

# THE VALUE OF DESIGN RESEARCH

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## CO-CREATION IN SERVICE DESIGN PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

*Design practice is expanding its borders. The roles of designers have expanded from being a 'shaper' of industrial products to acting as a 'mediator' between the different knowledge cores in an organisation. Today designers play roles not only in creating material artefacts but also in creating immaterial ones such as processes and services as the leaders and facilitators of activities. In other words, besides its traditional realms, today design is seen as a catalyser, a process and a way of thinking about developing strategies, organisational change, business structures and enriching the way people live in this century. Moreover, the increase of service sector in industrialized economies, the shift from manufacturing industries to experience based service industries and the penetration of information and communication technologies especially in daily life have taken attraction to service design.*

*Services are complex, contain people, products, interactions, places, systems and organisations. In such a complex nature of service design, all the interactions need to be designed by including all the stakeholders early in the service process.*

*Starting out from the shift in taking user as an subject to overview and understanding the user from an external perspective to taking user as an active collaborator-partner, this paper aims to point out that using co-creation as an approach in service design practice is essential, different from and beyond than having a user-centred design approach. The very basic argument of this paper is that co-creation is one of the peculiar issues of design in the realm of services as opposed to the domain of products. As this research is closely related with design practice, interviews were conducted with interaction design and service design practitioners who have several years of experience working in design consultancies and companies in Sweden.*

*Co-creation is a critical approach in service design practice because it allows people to communicate and cooperate among each other regardless of their backgrounds. Applying co-creation as an approach might have benefits that would go beyond the actual service design project for client organisations and might play a role as a background for improving and increasing the creativity, thinking out-of-the-box and developing innovative solutions in the future.*

*Keywords: service design, co-creation, designer's role, users*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Design practice is expanding its borders. Today designers play roles not only in creating material artefacts but also in leading and facilitating activities (Botero, 2013; Zurlo & Cautela, 2014). The roles of designers have expanded from being a 'shaper' of industrial products to acting as a 'mediator' between the different

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knowledge cores in an organisation. In other words, besides its traditional realms, today design is seen as a catalyser, a process and a way of thinking for developing strategies, organisational change, business structures and for transforming the way people live in this century (Akoglu, 2014).

As we move from an industrial to a post-industrial society, Cross (1981) portrays a potential crisis in design and a completely new paradigm of design emphasizing that 'such a paradigm would suggest a reorientation of the values, beliefs, attitudes of designers, the goals of design (i.e. the nature of design products and the methods for achieving these goals'. (Cross, 1981, p.5)

Rittel and Webber (1973) point out that many problems especially involving social facts cannot be accurately modelled and an engineering approach to tackle with them would fail. Today the complexities of the challenges that design deals with are so diverse and broad that user-centred design approach has become insufficient to be used in such diverse and broad challenges (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). It is not only products that are designed for users but recently it is more of a series of interactions and experiences as part of bigger complex systems that are designed for people. In such a situation, Manzini (2011) claims that the nature of service design is un-designable since it supplies a background, a platform that can be changed, directed and developed by people. This characteristic is also related with the projections in society and economy (Author, 2014). The very beginning of 21st century witnessed the emergence of a society and economy based on experiences, knowledge and services (Manzini, 2011). Especially the knowledge age has showed us new business models where stakeholders might have multiple models and create consume value by supplying a background or basic guidance where people can contribute in many different flexible ways (Brand&Rocchi, 2011). Recently designers began to build up frameworks, backgrounds for different platforms in designing services; designers serve as catalysts and facilitators. Values are created collaboratively with people, but the intensity, the extent, the timing of involving people and their roles vary widely. Moreover, "design has always been and will continue to be collaborative at its core; even if that collaboration only includes one designer and one client. Design activities are typically carried out in groups, with roles involved in complex relationships" (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012, p. 290).

Starting out from the shift in taking user as an subject to overview and understanding the user from an external perspective to taking user as an active collaborator-partner (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), this paper aims to point out that using co-creation as an approach in service design practice is essential, different from and beyond than having a user-centred design approach. The very basic argument of this paper is that co-creation is of the peculiar issues of design in the realm of services as opposed to the domain of products.

Sanders and Stappers (2008) refer co-creation to "any sort of act of collective creativity", "to a very broad term with applications ranging from the physical to the metaphysical and from material to the spiritual..." (Sanders&Stappers, 2008:2).

In a recent European Commission report on 'Design for Innovation', from management perspective, co-creation is seen about joint creation of value by companies and its customers and crucial to innovation (Dervojeda et al, 2014).

I would use co-creation as the collaborative and collective creative work by users and stakeholders because the findings I explain here are not necessarily applied across the whole design process. It is rather applied in the very early

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design process that is also called the fuzzy front end where everything is blurry and ideas float around among people (Clatworthy, 2011). This is a period where people who are not trained in design work together with design and development team. It is where strategic decisions and the initial concepts of the design might occur as well. The fuzzy front end has become in focus because of its potential to be an important factor in innovation (Allam 2006; Clatworthy, 2011). The fuzzy front end is where the designer plays a catalyser role and tries to show what the organisation could benefit. The fuzzy front end is seen as a period where design might have a strategic role for organisations (Clatworthy, 2011; Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009).

On the other hand, Sanders and Stappers (2008) put forward on user-centred design as such:

“The first advances, well consolidated now in industrial practice and education, practiced user-centred design from an ‘expert perspective’, in which trained researchers observe and/or interview largely passive users, whose contribution to perform instructed tasks and/or to give their opinions about product concepts that were generated by others.” (Sanders&Stappers, 2008, p. 1).

Content-wise the idea of collective creativity/creating together is not new in design; this idea roots in participatory design which started in Northern Europe, mainly in Scandinavia (Sanders&Stappers, 2008). The beginnings of participation phenomena in design can also be seen in the UK especially at a conference, of which some papers formed a book called Design Participation, held by the Design Research Society in 1971. In that book, Robert Jungk stated that participation should not only be at the time of decision making, but also be at time of idea generation as well.

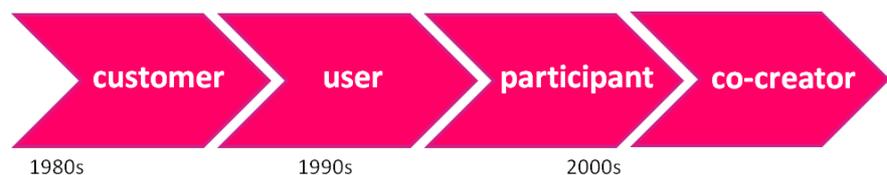


Figure 1 –The change in involving people in the design process (adapted from Sanders, 2005).

Figure 1 shows how the common language about the people that designers serve for has changed; it also gives a general perspective on the level of participation of people in the design process shifting from just consumers, to users for understanding people’s needs, preferences and desires from external perspective, to participants and to co-creators who are the experts of their needs, preferences and desires and take part actively beginning from the very early design process. The collaboration with people in the design process began with the user-centred design approach that also is applied widely today as well. Starting especially from the last decade, since design has become to work with larger issues, trying to find solution for bigger complex systems, co-creation has become a critical dynamic in design.

When related work in management and marketing literature is overviewed, key benefits of co-creation are traditionally seen as increased speed to market, increased product quality, and a reduced risk of innovation efforts not meeting customer needs by Dervojeda et al (2014). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) point out that there is a rapid shift in value creation from product-and firm

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centric view to a personalized consumer experiences view. Within line to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Dervojeda et al (2014) address that co-creation becomes a critical tool for new products and services, an increased competitive advantage, new customers and a larger market share. The benefits of using co-creation has been mentioned earlier in management and marketing fields. Bendapuli and Leone (1993) claim that successful companies focus on value creation but not on the industry or on themselves. Schrage (1995) uses the word co-creation where he argues co-creation is at the heart of collaboration between customers and organisations. Wikström (1996) claims that the customer is not a passive receiver anymore, but more an active participant.

### **2 THE RESEARCH METHOD**

The empirical data for this paper has been gathered through four in-depth face-to-face interviews with designers who work in service design field in Sweden between 2011-2013. The interviewees have several years of expertise at senior level working in design consultancies and work as consultants for organisations. The design consultancies, which the interviewers work in, have clients from different sectors; large and small, corporate and entrepreneurial, non-governmental and commercial clients.

This study is part of a wider research that attempts to find the viewpoints of design practitioners about service design field by asking open-ended questions ranging from the way they see industrial design, interaction design and service design practice, the design processes, the tools and methods that these three professions use and how these design practices might get inspired from each other. In this study, the scope is limited to understanding the role of co-design in service design practice; how service design practice is accomplished by having co-design as a fundamental approach in the fuzzy front end as mentioned before.

The interviews are semi-structured to in order to get the most in-depth data from the interviewees. The interviewees are shown as anonymous and referred to numbers. The descriptions of the projects that the interviewees gave examples from are also kept at a very general level (no names are given) since the interviewees preferred as such.

### **3 THE INTERVIEWS**

According to the interviews, there are three areas where service design plays different roles: the first and the most common one is approaching service design as a series of interactions and experiences while very few others explained cases where service design is seen as an actor for organisational change. The third one is seeing service design as a leading actor for public services, enhancing the relationship between citizens and governmental organisations.

In the first case, the designer played a role in trying to find a way for creative industries to meet traditional industries such as a steel manufacturing company.

*"We have been trying to look into how they [companies] could benefit from creative processes. And it has a lot of different aims for different people. But the main aim of the project is to try to match or try to find a way for the creative industry to meet the traditional industries like the steel manufacturing company for example. So my job has mainly been to first introduce what is a creative process and how could the company benefit from those. Then I try to make them take the next step by themselves to start thinking about and maybe change the way they work a bit; also let them know what sort of help*

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*they could get from a designer or from other creative industries. I think this process, how they use it and what they think of creative processes are very interesting. I wouldn't say design processes because they are only certain parts of the process that we are actually working with". (Interviewee 3, 2012).*

From the above explanation, it is possible to assume that the designer had a role as a communicator and a facilitator of the process (Knight, 2013). The role of the designer here is more of a communicator and a facilitator who shows tools to the organisation, to non-designers to use for expressing themselves creatively (Sanders & Stappers, 2008).

*"For me at least service design is a much longer process. I mean it's not doing those 5 minute things on the screen, well it could be, but it's usually not. It's usually a much longer process and you have to sort of go into a bird's eye view and you have to see the bigger picture of everything and how things supposed to be connected and how the flow of things-it's much more important than... and to make all the things work together. You can make the different touch points, but the main thing is to make the whole full picture make sense in the end together with people involved in the process. We are talking a lot with healthcare providers for example. They have major problems in some areas and they also have that problem with trying to reach out to the patient or the client or the user-what you want to call it. But they can't reach out and they don't know how their own service looks from their perspective. So it's also in a way making the organisation to look at itself from another perspective in order to show them how to change. That is another sort of challenge than for example asking 'could you make this interface on our booking system work?'" (Interviewee 3, 2012).*

As it is seen from the statement of Interviewee 3, the output of design is a process not a product. Therefore when people deal with complex and larger problems, complex systems, co-creation especially plays a critical role because getting people such as customers, stakeholders and members of the client company to co-create, has a high potential to understand the circumstances from different perspectives and try to create innovative solutions rather than trying to understand the needs and desires of only users from an external perspective.

From the perspective of organisations, it seems quick and easy to gather people at one time dealing with the same issue in workshops, so it is also a tool that organisations might prefer as well. The workshops are kept as open as they can be, kept so get the organisation/people think more open than they usually do. It is important that the organisations take these tools get the progress and continue by themselves. For example from a public organisation point of view as Interviewee 2 (2012) puts forward, these workshops might be used to get in dialogue and communicate with their inhabitants while in a corporation it might be related with re-thinking about a process that needs to be revised or changed.

*"...co-create with us. Workshop would be a really good start from scratch. So that's also what we have as an internal task where we're trying to find out wording and differentiation between let's say, what is then user-lab, co-creation session, workshop etc." (Interviewee 2, 2011)*

In the same way, another interviewee emphasizes the complex nature of services and how to approach services from different perspectives of people engaged in services as such

*"... what we produce in service design projects are more complex than when we work in an industrial design project. What I mean is, it gives us more dimensions to consider and control as well..." (Interviewee 4, 2012).*

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According to the below statement of the Interviewee 3, co-creation might be seen as a way to improve and increase the creativity and innovation within organisations, a better way for understanding people a better cooperation between different people in the organisations and among different disciplines. The very same statement was also put forward by Steen et al (2011) and Sanders and Stappers (2008).

*"... that's what we have been working on: mainly trying to discover what is it that they need to do by using the end-user. Because if you do like a market research, then you don't ask the people who actually use the products. You ask the people who sell the products... But they're all very different. For example the organisation that owns the forestry, they have adapted this way of understanding really quickly. And they are now in this phase all by themselves. They also keep starting new processes all the time, so I can't keep up with them!.." (Interviewee 3, 2012).*

What is commonly seen from the interviews of this study is that the outcome of service design for organisations are artefacts, patterns of behaviour and interventions (Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009) in an organisation where co-creation might be claimed as a crucial approach.

### 4 TO CONCLUDE

As Sanders and Stappers (2008) advocates, co-creation in design practice have a potential effect on the way designers design, what is designed, how the design is designed, who designs and also the tools and methods used. Moreover, using co-creation as a tool in service design practice might lead to better and more innovative results that are both beneficial to customers, stakeholders and companies. Co-creation needs time dedication (short or longer) depending on the context of the service and companies need to foresee at least time investment in co-creation sessions.

Co-creation is a critical approach in service design practice because it allows people to communicate and cooperate among each other regardless of their backgrounds. Applying co-creation as an approach might have benefits that would go beyond the actual service design project for client organisations (Steen et al, 2011); it might play a role as a background for improving and increasing the creativity, thinking out-of-the-box and developing innovative solutions in the future as it was already understood from the interviews in this study. On the other hand, the complexity of planning, designing, organising and applying co-creation as an approach in design practice are critical in terms of involving appropriate people, giving appropriate roles and applying appropriate tools and methods since all these factors might change the process and the outcome.

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