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NEW SERVICE CONCEPTION ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

The article proposes a model for assessment of new service conception feasibility. Every idea can be developed from several conceptions. Using the model allows choosing the best conception of new service. Flexible structure of the proposed model enables differentiating conceptions according to technical complexity and source of ideas. The construction of the suggested model provides for a possibility to skip assessment of service conceptions that are simple in technical and technological terms and to proceed to the next stage of development. Skipping situations are discussed and validated in the article. Using of the model allows decreasing expenditure on assessment and reducing time for evaluation as well as time for new service implementation.

Keywords: new service development, conception of new service, conception assessment, model of assessment.

1. Introduction

One of the tasks of a modern business is the ability to develop and properly implement new services (NS). It is therefore important for the service business sector to thoroughly analyse all relevant processes, to work out systematic provisions for the development and implementation of new services as well as to devise efficient methods. Development and implementation of new services is a common problem faced in the activities of many service undertakings because of occurring risky decisions determined by improper activity planning or managers' unawareness of the optimal sequence of required procedures subject to external and internal conditions. Scientific and special literature suggests a number of different models for the implementation of new services, but most of them are contradictory in terms of both the content and the sequence of stages. Some authors present service implementation schemes that are very general, containing general action scenarios and thus making implementation even more difficult under realistic business conditions due to probability of improper decisions.

The research ***subject*** is the instantiation of a generated and approved as appropriate for further development new service idea until its conceptualisation and assessment. This implies that a new service concept is an interim outcome of the implementation process produced as a result of instantiation of a new service idea. The stage of conceptualisation and concept assessment is skipped by some authors without any reasoning of such a decision. It should be noted that other researchers, on the contrary, pay much attention to the concept building and assessment, emphasising this stage as one of the most important in new service implementation schemes. Therefore, we can say that approaches to the reasonability of new service conceptualisation and assessment are contradictory in their essence and there is a lack of concept assessment methodology adapted to service business. These circumstances should be regarded as a ***problem*** relevant both to science and business. Existence of this problem presupposes a need for a more detailed analysis of researchers' opinions and arguments in relation to the reasonability and content of the stage of new service conceptualisation and assessment in the chain of new service implementation processes and for a justified concept assessment solution based on the analysis results.

The ***aim*** of this article is to provide a substantiated model for conception assessment of new services. The following ***objectives*** have been set in order to achieve this aim:

1. To analyse opinions and approaches found in scientific literature in relation to concept elaboration; to provide with critical assessment thereof and to come up with rational solutions.
2. To propose a model of assessment of suitability of a new service conception by providing with arguments as to the contents of its functional components and application sequence subject to business conditions.

   Methods applied in this ***research*** are scientific induction, gap analysis, logical analysis, comparative analysis, modelling.

2. Methodological approach to new service conception

A product conception is a detailed version of

the new-**product** idea stated in **meaningful** consumer terms (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, Wong, 1999). The need for generating a new service conception is rationalised by research-based arguments of Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), suggesting that an idea describes only general provisions of a new service which, if made more accurate, can even lead to some fundamental changes aimed at better satisfaction of consumers of a certain segment. The authors highlight that the designed conception of new services is aimed at a particular market segment and therefore creates a possibility to maximise consumer satisfaction.

Designing a conception of a service as that of a product is described by Edvardsson, Gustafsson, Roos (2005). The author of this article finds it reasonable to agree with the content of their conception building given some adjustments. Edvardsson et al. (2005) suggests complying with available research results providing with detailed characteristics of the process of conception elaboration. The above-mentioned researchers support Grönros' service concept description and argue that a new service conception helps to express the service provider's idea of what consumer problems he intents to tackle and how. Furthermore, Edvardsson et al. (2005) also support the Grönros' service conception description in that the new service conception should express the stance of an undertaking in respect of the three key characteristics of the new service:

1) Nature of activities;
2) Nature of potential relationships between consumers and service provider as well as service outcomes;
3) Degree of solving consumers' problems.

Edvardsson et al. (2005) further specify that developing a new service conception also includes instantiation of ideas by identifying the above-mentioned characteristics, the form of which could depend on the nature of services. Likewise, it is suggested that the first characteristic of the above-mentioned ones (concerning the nature of activities) could be also instantiated in the description of NS idea. In this case, while building a NS conception, it is reasonable to emphasise the nature of likely relationships between consumers and service providers by describing them in greater detail. It is worth noting that Davis and Moe (1997) similarly define the process of conception building suggesting that for identification of the ability of a new service to satisfy consumer needs it is reasonable to select certain quantitative characteristics as early as at the stage of conception building and to foresee their likely values to be used for further commercial feasibility of the conception.

What is doubtful in the Edvardsson et al. (2005) approach is considering a proposed characteristic of the degree of solving consumer problems to be an element of NS conception building. The degree of solving consumer problems can be expressed as consumer satisfaction with a new service and therefore it is reasonable to consider it as a criterion of NS concept assessment. To summarise, the process of NS concept building could be described as consisting of the following stages:

1) Identification of the nature of activities (which might as well be identified in the description of NS idea);
2) Detailed specification of NS idea by identifying likely quantitative characteristics for certain procedures.

To develop the conception of new services, it is reasonable to invite internal experts who, in their turn, should use the available results of market needs assessments, as obtained during earlier stages of implementation, for identification of the above-mentioned NS characteristics in this process. Incidentally, Crawford (1994) also suggests that conception building and assessment procedures should be vested in experts. When there are no adequately qualified staff members to perform the conception building and assessment procedures, it is reasonable to apply with this issue to business consulting companies as it is suggested by Melnikas, Jakubavičius, Strazdas (2000).

Having analysed new service procedures that are reasonable to be implemented simultaneously, Alam and Perry (2002) omit the stage of concept building and suggest that ideas and conceptions should be assessed at the same time. There is no rationale in this suggestion, because it refers to categories which are fundamentally different and thus require different assessment. Moreover, we can only assess what we have, i.e., to start with the assessment of an idea which serves as a basis for conception building and could be further assessed by different criteria too.

It is worth noting that simultaneous building and improvement of conceptions seems to be better substantiated in terms of shortening the duration of this stage. Discussion of the methods of conception presentation to consumers already provides an opportunity to adjust and improve the conception in order to better adapt it to the needs of a certain consumer segment (Gomes, Yasin, Lisboa, 2007).

3. Analysis of commercial feasibility of new service conceptions

Once the NS conceptions have been developed, the next step according to the principal scheme for new service development and implementation is conceptions assessment (Bivainis, Drejeris, 2006). Davis and Moe (1997) specify this definition in more detail suggesting that the next stage of conception development is the analysis of its commercial feasibility. Commercial feasibility of the new service conceptions is analysed by its conformity to the current and future business conditions. If the analysis results

show that the NS conception satisfies the aforementioned business conditions, the next logical question is about the need of NS design. If such a need is established, the next issue has to do with certain conditions of technology development. Once the NS technology is developed, further refinement opportunities shall be assessed, i.e., NS suitability in terms of technical implementation, attractiveness to the market, etc.

It is worth noting that researchers offer quite conflicting opinions about the sequences of stages of conception assessment and analysis of business conditions in the chain of the new product (service) implementation process. In addition, some authors even omit the stages of conception building and assessment as a result of failure to reach a consensus about their necessity and different interpretation of these stages vis-à-vis business conditions analysis.

3.1. Assessment of new service conception and conformity of business conditions

Tidd and Bodley (2002) presented a scheme for development of new products where the first component represents conceptions building, while conceptions assessment procedures are proposed as the second component. It should be noted that such an approach brings some confusion as to the consistency of the process. The point is that conceptions are built on the basis of ideas, while origination of an idea is not even mentioned by these authors. Wood (2003), the promoter of a systematic approach to the implementation of innovations, skips the stages of conception building and assessment arguing that a new product is developed (anticipated) on the basis of selected and assessed ideas that have been recognised as suitable. Incidentally, Wood (2003) emphasises the importance of the idea assessment stage and of the results obtained at that stage, because the results serve as a basis for making fundamental decisions as to the further development of a new product (service). The aforementioned approach of omitting the conception assessment stage might be justified when services to be implemented are simple in technical and technological terms, and only provided that sufficient demand for them is guaranteed in the future. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) provide an explanation of different approaches suggesting that it is not reasonable in service business to separate assessment of the conception and idea of technically and technologically uncomplicated services due to exclusive characteristics of the services (inseparability, intangibility and perishability). Yet, in order to present a more universal model, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) omit the stage of evaluating ideas in a scheme for new service implementation and suggest that service conceptions should be built on the basis of existing ideas and further assessment of new services should be performed. The statements of Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) also reflect some divergence with systematic provisions. It is therefore more reasonable to support Wood's (2003) opinion as to the necessity of the stage of idea assessment and importance of relevant actions. The author of this article shares the opinion that the stage of idea assessment should not be omitted. The importance and necessity of idea assessment are justified in the article *New Service Ideas Screening* by Bivainis and Drejeris (2008). If this stage is omitted, it is quite possible that ready-built conceptions will have to be rejected during their assessment on grounds of concept's lack of prospects and being built on the basis of wrong idea. In this case, conception building costs turn out to be worthless. In order to avoid such worthless costs, assessment of ideas is suggested at earlier stages, while conceptions should be built only on the basis of screened ideas that have been recognised as suitable. Accordingly, Wood's (2003) arguments as to the strict organisation of screening and selection procedures for new service ideas could be supported taking into consideration the unreasonableness of screening technically and technologically uncomplicated services as well as service conceptions requiring minor modifications that are known to an undertaking and/or consumer and do not require high implementation costs or delivered by other undertakings. It is reasonable to omit the stage of conception assessment in the implementation of the aforementioned services. The latter conclusion is based on the fact that particular ideas of new services have already been tested at an earlier stage and recognised as suitable for the existing or future business conditions. Assessment of ideas for other service conceptions is found to be reasonable in order to justify increasing NS implementation costs that are required at the stage of designing and commercialisation of new services. Differentiation of service conceptions by technical-technological complexity should be vested upon internal experts, because this factor should have different weight in undertakings with different technical capacities. In addition, differences of this conception are determined by qualification of staff and nature of activities of the undertaking.

It is worth noting that assessment of conceptions and analysis of business conditions at the same time are seen to be quite reasonable. Many researchers even see no difference between these processes. For example, Davis and Moe (1997) suggest that concept assessment implies testing of commercial feasibility of the concept under existing business conditions. I.e., the two processes are identified and not singled out in the proposed model. Likewise, Davis and Moe (1997) specify that assessment of conception's commercial feasibility in the market implies the market familiarisation with the characteristics of a new product describing the main properties thereof and the testing of consumer reaction (degree of recognition) vis-à-vis satisfaction with the proposed NS characteristics. By

the way, the model of Alam and Perry (2002) also suggests simultaneous conducting of these procedures.

Special attention should be paid to substantial contribution of Rahman (2003) in the studies of suitability of business conditions for different business branches and suggested research methodologies. He sees suitability of business conditions in selecting business-friendly environment and presents a model of international market selection based on assessment-grouped quantitative criteria used to identify the sufficiency of market size and the suitability of market structure. Unfortunately, criteria predominant in Rahman's works (2003) assess the opportunities for external environment for the development of a new product and specialisation thereof for international markets. However, it might be admitted that some criteria are suitable to be used for screening of the existing conception through the perspective of new service feasibility not only in international market, but in local one as well. For the purpose of clarity, it is worth noting that it is reasonable to reject new service conceptions at the stage of assessment of commercial feasibility of the conception if further development and commercialisation thereof do not guarantee the achievement of goals identified in the strategy, i.e., business conditions are recognised as unsuitable for the conception development.

Cramp, Beverly (1994) and Salavou (2004) clarify the necessity of business conditions analysis for new product development from the concept ability viewpoint. They state that the result, which shows that the concept corresponds to market requirements, substantially increases probability of commercial success of a new product. Incidentally, it is meaningful to accept the proposition of these researchers that market analysis is necessary at most stages of new product development. Trot (2001) also properly explains the significance of results of business conditions analysis for new product development. He agrees with Rahman (2003) opinion that appropriate selection of the market segment determines the amount of sales and profit. According to Trot (2001), results of business conditions analysis sometimes mean that the new product is unmarketable, though after some time it can attain phenomenal success. According to Trot (2001), it is always reasonable to verify market availability for admission of new product (service).

To continue the Trot's (2001) idea, it can be claimed that Olsen, Sallis (2006) significantly colligate willingness of consumers to accept new product and level of particularity analysis of business conditions. They distinguish two levels of particularity analysis: "narrow scanning" and "broad scanning" (Olsen, Sallis 2006: 467). They suggest performing a narrow scanning in the cases when conceptions of service are developed by ideas, which emerge on initiative of consumers, because development of such services is requisite for them. This attitude is grounded on approach that consumer's proposals concerning the necessity of a new product eliminate the need to test the new service from the perspective of consumer satisfaction. In this case, market preparedness to admit new product is considered sufficient and emphasis is placed on the evaluation of new product technical feasibility and new service technology suitability by consumers approach. According to Olsen and Sallis (2006), broad scanning should embrace not only evaluation of consumer satisfaction, but also evaluation of compliance with ecological requirements, competitiveness and other environmental evaluations.

Crawford (1994) suggests making an analysis of business conditions according to a widely argued out and accepted as appropriate model of economic analysis of his concept, which is based on expert evaluation of technical and commercial feasibility for conception development. Crawford (1994) proposes a set of criteria for technical and commercial evaluation of the conception and a scale for determining significance of the criteria. It is useful to accept this differentiation of technical and commercial criteria, but in technical assessment it is more reasonable to follow Drejer (2000) approach. Drejer states that assessment of technical feasibility of the conception is more reasonable from the perspective of suitability of new service technology. The author substantiates this Drejer's suggestion with a provision that every conception can have several technological solutions; therefore technical assessment is more reasonable after making a decision as to particular feasible technology of new service.

It is reasonable to accept Schnetzler's (2005) suggestion for commercial evaluation of conceptions**.** She offers a questionnaire for the assessment of conceptions and claims that the answers will allow to determine the best conception of the new service, which corresponds to the present and future business conditions. The above-mentioned author suggests comparing different conceptions of some ideas according to the answers to the questionnaire**.** It is possible to accept the substance of the questionnaire and its significance**,** but it is reasonable to add some questions related to the possibilities of external environment to implement NS according to the given conception. It is also meaningful to support the approach to conceptions assessment using expert method. According to Schnetzler (2005), it is reasonable to choose for developing such a conception that accounts for more positive answers to the questionnaire (Table 3.1). It is worth noting that Crawford (1994) also shares the opinion on evaluation of conceptions by expert's method. The indicators in his accepted set of criteria are almost the same as offered by Schnetzler (2005). Incidentally, criteria offered by Rahman (2003) are also almost the same as those suggested by Schnetzler (2005).

Therefore, to select a conception to develop, it is reasonable to find answers to the questions given in Table 1.

It should be noted that evaluation, as suggested by Schnetzler (2005) and modified by the author, basically satisfies the requirements for broad scanning of a new service conception accepted by Olsen, Sallis (2006). Furthermore, it is possible to choose criteria for narrow scanning from the questionnaire proposed by Schnetzler (2005) and supplemented by the author of this article. Criteria for narrow scanning have to correlate with assessment of technical possibilities for conception developing. Therefore it is reasonable to form a new set of criteria (3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12) and to apply them to narrow scanning of the concept analysis proposed by Olsen, Sallis (2006). These criteria are marked with an asterisk in Table 1.

One has to admit that if a conception does not meet at least one criteria of the narrow scanning analysis, its further checking has to be stopped and this conception has to be eliminated. Furthermore, the author suggests a supplementary indicator – identification of significance of the criteria and selection of the most suitable conception by applying the scoring method.

Incidentally, it should be clarified that new service conceptions, according to which new services are designed for international markets only, should be assessed using the Rahman's (2003) model suggesting the use of criteria exclusively devised for the evaluation of possibilities of external environment in certain markets. Responsibility in evaluation of conceptions is bigger due to relatively higher implementation costs and Rahman (2003) therefore aims at selecting specific criteria.

When new service conception overcomes the above-mentioned obstacle, the next stage is designing a new service technology. Davis and Moe (1997) state that technology of new service has to be designed on the basis of conceptual characteristics, which have to be evaluated and accepted as well chosen. Incidentally, practical testing of new service conceptions is a complicated task in service business because of special characteristics of services (Zeihaml, Bitner 2003).

Table 1

Criteria for assessment of new service conceptions

Questions for choosing a NS conception	**Conception 1**	**Conception 2**	**……**	***n* conception**
1. Are customers' requirements, their requests, and preferences taken into consideration in NS conception?				
2. Are consumers' requests adequately expressed by technical characteristics of NS?				
3.* Does NS conception consider the problems of existing services?				
4. Is the NS concept more advantageous compared to competitors' services?				
5.* Is the environment more customer-friendly compared to the environment of existing services or those provided by competitors?				
6. Does NP conception provide for any possibilities to meet market requirements?				
7.* Do possibilities exist for proper tackling of environmental, disposition and other ecologic problems, when NP service is implemented according to the analyzed conception?				
8.* Aren't the related to NS conception actions taken in conflict with requirements of industrial safety?				
9. Is service according to new conception superior to existing services?				
10. Is service more accessible for consumers according to new conception?				
11.* Is not service realization according to new conception conflicting with requirements of external environment?				
12.* Is technical implementation of the service technically feasible according to the new conception?				
In total:				

Sourse: Adapted from Schnetzler, N. (2005). *The idea machine. How ideas can be produced industrially*. Weinheim: Wiley-VCH Verlag.

3.2. Analysis model of feasibility of new services conception

After structuring of the peculiarities and circumstances of conception assessment reasonability, as discussed in the previous section, model of analysis of commercial possibilities of new service conception has been prepared (Fig. 1). The purpose of conception analysis is checking the commercial feasibility of its further development in a certain market. Commercial possibilities for development are checked by comparing the conception with business conditions. Conceptions are selected according to the criteria laid down Table 3.1.

As it has been mentioned above, every idea can have several conceptions for its further development. Therefore, the purpose of this assessment is to find the one that would be the best in particular conditions in the analyzed market. The conception that receives the biggest number of points is considered to be the best.

According the model of new service development (Bivainis, Drejeris 2006), the next step after conception assessment is making a decision about reasonability of designing a new service technology. As mentioned in the article (Bivainis, Drejeris 2006), it can be meaningful to omit technology designing in cases of developing new services that are simple in technical and technological terms and in cases when a company has personnel with high qualification. Tking into consideration the complexity of NS, the scope of designing works can be reduced or made simpler. The decision on the reasonability of designing shall be vested upon internal experts of the undertaking.

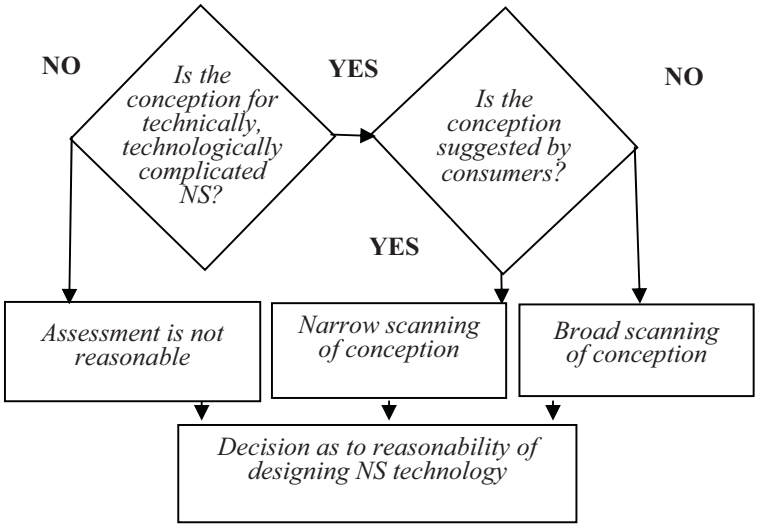


Figure 1. Model for assessment of new service conception feasibility

4. Conclusions

In research and professional literature much attention is paid to the problem of new product development, analysis of different aspects of designing new products and implementation of new services. The conducted analysis allows to state that the views about reasonability of building and evaluation of new service conceptions are highly contradictory. Furthermore, business has no methodology for the conceptions evaluation that would be adapted to the service sector.

After generalizing the broad studies the reasonability of designing a new service conception is validated and the model for its assessment is developed. The model consists of the following main components: expert evaluation of complexity of new service conceptions, evaluation of conformity between conceptions and business conditions according to the two different sets of criteria, decision making as concerns designing technology of the new service.

Flexible structure of the proposed model allows differentiating conceptions according to their technical complexity and source of ideas. The construction of the suggested model provides for a possibility to skip assessment of service conceptions that are simple in technical terms and to proceed to the next stage of development. The model provides for differentiation of conceptions according to the source of ideas. Such construction of the model allows cutting expenses on assessment and reducing time for evaluation as well as time for new service implementation.

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R. Drejeris

Naujų paslaugų koncepcijos vertinimas

Santrauka

Vienas šiuolaikinio verslo uždavinių – gebėti sukurti ir tinkamai įdiegti naujas paslaugas, todėl paslaugų verslo šakai aktualu visapusiškai ištirti šiuos procesus, parengti naujų paslaugų kūrimo bei įgyvendinimo sistemines nuostatas ir sukurti efektyvius metodus. Naujų paslaugų kūrimas ir diegimas – dažna daugelio paslaugų įmonių veiklos problema dėl pasitaikančių rizikingų sprendimų, kuriuos sąlygoja netinkamas veiksmų planavimas arba vadovų nežinojimas tinkamiausio reikalingų veiksmų nuoseklumo, priklausančio nuo aplinkos ir vidinių sąlygų. Mokslinėje ir specialiojoje literatūroje pateikiama daug įvairių modelių, skirtų naujoms paslaugoms diegti, bet dauguma jų yra prieštaringi tiek turinio, tiek etapų nuoseklumo aspektu. Kai kurie darbų autoriai pateikia labai apibendrintas naujų paslaugų diegimo schemas, kuriose pateiktas nesukonkretintas veiksmų scenarijus tik apsunkina jų įgyvendinimą realiomis verslo sąlygomis dėl galimybių priimti netinkamus sprendimus.

Koncepcijos kūrimo ir vertinimo etapą kai kurie darbų autoriai praleidžia, net nepagrįsdami tokio sprendimo. Reikia pastebėti, kad kita grupė tyrėjų koncepcijos kūrimui ir jos vertinimui skiria daug dėmesio, akcentuodami šį etapą kaip vieną atsakingiausių naujų paslaugų diegimo schemose. Todėl galima teigti, kad požiūriai dėl naujų paslaugų koncepcijos kūrimo ir vertinimo tikslingumo yra prieštaringi. Be to, nėra pateikta koncepcijos vertinimo metodikos, adaptuotos paslaugų verslui. Šias aplinkybes tikslinga traktuoti kaip problemą, aktualią tiek mokslui, tiek verslui. Tokios problemos atsiradimas suponuoja poreikį išsamiau išanalizuoti įvairių tyrėjų nuomones ir argumentus dėl naujų paslaugų koncepcijos kūrimo bei vertinimo etapo tikslingumo naujų paslaugų diegimo veiksmų grandinėje bei jo turinio. Pagal analizės rezultatus pasiūlyti pagrįstą sprendimą dėl koncepcijos vertinimo. ***Straipsnio tikslas*** – pateikti pagrįstą naujų paslaugų koncepcijos vertinimo modelį.

Apibendrinus plataus spektro darbus pagrįstas koncepcijos vertinimo tikslingumas, parengtas naujų paslaugų koncepcijos vertinimo modelis, sudarytas iš tokių svarbiausių komponentų: naujos paslaugos techninio-technologinio sudėtingumo ekspertinis vertinimas, koncepcijos ir verslo sąlygų atitikties vertinimas pagal pateiktus 2 kriterijų rinkinius, numatytus vertinti skirtingomis aplinkybėmis, sprendimo priėmimas dėl technologinio projektavimo tikslingumo. Lanksti siūlomo modelio struktūra leidžia diferencijuoti koncepcijas pagal techninį sudėtingumą ir jų idėjų šaltinį. Siūlomo modelio konstrukcija numato galimybę techniškai ir technologiškai nesudėtingų naujų paslaugų koncepcijų nevertinti ir pereiti prie tolesnio vystymo etapo. Šį sprendimą pateisina tai, kad naujų paslaugų konkrečios idėjos jau buvo patikrintos ankstesniame etape ir pripažintos kaip tinkamos esamoms ir būsimoms verslo sąlygomis. Modelyje numatytas koncepcijų diferencijavimas pagal idėjų šaltinį leidžia atlikti skirtingo detalumo vertinimą pagal minėtus 2 kriterijų rinkinius. Tokia modelio konstrukcija sudarys galimybes sumažinti vertinimo sąnaudas ir sutrumpinti vertinimo, kartu ir naujų paslaugų diegimo laiką.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: naujų paslaugų plėtra, naujų paslaugų samprata, koncepcijos vertinimas, modelio vertinimas.