COLLABORATIVE SERVICE INNOVATION
A STUDY ON THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN DESIGNERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS IN SERVICE DESIGN PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Designers move more and more in the direction of Service Design, in which frequently a participatory or co-design approach is used to involve service providers in the design process. The designer-provider relationship in such Service Design processes differs in four aspects from traditional client-relationships: The relationship is 1) more *dynamic and interactive*, 2) based on *collaboratively evolving* ideas and ambitions, 3) focusing on the *process of innovation*, rather than on the outcome, and 4) frequently based on *extrinsic motivation* for innovation or on *fuzzy starting points*. Designers experience difficulties in persuading service providers of the importance of such a collaborative approach, while providers are not familiar with this kind of approach and their organizations are not ready for such a kind of collaboration. This paper positions designer-provider relationship in Service Design processes in literature and describes a research proposal for the development of an efficient and effective participatory design intervention that stimulates collaboration between designers and service providers.

Keywords: Collaboration; Service Design; participatory approach.

INTRODUCTION

Service innovation with a designerly approach (also called 'Service Design') has been evolving during the last years, and at this moment Service Design is a hot expression for mentioning the field of practice 'doing Service Design' (Miettinnen, S. and Kiovisto, M., EDS., 2009; Sleeswijk-Visser F. and Stappers, P.J., 2011). From the field, it turns out that designers 'doing Service Design' use participatory methods to come up with ideas for service innovation, based on latent consumer needs and organizational opportunities. Insights from the organization (the provider) they design for, and the service clients (the consumers, the users), are necessary for designers in the early phase of the design process, to come up with results that really fit consumers' needs and possibilities that service providers have for new service development (NSD), realization and implementation. Thus, co-operation of providers' employees and consumers is required in Service Design projects.

Service providers are actually not familiar with such a participatory approach, but they are used to a more traditional kind of collaboration. Thus, service innovation with a participatory design approach (Service Design), asks for new ways of professional collaboration between designers and service providers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

In participatory design there are many methods to involve stakeholders in co-design activities throughout innovation processes (e.g. Buur J. and Matthews, B., 2008). From practice, I notice that designers 'doing Service Design' frequently act as facilitators of the process. In line with this, Han (2010) describes the role of designers 'doing Service Design' in Service Design cases as design managers in the process aiming to make providers self-supporting in the innovation process. Thus, stakeholders' involvement by means of participatory tools or

20 IASDR 11
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techniques and designers as facilitators of the innovation process can be seen as two characteristics of designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects. This stakeholder involvement (providers' participation) and a focus on the process, rather than on the outcome, is something difficult in designer-provider relationships, because of non-traditional roles in collaboration.

This non-traditional designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects differs in four aspects from traditional client-relationships. First, traditional client-relationships are rather static with an explicit vendor and buyer role, in which both parties operate within their own company boundaries. In Service Design, designer-provider relationships are *more dynamic and interactive*, because of a more intense collaboration and relations in collaboration emerge during conversational interactions between both parties (Buur, J. and Larsen, H., 2010).

Secondly, service providers who are traditionally in the buyer's role are not used to take part in the process of 'answering their own question' or 'solving their own problem', which is traditionally the role of the vendor. In Service Design shared goals and understanding may emerge through ongoing relating, thus *ideas and ambitions are based on collaboratively evolvement*. Stacey et al. (2000) studied complex responsive processes of relating, on which Buur and Larsen (2010) based a theory: 'Local interactions among humans are processes of relating in which we continuously respond to each other. People meet each other with different intentions, which create a complexity that non of them could foresee' (Buur, J. and Larsen, H. (2010). This makes that the outcome of the process is unclear beforehand, because the process of human-interaction shapes the outcome, and that the *focus* in Service Design projects lies *more on the process*, rather than on the outcome. This can be seen as a third aspect of a untraditional client-relationship in designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects, which makes such a participatory collaboration between designers and providers in Service Design processes complex. This third aspect follows from first case data in this research and case studies in literature (e.g. Han, Q., 2010 and

Miettinnen, S. and Kiovisto, M., EDS., 2009)). Unclearness about the outcome of the process makes it difficult for designers to build up trust and new client-relationship in the field of Service Design.

A fourth aspect that characterizes the non-traditional client-relationship in designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects, is the fact that service providers' *motivation for innovation is not always intrinsic* as is often the case among traditional buyers. In Service Design the motivation for innovation is regularly enforced by authorities, like governmental organizations, or based on *fuzzy presumptions*. This fourth characteristic is based on insights from field studies in this research as well (interviews with providers). As a result of extrinsic motivation or fuzzy presumptions as starting point for a project, service providers are often searching for change and innovation, without well-knowing what they are exactly searching for since the need to change was not elicited by their own wants or their wants are not really clear yet.

In practice, service providers and designers experience difficulties while co-operating in service innovation with a participatory approach. Hence, this research focuses on the collaboration between designers and providers in Service Design projects to come up with effective and efficient interventions for improving the designer-provider relationship in such projects.

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POSITIONING IN THE LITERATURE

Studies of Han (2010) and Melton and Hartline (2010) combine the three topics of 1) service innovation, 2) designer-provider relationship and 3) participatory design methods and tools. Melton and Hartline (2010) studied the influence of the role of frontline employees on NSD. The study focuses mainly on the familiarity of service employees with the service itself, by training, technical support and the launch

of the service, while it focuses less on the development of services in collaboration with designers. In their study, they concluded that 'the involvement of frontline employees in the design and development stages of new service development is less effective than in the launch stage' and they recommended future research regarding the design and development stage of new service development. Han (2010) concluded in her study on practices and principles in Service Design, that 'managing design projects is not a new topic, but there is few literature describing the collaboration between organizations and service designers'.

Although studies of Dougherty and Takacs (2004) and Muller (2002) do not specifically focus on NSD or more specifically Service Design, their studies on collaboration in innovation projects could provide my study with useful insights, because they describe outlining conditions for successful collaboration in innovation projects (in spaces, with boundaries).

Two studies that focus on design tools and methods in stakeholder relationships are: 'Barriers and enablers for creating shared understanding in co-design projects' (Kleinsmann and Valkenburg, 2008) and 'Models, Collections and Toolkits for Human Computer Interaction: What Can We Learn?' (Tidball, Stappers and Mulder). Although both studies focus on barriers in creating shared understanding in innovation processes, they do not come up with interventions for improvement, neither they focus on NSD or Service Design projects specifically.

Co-design in itself could be seen as a participatory design method for creating shared understanding in designer-client relationships. A lot of researchers studied co-design (e.g. Sanders and Stappers, 2008). However, those studies focus rather on user involvement than on client-relationships.

Albinsson, Lind and Forsgren (2007) and De Vries (2006) actually did study client-relationships in NSD. Albinsson et al. (2007) studied co-design in network innovation as approach for organizing meetings between several different stakeholders. They describe reasons why a co-design approach could be useful for service innovation processes, but do not

point out how such an approach could give structure to early phases of innovation projects. Their study focuses specifically on the development of internet-services from a management point of view, rather than on general NSD by means of a design approach. The management perspective in this study may cause the marginal attention to the role of the designer in the process.

Also De Vries (2006) draws in his study on professional collaboration in NSD little attention to the role of designer in the innovation process, as well he draws little attention to the user.

De Vries (2006) elaborates on an innovation model of Gallouj and Weinstein (1997) and emphasizes that service innovation is rather dynamical and interactive, than the static model of Gallouj and Weinstein (1997) implies (De Vries, 2006). De Vries takes more than one provider into account in Service Design processes and includes possible interactions in a network of organizations in his model. In previous literature, such processes of networking in innovation have been called 'imaginary organizations' by Gummesson, (1996) or 'virtual organizations' by Davidow and Malone (1992), Mowshowitz (1997), Österle, Fleisch and Alt (2001).

Han (2010) actually pays attention to the role of the designer in the innovation process and describes this role as 'the service designer can help leading, facilitating and producing a CoS' (Community of Service). In her opinion, a CoS is something designers ought to aim developing, rather than designing services, in which a CoS is described as 'a community that emerges among stakeholders who experience a mutual engagement in a shared practice (Service Design) around which they share a common repertoire of knowledge…'.

Although Han's study (2010) focuses on describing stakeholder relationships and processes in Service Design projects, and she ends up with a focus for designers, Han did not develop interventions that could actually stimulate stakeholder participation and new kinds of designer-provider relations in NSD.

While having a look at the literature, there could be more research regarding collaboration between service providers and designers in networks of organizations in the early phases of specifically Service Design, with a focus on developing or outlining an imaginary or virtual organization or space, or a Community of Service and/ or formulating boundaries, conditions or guidelines for that to evaluate in a practical setting.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Given the aforementioned gap of knowledge concerning effective design methods that reinforce professional collaboration in a Service Design context, my study will attempt to fulfill this gap by closely mapping the client-provider relationships as they emerge during Service Design projects and by designing interventions for enhancing collaboration between designers and service providers in Service Design projects.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to reach the research objective, a research question with three sub-questions is formulated:

Main research question

How can designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects be enhanced by means of participatory tools and techniques?

Sub-questions

- What characterizes Service Design projects and how are agencies that are 'doing Service Design' positioned in relation to other (design) agencies?

- What characterizes designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects; what barriers and enablers occur?

- What (elements of) participatory tools and techniques can be used, and how, for bridging the gaps in designer-provider collaboration in Service Design projects?

APPROACH OF THE RESEARCH

In-depth interviewing of both service providers and designers will be conducted, next to two rounds of case studies that will be used for observing co-operation in Service Design projects. Simultaneously, a theoretical framework will be developed, by means of a literature study, which will be practically validated during the studies. Based on the interview, case studies' and literature review results, a methodological participatory tool or technique will be created, that will be prototyped and evaluated in practice.

INITIAL DATA

A first round of cases has been started and some pilot interviews are conducted in this study. The initial data generated by these field studies helped me to formulate the research topic, objective and questions.

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