

From Service Design to Social Governance: Extending Design Thinking into Public Service

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ABSTRACT

Design thinking is widely applied at various locations for problem-solving; it has gradually become a routine way of work among governments, NGOs and others to improve services or resolve complex social issues by means of orderly arrangement. Based on this paper, how Design Thinking is migrating from Service Design to Governance in general Social, What the Theoretical Foundation for such a transition Is and How it shapes Public Sector Practice through Human-centred approach. Based on international case studies and governance theories, the paper will identify the enabling Conditions and structural hindrances to this Process. Situate design thinking within the framework of participatory governance to explore its applicability in promoting reforms of the public sector across different nations. Based on the above analysis, Design Thinking provides a reasonable Pathway for Citizen Engagement and Policy Iteration among multiple agencies; Its introduction to Governance is not as straightforward as it seems.

KEYWORDS

Design Thinking; Public Service Design; Social Governance; Human-Centered Government; Participatory Policy; Service Innovation; Institutional Adaptation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Governments all over the world continue to face the contradiction of growing complex social issues compared with administratively designed early simple problems. Citizen's demands focus on responsive, accessible public Service Systems that provide a certain level of Personalised Experience; However, Most Public Institutions remain within their own Bureaucratic Isolation, mainly emphasizing compliance rather than impact evaluations[1]. There are still many concerns that import solution approaches from Design and Innovation into the public sector simply reflect users' expectations rather than actual conditions.

Design Thinking emerged as an organised creation method in the 1960s and 1970s; it was brought to attention through research conducted by design practitioners and scholars at institutions such as Stanford University's D-school and IDEO [2]. Initially used to guide product design and enterprise planning, it is based on extensive user insights through deep immersion; It takes several iterations of prototypes as its path; And accepts uncertainty at this stage. However, over the past two decades, governments across Scandinavia, Britain, Australia and elsewhere have tried out design thinking for all sorts of problems - welfare services reform and new e-government systems[3].

Migration of Design Thinking into public service goes beyond transferring theory as a set of tools. Additionally, can Citizens be informed of their opinions on matters requiring improvement in Service Reform? After the Design Team reinterprets a housing-policy issue as an experience-Design Problem or after the social-welfare Agency introduces service recipients to participate in developing New Delivery Models, the original epistemological assumptions of conventional Governance have

gradually but clearly changed[4]. Explore the following issues with Design Thinking application under public circumstances: whether it is effective; how does it function; at which points is resistance encountered; What kind of change occurs when moving from service improvement to governance system restructuring?

The paper proceeds as follows. Secondly, based on Design Thinking theory and its links to the fields of public service governance scholarship. Examines the Mechanisms and Applications of Service Delivery, etc. Section four addresses the structural problems and adaptive measures for promoting Design Thinking towards Governance Innovation. This section introduces the main limitations, integration and applications at present along with the conclusions.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Design Thinking is typically presented in the form of a five-stage Process - Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test - but scholars have warned that it should not be treated as such. Based on this way of presentation[5], it can be called an attitude toward solving problems rather than a series of stages for operating methods; It tries several ways to alleviate suffering and proposes many ideas during all processes, thus seeing them as full learning processes instead of concluding there will only be one solution[2]. Design Thinking's features distinguish it from the former to be a form of rationalising problems ahead and neither for policy analysis nor influenced directly by this issue-definition relationship.

Design Thinking theory in the context of publics is based on multiple overlapping bodies of research. As an area of study, service Design emerged along with its increasing realisation from the mid-1990s on that services are jointly created during interaction among provider-users [6]. Some scholars, including Ezio Manzini, believe that Design is not only an activity for manufacturing objects, but also a means to build social connections and create novel modes of life [7]. This enlarged definition of Design brought about conceptual Space for it in public service applications, and where the product was always related, users were also citizens possessing rights, needs, and political status.

Simultaneously building a governance model also evolved together. With the transition from government to governance in public administration theory since the late 1990s, it has gradually drawn attention that networks and partnerships are increasingly significant channels for providing public goods[1]. The introduction of market logic in government by New Public Management had failed to address the issue that efficiency-driven measures often exacerbated inequality. Design thinking presented something new: it was not a market mechanism but a participation method; It may help bring back citizens at the centre of public service and avoid simple commodification.

Wicked problems, which Rittel and Weber first presented in 1973 as a reference point for design thinking enthusiasts in public administration [8]. Ill-defined, multi-causal and unsolvable problems in areas such as poverty alleviation and the transformation of urbanisation represent a large proportion of what governments need to deal with. Design Thinking, which feels comfortable in times of uncertainty and adaptability, can be used in practice to solve these issues. Theoretical alignment has had some effect; however, there is criticism of the real-world institution situation that makes it much more harshly unfavourable in comparison with this frame [3].

3. DESIGN THINKING IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY: MECHANISMS AND APPLICATIONS

Among all applications of Design Thinking in the public sector, those related to service delivery are more easily observed and reflected directly on a human-centred basis by this approach. Design-led reforms across different countries have changed the way in which people access, convey and experience public Services.

The UK's Government Digital Service (GDS) was born in 2011 and is a well-analysed example among those that have implemented Design Thinking systemically for public services[9]. GDS first applied user research, rapid prototyping and iteration to redesigning the government website and e-government application scenarios. It can be seen from the most evident that a service-oriented idea dominates as opposed to an absolute top-down model of organisation. In 2012, the GOV.UK platform combined more than three hundred separate government websites into one user-testable Interface. By 2014, the platform had cut down about £1.7 billion in costs for governments to make digital transactions available and consistently received positive responses from users [9]. The GDS model specifically rejected the idea that government technology projects needed to be determined in advance and provided all at once -an assumption responsible for many costly public IT setbacks over a long period of time -and instead proposed an agile, design-led development system.

Denmark's Mindlab, a cross-departmental innovation institution established from 2002 to 2018 and taking a different yet complementary path [3]. Instead of paying attention to digital channels, MindLab used design Thinking to reshape the content of policies, through ethnographic Research and co-design workshops To help government agencies better understand citizens' experience. For example, in a particular case study, researchers followed some unemployed individuals as they interacted with job-seeking assistance to uncover problems and obstacles at an agency's end that appeared insurmountable for internal staff observation. As a consequence, service redesigns have been carried out in practice to address both process obsolescence and the sense of disapproval among ordinary people when interacting with them; This aspect was absent from traditional performance evaluation.

Three-dimensional Mechanisms by Design Thinking to Improve Service Delivery Can Be Explained As Follows. Empathy-building methods include user interviews, observations, and the use of journey mapping to acquire a certain type of knowledge about citizens' experiences that cannot be obtained directly by summarising, de-personalising, and processing policies based on these data[4]. Self-relief from the idea that professions and administrative beliefs do exist, highlighting the deep-rootedness of Bureaucracy in abstraction. Secondly, using prototyping for quick iterations helps test ideas at low risk on a miniaturised scale; this may be seen as unsatisfactory within the traditional Procurement and Budgeting cycle but it can have been realised in some jurisdictions thanks to special innovation funds and regulatory sandboxes[6]. Thirdly, the structure of cross-functional cooperation in Design Sprints and co-creation processes has created work relations among departments that will continue after project completion, promoting gradual establishment of joint-service delivery institutions within organisations.

The Australian federal government also built Design Capacity through the Digital Transformation Agency and Innovation Lab at State level to improve service efficiency of Indigenous Communities and persons with disabilities [3]. The OECD's observatory on public-sector innovation (OPSI) has identified more than 700 public sector innovative cases from 2013 to now, and about one-third use design-thinking methods; This indicates that these practices have indeed been widely disseminated across different countries[10].

4. FROM SERVICE OPTIMIZATION TO GOVERNANCE INNOVATION: STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES AND ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

Although the service-delivery applications of design thinking have accumulated some valuable experience, extending this approach to broader governance issues such as policy formulation and institutional design is met with much greater opposition. In fact, beyond culture or politics, it concerns the core organ-isation charters and liability arrangements for newly appointed local governments following election.

The core issue is what can be referred to as the legitimacy problem. According to Design Thinking, getting close to the user will add richer Data Sources and turn qualitative research more practical In

Reality. At present, when used for commercial purposes, most people believe it necessary to determine the target consumers. However, in terms of public Governance, the power to decide comes from the people's vote rather than users' research[8]. However, these designs cannot replace the wishes of those who are democratically elected or conform to the stipulations of law. Therefore, Design Thinking in Governance needs to maintain its connection with the existing system of democratic supervision throughout; it cannot replace these systems entirely.

The second problem in structure is related to the time spans of governance and Design; Democratic Circuits, Legislative Processes, and Budget Planning follow an annual or multiple-year cycle that do not align well with the iterative learning dynamics of Design Sprints. Many public servants are willing to try out new policies through prototypes and iteration; however, the institution's doors often close before they learn anything concrete, or the initial test is prematurely rolled out based on political factors instead of actual results. The MindLab experiment shows us this: Although it has been generating considerable methodological innovation for more than a decade now, and although there are some signs pointing towards a positive return on investment; in fact, when these metrics were used as the sole criteria, they would have found that the unit did not meet them[3].

The third one is about scale and Systematic Complexity. Design Thinking was used to address bounded problems that have identified users and testable solutions. Many governance problems such as climate change adaptation, intergenerational poverty and housing affordability are not topologically consistent. Multiple levels of government, contesting causal theories, distributional issues that cannot be addressed merely by means of user research [7]. The scaling Design Thinking response to this challenge should go beyond broadening its application area; instead, adapt it by integrating System Theory, Complexity Science, and Deliberative Democracy in addition to it to deal with the structural aspects of evil problems.

adaptive countermeasures have been put forward to solve them. A number of governments have set up special policy laboratories - Helsinki Design Lab in Finland, Policy Lab in Singapore, and Danish Design Centre among others - which act as protected institutional Spaces for Design-oriented experimental activities to avoid pressure due to elections [6]. These labs usually collaborate with line agencies but do not replace them; they build Design capability within the bureaucracy rather than concentrate it in special departments. As the design method gradually becomes an internalised way of working among mainstay agencies, it may not stay long in separate innovation laboratories as was originally envisaged [9].

Regulatory sandboxes and staged policy trials are other forms of regulation adaptation mechanisms; by conducting experiments at a smaller scale on the designed policies before legislating them, we create an iterative learning Environment that matches what Design Thinking requires. The Financial Conduct Authority in the United Kingdom was an early example globally and others that followed were established for different sectors, such as Health Services domestically overseas[10]. These mechanisms have not completely addressed the problems of legitimacy and accountability mentioned above; however, they establish institutional pathways for Design Thinking to interact with governance in a manner that the political system can accept.

5. DISCUSSION

Trajectory examination in this paper shows that although there is indeed an actual potential of design thinking to drive change in the public sector, it also faces real constraints on implementation. A lot of prizes. It has been proven effective in many places through implementation; Design Thinking can enhance the effectiveness and access of public Services, promote a new type of interaction among citizens, and form a different kind of work culture at the government level -more curious, flexible and receptive to life-experience-based observation from ordinary people[4]. This is not a simple

matter of them being unimportant; it may also indicate that problems at this level go beyond the scope of resolution through Design Thinking.

These limits are also true. Design Thinking does not belong to the domain of theories of justice and theories of power. It reveals the kind of things that individuals have experienced and generated creative reactions towards these experiences, but in itself cannot resolve conflicts among values, adjust resource allocation, or hold institutions responsible for failures [8]. In the deployment of Design Thinking under governance Contexts for political consideration, if not paid attention to these political Dimensions, it may become a sophisticated version of consultation theatre: Producing abundant Qualitative Data and eye-catching prototypes while keeping the structural Implies unscathed[7]. From a perspective of criticism in critical Design and Social Justice, there is also such an argument that people-centred design often focuses on individuals with more obvious voices and recognitions, thereby further isolating the most disadvantaged groups.

Integration of Design Thinking and Participatory Governance Approaches Can Offer Another Path Out Of These Limitations. Participatory Budgeting, Deliberative Mini-Publics, and Community-Led Planning Processes are committed to citizens' involvement Design Thinking[1]; however, these designs place the basis for this participation in the forms of democratic legitimacy and equitable representation. When these approaches combine - that is, Design methods guide the quality of discussion and Deliberation Frameworks define the range of Designs - a resultant Practice may be more solid than each one separately.

Governments of low-and middle-income countries need to pay more attention here. Most of the evidence-based design thinking application cases in governance come from countries with relatively low distrust in institutions, good strength in civil servants' professional skills and abundant resources for innovation infrastructure development [10]. When transplanting Design Thinking to situations where these prerequisites are absent, it may yield different outcomes; moreover, designing suitable adaptation paths for this purpose also represents another kind of governance problem requiring investigation. The OECD's work through OPSI suggests that cross-national learning is accumulating, but context-sensitivity remains an underdeveloped dimension of the field [10].

6. CONCLUSION

Design Thinking, which once operated in the field of product Studios and engineering Schools, has travelled far. In other words, as a tool for changing the functions of government, this instrument is designed to help administrative Systems become more adapted to the complexity and diversity of people's lives in contemporary Society. This paper has followed this process of tracing at multiple levels: theoretical practice and institutional; The mechanism by which Design Thinking re-shape the service delivery model, the barrier to extend its influence into governance and adaptive strategy that emerges in reaction.

In other words, when taking design thinking out of service improvement and moving it to governance transformation needs a change in system itself not just learning by transplanting methods. Design's participation and iteration logic are indeed beneficial for the public; however, these methods need to be linked to an architecture of democratic oversight, distributive equity, and systemic dynamics that design itself cannot deliver. Among the most successful cases of public-sector Design practice, which treat design as an extension rather than a replacement for governance, there is much that can be gained from bringing new knowledge, new links and novel prospects into these processes where citizens retain supreme jurisdiction over them.

In the future, we should ask what kind of long-term institutional change does Design Thinking bring us? At the same time as paying more attention to citizen experiences and particularly those who are closer to direct beneficiaries of human-centric Governance.

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