



# XLA<sup>®</sup> Pocketbook

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Marco Gianotten



# Colophon

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# About this book

The XLA Pocketbook introduces the concept of “Xperience Level Agreement” (XLA) and the XLA 6P Framework for understanding and applying IT service experience management. The pocketbook is intended for IT service providers and consumers who want to learn the basics of XLA in order to derive more value from IT services. Value from IT services is usually expressed in terms of efficiency or effectiveness. Organizations are more efficient when information processing has been automated. They are more effective when IT services provide new information that enables them to take – and act upon – better decisions. Traditional IT Service Management often focuses too much on technology and not enough on its impact upon people and their business. The underlying assertion is that investment in IT service experience and its business impact fosters more meaningful, rewarding, and productive work.

IT service is where value is actually realized. The moment of truth is when people experience the IT solution and benefit from it. Even if IT solution design, application development, and IT operations were executed perfectly, an inadequate IT solution generates limited value. There is also value leakage when IT solution design and application development spend more time than necessary enabling the right IT service experience. Experience Management (XM) is therefore an integral part of IT solution design and application development, as well as IT Service Management. Although most of this pocketbook is written in the context of IT Service Management, IT solution designers and application developers will understand that their contribution to the right IT service experience is crucial. They can apply empathy and focus



on ensuring that there is “experience inside” their valuable contributions.

The XLA Pocketbook is based on the XLA 6P Framework. The vendor-neutral XLA Consortium is tasked with developing the XLA 6P Framework and promoting its effective adoption. This knowledge-sharing organization elicits feedback from the organizations that use the XLA 6P Framework and uses their feedback for future versions of the framework.

The XLA Pocketbook includes:

- Examples of the application of XLA
- An introduction to the XLA 6P Framework
- An overview of the key XLA concepts
- The XLA template
- The official Giarte XLA glossary of terms

It is structured in chapters that address:

1. Introduction to XLA and the XLA 6P Framework
2. Business Case for Better IT Service Experience (why)
3. IT Service Experience and its Management (what)
4. Organization of IT Service Experience Management (who)
5. Transformation of the IT Service Management Organization (how)

**Chapter 1** gives a history of XLA and introduces the XLA 6P Framework that provides a way of thinking (perspectives), a way of working (practices and products), and a way of being (people, principles and propositions).

**Chapter 2** is about the importance of co-creating value with customers through IT service management. It proposes the Xperience Level

Agreement as an effective instrument through which to improve customer value.

**Chapter 3** is about the increasingly higher demands people place on providing and consuming IT services and explains how a better IT service experience has a positive business impact.

**Chapter 4** describes the organizational structure and other resources needed to adopt and practice IT service experience management as an integrated part of IT Service Management.

**Chapter 5** describes an approach for adopting IT service experience management and embedding it into IT service management activities.



# 1

## Introduction

From software rebels creating the Agile Manifesto in a ski resort in Utah in 2001 to Steve Jobs launching the first iPhone in 2007 – the experience economy has influenced the last twenty years of Enterprise IT. However, experience had not been included in the contracting of IT services until Giarte created the Xperience Level Agreement (XLA) in 2015. In 2022, Giarte introduced the XLA 6P Framework for IT providers and consumers who want to derive greater value from IT services. This chapter gives a short overview of the history of XLA and summarizes the XLA 6P Framework.

### 1.1 History of XLA

ITIL was developed at the end of the 1980s to streamline and optimize service processes. In the following decade, design thinking was showcased by IDEO for creative problem-solving. The origins of Scrum for cross-team collaboration on projects also go back to the 1990s. In 1999, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore brought us the “return on experience” with their bestseller *Welcome to the Experience Economy*. Two

years later, a group of software rebels gathered in a ski resort, defining the Agile Manifesto as a declaration of independence for software coding. Donald Norman published his book *Emotional Design* in 2003, after his earlier masterpiece *The Design of Everyday on User-centered Design*. In 2007, Steve Jobs performed the best product launch ever with the iPhone, setting the tone for the consumerization of Enterprise IT. Enterprise IT refers to the IT services that support large organizations. The above may seem like a random listing of events, but when connecting the dots, these developments set in motion the movement of XLA.

The notion of XLA was introduced in 2007 by Dutchman Marcel Broumels. This term, then described as Experience Level Agreement (ELA), was coined in his study on a new approach for facility management. The outcome of his study about the value of Service Level Agreements (SLA) in facility management proved relevant for the IT Service Management domain.

Unmistakably, this concept of XLA was based on Pine and Gilmore's book *The Experience Economy* (1999). The authors proposed a new way of connecting with customers and securing their loyalty. They describe the progression of economic value through agrarian, industrial, and service and experience economies. Although the concept of the experience economy was initially focused on business, it has crossed into other fields such as tourism, architecture, nursing, and urban planning.

All these and many other great moments, brilliant philosophies, and groundbreaking publications triggered the conception of the XLA movement. Putting Customer Experience and business impact at the heart of IT by collaboration was Giarte's mission. Giarte coined the term Xperience Level Agreement. Inspired by the Occupy movement, it

started with activist slogans: “Users are no losers!”, “We are the 99 percent!”, “SLA stands for secrets, lies, and assumptions!”. This provocative start transitioned into a period of scribbling models and writing articles on how to use XLA as a force for good. In 2015, Marco Gianotten, the founder of Giarte, took XLA to the Pink Elephant conference in Las Vegas, the most prominent IT Service Management conference in the world. What happens in Vegas never stays in Vegas, and a coalition of the willing started flocking together with Giarte as a safe haven. Today, this role is fulfilled by the XLA Consortium. In 2016, Gianotten published the book *Digital Empathy: When Tech Meets Touch*. After this publication, many organizations wanted to try XLA and its good practices – often as a last resort to solve problems.

In 2018, the Royal Netherlands Standardization Institute (NEN), Giarte and three external stakeholders started developing a Netherlands Technical Agreement (NTA) defining the basic requirements for XLA. The NTA 8038 document was published in 2020. The next step for a federated international standard is a Dutch NEN Standard with broader stakeholder representation to publish an authoritative standard. This NEN 8038 Standard will be published in 2023, five years after the initial NTA. This will be a steppingstone for the worldwide federation of national standardization bodies in the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The major difference between an XLA Standard and the XLA 6P Framework, as described in this book, is that the standard focuses on the requirements for organizations that adopt XLA. The XLA 6P Framework offers guidance on how to fulfill these requirements. As such, they are closely related.

People in IT talk about adoption, usability, and productivity. They preach transformation, innovation, and software eating the world. So what? How does this affect people outside IT who use technology? What

does this all mean to normal human beings? The XLA Consortium is on a sensemaking mission by simplifying IT and giving meaning to change. It is not easy. There are ill-defined “wicked” problems to be tackled, with no right or wrong solution. This requires unconventional approaches. The XLA Consortium is building the plane while flying on the XLA 6P Framework. One of the most complex parts is to codify dynamic and evolving practices.

## 1.2 The XLA 6P Framework

The XLA 6P Framework provides guidance to help organizations improve the impact of IT services on people and their business. It comprises a way of thinking (perspectives), a way of working (practices and products), and a way of being (people, principles and propositions).

The way of working is referred to as Experience Management (XM). This is based on the concept of consensus between IT service providers and consumers regarding the desired human experience and business impact: Xperience Level Agreement (XLA).

The XLA 6P Framework is for IT service providers and consumers who want to derive more value from IT services. It is for managers and practitioners concerned with the strategic value of IT services, with the engagement and agreement between providers and consumers, or with the operational service interactions. It is equally relevant for business functions that acquire and consume IT services, for an organization’s IT department or function, and for managed IT service providers or other external IT service providers.