

Service design is a hydra-headed issue that involves intangibles, touch-points, and the entire staff of a company. And sometimes, it is the service designer's job to convince managers to lead from behind.



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Reflections on Service Design, Frameworks, and the Service Organization

by Jacqueline Wechsler

News flash: The responsibility of the service designer is not to swoop into a company and present it with a designed service plan—and then fly out. On the contrary. What the service designer should be doing is supplying the organization with the tools, discourses, and frameworks that will enable it to develop *its own* service

design capabilities. Unlike building a website, for example, or even a suite of design artifacts (as part of either a communication or a service component), service design demands extensive collaboration from the client. A company that hires a service design consultancy needs to understand that if it is not completely on-board and

does not invest resources in developing its own service design capability to carry out the consultancy's recommendations, the organization and its customers will not reap the full benefits of the consulting work.

In addition, service design is a complex activity with broad scope. It usually involves the design of

customer interactions through a variety of touch-points over an extended period of time. Many of these touch-points are non-tangible (call centers, social media channels, websites, and the like), though others are tangible (that is, customer- and employee-facing design artifacts). Essentially, services are co-created by multiple staff members and customers interacting in different ways during various stages of customers' journeys. That requires inter-departmental dialogue and collaboration during both design and implementation phases. The result is that organizations must often commit to sequential change to a variety of front- and back-end processes. Organizational structures may need

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reshuffling; new relationships among departments may need to be forged. Indeed, service design requires us to consider the experience of our staff, as well as of our customers.

Service design requires an iterative process throughout the initial implementation phase, as well as afterward, and organizations need to understand and be equipped accordingly. Essentially, service design exists within the translation space (Figure 1) that lies between strategy and

implementation; and eventually, managers need help translating that strategy into action (that is, interactions among front-line staff and customers). Sometimes, there is a requirement for an internally facing organizational change program.

Service organizations need

help as they learn to navigate through this translation space. Creating a roadmap of sequential internal and external activities is often helpful. So is the use of frameworks.

Observations from the field

I had some experience recently with a large company that was suffering from siloed thinking. Staff members were not used to thinking outside their particular activities or spheres of influence, and their understanding of the different services and associated processes that facilitated the general customer experience tended to be fragmented. The result was a similarly fragmented—and poor—customer experience. The evidence for this breakdown was made most apparent when we held internal workshops to map the customer journey and found that the management team was not sure how things actually worked out there in the field. Of course, the implicit knowledge of the staff and

STRATEGY - intended experience



Service design exists within this translation space

IMPLEMENTATION - actual experience

Figure 1. The domain of service design exists in a gray area between strategy and execution. Service organizations need to support companies in their quest to effectively navigate through this space.

their associated informal arrangements led to sales, but how could we design an improved customer experience when we were not even sure what that experience actually comprised? We turned to the call center staff to get some insight into how the current processes failed and at which stages of their journey customers were seeking assistance and of what kind. It was not a surprise that the most angst experienced by customers occurred during the stages at which the processes were not clearly defined or understood by management.

The customer journey map (also known as a service blueprint) was first discussed by G. Lynne Shostack¹ in 1984 and has since become a widely used tool for service design practitioners. Customer journey maps are visual representations of the various interactions a customer has with an organization through various touch-points over time. (Some examples can be found at <http://www.servicedesigntools.org/tools/35>.) Shostack identifies the steps for designing a service blue-print as the following:

- Identify general processes, sub-processes, and back-end processes.

1. G. Lynne Shostack, "Designing Services that Deliver," *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 62, no. 1 (January-February 1984), pp. 133-139.

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- Isolate fail points.
- Establish time frames, including ones for best- and worst-case scenarios.

To help the siloed company, our team created several large maps (over a meter wide) that represented customer journeys for various products. The maps traced a customer's interaction with the organization over a variety of touch-points over time, and highlighted all the pain points—or interactions on the journey that tended to cause irritation. The result was a framework that facilitated collaboration across multiple business units. Indeed, as time went on the maps were often requested by staff for planning and strategy conversations, and it did not take long for them to become widely used within the business. They invited dialogue among departments and provided both language and a prototype of sorts with which to consider, discuss, and plan new ways of doing things. This helped make an intangible

service more tangible and provided a representation through which staff could understand the customer's point of view. In effect, the map/framework provided a language, as well as a tool, with which staff could plan new services and improvements to the already existing ones.

Service design and organizational change

The co-created nature of services underlines the importance of considerations related to organizational change. Organizations are complex social systems, and service design projects sometimes necessitate changes within them. Consequently, the implementation of a new service design can require a long-term commitment from the organization. Figure 2 (on next page) illustrates a schema² that highlights the potential organizational impact of service design projects.

Although service design can often begin on the periphery of an organization, for maximum effectiveness, it may need to permeate to its core. This depends on how closely aligned the new design is to the firm's

2. S. Junginger and D. Sangiorgi, "Service Design and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap Between Rigor and Relevance," paper presented at 3rd IASDR Conference on Design Research, Seoul, Korea, 2009.

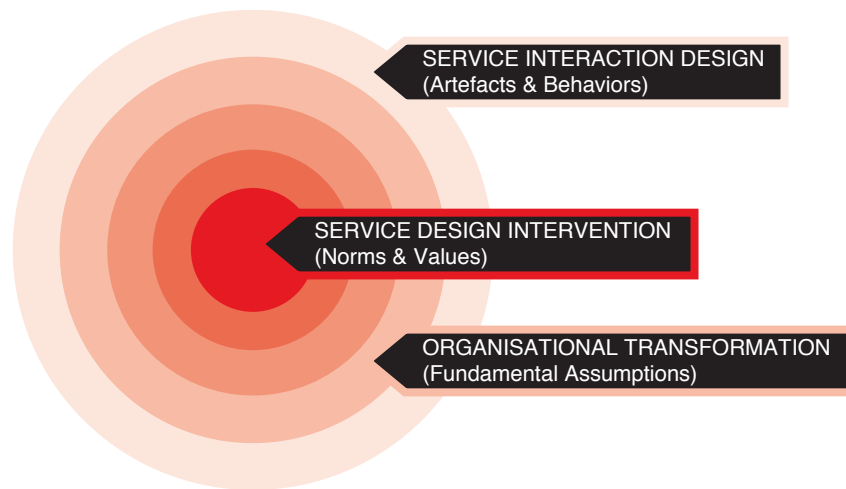


Figure 2. It can be useful to consider your service design recommendations in terms of their potential impact in order to determine how much focus should be given to internal, staff-facing initiatives. Some service design recommendations sit at the periphery and do not require any organizational change activities. Other designs may not be aligned with the current assumptions of an organization and may require some internally facing service design activities in addition to a customer-facing program.

current assumptions and philosophy. If the scope of service design work sits at the periphery, the impact to the organization is minimal and the beliefs and norms of the company do not require change. Service design that complements existing values and assumptions within the organization have a less significant impact on the organization even if it takes a more central place in the firm; and when the service design is not aligned with the organization's fundamental assumptions, a long-term commitment for organizational change is almost invariably required. In other words, internal programs that ensure that the organizational philosophy and aims of the staff align with the service aims may be necessary.

Peter Senge writes extensively about organizational change and systems thinking, and in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, he notes the need to build what he calls governing ideas into an organization.³ Ideally, employees come to share in a vision of the organization's true mission and purpose, making it easier for them to participate in conceiving and creating customer experiences. Organizations thus need to understand that their services are co-created with their staff, and so they must find ways to get their staff on board with the firm's broader goals and experiential strategy. It is essential that the

3. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 223.

vision of senior—and, particularly, middle management—are aligned with the broader strategic goals of the organization to ensure that the strategy is executed by front-line staff. Similarly, organizations need to empower their staff to innovate from the inside (Henry Chesborough writes extensively about this idea as part of his studies of open innovation⁴). As part of this process, it is vital that companies provide their staff with frameworks, language, and tools to help facilitate ongoing service improvement.

In 2007, the UK's National Health Service (NHS) launched an experience-based design program developed in collaboration with the London-based service design agency Think Public. It is an approach supported by co-design activities in which staff are given the tools, as well as the permission, to redesign services at their workplaces with each other and with their patients. In a talk at the 2011 National Service Design conference in Paris, Julia Schaeper, the NHS's service design lead and innovation associate, reflected on the program and on her efforts to develop design thinking from the inside. As part of her presentation, Schaeper

4. H. Chesborough, "Bringing Open Innovation to Services," *Sloan Management Review*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2011), pp. 85-90.

screened videos of NHS service design in action. The videos included footage of hospital staff co-designing experiences with patients—and made it apparent that small changes can make a disproportionately large impact. Schaeper also discussed the toolkit developed for NHS employees to help them improve services from the ground up. (Some of these resources, along with case studies, are available at <http://www.institute.nhs.uk/>.) The toolkits and the training that went along with them were instrumental in transferring service design capabilities to employees—but no more instrumental than the permission given to staff members to devise their own improvements.

Empowering the front line

When service design becomes participatory, it facilitates buy-in from the people delivering the service. It is thus important to note how often good service design recommendations created by strategic staff get lost in translation once those designs filter down through multiple layers of middle management. Clearly, internal staff must be empowered if they are to participate and make changes. Schaeper stressed the importance of breaking down internal barriers, leveling the playing field, and making this approach part of the organiza-

tional philosophy. Co-design activities can be an effective way to get buy-in from internal staff. I have run many co-design sessions with internal stakeholder groups and I am often astounded at how effective they can be. There is such power in allowing staff to execute a solution they have helped design themselves, rather than one forced upon them from an external source.

Indeed, it is only when staff members feel they are supported in their commitment to service change that they are able to carry out those changes. I find in my own experience as a customer that all too often there are no structures in place to perpetuate effective action by front-line staff. Employees are often disempowered by organizational processes and systems that thwart their efforts toward customer satisfaction. IT systems, for example, are too often developed without an adequate understanding of the context in which they are used. Organizations tend to set out processes and IT systems to handle only best-case scenarios, and these are not the types of situations that perpetuate customer delight and subsequent advocacy. Consider a scenario that most of us have experienced, in which several phone calls have to be made before speaking to a person high enough in the corporate

hierarchy to make a fairly simple decision. Not only does this result in a poor customer experience, but it also tells front-line staff that they are not valued enough to be given the power to do their jobs properly.

A service design consultancy that is doing its job properly must provide its client organizations with a sturdy boat and a reliable GPS system to help them navigate through the translation space between customer experience strategy and service delivery. This may well mean that service design will need to sit at the core of the organization and address the relationship of staff to the broader company strategy while they co-create a service plan. Once an organization has won agreement and commitment from staff to that strategy, it needs to empower staff to execute on that broader vision, and not stifle them by restrictive protocol. Only then can a company deliver service second to none.

After the consultants leave

I recently had the opportunity to work with an organization that is doing an exemplary job incorporating the work of their service design consultants. The company uses a range of external providers on various projects. However, these projects are always closely led by internal staff—and these staff members are not simply

project managers but experienced design practitioners who work alongside the consultants. Essentially, internal staff act as advocates and educators, retaining knowledge and perpetuating the frameworks and methods gleaned from the consultants. This company has the right idea.

If you are planning to hire a service design consultancy, I would strongly recommend that you consider who is going to own that work after the consultants have left the building. Before the project even begins, it's important to discuss the deliverables which will be created by the agency—in relation to their intended internal audiences. Are the consultants offering frameworks or knowledge that can be used by your organization in future? Is there anyone in your company who can be encouraged to work with them? Another important suggestion involves co-design activities with pivotal internal staff to ensure that the consultants' recommendations gain buy-in from an early stage.

Service design is a journey. It's not something that can be done by a consultancy in isolation. It can also take time. Ensure that you have an internal resource to come along for the ride, and make sure those staff members are ready to take the wheel after the consultants make their exit.

For their part, service design consultants must consider what they can do to embed their recommendations into a company's processes in a way that will enable internal staff to comfortably manage the translation space between strategy and delivery.

Suggested Reading

Buxton, B. *Sketching User Experiences: Getting the Design Right and the Right Design* (San Francisco: Morgan Kauffman, 2007).

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