

# Design Legacies: Why service designers are not able to embed design in the organization

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## Abstract

Much talk about service design has focused on how to bring design practices, design thinking and design methods into an organization in order to transform or change the way it is going about business. There is only one thing that researchers and practitioners have overlooked: Design principles, methods and practices are already deeply embedded in organizations. That is, in fact, the real problem: Organizations are full of design legacies, however flawed and poorly suited. If service designers want to effect real change in real organizations, they have to be able to articulate these organizational design practices. This paper explains the concept of design legacies and describes three elements of organizational design legacies: organizational purpose, organizational design approaches and organizational design practices. Using a matrix developed around designing for, with and by, the paper explains how we can make sense of existing organizational design practices.

**KEYWORDS:** organizational design practices, design legacies, public organizations, service design, organizational change

## Introduction: Design Legacies & Organizations

When it comes to design in the organization, there are many misconceptions. Numerous people, managers and designers alike, believe that they can introduce and bring design practices into an organization. Working on this assumption, they focus very much on how to embed design into organizations. Service designers are no exception. There is only one thing that researchers and practitioners have overlooked: Design principles, methods and practices are already deeply embedded in organizations. That is, in fact, the real problem: Every organization develops and establishes certain kinds of design practices, design concepts and design approaches over time. This means that at best, we can introduce new design practices and different ways to think of design into organizations. Design practices are embedded in organizations for obvious reasons: Any organization, no matter if it is public or private, has to develop and deliver some kinds of product(s) or service(s) in order to exist. The forms

these products and services may take vary widely. Some organization may produce and deliver information, another consumer goods. The point is that organizations are created, set up, run and maintained by people in order to provide something for other people. In order to do so, they have to conceive of products and services, plan them, develop them, realize them and deliver them. This also means that organizations are full of design legacies, however flawed and poorly suited.

One of the great current debates in design is its role in society. This conversation has a long history but it has been reinvigorated by public servants in government institutions on national, regional and local levels who have begun to look to design as a path to arrive at social innovation, new and improved services for citizens and are therefore challenged to reflect on their own organizational design practices and concepts. Examples on the national level include the US Office of Personnel Management or the Singapore Center for Design Excellence. On the local level, Denmark is perhaps spearheading this development with municipal design offices within the city of Odense and the City of Kolding. At the same time, many professional designers are taking up opportunities to improve the experiences of everyday people with public organizations. They are working on healthcare projects, on social welfare projects on the community level. This means that designers, too, have to come to terms with their own design concepts and practices as well as those they find in place in the organizations and institutions they work with. In short, they have to come to terms with organizational and professional design legacies. While we can find research into design legacies of design movements like Art Deco, the Bauhaus, the HfG Ulm or individual designers, design legacies in the public sector have received little attention.

The idea of a legacy is one of heritage, of being passed down something from someone, often from one generation to another. Public organizations in their own right might be described as legacies, as they are taken on from one generation to another. However, we can also think of legacies of practices, and in the context of the public sector as legacies of designing. A design legacy in this context refers to a practice that is being handed down, from one employee to another, from one management team to another, from one CEO to another. This practice is often shaped or influenced by specific management approaches like, for example, Top Quality Management (TQM), or New Public Management (NPM). Thinking of organizations as places of design legacies with embedded design practices enables us to overcome some of the key obstacles to organizational change by design: For example, it lowers the resistance to design by acknowledging and embracing on-going design efforts by an organization. Instead of coming in to the organization to right the wrong, design connects to what is already happening in the organization and merely offers a way to inquire into how its current design practices, products and services aid the organization in achieving its purpose or vision and how this might be improved on. It re-positions design from a foreign, alien element or factor that needs to be injected into the organization, to one that is essential and real within the organization. Furthermore, thinking of organizations with different design legacies at work encourages us to respect the experiences, skills and knowledge of silent designers (Gorb & Dumas, 1987) and to work with them together on improving existing design practices.

Understanding and acknowledging design legacies therefore opens the path for co-designing and for co-creation with the organizational system and its members. It also aids design consultants and other external design experts to scope their expectations on what they can change and what they are prepared and willing to engage with: the product in development or the design practices and methods an organization knows and applies in its task to develop and deliver products and services.

## Design Legacies & Service Design

The field of service design has moved significantly since the mid 1980s. Service design originally formed around transactional service experiences (Bitner et al., 1990), which researchers described accordingly as ‘encounters’ or ‘touch points’ (cf. Shostack, 1984; 1985). Transactional service experiences cannot meet the criteria for holistic and integrative design approaches pursued by human-centered design. One of the reasons is that the design of transactional service experiences depends on capturing an individual person’s market-relevant characteristics. A person is considered only in her capacity of being a ‘customer’ or ‘user’ of a specific service. The objective of the service is to seduce or otherwise entice that person to enter into this transaction. The transactional service model has its roots in the industrial production of consumer goods. Service here emerged as added value to consumer goods. In other words, services have been added on to already existing tangible products in order to maximize sales but also to tie existing customers to a specific product. The purpose of these services was to strengthen customer-loyalty and to allow businesses to develop on-going relationships with already existing customers who would “come back for more” as a result. This transactional view of service design is best illustrated by the concept of ‘servucation’, a term that combines the two words service and production. Servucation has been introduced by Eiglier & Langeard (1987) and refers “to the production and delivery of services” (Gummesson, 1990). The concept of service more recently moved from actor network theories to human-centered design (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). Service design is now recognized to be inseparable from organizational change (Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009, 2011; Sangiorgi, 2011). As a result, service designers have to find ways into organizational systems to create pathways into organizational life for people (Buchanan, 2004). More than ever, service designers find themselves working in environments where specific design legacies seemingly suffocate any attempt at innovation and change.

One way to understand design legacies in the public sector is to inquire into organizational design practices. What are they? How can we work with them? How can we discuss them? What do they achieve (and what not)? How can we change them? When we acknowledge existing organizational design practices, we do not have to justify the role and value of design to the organization. In doing so, we begin to embrace the many silent designers that are present in any organization. Instead of confronting people with a design agenda, we can map their very own work and engage them in the redesign of these very practices. If service designers want to effect real change in real organizations, they have to be able to articulate these organizational design practices. There are then at least two kinds of design legacies we can find in organizations: A legacy that shapes how the organization understands its own role as designing and a legacy of what kinds of organizational design practices an organization promotes and relies on. I have developed an organizational engagement matrix (Junginger, forthcoming) that I will use here to argue for the existence of organizational design legacies and organizational design practices service designers encounter in their work. This work is part of my wider study of public sector design. For this reason, the references all apply to public organizations. However, one can easily exchange ‘citizens’ for ‘customers’ for example, to find that the similarities of design legacies and design practices in the public sector and the private sector are greater than their differences.

## Elements of Organizational Design Legacies

What are the elements of an organizational design legacy? There are three elements that have a tradition or a history within organizations. These are organizational design practices, organizational design approaches, and organizational purpose. In this paper, I will elaborate on organizational design practices. However, we shall also briefly cover organizational purpose and organizational design approaches, to which I dedicate more attention in other places.

### *Organizational Purpose*

Few aspects shape an organization as much as what its members and management think its purpose is. It is equally important to understand what people outside of the organization think the organization's purpose is. Organizational purpose is an element in an organization's design legacy because it encourages certain actions and discourages others. Ideas that seem too far away from the organization's purpose will be dismissed. Certain products and services will not be developed because they are identified as misfits with the organizational purpose.

### *Organizational Design Approaches*

We can think of an organizational design approach as one that is, for example, human-centered, process-oriented, problem-solving or cost-saving. In a human-centered design approach, the core focus on the organization rests on identifying and developing products and services that are meaningful to people and empower them in one way or another. In a process-oriented design approach, products and services first and foremost fit into existing structures and processes of the organization. The problem-solving approach is often marked by top-down, linear decision-making with a tendency to fragment design activities (Junginger forthcoming) whereas a cost-saving design approach is strictly guided by identifying and realizing cost reducing opportunities. Of course, organizations may also mix any of these design approaches and combine cost-saving with problem-solving, for example.

### *Organizational Design Practices*

Organizational design practices are part of the design legacy we find within an organization. It is therefore important to identify and articulate the kinds of design practices we find in organizations to understand with what kind of design legacy we are dealing with and to develop new design capabilities. In public organizations, we tend to find three basic groups of people who may get involved and participate in product development. There are the internal *members of an organization*. Members of an organization may be managers, supervisors, front desk, administrative staff or all of the above. They may or may not be aware of their design activities and may therefore act as "silent designers." Steeped in and often hampered by organizational processes, structures and procedures organizational members can easily overlook their own role in giving shape and form to products and services. *External experts* form a second, much larger and much more diverse group. External experts who get involved in the design of public services can range from a professional consultant to an academic researcher but would also describe an organization's external stakeholders. For government agencies, the needs, demands, and pressures of external stakeholders, such as professional trade groups, lobbyists, unions or other parts of government can pose enormous obstacles to any change or transformation. External participants tend to be more aware of their role as designers and shapers because they either make a living of it (as design and management consultants do), or they have a vested interest in the design outcome (as do lobbyists, unions, or industry associations). We can therefore refer to external experts more generally as external design experts. The third group of people that factors into

organizational design practices are the people an organization either aims to provide for or has a mandate to serve. In business organizations, the term *customer* is a catch all term for this group of people. In public organizations, it is the *ordinary* or *everyday citizen* who may have a role in organizational design practices. Ordinary citizens are individuals who are already engaging with an organization or who the organization would like to see engage with its services. How they are getting engaged in organizational design practices depends on the ability and willingness of an organization to embrace participatory design approaches.

## Designing to, for, with and by in public organizations

Who gets involved in the design of a product is indicative of the potential of an organizational design practice to promote or stifle organizational changes. It seems obvious that when the role of organizational members is minimized or even neglected, there are few opportunities to share knowledge and insights generated through the design activities with the organization. How then is the organization supposed to change? Yet, when we look at the range of organizational design practices, we do find many forms that create artificial barriers to collaborative and participatory practices with members of an organization. The reasons are manifold but many of them have their roots in what people who represent these three groups, think of their own role and that of people part in the other groups. In essence, they can each assume one of three roles: they can design for, design with or they can have the design being done by one of these three groups. Organizational design practices follow directly from an organization's view of designing as an activity done by a group to or for people, done by a group with a group of people, or done by a group of people. When organizational changes are intended to result from a design effort, members of the organization have to be conscious of their roles in the design process.

### *Designing for or designing on behalf of public organizations*

The distinctions between design being done to someone (designing for), design being done with (designing with) and design being done by (designing by) someone have been pointed out by Suri Fulton's keynote for the *Include Design Conference 2007* (Fulton, 2007). Fulton observed that "people are not passive consumers but active designers of their own world- and always have been." Charles Leadbeater (2009) picked up on these distinctions in (2009). When one group is designing for one or both of the other groups, when the one group is expected to deliver something to or for another group, the opportunities for collaboration, co-development or co-design are very limited. Leadbeter is critical of a culture that seeks to deliver goods and services to and for people:

*"Often in the name of doing things for people traditional, hierarchical organisations end up doing things to people." ... "Social services departments were created to help people in need. Yet those on the receiving end of services often complain they feel they are being done to, processed by a bureaucratic machine" (Leadbeater 2009: p. 1).*

Leadbeater's 'design for' can also be understood as 'designing on behalf of' someone. This has implications for our understanding of organizational design practices. When internal organizational members design *on behalf of* citizens, they position themselves as the design experts in a design activity. They are the ones who know what needs to be designed and who know how to do this. The need to engage with either external design experts or everyday citizens is on a 'need-to-know' basis. For this reason, designing for reflects a rather

paternalistic approach to product development, one that insists that ‘we know best’ and that pushes products out of the organization and imposes them onto people.

If we stay with the idea of ‘designing on behalf of someone’, we can also think of the second group, the external design experts to take on a leading role in design in the public organization. For example, an organization can rely on external experts to design *for* or *on behalf of* the organization and *on behalf of* citizens. In this case, the challenge to create participatory opportunities rests with the external design experts. It is up to them to decide how to bring in organizational members and everyday citizens into the design process. The direction of product development remains one-directional and therefore less likely to effect any change in an organization, which either is at the receiving end or is imposing its own vision.

But cannot everyday citizens also design on behalf of an organization or on behalf of external design experts? This is a possibility that is increasingly being explored in a range of community projects in the UK. The Big Society was not least built around the idea that everyday citizens know better what and how public services should be provided.

#### *Exploring designing with public organizations*

Members of an organization can also work with design experts, design experts can work with citizens and all three groups can engage with each other during a design activity. For Charles Leadbeater, the *logic of with* implies the following:

*“A with approach to any issue or challenge has to be co-produced and negotiated. That means it cannot be planned out in detail in advance. With style campaigns and organisations have to emerge and develop.” (Leadbeater 2009: p. 5)*

In Leadbeater’s view, ‘the logic of with’ allows for the co-creation of knowledge and learning from many sources. An organizational design practice that brings in external experts and/or everyday citizens should therefore have a better chance of achieving and realizing organizational changes.

If we apply the idea of designing for, with and by to the core problem of a public organization to design products and services that are relevant for citizens, we end up with a matrix of nine organizational design practices that I show in *Table 1*.

	Designing for Citizens	Designing with Citizens	Designing by Citizens
Designing for Organizations	Design experts design for organizational staff and for citizens	Design experts design with citizens for organizational staff	Citizens design for organizational staff
Designing with Organizations	Design experts design with organizational staff for citizens	Design experts design with organizational staff and with citizens	Citizens design with organizational staff
Designing by Organizations	Organizational staff designs for citizens	Organizational staff co-designs with citizens	Organizational staff and citizens co-create and 'co-produce' (i.e., operate the new)

**Table 1: MATRIX OF ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN PRACTICES. Organizational design practices are influenced by what the organization perceives to be its own design capability and by whom the organization views to hold the necessary or sufficient design expertise. Organizational design practices are part of the design legacy we find in organizations.**

In simple terms, the left column of the matrix talks about the involvement and responsibility an organization is willing to take on in a design effort: an organization can leave the design to external design experts (designing for organizations); it can design with external design experts (designing with organizations) or it can take on all of the design tasks themselves. In a similar fashion, we can talk about the involvement and responsibilities citizens have in a design effort: citizens have no responsibility or involvement when they are being designed for; but they may also be included somewhat or even given the responsibility to design for themselves. There is one important aspect that we should not lose focus on: We are talking here about organizational design practices. Thus the agency of involving citizens rests in the organization, not in the citizen. It is the organization, especially the public organization that decides what participation means and what forms it can take. But in the public sector, participation often refers merely to participation in the decision-making process, not in the actual design process that precedes the decision-making process.

The *Ladder of Participation* by Sherry Arnstein (1969), for example, is central to the Berlin Senate's *Handbuch zur Partizipation* (Handbook on Participation). When we take a closer look, we find that the Ladder of Participation literally refers to levels of participation as 'not informed', 'being informed', 'being consulted', 'co-operation' and citizen referendums. Thus we need to be quite nuanced about our ideas of "designing with" in the public sector.

Nonetheless, we can immediately see from the matrix how each different design practice assigns the responsibility of designing either to the organization, an external design expert or the citizen. Each organizational design practice makes a statement about who is considered to be capable of designing, and who is thought to have design expertise. For example, design

experts are given the largest authority and responsibility when they are hired to design on behalf of an organization to design for citizens. Organizational staff has most influence on the design outcome when they are designing themselves for citizens. When citizens design together with organizational staff, we see the biggest indication of a shared responsibility. The matrix also sheds light on the role and place of design experts—especially service designers—in a particular design approach. Using this matrix, we can begin to make sense of organizational design practices and begin to talk about organizational design legacies.

## Summary & Conclusion

I have provocatively titled this paper why “service designers cannot embed design in the organization” because we have been so busy talking up the need to bring design practices, design thinking and design methods into organizations that we have failed to see the design principles, methods and practices organizations work with already. I have introduced the idea that organizations, in fact, are full of design legacies. I have identified three elements of organizational design legacies—organizational purpose, organizational design approaches and organizational design practices—and explained organizational design practices in detail. I have developed the idea of organizational design legacies with a matrix that results when we think of organizations as leaving the design to external design experts (designing for organizations); organizations as designing with external design experts (designing with organizations); or organizations as taking on all of the design tasks by themselves and align these concepts with the ideas of designing for citizens, designing with citizens or designing by citizens. The matrix demonstrates that design is already embedded in organizations and that we can distinguish between different organizational design practices. At this point, I have shared this matrix with a government policy-planning department; several public management scholars; and several other practitioners and scholars working in and around public sector innovation. In these contexts, the matrix became a tool for reflection and understanding of current design practices. In this sense, the matrix supports efforts to make visible an organization’s very own design legacy.

Though I am not sure if we need to delve into the last corner of design legacies to grasp their relevance for design research and design practice, the concept of design legacies deserves our attention. Clearly, more research needs to be done on the different elements. I have pursued some of this work by looking into design perspectives and design approaches in the public sector. For most people within organizations and for the majority of external design experts, however, it may suffice to be aware that such design legacies exist; that there are design practices that are being applied and that organizations already have an approach to design products and services. By merely stating this fact, we enter at a very different level in the organization and open up new ways to collaborate and engage with organizational staff. Instead of having to convince managers, employees and the rest of the organization that design is relevant, the point is already made and we can begin to focus on changing design practices that do not lead the organization to the desired outcomes.

Here, Service Design has a key role that is not well understood yet. As many organizations are turning to service designers and to methods of service design, they are demonstrating a willingness—at times even an eagerness—to pick up new design practices. The core argument of this paper is that both the organization and any involved designer will be more successful in doing so when they are prepared to recognize and deal with existing organizational design legacies.

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