

## **WHAT SERVICE DESIGN LEADS TO IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

- seen in a Danish perspective

**DATO**

18. NOV 2009

By Ida Vesterdal, partner VIA Design

*A paper on the actual effects of servicedesign projects carried through in the public sector in Denmark the last three years combined with some reflections on what this means in order to position service design in the future.*

### WHAT DANISH SERVICE DESIGNERS HAVE DELIVERED SO FAR

I have always had a hard time with the term "service design".

As a phrase, it doesn't really embrace or reflect what myself and my colleagues actually do, although we work with the development of existing and new services.

The term "service design" signals that you as a design company deliver something tangible; an end-product to implement and make use of in an interaction between service provider and service user.

In terms of Denmark and what my company and others have done in the public sector so far, this has not been delivered.

What has been delivered is people-centered service concepts for the future.

Fully-described and well-visualized so that all stakeholders understand that this is how sustainable services are created and delivered.

Small parts of the concept, often the most inexpensive, have been realized. But not usually the concept as a whole.

Why? Why don't we make it to the end and deliver the actual design and not "just" the process and a well-communicated concept?

### WHY WE FAIL TO DELIVER THE ACTUAL DESIGN

My experience is that it is connected to a lack of concrete business cases (numbers and figures) and a lack of understanding of the formal and informal relations within the public sector. Especially when it comes to the culture of political driven organisations.

And more importantly, when a concept is based on holistic design thinking, it belongs both everywhere and nowhere. There is often no one there to take ownership within the public organisation and implement the service concept. Often it becomes a strategic choice whether to go further with the project and here we fail because the concept is owned by someone who is not on that level in the organisation.

### WHAT WE DO DELIVER

So the output, the result of the service design process cannot be described as "service design".

But what is it then? What kind of value is created when you go through a service design process? What are the effects?

Let me try to answer this question by looking at the difference service design creates in the public sector. Referring to a assesment that is being made right now by Danish Techonological Institute for the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority.

The Danish Business and Construction Association supported a number of service design projects in 2008 and 2009 and are now looking at the outcomes in order to find out how to evaluate public sector innovation projects in the future.

The survey shows that these projects created both immediate and long-term effects on the mindset of the public organisation. After a service design project, the organisation has a new approach to users and user needs and the way they interact and address information to these users.

As a long-term effect, there was also increased job satisfaction among employees and reduction in absence due to sickness. Improvement of the quality of services leading to increased user satisfaction was another consequence. And maybe as a result of this: increased sales and cost reductions.

Fantastic results! So despite the fact that the majority of the projects resulted in a concept and not "design design", they had significant benefits.

#### WHEN SERVICE DESIGN BECOMES TRANSFORMATION DESIGN

My conclusion is that these benefits are connected to what "change management" actually delivers, i.e. a change of culture and mindset within an organisation. In the world of design, this discipline and the way it is implemented is called transformation design and because of the human-centered, interdisciplinary process and focus on form as well as behavior, it differs from what traditional change management consultants deliver. At the same time, it is very closely connected to service design, but the difference is that in transformation design, you generate change through your process and the end result is for most parts not actually materiel.

#### DELIVERING SERVICE DESIGN IN THE FUTURE

My dream is that more "service design" is designed for the public sector in the future.

There is huge potential, but still so much more to learn.

What would happen if we team up with those familiar with the dynamics of the public sector, particularly the informal ones?

What would happen if we started collaborating with people able to deliver a tangible business case showing the benefits of the service design concepts we deliver?

This might speed up the process, reinvigorate "service design" and have us all explore the potential of service design when we go to the doctor, take our kids to kindergarten or need to be in a hospital.

I for one look forward to this future.