



## **THE ROLE OF CREATIVE APPROACHES AMONG SERVICE DESIGN PROJECTS**

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### **Abstract**

Many current social and service challenges are so complicated, or wicked, that linear approaches do not equate in tackling them. Service design is a field of design that endeavors to innovate service interactions using a holistic, human-centred, creative approach. Service design brings people together from various backgrounds beyond design, to work collaboratively on people-oriented projects. Internationally, service designs' creative methods are being applied in varying corporate and social contexts from banks and restaurants to hospitals and airports.

The diversity in approach to service design however means there has been no fixed set of working methods for practitioners. This paper looks to explore service design methods currently in use among the international design community and how they are being applied around the world. In particular, this paper discusses the role of creative approaches and the difficulties associated with defining those methods among complex service and social contexts.

**Keywords:** *Creative Approaches, Service Design, Complex Contexts*

## Introduction

This literature review will be used to explore the role of creative design methods to address complex social and service challenges around the world. Creative practices are being utilised to address complicated social and service issues within many different sectors of society; both public and private. International service design authors, however, have written about the variations in their creative practices along with the additional issues that these might bring when working among human-focused projects. This paper will explore the creative concepts, theories and processes associated with service design. Section one discusses the role of empathy within the design profession. Previously, design had been linked with using its creative practices to develop artefacts. In recent years, however, design is shifting its creative focus to becoming more holistically driven. Section two explores designs' changing once top-down creative landscape and how design practitioners are now developing more grass roots creative approaches to tackle design problems. Section three investigates the importance of creative design methods and how they can be used to help 'make sense' of complex information for stakeholders during the many stages of service design projects.

The purpose of this literature review is to shed light on the role of creative methods along with any difficulties associated with applying them to complex social and service systems in varying contexts. The findings of this literary investigation will act as a contribution to my PhD thesis which looks to investigate the reactions of graphic designers and also local industry following the introduction of service design approaches to small commercial graphic design projects in Perth, Western Australia. My project endeavours to introduce service design methods to two different design studios via case study research to evaluate how service design methods and approaches help graphic designers develop holistic community-focused outcomes for small commercial project frameworks.

## 1. Creativity in empathy

Service design is a relatively new design practice. While no complete consensus exists on its definition, generally speaking, service design can encompass all fields of design. It regards the artefacts produced (whether these are furniture, appliances or posters) as 'touch points' in a larger user experience. In order to provide effective design outcomes, service designers often work with the users of these 'touchpoints', using creative approaches to collaboratively design this experience. The principles of service design, have been in the making for decades. Brown & Katz (2011) agree and describe the transition of design's disciplinary approaches recent years: "It's not about 'us-versus-them,' or even 'us-on-behalf-of-them.' For the design thinker, it has to be 'us-with-them'" (p. 382). The consideration of 'them', or the 'user' of a product or service, has been the current rhetoric of the design industry at an international level: "Service design is all about taking a service and making it meet the user's and customer's needs for that service" (Interactive Design Foundation, 2017). As Lance Bettencourt (2010) points out, "all customer needs are not created equal - not in the eyes of the customer, and not from an innovation perspective" (p. 22). This statement alone illustrates, that the previous design methods of creating products for mass audiences is no longer considered an effective approach to design issues by leaders in the design field.

In recent history, when big corporations developed new products, they would hire marketing and advertising agencies to sell them to the public. Commonly the messages, created for the advertisements to the sell products of large companies, were directed at the customer's fears or vanities (Brown and Katz (2011), p. 382). Papanek (1972) explained the devastating results of this marketing method by stating that "today the myriad of objects of daily use are mass produced to a utilitarian and aesthetic standard often completely unrelated to the consumer's need" (p. 220). In other words, all of these products were produced utilising the core marketing agenda: would it sell? Historically established design practices like these, which pivoted around producing artefacts, have resulted in design being titled as a "wasteful business" (Butler cites Thomas, 2008) and "that we have filled more dumps and landfills than any other profession" (Poynor cites Buchanan, 2008, p. 5).

In terms of service design thinking, the "consumer's need" (Papanek, 1972, p. 220) is sought through questioning: "Whom is the thing supposed to serve, and what do 'they' want/need?" (p. 130). Kimbell (2011) agrees but looks closer in terms of social responsibility with "an emphasis on accountability" (p. 62) and asks "who or what is service design serving?" (p. 62). Papanek (1972) was a pioneer of this approach. He urged designers to use their creative skills to "design for the people's *needs* rather than their *wants*, or artificially created wants" (p. 234). These 'wants', according to Papanek, are the products that are pushed to "a level of desire so as to create 'need'" (Jedlicka, 2013, p. 130) and "are the bulk of what drives our current economy" (p. 130). Examples of these include "dog

biscuits, designer coffee, diamonds, detergents, hair gel, cigarettes, credit cards, sneakers, butt toners, light beer and heavy-duty recreational vehicles” (Garland, 1999, p. 2). Ken Garland, who in 1964, called for graphic designers to put their skills to better use, declared, “the profession’s time and energy is used up manufacturing demand for things that are inessential at best” (p. 2) and concluded that “unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention” (p. 4). Brown & Katz (2011) reinforce a grass roots approach by stating that “we can connect with the people we are observing at a fundamental level. We call this ‘empathy’”(p. 382).

## 2. Trickle down of creativity

Service designers are aligned in their ideology to uncover their users needs for any given project. Andrew Shea (2012) wrote in his book, *Designing for Social Change*, that “in order to accurately understand a community’s needs, it is extremely important to gain a thorough knowledge of the community and experience firsthand the lives and environment of community members” (p. 13). He used the term “immersion” (p. 13) to describe the many ways in which you can experience a community and the people who exist within it (p. 13). Focus groups have been used regularly in the past by marketers of products to develop an understanding of what consumers might need but as Jedlicka (2013) points out, this provides “only a sketch of what a potential buyer thinks” (p. 130). Instead she proposes that “an ethnographic study, though still more subjective than actual purchase data, can work with each subject in a place with no distractions or outside influences, [to] observe each audience member in his or her natural environment” (p. 132).

Ethnographic practices such as observing a particular group of people within the context of their everyday lives, allow service designers get to know their users individually; to understand their needs, wants and desires so as to regard as significant their everyday individual, personal as well as social experiences. Through the application of ethnographic methods such as interviewing, videoing, photography and observation of people over extended periods of time, service design outcomes are user driven. Shea (2012) confirms this as an effective method and suggests a two-pronged approach by saying that “sometimes you may need to fade into the background and observe, while at other times you need to work side by side with members of the community” (p. 13). Working alongside community members has been by described by many in this field as co-design. Gregory cites Bason (2012) in his journal article, “Leading Public Sector Innovation: Co-Creation for a Better Society, to describe the processes of co-design”:

Co-creation is presented as the use of a number of qualitative techniques (from interviews to video-recordings) of citizen interactions with services to generate solutions based upon new insight into user perspectives. (pp. 131-132)

Ers & Stappers (2008), suggest that citizens get more deeply involved in the design processes: “We use co-design in a broader sense to refer to the creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process” (p. 6). The results of co-design can be service interactions that individuals not only want to use, but will continue to want to use. This can be attributed to participants of co-design projects claiming ownership of the final outcome to which they have made valuable contributions. Stickdorn & Schneider (2011), who compiled over twenty case studies from prominent service designers for their book *This is Service Design Thinking* reiterate the positives of co-design practices.

...through co-creation customers get the chance to add value to a service in partnership with the service provider early in the development of the service. The more a customer gets involved in the service provision, the more likely this service is of evoking co-ownership which in turn will result in increased customer loyalty. (p. 39)

These authors agree that “understanding value and the nature of relations between people and other people, between people and organisations, and between organisations of different kinds, are now understood to be central to designing services” (p. 51).

Emily Pilloton (2010) is a designer who addresses the issues of traditionally practiced design processes and how service design thinking is a more sustainable approach for design projects. Pilloton (2010) is the author of several publications endorsing co-design methodology, which is one of the significant principles of service design theory. During her presentation, *Teaching Design for Change*, at Oxford University in the UK, she detailed the practical creative foundations of a series of co-design projects that she initiated within a small town in the USA. One such project was constructed in order to promote education as fun to primary school students who, within a particular

school in this American town, had previously achieved extremely poor academic results. The co-design team included Pilloton's design team, members of the school staff as well as some of the school students and together they designed a game for solving mathematical equations. Approximately twenty old car tyres were half submerged within the sand pit of the school playground. The teacher could write a differing number in chalk upon each tyre. With everyone ready to play, the teacher could call out a mathematical equation, such as 'what is seven plus nine?' The students could then run and find the tyre with the correct answer and once found could sit on it, determining them the victor of the game.

One of the positive outcomes of implementing this creative methodology was that the participating members of this local community developed ownership of the implemented design projects, which in turn, created a natural sustainability to the solutions. "It's not about designing for the client anymore but designing for people and letting appropriate solutions emerge from within" (2010). In cases like this one, education problems in low socio economic environment are very complex. Traditional ways of tackling issues like these are not adequate. Creative processes that involve building empathy and facilitation for co-creation of education systems help address deeper and more meaningful community solutions. This project involved developing design solutions that were specific to the needs and wants of the people in this town, which in turn rendered these customised design outcomes as 'original'. In co-creation, the designers' role is to facilitate creative processes with stakeholders. Creative methods can include illustration games for idea generation, role playing to better understand varying human perspectives, Lego play to examine multiple layers and angles of complex problems and card games to research potential customer journeys through a proposed project experience. From this perspective, design can be seen as a process to encourage creativity with people from non-creative backgrounds rather than the 'top-down' process of designers focusing on polished outcomes for the users.

Brown & Katz (2011) reinforce this kind of creative methodology by declaring that designers are capable of delivering substantial outcomes of service design: "to translate observations into insights, and insights into the products and services that will improve lives" (p. 382). These outcomes are no longer the artefacts of the past.

The design of objects is no longer restricted to form, function, material and production. Design is arguably now focused on the interactions between people and technology, and products serve as platforms for experiences, functionality and service offerings. (Buchanan, 2001 cited in Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011) (p. 56).

Jedlicka (2013) agrees with this and puts forth, that designers should consider projects through an holistic perspective: "Rather than seeing design problems as something to be divided down into the smallest bits, the systems view sees them as opportunities for interconnecting the world back together again" (p. 146). Enninga & Manschot et al. (2013) add, that "a holistic design must take this entire context into account and make human experience the foundation of the design" (p. 14). These aligning statements propose that designers need to stop seeing an artefact-focused solution at the end of every job and instead should broaden their view to include a larger, integrated set of 'touchpoints' that link a service together. Benmouh (2011) summarises the importance of this user-centred service system in his article, "Your Service Is Your Brand In Action", by stating: "All the touchpoints between the company and the rest of the world carry a message. Everything communicates" (p. 14). He supports this move away from artefact-focused design by adding that "a company could define its brand in a perhaps different-but much-more-tangible way than before: as the sum of all touchpoints" (p. 15).

### **3. Creativity in sense-making**

One of the most prominent service design methods, which is written about consistently among global service design literature, is multi-disciplinary design. This method incorporates many disciplines, including creatives, within a single project in an aim to draw from a range of technical backgrounds. This structure is different from co-design which, for some people, refers "to the collective creativity of collaborating designers (Ers & Stappers (2008) p. 6) and, as established in section two of this paper is more recently defined by leading service design authors, as incorporating the user within the designing process. Instead, a multi-disciplinary design framework gathers together specific disciplines so as to access their specialised skills when needed within the duration of a project. Richard Grefé (2011), author of *Experience Design is the Only Design*, discusses the challenges facing designers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Grefé (2011) contends that design problems are ever increasing in complexity and that they require multiple disciplines to achieve simple, authentic solutions (p. 26).

Graphic design is one particular creative discipline that is extremely useful among service design projects. Graphic designers are capable of organising complex data and redraw it to visually demonstrate concepts to project stakeholders. Project notions documented in pictorial form during the research, experimentation and testing stages of service projects are often coined prototypes. A prototype is a powerful tool that reinforces designed ideas and make a project clearer to all who view it. Sketches, illustrations, three dimensional models and so on are just some of the creative methods which graphic designers can use to demonstrate the critical information of projects. Graphic designers play a key role among service design projects as they are able to visually construct information using 'systems of seeing' (Medley, 2012) to deliver concise messages about a project. Stickdorn, M. & Schneider, J. (2011), authors of *This is service design thinking*, point out in specific detail how valuable graphic designers can be among within the service design context: "The special perspective they possess in interpreting how graphic information and culturally coined visual codes work is valuable for creating functioning design propositions" (p. 78). According to Jedlicka (2013), graphic designers can apply "a big picture view that includes other perspectives" (p. 146). Stickdorn & Schneider (2011) endorse these comments by adding: "Graphic designers have a distinctive visual imagination and think early about how a planned idea will work in practice" (p. 78). Fabian Segelstroms' (2013) thesis, *Stakeholder Engagement for Service Design: How service designers identify and communicate sights*, called for service designers to recognise the immense influence that visualisation of project data can have during all stages of a project:

Few organisations have such a holistic image of how their service functions from the customers' perspective as portrayed in service design visualisations. The outcomes of stakeholder research, especially in the form of visualisations, provides genuine value for client organisations and could thus be promoted much more aggressively when a project is pitched to potential clients. (p. 136)

Design has been broadly under-utilised whilst it has been linked only with aesthetic finishes or artefacts. Service design, in contrast, investigates project issues deeply to explore core problems among convoluted social and service systems. Stickdorn & Schneider (2011), authors of *This is Service Design Thinking*, assert that, "While colloquially the word design is used to refer to the appearance or styling of a particular product or outcome, the proper meaning goes far beyond that. In particular, the approach of service design refers to the process of design rather than its outcome" (p. 14). They state that design needs to consider the larger picture when considering design issues (which are predominantly presented as client requests for artefacts) and propose that "the outcome of service design process can have various forms: rather abstract organisational structures, operation processes, service experiences and even concrete physical objects" (p. 14).

These design issues are complex and are not solved via simple solutions such as artefacts. This new design field concerns itself with innovating a greater system of service interactions or "touch points" (Benchmann, 2011, p. 15) and does not pivot around designing commodities. These 'touchpoints' are the necessary interactions that take place to access a service or product and the number of 'touchpoints' are increasing rapidly. "Whereas in the past, a user of banking services would primarily communicate with a teller, and receive a monthly bank statement by post, today consumers can organize and customize their banking services via various channels" (Enninga & Manschot et al., 2013, p. 13). Currently, the service design touchpoints of these finance driven communicative channels include recognizable outputs such as internet banking, smart phone application banking, telephone banking and so on. Banking communications with their customers were previously limited in terms of a bank's trading hours and monthly statement delivery. However, through a newly available extended range of touchpoints, users can not only have more options to complete banking transactions but, during this broadened range of banking channels, are becoming more familiar with this banks identity and company ethos. Customers can see the colours of this banks logo in its internet banking website and customers can access certain banking areas via specifically designed interactions in its smart phone application. What users see, how users interact and what users hear are all experiences of this financial service. Offering users an holistically designed selection of service options such as demonstrated in this scenario, can generate positive user experiences of this company.

Service design methods such as customer journey mapping, service blueprints, stakeholder maps and empathy maps are essential tools for discovering unforeseen project issues among complex social and service design systems. Customer journey maps, for example, are created by plotting common human service experiences: "These can take many forms, from personal face to face contact between individuals, to virtual interactions with a website or physical trips to a building. Constructing a customers journey map involves defining these touchpoints by generating user insights" (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011, p. 158). The data gathered for customer journey maps, "can also be

documented by customers themselves – blogs and videos diaries provide insights into the user’s own language” (p. 159). Customer journey maps can be constructed using creative tools such as drawing pictures, diagrams or storyboards to ‘make sense’ of complex project information. Enormous amounts of data can be brought together, often from widely varying sources via a concise visual aid that can be understood by all stakeholders. Relaying complex information in clearer visual forms for project stakeholders is an effective creative method for better understanding the needs and wants of people in service systems.

#### 4. Creativity for complex service and social systems

Service design, at an international level, is evolving at a rapid pace (Kueh, Medley & Price, 2013, p. 2). A report from the Business Innovation Observatory (2014) for the European Commission titled “Service design as a means to advance business models” discusses the positive impacts of service design applications among varying business sectors;

Although there are no official metrics measuring the use of service design, the potential for using service design is large. The discipline has been adopted by the private and public service sector, as well as the manufacturing sector, the latter in order to make their business more service oriented. Several studies show that customer satisfaction in relation to service delivery is low, and there lies the potential for service companies to design services that are able to attract and retain customers. (p. 2)

Sangiorgi (2009) instils however that “there has been description of the methods and tools these designers use, but relatively little theory-building” (p. 418). Regardless of this, the underlying themes among service design literature are consistent: “Service Design is an interdisciplinary approach that combines different methods and tools from various disciplines. It is a new way of thinking as apposed to a new stand-alone academic discipline” (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011, p. 29). And the core principles of service design are reinforced by the leading designers in the field:

Products and services are designed by people to be used by people, to achieve interaction between products and people, or between people and other people. In their search for good designs, designers are thus focused on people - the users. (Enninga & Manschot et al., 2013, p. 14)

Service design practices and creative approaches seem to vary greatly dependant upon their application. Leading global design organisations within the field such as IDEO and The Design Council have attempted to define service design process and these institutions include descriptions of service design methods on their websites. Stickdorn & Schneider (2011), who in their book, also describe service design practices, point out that service design seemingly cannot be simplified; “services can be designed from various perspectives, using different methods and tools of various disciplines and thus also using different terminology” (p. 18). Other authors however claim that even though service design processes are not systematic, there is a recognisable order to how they can be used:

Although service design methodology is not uniform and needs to be tailored to the specific service and sector, the following steps can be distinguished in the design process. The process starts with a search for customer insights, for instance through customer mapping or customer journey mapping. In the second step service designers draft new service concepts together with experts and/or clients. In the following steps designers develop service prototypes and start drafting service blueprints and matching business models which will be affected by the service design. The final step is the implementation of the design. (Business Innovation Observatory, 2014, p. 4)

In contrast, author Robert Curedale has written a book called *Service Design: 250 essential methods* detailing the vast array of design processes and creative approaches which might be applied to any given project in a multitude of ways. In his book, he isolates, “around 250 Service design methods described step by step” (Service Design Network, 2017).

Comparisons of statements on service design like these demonstrate how inconsistent the field of service design can be and most service design authors declare that service design methods are a “toolbox and not a manual” (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011, p. 8). There is no service design guide to follow. Instead, there is a spectrum of service design methods to access and use specific to any given project.

## Conclusion

This paper has brought to light several factors about the role of creative approaches among service design practices around the world. Firstly, service design is becoming more established and the role of its creative practices are being recognised as significant for innovating complex social and service systems. So much so that ServDes2018, a service design conference to be held in Milan next year, has declared that, “Service Design can no longer be considered an ‘emerging discipline’. Though recent and in continuous evolution, it is now consolidated enough to be assessed and reviewed in terms of effectiveness and impact on economy and society...” (ServDes2018, 2017). This statement alone reinforces that the value in the human-centred creative approaches of service design is being acknowledged by all kinds of institutions in both public and private societal sectors around the planet.

Secondly, the creative methods being used among service design applications seem to vary extensively due to broad differences in project sizes, contexts and complexities. Well-known service designers in the field discuss the extraordinary amount of service design methods currently available around the globe however none of them offer a definitive ordered set of methods to use for each and every project. These methods are instead repeatedly described as a ‘toolkit’ and not a ‘manual’ (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011). Service design authors have highlighted distinct common creative frameworks amongst varying case study projects. There appears to be similarities in how the creative practices are used but service design practitioners continually describe service design as an approach rather than an a precise way of working.

Lastly, most authors of service design agree that concise definitions for the field and the roles of its creative practitioners are difficult to resolve. Most literature on the subject of service design loosely describe it as the ‘design of services’ but these texts rarely goes into detail about what types of disciplines are instigating and then implementing the creative methods. In addition, some leading design figures only refer to service design in relation to the corporate sector whilst other design writers discuss service design using only public service examples. Often these authors also refer to practitioners of service design as ‘service designers’. Stickdorn and Schneider (2011), however, dismiss titles like these when they put forth that, “service design is interdisciplinary and therefore it cannot be a discipline in itself” (p. 18).

Service design as a field is still in flux but there is universal agreement from prominent design authors and leading design practitioners alike that the roles of the creative approaches used in service design practices are significant for innovating service and social systems. The value in using service designs’ creative processes to innovate services is being internationally acknowledged and broader applications of service design methods by varying kinds of corporations and institutions are on the rise around the globe.

The findings from this paper have reinforced the need for further investigation into broader applications of service design practices such as those proposed in my PhD. The literary data from this paper acknowledges the relevance of using creative approaches when addressing project problems and calls for greater understanding into issues that may arise during applications of creative methods to complex projects of varying context and size. This paper will be incorporated into the literature review of my PhD.

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