Does a more complex service offering increase uncertainty in operations?

Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the complexity of the service offering (service complexity) affects the uncertainty during service operations in engineering services. Specifically, the authors compare the existence of organisational, relational, environmental and technological uncertainty in maintenance services and performance-based services.

Design/methodology/approach
The authors present insights from four cases – two each for maintenance services and performance-based services. The in-depth data were based on 56 semi-structured interviews, multiple site visits, meeting notes, service contracts and other secondary data.

Findings
The case findings indicate that organisational and relational uncertainty were not linked to service complexity, while observations of environmental and technological uncertainty were higher and more varied for performance-based services. Based on these findings, the authors formulate four propositions regarding the relationship between service complexity and uncertainty in service operations.

Originality/value
This research contributes to the OM literature by suggesting that external sources of uncertainty increase with increasing service complexity, while internal sources of uncertainty remain unchanged.

General information
Publication status: Published
Organisations: Innovation, Engineering Systems, Department of Technology, Management and Economics
Corresponding author: Kreye, M.
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Pages: 75-93
Publication date: 2019
Peer-reviewed: Yes

Publication information
Volume: 39
Issue number: 1
ISSN (Print): 0144-3577
Ratings:
BFI (2019): BFI-level 2
Web of Science (2019): Indexed yes
Original language: English
Keywords: Servitization, Case study, Complexity, Uncertainty, Engineering services, Product-service system
DOIs: 10.1108/IJOPM-01-2018-0009
Source: PublicationPreSubmission
Source ID: 149731424
Research output: Contribution to journal › Journal article – Annual report year: 2019 › Research › peer-review