Actionable attributes of service design for business

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Abstract

The role of service deliverables in the early phases of service development has been studied both in academia and practice. We lack knowledge on the impact of service deliverables for the later phases of the service development process in which service designers are usually not engaged. In this paper, we aim to understand what attributes of service deliverables help business clients to act upon the deliverables on their own after service designers are gone.

To elicit actionable attributes of service deliverables, e.g., reports, we conducted semi-structured interviews with five leading and recognizable service design consultants from Poland who lead service design consultancies. We identified three categories of actionable attributes of service deliverables: communication, contextual, and transformative attributes. The attributes might support service designers in empowering their clients to make use of the service deliverables in later phases of service development.

Keywords: service design, service design deliverables, actionable attributes, service development

The absence of service design consultants in later phases of service development

The integration of service design into service development enhances a company's competitiveness (Gemser & Leenders, 2001; D'Ippolito, 2014; Patricio et al., 2011; Ostrom et al., 2015). Therefore, an increasing number of companies are reaching out for the support of external service design consultants (Yu, 2015). Large service providers, such as banks, decide to collaborate with service design consultancies to support the delivery of the optimal customer experience (Johnston & Kong, 2011), or develop capabilities necessary to offer new services that fit customer needs (Gericke & Maier, 2011).

When collaborating with companies, service designers are usually involved only in the service design phase of the service development process (Overkamp, 2019). We understand service design as the Double Diamond process model (The Design Council, 2015) which is an approach to designing service concepts. The implementation of the service concepts takes place in the later phases of the service development process (Overkamp, 2019), in which service designers are often not engaged. Therefore, the responsibility and ownership of the implementation is on the clients (Han, 2010; Overkamp & Holmlid, 2016). Karpen et al. (2017) indicate there is a lack of research on organizational capabilities supporting service design, rendering the implementation of service design challenging. Ostrom et al. (2015) included "fostering service design thinking throughout the organization" among key service design research priorities.

Service deliverables empowering clients in later phases of service development

Many scholars have studied the role of service deliverables in early phases of service development, e.g., in the context of communicating user insights or engaging stakeholders (Sleeswijk Visser, 2009; Segelström, 2013). The impact of service deliverables produced early in later phases has received little attention. Almqvist (2018) argues that service deliverables can act as a material supporting clients in later phases of service development after service designers are gone. Therefore, we are interested in understanding what attributes of service deliverables help clients to act upon service deliverables in later phases of service development. The aim of this paper is also to support service design

consultants in communicating the outcomes of their work and empower clients from large companies.

This initial exploration aims to contribute to research on the later phases of the service development process. The focus is on service deliverables (co-)produced and delivered by service design consultants in the early phase of service development before they exit the company. Three categories of actionable attributes of service deliverables: communication, contextual, and transformative attributes are the main contribution of this paper.

Background

There exist richness of methods and tools that assist service designers in the early phase of service development, e.g., in idea generation. Still, there are only a few methods and toolkits to support the later phases (Martins, 2016). In this section, we present aspects of service deliverables that are important for the study and which are required to add value to the later phases of service development.

Service design deliverables

Service design is a visual discipline (Segelström, 2013). By using visualization techniques, e.g., personas (Cooper, 1999), customer journeys (Parker & Heapy, 2006) or blueprints (Bitner et al., 2008), service designers aim to externalize their thinking (Schon, 1983), communicate user insights (Sleeswijk Visser, 2009), and capture the intangible aspects of services. Visualizations are service deliverables that service design consultants usually deliver to clients during the service design process. Visualizations can also be included in the *final* forms of service deliverables, that is *project documentation* and *service concepts* that service design consultants usually deliver to clients before they leave the service design project (Almqvist, 2018). The focus of this research is with an emphasis on *final* service deliverables. These are descriptive and more open forms of service deliverables, such as summaries and project reports, which received little attention compared to personas (e.g., Chang et al., 2008; Miaskiewicz & Kozar, 2011).

Supporting the success of later phases of service development *on day one*

Weisser et al. (2018) identified 24 factors that influence the success of implementing service design concepts. They argue that service implementation "*starts on day one*" of the project. Out of the 24 factors, they distinguished the six *hygiene* factors. These are factors that indicate how to create the conditions at the beginning of the service development necessary for favoring result-oriented implementation in later phases. Also, Overkamp & Holmlid (2017) indicated the importance of developing an early understanding of future implementation by proposing the concept of *implementation during design*. Almqvist (2018) proposed the concept of service design roadmapping to assist clients in using service design deliverables after service designers are gone. Karpen et al. (2017) discussed multilevel conditions facilitating service design throughout an organization. Many authors discussed organizational agility, flexibility or adaptability as important aspects for service design (Bernardes & Hanna, 2009; Kindström et al., 2013; Weigelt & Sarkar, 2012). Our research contributes to this with the exploration of attributes that empower clients to act upon service deliverables in later phases of service development.

Method

The main aim of this paper is to understand which attributes of service deliverables help organizations to act upon the deliverables on their own after designers are gone.

To elicit actionable attributes of service deliverables, the first author of this paper conducted semi-structured interviews with five leading and recognizable service design consultants from Poland who lead service design consultancies.

Service designers were identified in the Polish service design community. We selected senior service designers who recognize the challenges in delivering actionable results for their clients.

Only one of the five interviewed service designers were trained in the tradition of industrial design. The remaining four have backgrounds in political science, the humanities, economics, and management. Such diversity in designers' backgrounds is common in Poland, where service design is not yet well developed. Therefore, we were interested in conducting interviews in Poland where service design presents itself to

clients as a novelty approach, and, as a result, consultants rarely participate in service implementation.

Design in Poland is recognized in categories of aesthetics. The socio-historical background of the country - its high tendency towards risk-taking, its vertical management model, its low level of empathy and social capital, amongst others – means that incorporation of service design presents a challenge to teamwork and co-creation. This insight into the practice of service in Poland enables us to explore the phenomenon of how clients are empowered by acting upon service deliverables from demanding angles.

We prepared the scenario for the interviewing session using the elements of generative design research (Sanders & Stappers, 2012) to support service designers in reflecting and expressing experiences, observations and ideas during the interviews. We created a storyline toolkit composed of visual and textual elements addressing the following areas:

- service design practice - what are the background and distinguishing characteristics of the interviewed service designer?
- cooperation with large organizations - what are the goals of the cooperation? what are the role(s) and responsibilities of a service designer when cooperating with large organizations?
- forms and roles of the tangible and intangible service deliverables - does the decision-making support the choice of the given deliverables?
- understanding of the roles of service deliverables - what are the challenges in producing deliverables that will be used after designers are gone?
- discussing practices of empowering clients through tangible and intangible service deliverables.

To explore these themes and support the interviewees in sharing their experiences, the storyline toolkit included supporting materials such as:

- exemplary strategies for embedding actionable attributes in service deliverables based on the results of the literature review,
- insights from the service design practice of the first author of this paper,
- visual and textual analogies to support service designers in telling stories about how they communicate service deliverables to their clients (Figure 1).

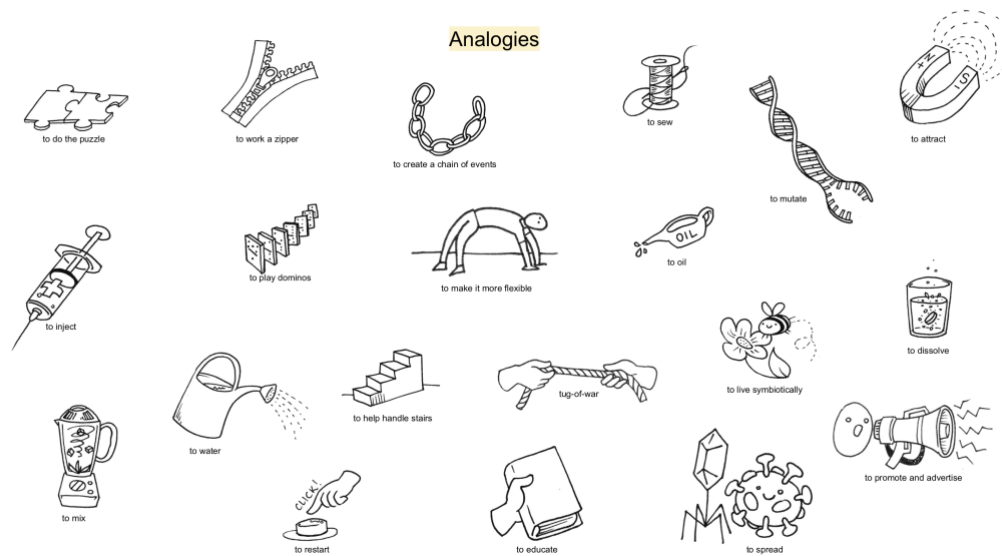The duration of interviews ranged from 80 minutes to 170 minutes.

Figure 1. The exemplary visual element of the storyline toolkit. The set of analogies meant to inspire service designers when talking about their challenges in embedding service deliverables in large organizations.

We transcribed the recordings of the interviews and analyzed the material searching for the examples of actions, strategies, patterns, or behaviors within the practice of the interviewed service designers which would make service deliverables more useful and actionable for clients. We identified 176 statements. We clustered these statements using the affinity diagram technique (Beyer & Holtzblatt, 1998). By eliciting the meaning of the identified affinity groups, we identified three categories of attributes of service deliverables that empower clients to act upon the deliverables on their own.

Results

All of the interviewees recognized the need to be more engaged in the later phases of service development. Knowing that they are going to leave the project after delivering service concepts, they strive to prepare clients

for the later phases by providing action plans. This is an example of a *bridging* approach that resonates with the need to create connectivity and integrity between the service design and service implementation phase indicated by Yu & Sangiorgi (2014).

Interestingly, the interviewees recognized the potential of the presented set of analogies (Figure 1) as a design tool supporting designers in coming up with strategies and mechanisms for embedding service deliverables in companies. For example, one designer said that service deliverables should act like a magnet that produces a powerful magnetic field. Therefore, it attracts as many people in the company as possible.

The tools that the interviewees use to communicate the outcomes of their work are similar and correspond with the classification presented in the Background section. The examples of the tools are:

- *visualizations*, e.g., personas, service blueprints, business model canvases,
- *project documentation*, e.g., reports, summaries, guidelines, list of recommendations,
- *service concepts* in the form of speculative films, scenarios, design principles, or prototypes.

Interviewees did not have any proven strategies for developing and communicating the final service deliverables. The form of final deliverables depends on the context of the project, the needs of the client, and the experience of service designers.

Furthermore, the interviewees expressed that when delivering the final deliverables, the major challenges are to:

- overcome the internal politics of the company,
- inspire, inform and motivate employees who have not been part of the service design project,
- and make sure that the client will be able to apply the results without the support of designers.

Below we introduce three categories of actionable attributes for service deliverables: communication, contextual, and transformational attributes. These categories are an introductory attempt to support service design consultants in developing final service deliverables that empower clients to act upon the deliverables after designers are gone.

1. **Communication attributes** indicate the importance of sensemaking and comprehension of final deliverables. Clients need

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to retrospect and create understanding out of different actions and deliverables of the service design projects to be able to pursue further actions. The communication attributes include:

- identifying common language

Interviewees indicated the importance of conscious use of wording and jargon to create a common language (Bailey, 2012) with clients. A common language is a mixture of clients' vocabluary with service design terms and statements that were co-created and used during a service design project. When using common language in the final deliverables, e.g., reports, clients receive material that they can recognize and therefore relate to. Furthermore, if presented statements or insights are unambiguous, and easy to remember, it encourages clients to share them within the organization, which makes the deliverables actionable. One interviewee summed it up as a need to "*create synthetic summaries that attract as many people as possible.*"

- creating multi-level presentations

This means presenting the outcomes of service design projects at various levels of abstraction, e.g., research, design, business (Stappers & Sleeswijk Visser, 2014). The multi-level presentation can have a form of textual and visual digest that compiles various types of information. Therefore, with layers of information, clients can easily build associations between multiple pieces of knowledge and outcomes. As a result, they receive an immediate understanding of the decision-making process behind the project. It brings trust and validation for delivered service concepts, and supports discussions on deliverables and planning future actions.

2. **Contextual attributes** indicate the importance of embedding service deliverables in a real-world context and encouraging clients to go beyond the service design project. As a result, clients can see the competitive potential of presented opportunities, know what to do to implement them, and be motivated to do that.

- a real-world context

This means presenting the outcomes of service design projects in correlation with various factors, e.g., technological trends, competitive solutions, relevant to the particular problem or issue that

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was the subject of the project. Embedding service deliverables in a real-world context helps clients to recognize the value of the deliverables and decide on the implementation priorities.

The interviewees indicated that as they conduct projects for various clients and operate in various organizational cultures, they are fluent in context-switching and bringing an external perspective into the business of their clients. One interviewee summed it up as follows:

We help clients to notice that their company is part of the given ecosystem. The butterfly effect that is happening in one place can trigger the change in their business. We show that their industry can be in various correlations. There are cause-and-effect relationships that we see. The change and value happen at the crossroads.

- planning beyond the service design project

The interviewees expressed the need to prepare clients for service implementation during the service design phase. Therefore, from the very beginning of the service design project they explored the context of future implementations. Exploring and then knowing the organization's capabilities, service designers developed strategies for stakeholder engagement. At the level of deliverables it meant providing action plans, so clients know exactly what to do after designers are gone. As one of the interviewees said:

If we don't say what the next steps are, nothing will happen or will happen much less. We tell what to do, and what to prepare, how to do it, and when. The project managers are getting involved in that, as we solve their work a bit. Whilst not having a spectacular effect, the result, when implemented, was small but important.

3. **Transformative attributes** indicate the importance of organizational transformation as a critical factor for service implementation. Therefore, clients need to know what to change in their organization, e.g., to gain new skills, to successfully implement the service. The transformative attributes include:

- questioning the status quo of the company

This means showing the strengths and weaknesses of the existing conditions in the company in terms of its readiness for service implementation. At the level of service deliverables, it translates into

questioning the status quo of the company by suggesting alternatives, e.g., to current norms, behaviors, or assumptions, and providing recommendations of changes and indicating the agents of change in the company.

The interviewees claimed that as consultants, they have the privilege of acting from a position of ignorance, asking questions about fundamental aspects of the client's business that have rarely or never been asked before. It can initiate changes in the company that were difficult or impossible to start without the presence of an external facilitator.

- overcoming the inertia of the company

As one interviewee said:

Service designers can identify issues that slow down the internal processes that nobody has seen happening or the possibilities to do something easier and simpler. In large organizations, there are lots of activities around the subject: emails, meetings, etc. There are many of time-eaters.

In order to ensure the success of the later phases of service development, service deliverables could include suggestions for more iterative ways of working or indicating areas for operational improvement.

Discussion

In this section we discuss the implications of the three categories of actionable attributes of service deliverables that empower clients to act upon the deliverables after designers are gone.

1. **The form of service deliverables depends on the designer-client relationship. Therefore, the communication attributes of service deliverables need further investigation in this context.**

   There exist various designer-client relationships that determine the designers' role in the organization and influence service deliverables. Therefore, deliverables can take the form of handover documents in *delivering* relationships or tools that facilitate communication and support the implementation of sustainable

change within an organization in *partnering* and *facilitating* relationships (Yu, 2015).

The interviewees did not express what type of design-client relationship they prefer and promote, and how it relates to the development of service deliverables.

2. **Organizational transformation is critical for service implementation, which emphasizes the importance of further investigation of transformative attributes of service deliverables.** Overkamp & Ruijs (2017) proposed the use of visual language to co-create boundary objects that support the development of shared understanding regarding service implementation early in a service design project. This suggests there is space for new types of implementation-oriented service deliverables that can support *implementation during design* (Overkamp & Holmlid, 2017). The interviewees perceived the implementation of service concepts more as future actions rather than something that can take place in the early phase of the project. Furthermore, the existing studies that present service design as a transformative approach can provide substantial input for the further development of transformative attributes.

3. **Knowledge existing outside the design discipline focusing on designing change, as noted in Kotter's 8 Steps for Change** (Martins, 2016). The interviewed service designers did not draw from other disciplines to come up with deliverables that support culture or organizational change. They were trapped in the world of service design tools and methods. Therefore, there exists a potential for further development of the three categories of attributes.

Conclusions and future work

This paper contributes to the research on the later phases of service development. We concentrated on supporting service design consultants in empowering clients from large organizations to act upon service deliverables in service development after designers are gone. We propose that empowerment can be achieved by embedding the communication, contextual, and transformative attributes into final service deliverables.

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In future studies, we will explore how service design consultants can apply actionable attributes in their practice and conduct further exploration of actionable attributes drawing from disciplines outside design. Finally, further research will be conducted on the needs and challenges of business stakeholders, to provide them with service deliverables empowering them to act on their own.

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