Service Design Memo

ID-StudioLab, January 2011

There is a lot to do about 'service design'. Many of our recent graduates do projects in, and find jobs in, this area, and established design consultancies are trying to come to grips with it. So is our faculty, with projects as FES-CRISP and 'Are you being served'. This memo reports outcomes of an exploration of what is going on in the field, both practice and research. It is based on a study of literature, interviews with practitioners and academics, and discussions with colleagues at a series of conferences in 2009/2010.

It is written for internal use of our faculty. We hope this memo supports our faculty staff in achieving more clarity about the 'buzz' service design, and where we stand in relation to service design. As a first step, we answer these questions from the perspective of ID-StudioLab; however, we hope the memo will serve as a starting point for widening the perspective to the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, open up discussion between faculty members and combine forces for further developments.

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What service design refers to...

Service Design is hot! Both in the commercial and academic world the term service design is gaining much attention. Here are some signs of the times;

- **In traditional product industries**, many companies such as e.g., Xerox and IBM have shifted their business models, and gain their income more from services (supply of toner for printers, supply of education, training, support for software).
- **In software design**, products are more and more released in a limited form and continuously upgraded after that (e.g., apps on the iphone). It becomes less and less clear to speak of a 'finished product', and in some circles, models of 'infinite beta state' are becoming common.
- **In business and management**, the term service design is often mentioned together with 'design thinking'. The innovative tools and processes of designing are opening up new ways for innovating business.
- **In the media**, the 10-page media supplement of the Guardian of 15 March 2010 was entirely dedicated to service design. Such a publication by a large national newspaper is an indication of serious interest in the UK.
- **In design practice** in the Netherlands and abroad, various studios and consultancies are offering 'service design' as one of their competences (see link for an overview of service design consultancies in NL and UK).
- **In research**, several universities and applied sciences are starting to offer courses on service design. Our faculty has received a national FES funding focusing on Product-Service combinations for the next four years. (see link for an overview of service design academic groups).
- **Of our alumni**, several of our DfI, and SPD students are now working in companies developing services (insurer Achmea, service consultancy Engine, Schiphol, etc). They report that what they learned at our school have been valuable and provided them with useful skills and knowledge, but also mention that they miss some skills and knowledge such as designing the back-end of a system, and change management.

Despite the widespread attention, a clear definition of service design is lacking. 'design' has already many meanings, let alone the various meanings of a 'service' in different disciplines:

- In business it is all about **creating value**. Customers do not buy an airplane ticket, but buy the holiday experience.
- In IT and software design, the term service refers to software that goes beyond the standalone computer system, but, e.g., manages and delivers information, **realizes communication between units**. Examples are telephone communication: without a provider, a mobile phone will not allow you to make calls or synchronize your mobile agenda with the one at the office.
- In the product or goods industry, the service is seen as **the longer-term component that accompanies the sale of a product.** Here the emphasis lies on coffee with a senseo, toner with your printer, etc.

So what is service design? The current 'service design' wave refers to service as a holistic unity of everything that needs to be considered for satisfying people's needs in a certain area over a longer period. Service design is seen as a comprehensive design activity, spanning and directing several activities of product design, software design, architectural design, transformation design etc. that is needed for its components. Oliver King, founder and director of one of the larger service design studios in UK, describes service design as: *'A process of researching, envisioning and then orchestrating for experiences that happen over time and multiple touchpoints.'*

In many respects, it seems to involve many similar aspects of product design that were in the preceding waves of 'user-centred design' , 'experience design' and 'interaction design'. But this is not always acknowledged by everyone in the service design community, feeding the confusion of terms: *'I would love to see designers thinking about what design really is and the added value it can bring to society. Wouldn't it be great if the focus was no longer on the shininess of a vase, but the value the designer van bring to the lives of everyday people?....Forget the uncomfy chairs. Think people!'* (Zwiers, Touchpoint issue 1). This quote sets service design off to product design, in which product designers would not think about the people they are designing for(?). Also many service designers talk about tools and methods to visualise the intangible aspects of a service or an experience, such as customer journeys, touchpoints, and use methods, such a role playing, storyboarding, while such tools and methods often originate from the product-, software-, interaction-, and experience design field.

So to conclude, depending on the discipline talking about service design, it might refer to different meanings of a service. But in general it is an umbrella term to take **a holistic look at the demand, supply, and strategy of a service.** If you would call it a discipline, King refers to it as *'a discipline occuping a new space between design and marketing agencies, management consultancies and research agencies, exemplifying the virtues of people-centredness and co-creation as fundamental processes.'* (King, 2008). Although firm, agreed-on, clear definitions are missing, a few aspects are often mentioned when 'service design' is described:

1. A focus on user experience;
2. Active participation of users and stakeholders;
3. IT, logistics, human resources of organizations are ingredients.
4. The relation between producer/consumer (provider/client) is long-term. In the economy of services, there is not a single moment of transfer of ownership.
5. Brand, seen as the promise of what provider and client offer each other, is an important element for giving structure to the above relationship, whose elements may change over time.
6. A blurring distinction between design, prototypes, production, and consumption.
7. Infinite beta status of services. *You cannot separate in any challenge or project, the look and feel of the service and the operational systems, processes, and resources that deliver it. These two inseparable aspects of the same challenge must be resolved together.* (King, 2008)
8. Compared with products, the business models of services are more complex.

How our faculty relates to service design...

Industrial design engineers from Delft are taught many aspects which are claimed to be important for service design. In graduation projects, for many years the end results have included products, services, concepts, strategies, prototypes etc.; it has not been restricted to a physical product. Often, the outcome is not fixed at the start of the project. At our faculty, there is a large overlap of the two disciplines, service and product design, when it concerns the mindset and toolset of user-centred design. Many user research methods used in product design such as ethnographies, observations, a day in a life, contextmapping, diaries, co-design sessions fit under the umbrella service design as well. Here are the aspects which make our students meet what is claimed needed to become service designers:

- **Our students become T-shaped designers,** engineers or managers. These are professionals who are equipped with a core in-depth skill (the vertical bar), together with general skills connecting them in multiple domains (the horizontal bar), and are therefore better equipped to function in multidisciplinary teams than either 'overall superficial generalists' or 'narrow specialists'.
- **Holistic approach of the user.** Especially in the early phases of the design process, DfI and SPD students are equipped with skills and knowledge to explore the users in their context.
- **Visualisations of the intangible.** Visualising and prototyping are necessary skills for our students. Whether it is a service or a product, students are trained to visualise and make their earliest concepts experiential, by using storyboarding, prototyping, storytelling, roleplaying etc.
- **Finding integral solutions.** When detailling a concept many aspects are addressed in parallel. Figure 1 shows an overview of how the product concept, an interactive cupboard supporting kids to search for books in the library, could operate (from graduation report of Fenne van Doorn, 2010). This student presented this overview to map out all aspects that need to be thought of to realize her product concept. She had never heard of service design, but has intuitively drawn this scheme to think about roles of people who need to be activated along the service, including the back end of the system.

To conclude, there is a great overlap in mindset, methods and tools. Our education lays a good basis for service design, but there are differences as well. The differences lie especially in the phases after explorative user research, such as conceptualisation and implementation. Building a service *is* indeed very different than building a physical product. In product design a designer has to materialize, construct and make it ready for mass production, besides marketing, branding and sales. In a service design project the result might often be a new business model. Service design is starting to develop their own methods and tools, which are again valuable and contributing our toolset, such as blueprints, front-end, back-end etc. In service design, other skills and knowledge disciplines are needed to create or implement a service, such as software coding (DBMS), training people using the service, making the organization of a company change etc.

Our recommendations regarding service design and our faculty are:

- Clarify the service design perspective. Explain the students what is going on in real practice by inviting guest lectureres (as initated in e.g., the C&C Master course 2010);
- Offer more education on the implementation part of service design, since that part is not much covered in our faculty (see figure 2) by collaborating with other (Delft) faculties and learn from experts in the fields of IT, change managers, economics and business. (see link for related research groups beyond Delft.)
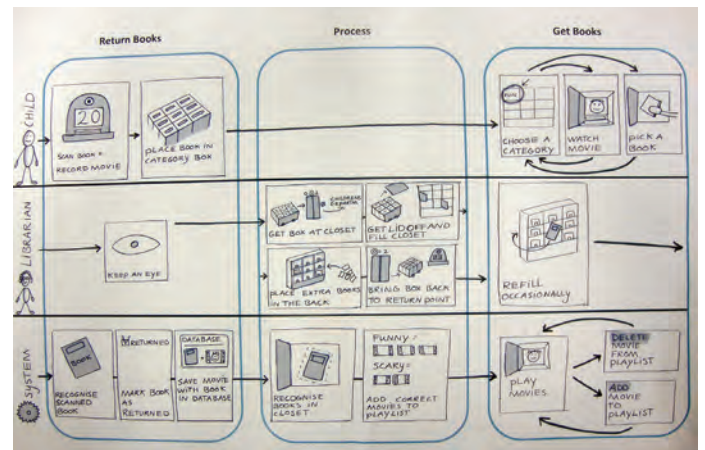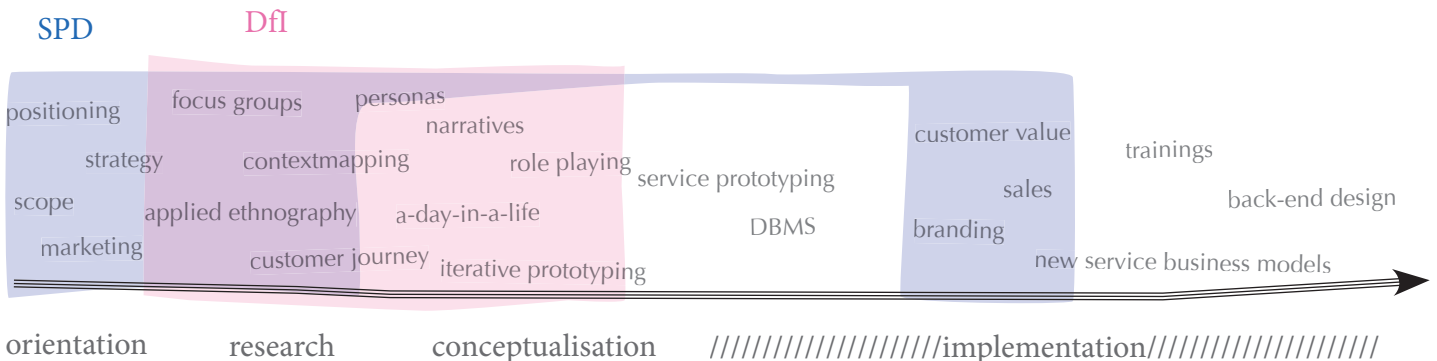

Figure 1. A scheme, including roles of people and the back-end system along the service in a library (Fenne van Doorn, 2010).

Figure 2. Rough sketch of how, in our view, our Masters SPD & DfI cover parts of the service design process.

SPD   DfI

positioning   focus groups   personas
narratives
strategy   contextmapping   role playing   service prototyping   customer value   trainings
scope   sales   back-end design
applied ethnography   a-day-in-a-life   DBMS   branding
marketing   customer journey   iterative prototyping   new service business models

orientation   research   conceptualisation   ////////////////////implementation////////////////////

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