

Case: Innovating implementation and design of services within the public sector

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Case background

By its nature, traditional product design results in the delivery of a fully formed artefact - one that can be used, more or less, out of the box. With service design projects however, designers hand over a far less tangible service proposition and it is hoped that the client has the skills and wherewithal to implement the service provision outlined in the service blueprint. Others in the field of service design (Vesterdal, 2009; Marsh, 2009 for example) have touched upon this dilemma but it is difficult to find explicit examples from which to learn from. This case study uses projects, undertaken for the public sector organisation Skills Development Scotland (SDS) by the Product Design department at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) over a two-year period, to explore the challenges addressed within SDS in the implementation of service design projects and highlights lessons learned.

Implementing service provisions from within a large organisation demands as many political and organisational skills as design skills, however design can support this process and should come from within. As discussed by Taylor & Tofts (2009) the ability to deliver innovation in services depends on compromises between implementation, policy goals, cost of delivery and the combination of staff and technology resources required to deliver the service. Service design consultancies can support implementation but it can be an expensive option for the client and may not achieve the necessary outcome due to self-imposed barriers within the organisation. These barriers can be a measure of an organisation's *design readiness*, or lack thereof. An organisation's absorptive capacity is the ability to "assimilate and make use of the transferring technology" (Halverson, 2005: p3), but it is not difficult to extend this to include the transfer of design thinking and knowledge. Design readiness, or absorptive capacity, develops cumulatively and represents a long-term investment. The projects shared by SDS and GSA highlight a number of areas where obstructions may arise; from employee reluctance and management restraint to political and media pressures; and where design can help work around these obstructions. Some examples of innovation explored within SDS included employing design interns, developing in-house service design talent, raising design awareness within staff, and departmental reorganisation. Projects also highlighted the need to empower employees and encourage a flexible approach; some of the points discussed by Taylor & Tofts (2009).

Of particular interest is the way that the SDS engaged with the projects. Dissemination of a design approach was aided by the involvement of design students, and staff within SDS were often more open to learning with students what was, to some, a new approach to their working practice. When external media coverage made the organisation more sensitive to

criticism, the flexibility with which the students could engage with SDS was affected. This highlighted the importance of innovation opportunities being allowed to take shape and to be prototyped as well as the need for senior management to be open to this - bottom-up innovation being as important as top-down management (Halvorsen, 2005; IDeA, 2005).

Take home

It is easy to hand over a service design and expect the client to be able to run with it. However, experience shows that there are many factors internal to an organisation that can hinder the implementation of these service designs. With a range of projects and experiences to draw upon, this presentation will illustrate how an organisation might prepare to implement new service propositions - for design readiness. In particular,

- The value of the design of internal communication.
- Visualisation and prototyping of the proposed service implementation.
- Understanding the needs of the workforce involved in delivering the service to an end-user.
- Developing strategies to improve the ability to innovate implementation of service provisions within the organisation.

It is intended that the points discussed here and in the presentation can be taken away and adapted by management, and service designers alike, to identify potential organisational barriers to service innovation and implementation. By providing examples of how one public sector organisation (SDS) tackled these hurdles, it is hoped that others will be able to take a similar design approach to their own particular situation.

References

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