conversations, however the assumption that the other patients would rather not talk prevents them from doing so. One female participant stated in this regard that she would like to have a chat but she thought that she would bother the majority of people by talking to them (A6: 27). Another female participant expressed the same concern, although personally she found having a conversation a good form of entertainment in doctors' offices (A7).

There are also people who have little interest in conversations in a medical office because they believe that the main topic of discussion in such places could only be illness and other patients' sufferings. One participant said:

"What is talked about here is illness and I simply do not talk about illness. It makes me feel bored." (B5: 26)

Another participant supported this view, saying:

"I don't think that I would have a conversation with people because it always hurts me when people talk about their sufferings. I don't see it as an appropriate subject. You visit the doctor to feel better, but with such conversations you would go deeper in your suffering [...]. I can imagine instead being in an environment that has little to do with illness, but rather with health." (B6: 23)

The drive to communicate: During the observations it was recognized that some stimuli create an atmosphere in which conversations are more likely to happen.

Sharing similar experiences, beliefs and life situations are examples of such stimuli. Participant observations showed that people who have obvious similarities are more likely to talk to each other. One example involved two elderly veiled women. One of them, just like the other patients, sat silently staring into space, when the other woman entered the room. A few minutes later the two women started talking to each other. A similar situation arose when a young man recognized a former schoolmate of his in the waiting room. He recounted this experience:

“A former classmate of mine was there (in the waiting room), so we talked a little. It rarely happens that you meet someone you know there, but if you do, then time passes a bit faster” (B2: 7).

It was also noticed that apparently unimportant small occurrences could lead to conversations. In two cases the physician’s assistants played the main role in shaping these events. These cases will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

5.5.10 Unsatisfactory aspects of the current situation in waiting areas

Participants recounted some of their experiences in different doctor’s waiting rooms and mentioned a number of unpleasant situations. Their opinions were analyzed and put into the following categories: the condition of the waiting room, crowded waiting rooms, lack of privacy, the doctor’s assistants, anonymity and discrepancies in waiting time.

The condition of the waiting room: Cleanliness, lighting, ventilation, temperature, size of the room, furniture and interior design are issues that influenced participants’ judgments about the state of the waiting rooms. The following were mentioned as unsatisfactory:

- Dark room with poor lighting
- Dirty and neglected room
- Uncomfortable seats
- Cold and unfriendly colors and decoration
- Lack of fresh air
- Small room where patients have to sit close together

Crowded waiting rooms: A full waiting room is mentioned as being unpleasant from several viewpoints. The presence of many people in the room can cause an unpleasant room climate. On the other hand, there are individuals who don't like to be in crowded places. Some even feel scared among a lot of people in an enclosed place (A, office manager). From a different point of view, a crowded waiting room can be a sign of long waits, as a young female participant recounted:

“When you enter the waiting room and see a lot of people sitting there, you think that it is going to take much longer waiting to see the doctor than your actual appointment” (B12: 20).

Another problem of a crowded waiting room concerns patients' behavior and its influence on other people in the room in the sense that some patients can transmit tension and agitation and negatively impact other patients' experience of waiting. (B1: 10). An office manager described this situation as follows:

“There are people who cause no problems. They sit in the waiting room, read a magazine or talk to others. Then, someone becomes upset, and this influences the mood of other patients. As a result, general restlessness develops in the group and everyone start asking how long they still have to wait. It is important that people get back to their original state, so that they get ready for the medical examination.” (A, office manager: 4)

Lack of privacy: An issue that was mentioned in the interviews and also recognized in case observations concerns conversations which took place outside the waiting room. These are conversations involving people who call the office or talk to the doctor's assistants about their illness, problems and sufferings. A doctor's assistant explained the situation as follows:

“We are (at the reception desk) like a warm-up station. Many, especially elderly patients, would like to talk with us about their problems.” (B, office manager: 41)

The problem is that conversations at the reception desk of some doctor's offices can sometimes be heard clearly in the waiting area. This can, on the one hand, infringe the patient's privacy if everybody hears about his/her private problem (B6: 25). On the other hand, hearing about other people's sufferings can make patients nervous.

Discrepancies in waiting time: Some participants expressed their disapproval of long waiting times, especially if it was not clear how long it was going to take to see

the doctor. It was even more annoying if waiting time exceeded the expected length. (B6; A6; A9; B8)

Anonymity: Another issue that was mentioned as unpleasant in the interviews concerns the lack of a sense of familiarity and friendliness between patients and office personnel. A female participant complained about patients being treated as if they were only numbers, especially in larger offices (B11: 46). It was also recognized that although patients would like more familiarity at the doctor's office, at the same time a number of people want anonymity in the waiting room. People are more likely to create friendly relationships with the office staff, but when it comes to other patients they behave in a more reserved way (see also "Conversations in the waiting room" and "The atmosphere in the waiting room").

5.5.11 The ideal experience of visiting the doctor, from the patients' perspective

In order to get a better understating of patients' needs and to identify their wishes regarding the experience of waiting, they were asked to imagine the ideal experience of visiting the doctor. Participants were asked to describe how they would shape their own experience. According to key characteristics of the experiences they wished for, the four following categories were created:

No wait at all: Some participants expressed their ideal experience as one where they had no wait at all:

"Best of all would be for me to come and it would be my turn directly, rather than sitting there and waiting."(B8: 17)

Active engagement: One group of participants wanted a more active atmosphere in a livelier environment. These participants wanted to experience waiting time in a more active and interactive way such as by playing parlor games (A2: 30), having an opportunity to paint (B7: 19), having challenges for their hands and mind (B9: 11), or being able to make coffee or tea to fill the waiting time easier and also to facilitate making conversation with others. (B12)

Passive entertainment: Some participants wished to engage in rather passive activities during the waiting period. They wanted, for instance, to have a larger choice

of magazines or to have entertainment such as television or music in the background to reduce boredom:

“It is only important that there is someone talking in background that you can listen to.”
(B2: 19)

Other participants in this group wanted an atmosphere that could help them relax and wind down.

Different atmosphere: Some participants wished to spend waiting time in an atmosphere different from that of the medical office. Participants’ wishes varied from a more friendly waiting area away from the usual cold white rooms (A8: 21), to spending waiting time in an entirely different environment such as in the countryside (B3:17), at home, or in a garden to rest and recover (B6: 21).

5.5.12 The definition of waiting from the patient’s perspective

Participants explained how they personally understood the term wait by mentioning various factors that shaped their experience of waiting as well as by describing the opposite to the experience of waiting for them. The main factors they mentioned included waiting and being passive, waiting as a barrier to productivity, waiting and worry, waiting and expectations, and waiting as spending time in an unpleasant environment:

Waiting and being passive: According to case study findings, waiting is often associated with being passive and sitting still. Waiting is seen as having nothing to do or even feeling you are forced to do nothing. A male participant in his fifties expressed his understanding of waiting as:

“To wait means to be damned to do nothing until some kind of occurrence ends the wait.”
(B9: 19)

While waiting, people try to pass the time in some way, as another participant in his twenties stated:

“ You try to find some kind of activity to avoid wasting time.” (B7: 37)

Waiting as a barrier to productivity: Waiting time can be perceived as a barrier to other activities in the sense of preventing you from carrying out other plans. Although any activity could naturally do the same, a wait is particularly annoying perhaps

because it is wasted time. A young man described his experience of waiting as being not boring but at the same not pleasant either, because he needed the time to complete an important task. (B5)

Waiting and worry: Some participants associated waiting with a feeling of worry and unease. They saw the opposite as being able to calm down, to relax and to forget about everything that is happening around you. A male professional stated that for him having “Muße” could be the opposite feeling to waiting. “Muße” is a German word meaning something like the English “leisure”, i.e. time and peace of mind which allows you to engage in your own interests (Duden, Bedeutungswörterbuch, 1985). For this participant “Muße” was spending time doing activities that could help him recover and enrich his life, such as doing sport, talking to his wife, reading a book or being in the countryside. He stated that in contrast to the nervousness of sitting in a medical office waiting room, having “Muße” was beneficial for him physically. (B9)

Waiting and expectations: Individual conversations demonstrated that people’s perception of waiting also depends on their expectations about the duration of waiting time. One of the participants described this relationship by explaining that when he schedules an appointment, he does not expect a delay of more than 10-15 minutes. It would be a wait for him if it took longer and therefore did not correspond to his expectations. This would result in the feeling that his appointment had been ignored by the service provider. But if he didn’t arrange an appointment beforehand, he would not perceive this stay as waiting. Instead he would use the time to relax and would look forward to his turn (B6: 27).

Waiting and the environment: In other cases, the experience of waiting can be perceived more in connection with the environment than the time period. In this situation, spending time is itself not the main problem, and it is rather the upsetting environment of the wait that makes people want to get away from the place as soon as possible.

“Hospitals or doctors’ offices are not for me... All clinics have a strange (cold) atmosphere. I don’t want to have that around me” (B3: 26)

“I wait there for an hour and I know there is nothing to do, no entertainment only having to sit stolidly... No, it is really not for me!”(B2: 25)

5.5.13 The patients' experience of waiting and the role of the office staff

The office staff can influence the patients' experience of waiting. This impact can be a result of conscious or unconscious behavior by the medical office staff and can be positive or negative. Their role in transforming the usually depressing ambience of the waiting room was particularly noticeable in the case study. In two observation sessions, the office assistants' behavior resulted in replacing seriousness by a light and free atmosphere which led to positive and warm interactions among the patients. The following report from the observations is an example of such an impact:

People sit in the quiet waiting room. They look serious and everyone is occupied with himself/herself. After about 15 minutes of silence, one of the physician's assistants calls a patient for a blood sample and adds that when the patient returns, the next one can go to the laboratory. She goes without mentioning who the next one is. The patients in the waiting room look at each other a bit confused for a while, and then a woman asks: "whose turn is it?" An elderly man answers immediately and humorously: "definitely not me! I had a blood test recently and have already been punished for the bad results". He laughs, and this causes others to laugh as well. A cheerful conversation immediately begins in the group about similar experiences.

In this example, the assistant's behavior put patients in an unusual situation. A minor occurrence like this, although it may seem unimportant, can produce a marked change in the atmosphere in the waiting room. A similar event occurred in a different waiting room when the doctor's assistant came several times to call a patient who was obviously not there. As she left the waiting room, an elderly woman said mischievously: "Why doesn't someone wake us up?" She (the patient) may not be here, but we are here. They could call us instead". This also led to the development of friendly conversation. One of the participants mentioned the role of such occurrences in facilitating conversations between patients as follows:

"Maybe some people don't like to have a conversation with others, but sometimes a stupid accident or an irrelevant question results in communication between the people. I find it better than, for example, letting TV wash over you". (A7: 32)

The case study demonstrated that the behavior of the office staff can also cause or reinforce unpleasant situations in the waiting room. For example, if the doctor's

assistants do not appear in the waiting room for a long time, this can have negative consequences for the experience of waiting. Doctors' waiting areas are often isolated, closed rooms. The assistants come to the waiting room to call patients whose turn it is to see the doctor. If consultations take a long time, waiting periods increase as well. During this time, patients remain by themselves in a depressing and quiet atmosphere. After an hour of waiting, patients will perhaps feel they are alone on an island where no one cares about them. Interviews revealed similar perceptions among participants. A woman in her fifties stated, accordingly:

“Sometimes I have to go to the reception desk and say, look! Have you forgotten me?”
(A6: 24)

Participants' dissatisfaction is sometimes caused by the doctor's assistants bad mood and behavior in interactions with patients. One participant stated:

“In some offices the doctor's assistants are always under stress. They are irritated and complain all day long about something that happened at home. I think some problems don't belong in the office.” (B1: 41)

The other perspective concerns how doctors' assistants deal with arranging and managing appointments. Some patients think it is an essential competency of assistants to be able to estimate the length of consultation sessions and use their years of experience to arrange the appointments in such a way that people don't have to wait for hours (B6: 9-13). Office staff themselves perhaps don't perceive the passage of time the way patients do. They are busy doing their job. In a conversation, one assistant mentioned with regard to this issue that she had told all the patients when they came that they might have to wait a long time. Having made that clear, she saw no need to appear in the waiting room from time to time without any reason, as she said.

5.5.14 Other factors influencing the patients' opinion of waiting in the family physician's office

Trust and positive experience: The case study revealed a number of external factors that can also influence positively or negatively the way people experience their waits. Positive experience with the doctor and the office staff is an effective factor in shaping how patients deal with long waits. A friendly and caring office staff

and a kind proficient doctor give patients the feeling of being in good hands. In the course of time, similar experiences build trust among patients, the doctor and the office staff. As a result, patients can tolerate long waiting times easier, as they believe that if there were anything they could do to prevent a long wait, the office staff would have done it. (A4, A5, A11, B10)

Unpleasant memories, negative experiences: Waiting at doctors' offices can be particularly difficult where there are unpleasant personal memories of the issue of illness or previous negative experiences with medical centers.

"I really believe that hospitals and doctors' offices are not for me. In 2005 I was in hospital and had a bad experience. All clinics have such a strange atmosphere that I really don't want to have them around me" (B3: 24)

Some participants expressed their displeasure by mentioning the feeling that the office staff don't really care when patients have to wait for a long time. (see also "The patients' experience of waiting and the role of the office staff")

Waiting and the patients' life situation: During the interviews it became clear that the relationship between people's work and their life situation influences their approach to the issue of waiting. A female participant in her forties stated that since she has had a job that requires her to wait as part of her daily work, she has got used to being patient during long waits. She believed that with practice you can learn how to deal with waiting time and reduce its unpleasant aspects. According to this participant, a waiting period can be seen as a recovery phase in which you can unwind. She used meditation methods to fill waiting time (B2). In another case, an elderly participant said that his perception of waiting had changed since his retirement, mentioning that he could now wait longer and be more relaxed since he felt no job-related pressure (A11). Table (5-3) gives a summary of the case study findings regarding the participants' main statements about their experience of waiting at doctors' offices.

5.5.15 Types of individuals with reference to waiting time

So far the data collected in the case study has been analyzed based on the different relevant topics in the context. From another perspective, a review of the findings provides new categories to describe different types of individuals in their approach to waiting. The traditional experience of waiting is perhaps unpleasant for everyone. Research interviews showed that waiting time is considered positive only if it provides some leeway and late arrival does not mean missing the appointment. Nevertheless, people vary in their level of patience (or impatience) and their approach in dealing with waits. In the current research, people can be divided into three general groups – a group of people who cannot wait under any circumstances (the impatient group), a group of people who can accept a wait, to some extent, in certain circumstances (the busy group, the bored group, the sensitive group), and a third group of people who accept waiting as an inevitable reality that cannot be changed (the neutral group). A more detailed description of these groups is provided below:

First group: They cannot wait; the impatient group

The impatient group of people consists of those who are by nature impatient individuals. They have problems with any kind of wait, regardless of the place and the duration. As soon they perceive a situation as a waiting situation, they feel worried, annoyed and uncomfortable. As described in the case study, waiting, particularly waiting at a general physician's office, is inevitable and therefore a visit to the doctor without having to wait is very unlikely to happen.

Second group: They can wait in certain situations

- a. The busy group: People in this group prefer to deal with the waiting period independently. They spend their waiting time in different ways, including being productive and undertaking tasks, preparing mentally for the talk with the doctor or for some other tasks, or maybe just thinking and trying to relax.
- b. The bored group: People in this group find it unpleasant to sit still, be passive and do nothing. They are annoyed when nothing happens or there is no social interaction in the waiting room. Unlike the busy group, bored people do not

want to engage in their tasks in the doctor’s office, but they would be glad to have some physical or mental stimulation.

- c. The sensitive group: People in this group would like to distance themselves from anything related to medical issues, including the ambience, the appearance of the office, and conversations in any form. Being in a hospital-like environment and having to deal with topics concerning illness and pain make them feel worried and upset.

Third group: They just wait; the neutral group

The neutral group is the third group of people in a doctor’s waiting room. They fit neither the group of people who cannot wait at all nor the group that can imagine a better experience of waiting. I call this category the neutral group. People in this group find waiting in general annoying, but at the same time accept the situation the way it is and don’t complain. They believe that nothing about the current situation can be changed or they cannot imagine any alternative to the usual experience in this environment. Figure (5-4)

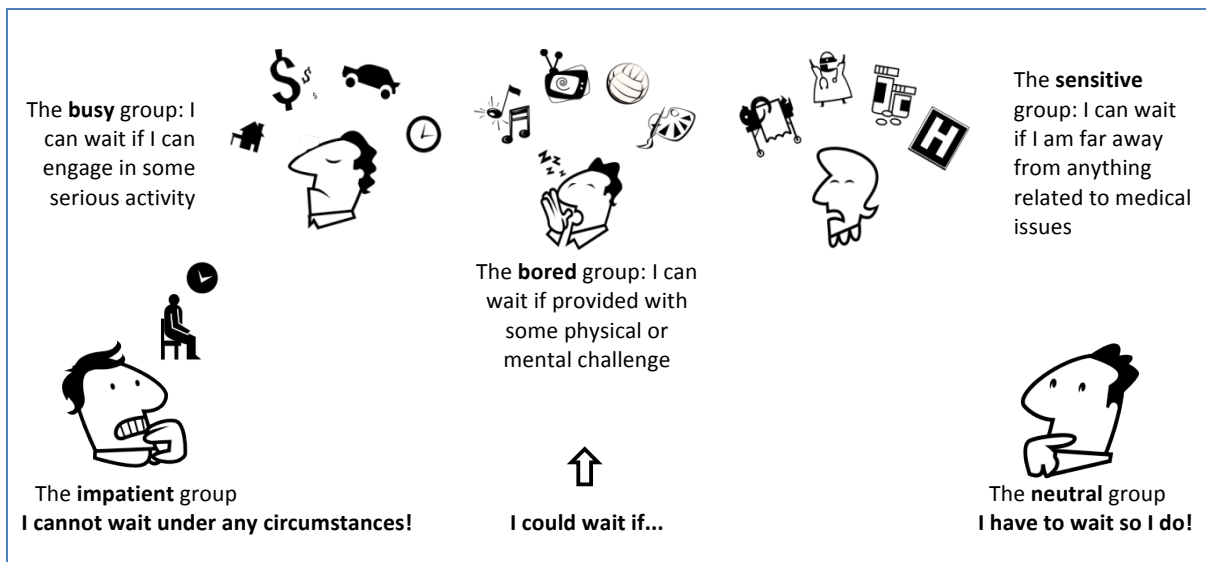


Figure 5-4 Types of individuals with reference to waiting time

5.6 Concluding Summary

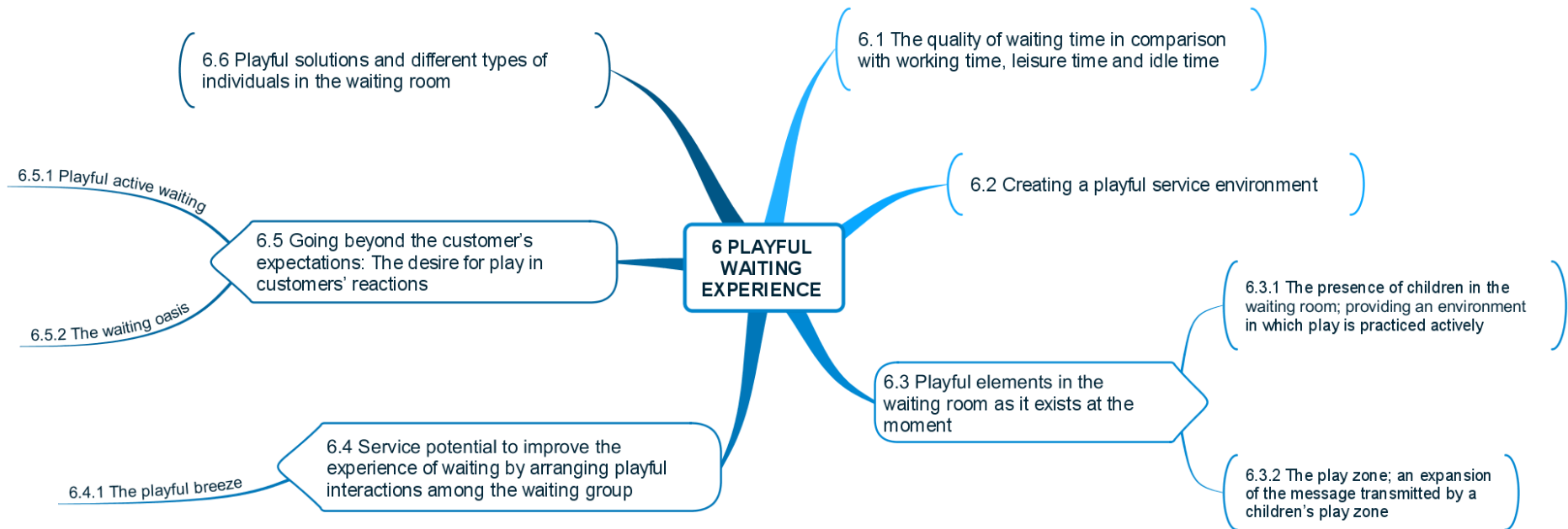
This chapter focused on the research question: “How do people perceive their experience when they are waiting at their family physician’s office?” Answering this question was approached by means of qualitative research in the form of a multiple

case study in family physicians' offices in Wuppertal. The case study used observations and interviews as the main methods for gathering the required data. Site observations and participant observations were carried out in six doctor's offices, and they studied the situation in the waiting areas and people's behavior while waiting. Observation data were recorded using photography and site notes. Following the observations, 25 interviews were conducted in two family physicians' offices, consisting of expert interviews with office managers and 23 with patients, in order to get a closer understanding of the patients' perception of the waiting experience and to provide the basis for the next phase of the study, namely the integration of playful aspects in order to improve the patients' experience of waiting. Interviews took place in separate rooms in the selected offices and were audio-recorded. Then the aggregate data were coded and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The case study revealed important insights into the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices, including interactions, activities and behaviors during the wait; feelings, opinions and desires regarding the quality and duration of the wait; the physical environment and the ambience of the waiting area; and also the office staff's view and their role regarding the patients' waiting experience. The findings in this chapter cover the following issues:

- The usual duration of a waiting period in family physicians' offices in comparison with the subjective duration of a wait from the participants' points of view.
- The physical environment of the waiting areas, participants' feelings and opinions about it, as well as their ideas for an ideal situation.
- People's behavior and activities during waiting time; similarities and differences between these activities and the participants' favorite activities as well as the way they imagine an ideal experience of waiting.
- What waiting in medical offices means for the participants.
- The ambience of the waiting areas and the quality of interactions between the people waiting; communication and factors influencing the desire to interact.
- The role that the office staff play in impacting the patients' experience of waiting.
- The participants' opinion of the entertainment facilities that are available.

- The impact of the presence of children in the waiting room on the adults' experience.
- Different types of individuals in waiting rooms according to their approach to dealing with waiting time.

Having provided the theoretical background and the required data from the empirical research, the next chapter will use the knowledge that has been gained in order to examine various aspects of integrating playful elements into the experience of waiting at physicians' offices with the aim of enhancing the overall experience.



Mind map 6 Playful waiting experience

6 PLAYFUL WAITING EXPERIENCE

Chapter 4 provided a general description of ways to strengthen the playful quality of non-playful activities and also explored how aspects of play could be used to enhance service interactions. Chapter 5 focused on a particular service experience and described a multiple-case study of how people perceive their experience of waiting in their family physician's office. Based on the findings of theoretical and empirical studies presented in these chapters, the present chapter will concentrate on examining various aspects of integrating playful elements into the experience of waiting, and in particular the experience of waiting in family physicians' offices. Before beginning the process of analysis, predefined key questions were drawn up, the data were reviewed and the findings compared several times in order to extract more information. These key questions supported the analysis and covered, among others, the following topics:

- Does the existing service environment/interaction include playful elements? How do people perceive them and react to them?
- Do people's natural behavior and activities while waiting include levels of playfulness? How does their playful behavior impact other people? How can playful behavior be developed to improve the experience?
- To what extent do people's behavior and reactions signal a desire for playful interactions?
- To what extent does the service environment and interaction offer the potential for integrating forms of playful experience?
- How can various playful aspects be integrated to enhance service interactions? (e.g. play and time, play and motivation, play and perception, play and facilitation, play and fun)
- How can different forms of playful activities be integrated into the service experience? (e.g. playful movement, playful discovery, playful attitude, childhood memories, playful fantasy and playful rediscovery)

6.1 The quality of waiting time in comparison with working time, leisure time and idle time

In previous chapters, issues relating to the psychology of waiting such as the perceived duration of waiting time and general factors that influence people's perception of waiting time were reviewed with reference to the existing literature. In addition to these issues, this study regards a comparison between the quality of waiting time and how time is experienced during other activities helpful to gain a better understanding of the experience of waiting in physicians' offices. The quality of time can be considered under three headings, namely working time, leisure time, and idle time. Working time refers to the purpose-oriented, functional and active time which is dedicated to productive activities in order to bring about all material benefits. Leisure time, in contrast, refers to free time when the individual does not have to work. It is time that everyone has for himself/herself to engage in his/her favorite activities – including play activities. Leisure time is associated with no material purpose, and the enjoyment of leisure activities lies in the activity itself. There is a third type of time that can be called idle time. Idle time refers to time in which an individual neither works, nor engages in a favorite activity. In the business world, idle time is associated with having to stop working as the result of factors beyond the individual's control, for instance because a machine has broken down or because he/she has to wait for a process to complete (see: dictionary.cambridge.org). Thus, because it involves neither productive nor enjoyable outcomes, idle time can be seen as undesired, dead or wasted time. Considering the above mentioned three types of time, waiting time can be similar to leisure time in that both of them are breaks from productive working time. However, they are different in a key aspect, namely in that in leisure time we have time and ease of mind to enjoy a favorite activity, whereas while waiting in a physician's office we have time but usually no ease of mind. Waiting time at physicians' offices matches closer the characteristics of idle time, as it also arises beyond the patient's control, and during waiting time people are often passive and have to concentrate on the passage of time patiently (see chapter 5, "The definition of waiting from the patient's perspective"). Psychological and physical barriers can prevent ease of mind and make playful interaction impossible. Patients referred to these barriers when they mentioned inner stress, lack of concentration,

unfamiliar surroundings, lack of courage, and being restricted by familiar routines (see chapter 5 e.g. “Leisure activities vs. waiting activities”). This last point refers to a widespread problem of similar serious everyday services in which engaging in playful activities or enjoying a hobby is always considered unusual. However, it seems that there is a need to distinguish between what is unusual and what is inappropriate or wrong behavior. Ignoring for a moment the positive impacts, if unusual behavior, including playful behavior, doesn’t cause any annoyance or disturbance during the service interaction, it shouldn’t be considered inappropriate or wrong behavior in that service interaction.

6.2 Creating a playful service environment

Following what has been said so far in this chapter, the first step towards creating a service environment in which the integration of playful interactions can be practiced is to minimize barriers to playfulness and to strive to achieve a playful level, both for the service and the customer. Creating a playful service experience involves welcoming enjoyable activities often only pursued in leisure time, and enabling people to feel free to engage in them during serious (non-playful) time when they are busy with everyday activities. The potential for this and ways to approach this goal in family physicians’ offices will be examined in more detail in this chapter. However, this will not be sufficient to achieve success. Before taking any step in this direction, special attention must be paid above all to the efficient delivery of the service itself and the preparation of the service for the change. The general requirements for introducing playful customer experience involve:

- Putting great emphasis on the efficient delivery of the service itself as the prerequisite for achieving a playful level.
- Communicating the interest in a playful attitude and providing the basis for playful experience.
- Providing rich facilities for playful interaction.
- Offering an environment in which customers can feel free to demonstrate their interest in play and act accordingly.

Having stated the general requirements for introducing a playful level into the service, the following section will now concentrate on aspects of the meaningful integration of playfulness into the experience of waiting in physicians' offices.

6.3 Playful elements in the waiting room as it exists at the moment; their effects on customer experience; considerations for increasing the positive impact

6.3.1 The presence of children in the waiting room; providing an environment in which play is practiced actively

In the case study it was noted that the presence of children in the waiting room produced a friendlier atmosphere and influenced the behavior of adults (see chapter 5, "Children in the waiting room"). This suggests that playful opportunities will improve the waiting experience. In childhood we enjoy play, and if the opportunity arises, no matter whether at home, in the playground or in a physician's waiting room, a child will typically find no reason for not following the inner desire to play. An invitation to play is welcomed much easier and more quickly by children than by adults. The findings of the present research demonstrate that if the waiting room provides good opportunities for children to play while they are there, it will probably impact not only the experience of those playing but also the experience of the non-playing individuals (the play audience). Watching children enjoy playing can recall pleasurable emotions and encourage adults to become involved. Being in a lively atmosphere in which play is practiced actively can remind adults of the joys of childhood playfulness and at the same time loosen the tension of the situation and encourage them to become playful. In the best case, this will make them think about engaging in play themselves. It has been suggested that thinking about play and exploring the memories of play in one's own experiences can help adults to relive the associated feelings, understand them and learn how to recreate the pleasant experiences of childlike play in their present life (e.g. Fritz, 1991, pp.185-189; Brown, 2009, pp.206-210). In addition, participant observations showed that people are more likely to take part in conversations with children than with other adults due to fewer interaction barriers (see chapter 5, "Conversations in the waiting room"). This indicates that it is more likely that adults will be prepared to take part in play

activities together with children. In general, the atmosphere in waiting rooms with only adults present is dominated by an unwritten law that makes you feel unwilling to disturb the silent environment. The presence of children provides a convenient excuse for adults to behave *unusually* and serves as a catalyst for achieving an atmosphere in which play is allowed. It can awaken a childlike desire to play and allow a playful atmosphere to develop and thus facilitate playful interaction in general. The preceding paragraphs suggest that providing people with a waiting area in which play is practiced actively and where the enjoyment of play can be felt directly helps to improve the experience of waiting as well as to increase the playful level of the service experience. This leads to one characteristic of playful experience design, namely an approach that facilitates playful service interaction by providing interesting service environments to be used by children and adults together. Table (6-1)

Experience component	The presence of children
Origin	Increasing the positive impact of existing playful elements in the waiting room
Essence	Putting people in an environment in which play is practiced actively
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Providing a convenient excuse for adults to behave unusually → Providing a catalyst to achieve an atmosphere where play is allowed → Making adults think about playful activities
Design challenge	Creating interesting waiting areas where children can play
Playful design approach	Facilitating playful service interaction by providing interesting service environments to be used by children and adults together

Table 6-1 The presence of children

6.3.2 The play zone; an expansion of the message transmitted by a children’s play zone

A children’s play zone (German: “Spielecke”) is part of the waiting area provided for young visitors in order to ensure that they and their parents (or those accompanying children) feel comfortable during their stay. Children’s play zones contain small furniture and toys, and have pictures suitable for children on the wall. A carefully arranged play zone communicates to children a message of welcome to the physician’s office. It is an invitation to play because it signals that playing in the service environment is accepted and encouraged. The fact that there is a play zone in most waiting rooms demonstrates that playing, although perhaps in a corner and only

for a small group of customers, is not completely forbidden. From the playful experience design view, the concept of a play zone in a waiting area can be used as an opportunity to respect and encourage playfulness among the whole group, including the adults, and above all to demonstrate that playfulness in general is accepted. This can be approached by expanding the message communicated by the play zone in two ways:

- One aspect is to extend the age range of the target group in the play zone from being limited to young visitors to being available to everyone present in the waiting room, both children and adults. This approach puts the emphasis on sending appropriate signals to a wider age group in terms of providing furniture, decorations and playful opportunities that adults would not be embarrassed to use, and at the same time sends signals that “invite a safe emotional connection” that welcomes play (Brown, 2009, p. 161). Here, the core idea behind appropriate playful signals is playing down what is perceived in everyday life as childish and unsuitable for adults and emphasizing instead the childlike and adult-friendly alternatives.
- The other aspect of expanding the playful message is to increase the actual size of the play zone from being restricted to a corner of the waiting area to being integrated into the whole waiting area. Since the waiting area of physicians’ offices is usually a separate room, it is not difficult to create one play-friendly waiting zone, and this would encourage the spirit of playfulness on a large scale and offer a framework for innovative waiting experiences.

The essence of expanding the message of the waiting room play zone is to awaken the inner human desire to play by means of an indirect and new message communicated by the familiar play zone. Ideally, this will create opportunities for playful interaction discovered by customers themselves, who will be encouraged to decide to play without being compelled to do so. This represents another important characteristic of playful customer experience design, namely an approach that provides an environment in which unusual interpretations of usual situations can occur. Table (6-2)

Experience component	The play zone
Origin	Increasing the positive impact of the existing playful elements in the waiting room
Essence	Expansion of the message transmitted by the children's play zone
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Creating an atmosphere to respect and encourage playfulness among the whole group, both children and adults → Demonstrating general acceptance of playfulness
Design challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the age range of the target group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Sending appropriate signals to a wider age group → Inviting a safe emotional connection by means of the service design → Playing down what is perceived in everyday life as childish and unsuitable for adults and emphasizing instead childlike and adult-friendly alternatives • Increasing the actual size of the play zone; making the whole waiting zone play-friendly
Playful design approach	Providing an environment in which unusual interpretations of usual situations can occur

Table 6-2 The play zone

6.4 Service potential to improve the experience of waiting by arranging playful interactions among the waiting group

6.4.1 The playful breeze; a playful moment in a usually non-playful experience

In the usual experience of waiting, people behave as expected in a medical office waiting room, namely they sit in silence, reading a magazine or looking around and doing nothing, until their name is called and they can go to the examination room. It is also rather unlikely that they will talk to the other patients as they do not want to bother them (see chapter 5, "Conversations in the waiting room"). However, the traditional experience can be interrupted as a result of unexpected events, as in the following scene from the case study observations:

Patients sit in the waiting room and everyone is occupied with himself/herself. Then the physician's assistant comes and calls a patient to take a blood sample. She adds that when the patient returns, the next one should go to the laboratory. She leaves without mentioning whose turn it will be. This unusual request is followed by humorous reactions

and a cheerful conversation (see Chapter 5: The patients' experience of waiting and the role of the office staff).

In the above story, the doctor's assistant leaves it up to the patients to determine whose turn it is next for a blood test. This request is different than the familiar routine, in which patients just wait to be called. This unusual – and at first glance apparently unimportant – event provided an opportunity in the eyes of playful individuals to try to use the situation for the purpose of play. In this example, an elderly man approached the problem with a sense of humor. He made other patients laugh and broke the serious atmosphere. As a result, other people who were waiting expressed their interest in playful interaction by contributing to a humorous conversation. I call this event the playful breeze; a playful moment during a usually non-playful experience. The playful breeze may only last for a short while, but the point is that its impact on the ambience is long-lasting. The playful breeze creates a surge of good mood in the group and reduces the tension of the atmosphere, causing people to feel no longer like a group of strangers but freer and less restricted in dealing with the experience of waiting. Returning briefly to the story mentioned above, a non-playful approach to service design might argue that a more pleasant customer experience could be achieved in this situation if the doctor's assistant called patients personally for a blood test while patients were waiting and relaxed and did not have to solve the puzzle of finding out who is next. However, the actual situation shows how the playful factor had a meaningful positive impact on the patients' experience of waiting. Thus, experience design can take advantage of the playful breeze to improve customer experiences by integrating effective stimuli into the particular service situation in a conscious and meaningful way. In practice, the playful breeze is brought about by means of some potentially playful stimulus and the presence of highly playful individuals. It was mentioned earlier that playfulness as a personality trait refers to the ability of highly playful people to bring more to the events than others based on their particular way of looking at the world (see chapter 1 "Playful behavior"). The stimulus for triggering such events can be given by the office staff's behavior or by any occurrence or object in the waiting area that allows an unusual humorous interpretation of the situation.

The effectiveness of the stimulus for the playful breeze can be increased if it has the following characteristics:

- The stimulus is more effective if it relates to a topic of common interest among the whole group of people sitting in the waiting room.
- An effective stimulus does not involve individual customers as the target of humor, as this can cause annoyance. (Examples of this are familiar from television shows with a hidden camera).
- An effective stimulus to play is an inviting call to become playful rather than a direct request.
- An effective stimulus is communicated in an honest and natural manner.
- An effective stimulus suggests suitable topics for interaction and lightens the atmosphere when play is staged by/ and among the customers.

A playful stimulus can be the result of irrelevant associations, unexpected situations, exaggerated behavior or mysterious communications. Service staff with playful characteristics can play an effective role in creating the meaningful playful breeze by seizing the opportunity and creating the appropriate situation for playful interpretations. Playful service individuals recognize or create topics for playful behavior spontaneously out of the particular situation during routine service interactions. The playful breeze is another characteristic of playful customer experience design that emphasizes a lively and creative service atmosphere that can take advantage of any appropriate situation through meaningful use of playful stimuli and people’s natural playfulness. Table (6-3)

Experience component	The playful breeze
Origin	Using service potential to improve the experience of waiting by arranging playful interactions among patients
Essence	A playful moment in a usually non-playful experience
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Creating a surge of good mood → Reducing the tension of the atmosphere → Causing people to feel no longer like a group of strangers but freer and less restricted
Design challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating potentially playful stimuli → Irrelevant associations → Unexpected situations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Exaggerated behavior → Mysterious communications → Playful service staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving highly playful individuals
Playful design approach	Putting emphasis on a lively and creative service atmosphere that can take advantage of any appropriate situation through meaningful use of playful stimuli and people's natural playfulness.

Table 6-3 The playful breeze

6.5 Going beyond the customer's expectations: The desire for play in customers' reactions; investigating the signals, creating and adapting appropriate opportunities

The interviews revealed that sometimes people don't know what to expect or do not express their expectations regarding a different, more pleasant customer experience. This can occur because they create for themselves an image of an acceptable waiting experience based on their previous interactions with a certain type of service. As a result, they can hardly imagine an experience different than the familiar one. In the case of a medical office waiting area, an acceptable 'normal' experience of waiting is provided by basic and familiar requirements such as comfortable seats, a clean room, drinking water, some magazines to read and a predictable waiting period (see, e.g. A2:30, A5:25, B535, B7:15-17). As a result, no matter whether or not patients perceive their experience of waiting as unpleasant, if they are provided with these normal facilities, they find no reason to complain about the service. During the individual interviews with patients, some factors emerged which restricted the patients' expectations of the service and their imagination of other ways of interacting with the waiting situation. These are summarized below:

- The customer didn't believe that the current situation in a waiting experience could be improved in any way.
- The customer had experienced the same situation very frequently over a long period of time and therefore could not imagine any alternative.
- The customer was satisfied with the overall medical service and therefore ignored other unsatisfactory aspects.

- The customer trusted the service provider and therefore assumed that if anything could be done to improve the situation, the service provider would have considered it.

If customers are unable for any reason to imagine what an alternative to the familiar interaction could be and how they would feel about it, determining their opinion and feelings regarding interaction alternatives is accordingly difficult to achieve by asking direct questions. Therefore, the use of alternative experiences – here the integration of playful aspects – must be examined by considering a variety of aspects, which the current research identified as:

- Studying the general importance and the role that engaging in play can have in people's lives.
- Observing carefully customers' natural behavior in the particular service situation to find possible connections with the idea of playful waiting experience.
- Examining people's perception of the traditional experience and looking for signals that support a playful alternative experience.
- Studying the impacts and outcomes of the presence of similar playful experiences in other contexts.
- Examining the general appropriateness of the service for integrating the alternative experience.
- Examining customers' feelings and opinions about the issue in indirect conversations.
- Doing experiments.

How meaningful playful elements should be integrated into different phases of customer experience and what the ultimate experience should look like can vary according to the customers and the actual situation. Ultimately, a variety of possibilities should be offered to improve different parts of the experience. The above sections describe an aspect of the process of playful customer experience design that involves helping customers to shape their desires beyond their traditional

expectations of the service, and attempting to find out about a customer's desire for playful experience through creative research methods.

In this research, direct observations and individual interviews identified signals that demonstrated the patients' desire for certain forms of play, as described in following sections.

6.5.1 More engaging pastimes; playful active waiting

During the case study it was observed that people's activities often communicated signals of feeling uncomfortable during their stay in the waiting room. Activities such as tapping the foot, drumming the fingers and playing with the fingers or with clothing demonstrated among other things unrest and the need for more engaging pastimes and ways to help reduce concentration on the passage of time and the negative feelings of sitting still and having nothing to do. Yet, the entertainment options in physicians' waiting rooms are mostly restricted to magazines. While reading or skimming magazines, the eyes are involved to some extent, the mind usually to lesser extent and physical movement is completely absent. A comparison between what is offered as entertainment for adults while they are waiting and for younger patients provides useful examples of more comprehensive ways of spending the time. Children are provided with illustrated storybooks, building blocks, coloring books and toy cars and dolls. This combination offers opportunities to involve the eyes, hands and the mind and facilitates free play activities. The study of adult patients' waiting experiences suggests that similar attention to comprehensive playful activities could be the right approach in order to eliminate the emptiness, fulfill the need for an engaging pastime and enrich the waiting experience in a different way by transforming idle waiting time into pleasant leisure time. From the play study perspective, engaging in physical object play is considered to have positive outcomes in general. As Brown (2009) mentions, "we find pleasure in the physical part of object play, in putting together a puzzle, kicking a ball through a goal, or simply tossing a paper wad in the wastebasket" (p. 86). The same author mentions the positive impacts of object play with the hands on the brain and on understanding and solving problems (Brown, 2009). Play objects in the waiting room would encourage physical movement and more active pastimes. In addition, they would

serve to attract people's concentration in the course of play and divert their concentration away from both the depressing ambience and the passage of time. Following Csikszentmihalyi's "Flow theory", deep engagement in minor challenges creates moments to unwind and to detach oneself from the surroundings and accelerates the perceived passage of time (see also Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). In practice, this can be done in the waiting room by:

- Providing a collection of familiar and common play objects from the existing range of hand-held toys, to board games for groups of people. The presence of common play objects in waiting rooms can also provide topics for conversation and can facilitate interaction among patients.
- Creating meaningful play challenges and rules for playful movement in the particular waiting environment.
- Providing a more co-creative playful experience in which patients and the physician's office staff discuss and decide on play activities to enrich the waiting time.
- A more flexible approach would be to shape the playful waiting experience around personal preferences by inviting individuals to bring their favorite hobby items with them to the waiting room.

As well as supporting the general aim to improve the experience of waiting, the last item in the list given above is intended to create an atmosphere in which people discuss their favorite activities, and to provide the opportunity to see hidden leisure time in what is typically perceived as a serious activity. The above sections reveal two characteristics of playful experience. First, an approach that integrates more comprehensive and movement-oriented playfulness into customer experience, and second, in a further step, an approach that directs people's attention toward hidden leisure time in serious daily life and encourages them to improve their waiting experiences by making use of the opportunity to consciously enjoy a break. Table (6-4)

Experience component	Playful active waiting
Origin	Going beyond the customers' expectations: The desire for play in customers' reactions
Essence	Integrating more engaging pastimes
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Allowing for physical movement and more active engagement → Attracting people's concentration in the course of play to divert their concentration away from the depressing ambience → Transforming idle waiting time into pleasant leisure time
Design challenge	<p>Creating engaging activities for the eyes, the hands and the mind, and facilitating free-play activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → A collection of familiar and common play objects. They provide topics for conversation and facilitate interaction among patients. → Meaningful play challenges and rules for playful movement in the particular waiting environment. → A co-creative playful experience for patients and the service staff to discuss and decide on play activities to enrich the waiting time. → A flexible approach allowing for personal preferences. Inviting individuals to bring their favorite hobby items with them to the waiting room.
Playful design approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Integrating more comprehensive movement playfulness into the customer experience → Directing people's attention toward hidden leisure time in serious activities and encouraging them to improve their experience by making use of the opportunity to consciously enjoy a break.

Table 6-4 Playful active waiting

6.5.2 Distancing from unpleasant topics; the waiting oasis

Waiting in a physician's office is a phase before getting to see the doctor, when the actual service occurs. However, the time a patient spends in this pre-station can, in comparison, take considerably longer than the consultation in the examination room, which means that a patient's overall perception of the service experience can be influenced to a large degree during the waiting period. Individual conversations with patients indicated that the experience of waiting can be more annoying when people have to spend time in an environment which is connected with depressing topics such as illness, pain and worry. This was also the reason why some preferred not to become involved in a conversation with fellow patients, namely to avoid experiencing more upsetting feelings by hearing about the problems and sufferings of the other patients. These people wished they could spend the waiting period away from the

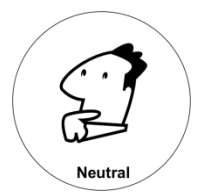
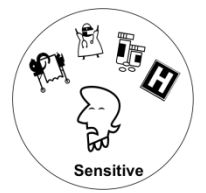
unpleasant atmosphere of the medical office. This unpleasant atmosphere is perceived more intensely because of the overall appearance of the doctor's office – medical information on the wall and flyers on display in the waiting room – or because of an individual's previous negative experiences. However it is, in fact, of great importance that patients be in a stress-free state when they see the doctor as this increases the quality of the consultation. The above points obviously strengthen the need for the playful approach in order to solve this problem. Here, the emphasis should be on the ability of play to transform perception. In the framework of play, as an inter-area between reality and possibility (see Fritz, 1991), we can decide to perceive or interpret things in other ways than we usually do. This aspect means that the playful experience of waiting in doctors' offices should make alternative interpretations of the service environment possible. The consequence of the above points is that the pre-service waiting period doesn't need to be related to medical topics. From the customer experience design view, this means improving the waiting situation by communicating an oasis beyond the traditional medical office to encourage this different perception. The waiting room in a high-contact doctor's office provides a particularly suitable area for the creation of a tangibly different atmosphere in order to recall appropriate emotions and accordingly to produce a new experience of the service interaction. Applying a multi-sense design approach in addition to the physical separation of the waiting room from the other areas of the medical office offers an appropriate way to facilitate distancing from the traditional experience and the feelings it evokes. Creative conversations with customers will serve to reveal people's feelings, tendencies and desires that can help the design to create meaningful alternative ambiences and service environments that are more in harmony with customers' ideals and well-being. This demonstrates a further characteristic of playful customer experience, namely putting emphasis on achieving desirable distancing by means of creative experience oases within the particular service experience. Table (6-5)

Experience component	The waiting oasis
Origin	Going beyond the customer's expectations: The desire for play in customers' reactions
Essence	Distancing from unpleasant topics
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Distancing from the traditional experience and the unpleasant feelings it evokes → Facilitating stress-free waiting
Design challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicating a different oasis beyond the traditional medical office → Taking advantage of the physical separation of the waiting room from other areas of the medical office 2. Creating a tangibly different atmosphere and recalling appropriate emotions → Applying multi-sense design → Conducting interviews to shape the design in harmony with the customer's well-being
Playful design approach	Creating desirable distancing by means of creative experience oases within the particular service experience

Table 6-5 The waiting oasis

6.6 Playful solutions and different types of individuals in the waiting room

The integration of playful aspects into the experience of waiting has been analyzed in this chapter by focusing so far on how playful alternatives can be employed to improve various aspects of the experience of waiting in physicians' offices. The influence of these playful solutions on the individual customer can be explained by comparing the outcome of the specific playful activity and the individual's needs. All types of playful activities have one outcome in common, which is the fun or the immediate pleasure of the activity itself. In this sense, playful experience seems to have an overall positive impact on people across all types of individuals. The other general effect of the experience is that it diverts the player's attention from concentrating on the passage of time. In addition, the creation of a waiting environment that supports, encourages and inspires playful behavior and allows everyone to feel free to express his/her desire for play will also have a general influence on the whole group. In addition, the playful experiences discussed in this chapter to a certain extent highlight some characteristics of play more than others in order to accordingly cover certain types of demand. With respect to the variety of individuals in the medical waiting room (see chapter 5 "Types of individuals with reference to waiting time"), the use of play in the sense of creating a different waiting oasis aims in particular at transforming the traditional perception of waiting to improve the experience of "the sensitive group" and the "impatient group". This should result in preparing the way to remove the annoyance element from the traditional image of spending time at medical offices. The integration of engaging playful pastimes and the opportunities for active play will enable "the bored group" to fulfill their need for movement and the desire for some physical and mental stimulation. Mental stimulation should also help "the sensitive group" and divert their attention away from concentrating on the depressing atmosphere. Finally, a playful breeze attaches great importance to the ability of individuals and the co-creative role of patients and the office staff in shaping and improving the patients' experience of waiting. The impact of



playful aspects on the waiting experience of the more introverted or less communicative “neutral group” can be determined by staging real experiments.

6.7 Concluding summary

This chapter was concerned with the research question: How can waiting experience be improved by integrating playful aspects? Answering this question was approached by comparing the findings of the case study with the knowledge obtained from the literature review. To begin with, waiting time was described in comparison with the quality of time experienced during work, leisure and idle time. Then, a series of key questions were defined and prerequisites for applying a playful level in services were determined, which facilitated the subsequent analysis. This led ultimately to the following results:

With regard to the presence of both children and adults in a family physician’s waiting room and its influence on the experience of those waiting, this research finds that providing a pleasant environment for children to play and stay in represents a positive approach to improving the patients’ experience of waiting. The research argues that being in an environment in which play is practiced actively will loosen the tension of the atmosphere, can give adults access to play and related feelings, and will also allow individuals to express their playful behavior.

With regard to the presence of a play zone in doctor’s waiting rooms, the research suggests that the message transmitted by the play zone should be expanded, thus providing an additional factor to encourage a playful attitude. This expansion, in the sense of broadening the signals and physical dimensions of the play zone, should provide an environment in which unusual interpretations of the usual situation can occur. The new message of the familiar play zone will send signals to play down the perception of items from everyday life as childish and unsuitable for adults and to strengthen the childlike and adult-friendly alternatives.

With regard to the service potential of improving the experience of waiting by making playful interactions among patients possible, the research suggests staging the playful breeze. A playful breeze is an event that is based on potentially playful stimuli and the presence of playful individuals in the waiting room. The stimulus for creating such events is produced by the office staff’s behavior or by an occurrence or object in the

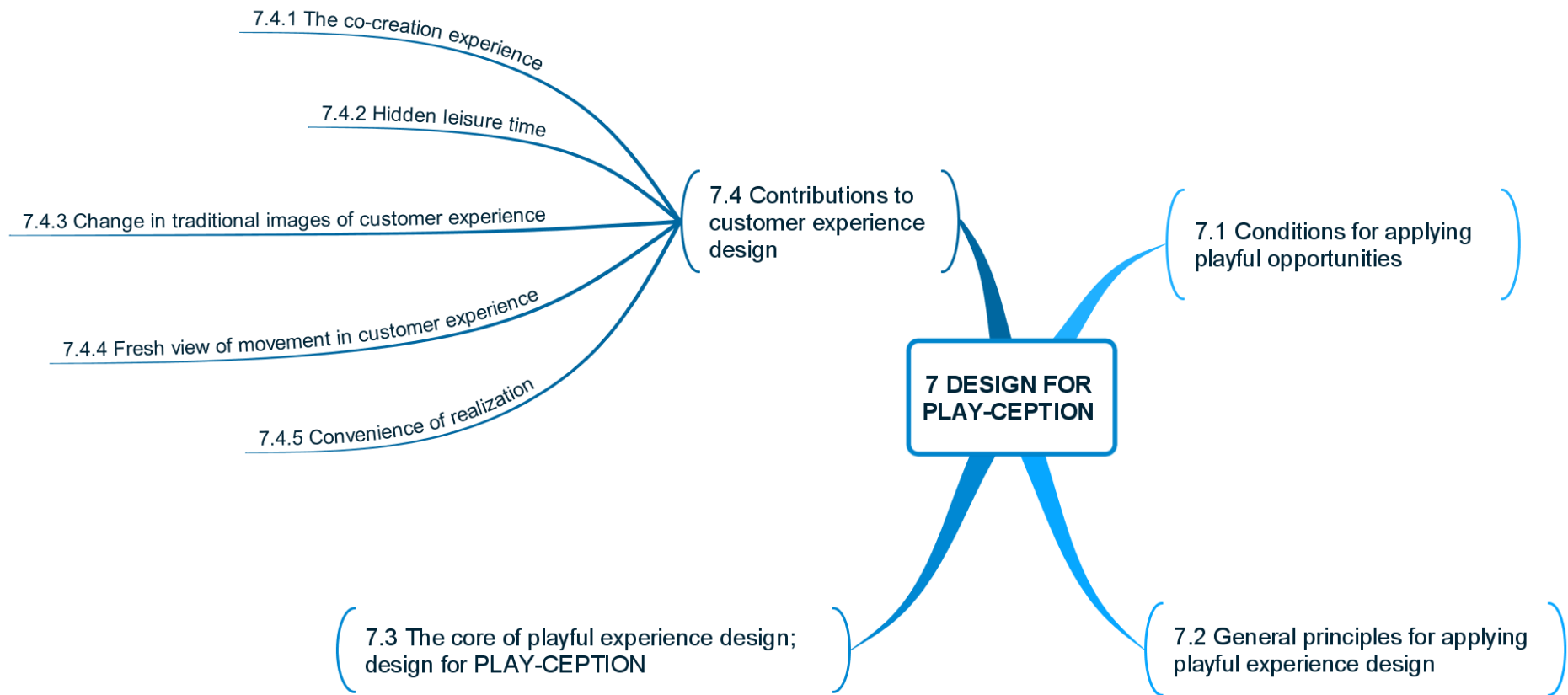
waiting area that supports an unusual humorous interpretation of the situation. Playful individuals who try to use their surrounding environment for the purpose of play will react to the stimulus and inspire the group to playful interaction about the event or object. Here, the service staff can play an important role in creating effective stimuli in the particular situation. The playful breeze reduces the tension of the atmosphere, causing people to feel no longer like a group of strangers but freer and less restricted in dealing with the experience of waiting.

It is difficult to find out people's opinions about the integration of playful interactions into the experience of waiting by asking direct questions. Thus, the research suggests examining a series of aspects to reveal the need for play, including studying patients' behavior and reactions. This analysis found that an integration of more engaging pastimes into the waiting room entertainment facilities such as the manipulation of play objects that involves more physical and active movements would impact positively the experience of waiting. This can fulfill the need for physical movement, but also can divert people's attention from concentrating on the passage of time and on the depressing ambience.

The study found that people's behavior and experience during a waiting period is strongly influenced by the environment where the wait takes place. Following the patients' wish to keep away from depressing subjects connected with medical offices such as illness, pain and worry, the research found that taking advantage of the ability to play in order to transform the perception is an effective approach to improving the waiting situation. This suggests that the design should communicate a special oasis beyond the traditional medical office to encourage a different perception of the situation. The waiting area of a doctor's office is usually a separate room and offers appropriate potential for the creation of a tangibly different atmosphere that allows other interpretations than the traditional one. This aspect of playful customer experience puts emphasis on achieving positive experience oases within everyday serious interactions.

The playful alternatives discussed in this chapter impact people's experiences of waiting in two respects. First, all playful activities seem to have an overall positive influence on the group of people in the waiting room. These impacts include

providing immediate pleasure, loosening the atmosphere and diverting attention from the passage of time and the depressing atmosphere. Second, each playful solution focuses on some characteristics of play more than others and accordingly covers certain aspects of the patients' demands. These aspects serve above all the needs of "the sensitive group", "the bored group" and "the impatient" group of individuals.



Mind map 7 Discussion and conclusion

7 DESIGN FOR PLAY-CEPTION

This research examined different aspects of the playful approach to designing customer experiences. It analyzed ways to improve customer experiences through applying playful qualities. At the same time it studied the integration of aspects of play into other, non-playful, interactions in order to expand positive impacts of play in people's experiences beyond the direct customer experience. The empirical part of the research concentrated particularly on integrating playful characteristics into the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices in a meaningful way, considering the potential of the service, the customers' needs and desires, and the effectiveness of playful solutions. This study shows positive impacts of the playful approach on a variety of issues related to loosening the waiting room atmosphere, enriching waiting time activities, facilitating interactions among patients, and improving the perception of the waiting environment. Playful experience improves customers' experiences of the service process by offering alternative ways of interpreting and dealing with service situations, putting emphasis on the quality of interaction moments, relieving unnecessary seriousness during service interactions, and finally making people aware of hidden leisure time in their non-playful activities as customers. It tries to reveal ways to employ a playful attitude to enhance the overall experience of everyday life and ultimately to draw more attention to the issue of play among adults. The following pages discuss the conditions for introducing playful opportunities as well as general principles for playful experience design. The chapter continues by providing a description of design for play-ception as the core idea of playful experience design and outlines the contributions of the playful approach to the practice of customer experience design.

7.1 Conditions for applying playful opportunities

The effectiveness of playful customer experience depends on the aim and the way it is used in the service company as well as on how it is delivered to the customer. It is important to offer playful interaction as a free choice, as a plus and not a replacement for traditional service activities, as an alternative suggestion and not as a requirement. Here, flexibility and variety are important, not only because of the free

nature of play but also because of the diversity of individual preferences, desires and moods in a particular service situation. Furthermore, playful experience cannot be a cure for all service problems. It should be noted that in any service there are aspects that should not be treated playfully. In other words, there are some basic and key elements in each service that should be provided properly, and playful elements should not be used as a way to direct the customer's attention away from deficiencies in key aspects of the service. For instance, some aspects like correct behavior of the service staff or the customers' physical comfort cannot be replaced by playful interactions. In a physician's waiting room, cleanliness and good ventilation are features that cannot be masked by other pleasant experiences. In a full waiting room the problems of poor ventilation should not be dealt with playfully; however, a meaningful integration of playful qualities can loosen the atmosphere and make people feel more comfortable in a crowded room. The main point here is that playful customer experience should not be used as a way to make up for poor service quality. This must be dealt with in other ways. Service providers should consider whether unpleasant service interactions are the result of failure in service performance and poor management or whether the problem is an inevitable aspect. Waiting at a doctor's office is an example of an experience in which delays in service are often unavoidable. Despite being unpleasant, it is hardly possible, especially in family physicians' offices, to exclude waiting or even to estimate exactly how long patients will have to wait to see the doctor. Once this is accepted, if the service provides proper opportunities for the integration of playful aspects, playful customer experience can be introduced as a rich human-centered approach to effective experience design.

7.2 General principles for applying playful experience design

In accordance with the issues covered in this research, the effective integration of playful aspects into customer experience needs to be approached with sufficient knowledge about the service as it is currently offered, and careful consideration of the process of experience creation and delivery. The service organization should pay special attention to the principles discussed below in order to be able to achieve effective playful customer experience. The service company should:

- stay committed to the service's main promise, provide basic needs and physical comfort.
- communicate playfulness by demonstrating interest, providing support, and participating in playful activities
- facilitate playfulness, provide the basis and the atmosphere for the customer to become involved.
- take the initiative and take the first step toward play.
- suggest meaningful playful interactions and offer opportunities for playful behavior.
- look for ways to involve the service staff in improving playful interaction in the service.
- experiment with new fields and opportunities for playful interaction in the service
- be flexible and open to new ideas.

7.3 The core of playful experience design; design for PLAY-CEPTION

The core element of playful experience design is an unusual message communicated about a particular situation, or an object that doesn't fit the expected function, and this must be in a meaningful funny manner with the aim of attracting the user's attention and interest in improving his/her own experience. The significance of playful experience lies in awakening the intention to pursue a different interaction and kind of behavior. Playful experience, in its core idea, suggests a conscious approach to controlling one's own perception in order to make the desired experience from the ongoing situation. The term *perception* is based on the Latin root *cept*, which means "take". While perception refers to taking and representing reality, the playful approach involves a particular interpretation of this reality, namely an approach that takes and reacts to the experience to increase the pleasantness of the interaction, to eliminate negative effects and to reduce unnecessary pressure. When playful perception or PLAY-CEPTION happens, it is based on an individual's voluntary, temporary and conscious decision, and the fun of it lies in the production

of unusual associations. Designing for play-ception means offering play-ceptional opportunities in traditional situations where unusual interpretations and corresponding behavior can take place. It is worth mentioning that playful interpretation can occur regardless of the designer's intention to provide it, depending on the individual user's level of playfulness. The role that designers play is above all to facilitate particular associations or direct the interpretation in a meaningful way and at the right moment in order to achieve an effective experience. The playful experience is then completed by the involvement of the user.

Design for play-ception can be used to create and improve people's experiences with services. This is a journey that starts by providing a close understanding of the current service and its customer experience. The service should identify unpleasant and negative aspects of the interaction process and the customer experience and consider which deficiencies can be improved using the design for play-ception approach and which the service should not try to change in this way. It should attempt to understand the customer both as the user of the service and as an individual in order to be able to find playful solutions that enhance the experience beyond the customer's expectations and the direct interaction. In addition, it is important to know about the general playfulness of the target society as well as the meaning of play and its role in the particular social context. This should help the experience design team to find appropriate language to communicate play. Thus, having acquired this knowledge about the service, the customer and the common language, a framework for the creation of play-ceptional experience can be developed. Here, one important and challenging task is to identify those unavoidable unpleasant moments in the actual service interaction where the customer needs distancing from the ongoing situation and where the designer must break the traditional experience. Finding out where a customer experiences an unpleasant service interaction is, among other things, a matter of selecting or training competent front-stage service staff. Careful service staff can contribute considerably to recognizing where the customer feels uncomfortable and accordingly to preparing a co-creative situation to change the atmosphere, for instance by arranging a playful breeze. The basic approach to experience design for play-ception is to find out how to communicate an appropriate set of associations for play-ceiving the unwelcome

situation. The function of appropriate playful associations is to connote an unexpected message or setting that doesn't fit the traditional image and which precisely for that reason evokes positive feelings and invites a different kind of behavior. The alternative experience can relate to playful movements, playful attitudes, play-rediscovery, a desirable playful fantasy or childhood memories. Generally speaking, any experience design team requires three main qualities in order to be able to deliver effective customer experiences: knowledge; empathy; and creativity. Focusing on the design for play-ception approach, the experience design team must also have, two other important skills in order to communicate successful play-ceptional experiences: firstly, good observational skills and experience in finding funny and unusual relationships between realities, activities and events in everyday life; secondly, the ability to translate the unusual message into tangible signals and an atmosphere that supports the alternative perception of the situation, in other words a series of cues that enable the customer to change his/her own experience of the service situation. Achieving this is the goal that design for play-ception should pursue. This research suggests that the integration of playful interactions into customer experience and designing for play-ception contributes to the improvement of people's experiences as customers and the preparation of a basis for a different way of dealing with everyday service interactions.

7.4 Contributions to the to customer experience design

7.4.1 Design for play-ception and the co-creation experience

One significant feature of design for play-ception is that it supports and enables a co-creation experience. The design for play-ception approach seeks opportunities to involve both customers and service staff in creating and developing pleasant interaction moments in the particular service situation. By incorporating the playful breeze, which is a co-created playful moment during a usually non-playful service situation, this approach aims at providing a stimulus to engage a customer's playful self and prepares the ground for interaction and the joint creation of a pleasant customer experience.

7.4.2 Design for play-ception and hidden leisure time

People usually devote a certain amount of daily time to work and productive activities to fulfill material needs. Productivity during working time can, however, be interrupted by a number of factors, often inevitably and beyond our control. A delay in work is very likely to be experienced as wasted and useless time, especially if it was not expected. Various forms of waiting phases during everyday experiences – at bus stops, in queues, or in interaction with services – are familiar examples of such unexpected interruptions or delays. Play-ception's approach to experience design suggests identifying situations in which delays usually take place and aims at preventing these moments from becoming unpleasant idle time and instead aims at viewing them as hidden leisure time in everyday serious routines. The aim is to avoid worry or disappointment and contribute instead to play-ceiving the situation. This means adopting a different way of dealing with unexpected delays, namely by integrating playful elements into the situation in a meaningful way.

7.4.3 Design for play-ception and the change in traditional images of customer experience

One role that the design for play-ception approach can play in improving customer experience is that it can change the traditional image of particular service interactions and enable customers to behave in a less inhibited way. In general, different and effective customer experiences can be created by offering innovative service models and by providing the basis for new kinds of interaction and behavior. This is possible on the one hand by enhancing creativity and flexibility in service interactions and on the other hand by increasing the freedom of the service environment, allowing customers to enhance their own experience of the service interaction. When supporting customers in this sense, it is therefore important to free them from obstacles to behaving or dealing with the experience in other, more flexible ways than the traditional fixed patterns and expectations. Applying the design for play-ception approach facilitates this process by identifying such barriers in service situations, suggesting ways to change them and communicating an atmosphere that allows distancing from traditional interaction behavior and thereby opens the door to different attitudes.

7.4.4 Design for play-ception and a fresh view of movement in customer experience

One significant aspect of the fun of play is the joy we experience in physical movement. Design for play-ception can be employed to improve people's everyday experiences as customers and as citizens by suggesting a fresh and creative approach to physical movement in non-playful activities. In this sense, everyday activities are valued not only for the aim they serve but also for the physical activity experience they involve in the course of the process. Thus, design for play-ception also considers how people's surroundings in different contexts can be altered to support playful movement and asks where active play can be integrated into serious interactions to improve the overall experience. Design for play-ception thinks beyond the advantages of simply using play as a way to achieve other ends. It believes that creating everyday environments (e.g. services and urban places) and processes that allow and invite playful interaction as alternatives to the usual routine can result in a more creative, flexible and pleasant environment where people can work and learn and change, and can enjoy fresh experiences again and again between performing serious tasks.

7.4.5 Design for play-ception and the convenience of realization

Another significant aspect of design for play-ception is that it suggests solutions to create and improve positive experiences that are not dependent on expensive technologies and complicated facilities. The core concept of the design for play-ception is based on the creation of the meaningful unusual association, and effective signals to communicate the playful message. Realizing the experience does not necessarily involve costly investments as it can be based according to service possibilities. Once the message is shaped, appropriate playful signals and cues can be provided through a variety of means, for instance, the appropriate behavior of the service personal, improving the already existing elements of the service and the appropriate selection of the available play objects (please refer to chapter 6 for more detailed discussion). As the result, the playful customer experience can improve the variety of solutions and can be refreshed more efficiently and frequently within

reasonable costs. According to this aspect, the design for play-ception can be adapted by both large and also small and local services.

CONCLUSION

This interdisciplinary dissertation studied the interplay between three disciplines of play studies, customer experience, and design for services. The research was based on the growing emphasis on the human-centered approach to creating customer experiences and the role design can play in improving social outcomes of service interactions and their impacts on the customer's well-being. It was developed through exploring the play phenomenon in order to provide a deep understanding of the play and its core characteristics that create positive experiences. The purpose is to apply this knowledge to determine how to meaningfully adapt and integrate playful qualities into customer experience to enhance people's experiences with services. The study draws on the literature on play, customer experience, and the role of design in services. Theoretical findings and their mutual effects were analyzed and developed the theoretical framework for a playful customer experience design. Playful design concentrates on increasing the level of playfulness of an experience in five aspects: *playful movement, fantasy, playful attitude, play rediscovery, childhood memories*. At the same time it applies playful characteristics to improve the customer experience according to the particular requirements of the service situation: *play and the enhancement of motivation, play and the passage of time, play as a facilitator, play as a way to change perception, play for the fun of it*. The research examined the application of the theoretical findings by conducting a multiple-case study in a real service situation, namely the experience of waiting in family physicians' offices. Theoretical and case study findings are then used in developing principles and practical considerations for improving the experience of waiting by adapting a playful design approach. The main recommendations are discussed under five categories, explained as playful experience components: *the presence of children, the play zone, the playful breeze, playful active waiting, and the waiting oasis*. Based on the findings, the concept of *design for play-ception* is introduced as a rich and human-centered approach in designing customer experience. Design for play-ception contributes to the practice of the customer experience design by helping practitioners to enhance customers' engagement in the co-creation of experiences, to turn unexpected

interruptions into hidden leisure time, and to change the traditional image of service interactions and enabling customers to behave in a less restricted way. It contributes to enhancing people's everyday experiences by offering a fresh and creative approach to physical movement in non-playful activities. At the same time the realization of the play-ceptional experience remains affordable for both large and small services.

Contributions of this dissertation to design research

The research topic: One important aspect of the topic for this research is that it developed with an outside-in approach. Outside-in refers to the fact that “playful customer experience” did not arise from within the field of customer experience design but developed from the basis of studying and exploring an experience that works outside this framework. The interdisciplinary research aimed at providing a deep understanding of the play phenomenon and its core characteristics that create positive experiences from the designer's perspective. It is an attempt to apply this knowledge to determine how to meaningfully adapt and integrate playful qualities into customer experience.

The research orientation: This research demonstrates the value of adopting a design approach in conducting research on customer experience that is based on a two-sided orientation toward the topic during the process of the research. In this sense, playful experience is examined both as a means and as an end – as a means to provide solutions for improving particular customer experiences, and as an end to be developed as a pleasant experience and for its positive influences on people's well-being. This twofold view was pursued throughout the research. In this approach playful experience is valued because of its positive effects on service experience design, as well as because of what it brings to people as customers and as human beings.

The interdisciplinary aspect of the approach: Another noteworthy aspect of the research is the interdisciplinary nature of its design. Conducting interdisciplinary research requires attention to particular considerations according to the main orientation of the research. Therefore, this research accepted that each discipline needs to develop its own methods and processes in conducting interdisciplinary research. There are publications on interdisciplinary research involving some

scientific disciplines, but in the field of design this area is being approached gradually in individual contributions. As a result, it is an essential step in the improvement of interdisciplinary design research to share experiences in this area. One important point in conducting interdisciplinary research in the field of design is perhaps how and where to make use of the findings of experts from other disciplines while doing interdisciplinary research in order to achieve the best results and prevent the research losing its creative essence. In the theoretical part of this dissertation, the research required examining the literature in three main disciplines, namely play studies, customer experience, and service design. In this part, the appropriate approach was found to be a process of drawing on the literature and theories of other disciplines while at the same time maintaining the researcher's own disciplinary perspective. The research included investing time and energy in the study of other disciplines but was a fruitful process of clarifying and forming meaningful relationships and a creative and sound basis for proceeding in harmony with the research objective. In this stage, involving experts from unfamiliar disciplines seemed to divert attention from the design-oriented research. However, in the empirical part of the research that included understanding the real experiences, opinions, needs and desires of people in real contexts, consultation and discussions with other experts were profitably integrated into the process with the aim of gaining a thorough and accurate understanding of the customer and the service experience.

Future research on playful customer experience

This research has developed the idea of playful customer experience, first by focusing on providing a deep and clear understanding of playful activity, the issue of customer experience and service design. Following that, the research concentrated on examining the integration of playful qualities into the experience of waiting at family physicians' offices as a way to improve the customer's experience and as an end in itself to be expanded for its positive effects on people's well-being. The research has attempted to provide the required knowledge for the implementation of playful experience design, including principles, processes, dimensions, components and influencing factors, and it has suggested design for play-ception as an alternative in order to enrich people's everyday service experiences. However, this dissertation is only the first step in a long journey. Further research projects on the topic need to be

developed with a focus on the realization of particular playful customer experiences in different service contexts. More focused research should be conducted in the form of case studies and experiments in service companies in order to create innovative experiences by means of playful solutions and to examine their influences on customers over time. Further research on the “aesthetics of play-ception” is also required to examine the effective communication of the desired service message through meaningful playful signals. Finally, focused research is required on facilitating the discussion and the co-creation of playful experiences between people and their services in order to achieve more effective, more innovative and more desirable experiences.

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Appendix

The participants' original statements in German referred to in chapter 5

5.5.3 Waiting room entertainment facilities

- Ich finde es gut, wenn es ein bisschen mehr Auswahl bei den Zeitungen gäbe. Also da sind immer ein paar bestimmte für Männer und bestimmte für Frauen, aber so ein bisschen... so mehr neutrale vielleicht über Garten oder schöner Einrichten, schöner Wohnen, so was auch dabei, dass man ein breiteres Angebot hätte, dass man einfach mal was anderes nehmen könnte, [...]wäre vielleicht nicht schlecht. (B12: 40)

5.5.7 The participants' leisure activities vs. their waiting activities

- Das Warten ist erstmal... Wenn ich tagsüber irgendwo warte, dann geht es erst Mal von meiner Arbeitszeit ab. Das heißt, ich muss die Arbeitszeit nachholen, weil ich eine gewisse Zeit arbeiten muss. Wenn ich warte, weiß ich genau, diese Zeit, wo ich dann länger arbeiten muss, wird mir dann abends fehlen, dann kann ich eben nicht mehr spazieren gehen, nicht mehr laufen gehen, oder solche Dinge nicht machen, oder einfach da sitzen, bevor man vielleicht zum Abend isst, mal jemanden anrufen, nach Hause gehen, mit der Frau sich unterhalten oder mehr Zeit für meine Tochter haben, die nicht mehr zu Hause wohnt. So Dinge, die man machen kann. (B8: 21)
- Wenn ich im Wartezimmer warte, dann meinen Sie, sollte ich malen oder so was? Ach nee, hören Sie mal! Das mache ich aber in einer anderen Atmosphäre als im Wartezimmer beim Arzt (A5: 32-34)

5.5.8 The atmosphere in the waiting room

- Wartezimmer ist wie Kirche, ein Museum. Man sagt nichts, man ist ruhig, man darf nicht pfeifen und singen. [...] Wenn zwei, die zu einander gehören reden, alle hören zu, weil es ungewöhnlich ist. (A11: 26)
- Im Allgemeinen empfinde ich die Atmosphäre in solchen Wartezimmer als ein bisschen bedrückend. Warum? Man unterstellt kranke Menschen sind dort. Diese Unterstellung kann im Allgemeinen falsch sein. Zum Beispiel ich bin für eine

Vorsorge Untersuchung da und nicht potenziell krank gewesen. Man unterstellt aber von den anderen, ja die werden krank sein. Man hat ein bisschen Scheu in Interaktion zu treten, weil man vermutet, sagen wir mal eine schlimme Krankheit bei anderen offenbar zu bekommen, dann weiß man gar nicht wie man sich verhalten soll und sucht vielleicht ein bisschen die Flucht in die Anonymität. (B9: 13)

- Man denkt nicht, dass es auf einmal so viele kranke Leute gibt,... weil alle auf einem Haufen hier sitzen. (B3: 32)
- Es kommt darauf an, wo ich bin und was die Leute haben. Wenn links und rechts geniast wird, wenn ich merke, dass alles erkältet ist, oder ich bin im Winter, wo Grippewelle ist, dann fühle ich mich im Wartezimmer nicht wohl und ich habe den Wunsch, dass ich so ein bisschen abgeschottet bin. Ich sitze auch gerne am Fenster, dass ich frische Luft bekomme. (B8: 23)
- Es gibt einige Ärzte, bei ihnen, ich sage es so, die Patienten sitzen da wie Hühner auf dem Stall so. Hier ist es im Vergleich gut. Es soll nicht heißen, dass ich hier eine Stunde lang bleiben möchte, aber zumindest sind hier bequeme Sessel. Man hat manchmal nur Stühle oder so was wo man drauf sitzt. (A7: 15)

5.5.9 Conversations in the waiting room

- Wir haben die Patienten, die ganz leicht mit den anderen Kontakt aufnehmen[...]. Die fangen hier auch an, ein Gespräch zu führen. Wenn sie jemanden finden, der bereit ist, dann sprechen sie über ihre Krankheiten oder irgendwelche Sachen. Das ist eine Typsache. (A office manager: 28)
- Was sie hier anbieten, ist über Krankheiten und ich rede überhaupt nicht über Krankheiten. Das langweilt mich. (B5: 26)
- Ich glaube nicht, dass ich besonders mit den Menschen ins Gespräch kommen würde, vor allem, wenn man beim Arzt ist. Ich erlebe immer, dass alle von ihren Leiden reden und das finde ich kein Thema, gerade wenn man zum Arzt geht, um sich besser zu fühlen, sondern man geht immer tiefer in seine Leiden. Deshalb sollte man andere Ebenen schaffen, wenn man überhaupt kann. [...] Ich würde eine Umgebung machen, die nicht mit den Krankheiten zu tun hat, sondern eigentlich mit Gesundheit. (B6: 23)

- Ich hatte einen ehemaligen Klassenkameraden gerade da sitzen. Dann konnten wir uns ein bisschen unterhalten. Das hat man ja selten, dass man jemanden da trifft, aber dann geht die Zeit ein bisschen schneller um, wenn man sich schön unterhält. (B2: 7)

5.5.10 Unsatisfactory aspects of the current situation in waiting areas

- Wenn man die Leute sieht, so viele, denkt man: Oh! jetzt musst du viel mehr warten, als der Termin eigentlich ist. (B12: 20)
- Es gibt Menschen, die gar keine Probleme machen. Sie sitzen im Wartezimmer, lesen die Zeitung oder unterhalten sich. Dann gibt es einen, der sich aufregt und zieht die anderen auch mit und die werden auch unruhig. Dann kommt allgemeine Unruhe in die Gruppe und alle fragen, warum und wie lange sie warten sollen. [...]Das ist wichtig, dass Menschen in ihren Urzustand kommen dass sie bereit für die Untersuchung werden. (A office manager: 4)
- Wir sind hier eine Anlaufstation. Viele (mehr die Älteren), die etwas auf dem Herzen haben [...]sind froh, wenn sie hier ein bisschen erzählen können. (B office manager: 41)

5.5.11 The ideal experience of visiting the doctor, from the patients' perspective

- Am liebsten wäre es mir, ich käme sofort dran, als dem ich da sitze und warte.(B8:17)
- Also irgendwas, wenn es nur die Nachrichten sind die laufen, ist egal. Hauptsache da redet was im Hintergrund, dem man zuhören kann. (B2: 19)

5.5.12 The definition of waiting from the patient's perspective

- Das Warten ist ja verdammt sein zum nichts tun, bis dass irgendein Ereignis eintritt. (B9: 19)
- Man sucht sich eine Beschäftigung, um den Leerlauf zu vermeiden, also Warten ist eigentlich Leerlauf. (B7: 37)
- Ich bin echt der Meinung, dass Krankenhäuser oder jetzt die Praxen sowieso nicht so mein Fall sind. [...]Krankenhäuser haben alle so eine komische (kalte) Atmosphäre. Muss ich nicht unbedingt um mich haben. (B3: 26)

- Ich warte eine Stunde, [...] aber wenn ich weiß, dass ich nichts zu tun habe, keine Unterhaltung habe und einfach nur stur da sitzen muss und...Nee das ist wirklich nichts für mich. (B2: 25)

5.5.13 The patients' experience of waiting and the role of the office staff

- Manche wollen das vielleicht nicht, aber es ergibt sich manchmal durch einen dummen Zufall, dass man irgendwas fragt, was belanglos ist und es ergibt sich, dass man sich unterhält. Also, ich habe da kein Problem mit. Ich finde es besser, als dass man sich von, weiß ich nicht, Fernseher oder so was da berieseln lässt. (A7: 32)
- [...]Bei manchen Ärzten habe ich das Gefühl auch, dann gehe ich nach vorne und sage: hört mal, habt Ihr mich vergessen? (A6: 24)
- Die Arzthelfer... Ja, ich finde sie sind genervt [...] Die regen sich den ganzen Tag über etwas auf, was zu Hause gewesen ist und reden auch darüber. Das gehört, glaube ich, nicht in die Praxis. (B1: 41)

5.5.14 Other factors influencing the patients' opinion of waiting in the family physician's office

- Sagen wir mal so, ich bin echt der Meinung, dass Krankenhäuser oder jetzt die Praxen sowieso nicht so mein Fall sind. Ich bin 2005 auch mal im Krankenhaus gewesen und habe da schlechte Erfahrungen gemacht so zusagen, und die Krankenhäuser haben alle so eine komische Atmosphäre. Muss ich nicht unbedingt um mich haben. (B3: 24)