

Touchpoint

THE JOURNAL OF SERVICE DESIGN



Better Outcomes by Design

Human-Centred Mental Wellness

by P. Jones, J. Robinson, A. Yip, K. Oikonen,
A. Starkman

Going all the Way

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Service Design for the Other 98%

by Melanie Wendland



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Service Design Work-out on Innovation in Health Care



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In April 2014, the Dutch chapter of the Service Design Network organised the 6th Service Design Work-out. Around thirty participants from various backgrounds came together to discuss the added value service design can bring to the healthcare sector. The session kicked off with a presentation by Jiska de Wit, innovation manager at the UMC (Utrecht Medical Center). She discussed the trends and issues the care sector currently faces. After a brief Q&A, the participants worked in groups on tackling the three questions below. This article summarises some of the outcomes of these discussions.

HOW TO BETTER SUPPORT INCREASINGLY DEMANDING CARE CONSUMERS?

While a decade ago it was still obvious to first turn to a specialist in case of medical problems, patient routines have gradually changed. An increasing number of people now turn to the internet first to look up their symptoms and then decide whether or not to consult a specialist, or to question a given expert diagnosis. As a result, the interaction with the medical professional has changed. How to deal with this trend? And how can this be turned into an advantage for better services?

Taking the patient seriously is at the core of answering this trend. Shifting the mindset of medical staff from ‘patients’ to

‘consumers’ is needed for the high quality care the medical professional should aim for. A service design approach can support this, for instance by identifying different type of patients, and indicating the different ways one can interact with them. Taking patients seriously also entails helping them to better understand the complexity of their situation. For instance, by making the costs of care more transparent, and giving patients the opportunity to better compare different care providers, patients can decide for themselves what they find most important and want to pay for.

Further thought should also be given on how to use this trend as an advantage. What type of information



would be most useful to provide to patients? Sharing personal experiences between patients who have similar diseases would enable the exchange of tips and tricks and help them to cope better with a disease. Also, providing high quality information on what is good, and why, could be useful for prevention purposes. Related to this is the idea of the ‘quantified self’: by developing a better understanding of your own body and behaviour, behaviour change can be triggered in a positive way. In return, using this data for research purposes can be very interesting for the medical professionals.

CAN A HOSPITAL IMPROVE ITS SERVICE LEVEL DESPITE THE NEED TO CUT COSTS?

The first remark made here was that cutting costs does not necessarily have to lead to a lower level of service or a decline in the patient experience. The big challenge for healthcare is to become more efficient and, at the same time, improve the patient experience.

Could hospitals differentiate their service level to specific target groups? This would give the healthcare consumer more freedom of choice, while the hospital would be able to manage their revenues and margins more effectively. The group questioned if this ‘airline-type of service segmentation approach’ could be translated to healthcare, while safeguarding sensitivity to ethical issues.

Another way of improving the service level without extra costs would be to better align specialists, based on a more integrated patient approach. This could lead to both an improved experience for the patient and a smoother internal process. Patients could also be given better information and guidance beforehand, so that they better know what to expect. This would create a better flow and experience during their healthcare process. Hospitals could, for instance, involve previous patients as volunteer ‘experience experts’ to better prepare the new patients. The new patients would get more attention than currently, which could lead to less stress, a smoother care process, and an improved experience at the same time.



HOW CAN SERVICE DESIGN THRIVE IN A HEALTH CARE SECTOR THAT IS DOMINATED BY A FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY AND MEASURING EFFECTS?

Instead of opposing the efficiency and evidence-focused management approach, it seems more effective to explain that service design is actually valuable in a complementary way. In many sectors, efficiency control and experimentation are equally important to safeguard continuity and innovation. It would definitely help service designers to develop a useful metaphor to explain the value of service design in terms that resonate with management aspirations. For instance, how does a five-star restaurant innovate?

Building up a portfolio of best practices from projects in other organisations and sectors is also a useful way to convince stakeholders in management. These references show how service design contributes to effective change and innovation. This evidence from parallel fields gains ambassadors in the organisation permission to experiment on pilot projects and to demonstrate their value.

These ambassadors can be found on any level in the organisation. They are willing to try things out and showcase the results to their colleagues. Service designers should help them to show the added value of service design. Creating visual evidence from all stages in the project to illustrate how service design contributes to real change. As the management team does not have the direct experience on the ground, they rely on this type of evidence. Make sure the ambassadors can tell the story, it will have a stronger impact when they tell the story.

Attention should also be given to actively creating opportunities to measure the success of the service design project from the start. This issue should be addressed early to be able to integrate ways to measure the value of the results. This could be increased customer satisfaction, but it might also be a new type of key performance indicator (KPI). In health care, and specially in academic hospitals, it seems that being the best in class or the first to do something, is very important. service designers should thus also look for aspects that will help hospitals be the best or first in something.



CONCLUSION

In a plenary wrap-up to the session, we shared the results from the various group discussion and reflected with Jiska how this could contribute to her daily work in the UMC. She mentioned that the discussions really inspired her: “...it was good to be amongst service designers again.” She also seemed very fired up by the last discussion and indicated that it would really help if service designers were able to find a way to connect the ‘efficiency and measuring’ culture of hospitals, thereby lowering the threshold of experimenting with it.

The objective of the Service Design Work-outs is to offer an opportunity for people working in service organisations to present some of the issues they face in their work and ask the service design community to think along with them. The informal setting enables the members from the network to mingle and share their thoughts. We tend to focus on ‘unusual suspects’ for service design, meaning those organisations that currently do not yet hire service designers for projects, but who might if they knew better what it was and what they may get. ●

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The Service Design Network welcomes all service design professionals and those interested in service design, as well as businesses and academics, service designers and young professionals who are not part of a company or institution along with students and PhD researchers to become a members of the network.

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Touchpoint - the Journal of Service Design provides a window into the discussion of service design, facilitating a forum to debate, share, advance and codify the field and its practices. In addition it aims at engaging clients to listen in on the discussion, learn about the field, and become involved in the development and implementation of service design for their organisations.

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The Service Design Network is the global centre for recognising and promoting excellence in the field of service design. Through national and international events, online and print publications, and coordination with academic institutions, the network connects multiple disciplines within agencies, business, and government to strengthen the impact of service design both in the public and private sector.