Scoping Study on Service Design

Submitted by the Madano Partnership to:

FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

This short executive summary pulls together our reflections on the main areas of enquiry:

1. The definition and boundaries of service design as a discipline are contested in both academia and professional practice, presenting significant opportunity for further research and exploration.To date the published literature is often self-reflective, concerned with finding a history and a justification, looking for roots in design thinking, interface design etc. Unfortunately this search for a multidisciplinary identity is not yet convincing, and some academic critiques of this work are perhaps more telling. Interview findings indicate that some believe that service design as an academic field needs at least a unifying 'label' in order to access funding. In terms of the market for services, an identity is also required in order for service design to be considered a valuable business investment. It is worth noting that a significant number of practitioners 'sell' the proposition by calling it something else, most likely associated with innovation. All this points to a field that is ripe for research funding, to enable these key themes to be developed and resolved.

2. There is positivity about the sector with a general consensus from the research findings that demand for service design is growing and will continue to do so, as our services led economy grows. However this reported demand works against comments that service design works on too small a scale to flourish. Expanding the sector to work on a larger scale, for example, working in hospitals nationally rather than in one department may be a challenge for the sector as it is constructed currently on a small and more informal basis.

3. It appears widely acknowledged that service design is multi-disciplinary, as evidenced through our survey and interview discussions, however this is less clear from the current literature published on service design and in some of the focus in research projects. We would suggest that service design academics could be encouraged to reach into other relevant bodies of knowledge that relate to their fields, engaging with the academic output they generate and the individuals and departments who put it together.

4. The professional practice of service design is a small community, mostly of micro-businesses and freelancers, with some in-house teams in users and some service design work by larger design consultancies. It is a young field, for example over a third of our survey respondents have been practising for under three years. There is little evidence of a strong conceptual basis for a well-defined service design industry. In the UK, a handful of agencies operate solely in this territory with many focusing on public sector issues, and increasingly structuring themselves as social enterprises. These organisations do not often refer to themselves as service design agencies but rather as 'social change' agencies or similar. There are also many larger agencies who offer service design as part of their suite of offers but we can only assume that service design practice is still a relatively small element of their business. For professional practice to grow the size of agencies needs to grow and their client base needs to expand beyond the public sector.

5. There is little compelling academic or professional practice material on the impact and value of service design. Respondents were unable on the whole to provide detailed or robust case studies of impact and there appears to be no common method or framework for measurement. There is a clear divide between academics and professional practice on the importance of measuring impact and value. Practitioners considered it essential in order to provide evidence to potential future clients, but academics were generally of the opinion that it cannot be measured and appeared to have limited interest in exploring how it could be measured. Further research into creating a measurement framework could support practitioners in 'selling' service design to industry.

6. There seems to be a growing number of service design courses but some commented that routes into the profession are less than obvious as the profession is in its infancy, affecting the standard of service design

graduates moving into professional practice. Service design teaching was critiqued for being shallow and not looking to other disciplines to strengthen its theory. International networks have been built largely on current service design expert's histories of education and employment, which is to be expected. However if the 'discipline' is not producing graduates to replace the current leaders in service design, there is a risk service design may not grow further.

7. Service design is undertaken across the world, and the UK has been seen to some degree to lead the way. Along with the UK there are 'pockets' of service design activity in Northern Europe, Italy, Australia and South Korea. International collaboration between the academic institutions exists, and the academic international service design community connect through annual conferences, international projects such as DESIS (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) and online networks. However, apart from DESIS, client facing research projects across the board tend to be fairly small and intensive, for example working with one department in a health service, or one branch of an organisation. There is a concern that the small scale of service design projects in practice is hindering the development of the discipline.

8. Collaboration between academics and UK businesses on the theme of service design appears limited. A lack of time to collaborate and participate in research on the part of professional practitioners was seen as a key reason behind this. Where collaboration is occurring evidence suggests it is academia with public sector organisations, stemming from the fact that service design has primarily been seen as a way to solve social challenges, rather than business challenges. This is clearly an area for development but genuine collaboration in research is a costly business, and has to fit all partners' needs.

Recommendations

1. 'Service design' is a complex and new area of academic study and teaching. As a "discipline" it is not yet clearly defined by a body of academic literature and with rather frayed edges, it remains open to considerable interpretation. Given this, and after some considerable thought it would be our recommendation that a future call focus on the role of design in services innovation and specific services sectors rather than on 'service design' per se. The role of design in the services sector is a neglected area of research, and we believe offers a larger and more expansive territory for research.

2. Further to this it is clear that as a community of practice service design academics need opportunities to engage with larger more established businesses – final users in the design value chain- who may already use, or be interested in benefitting from service design practice – focusing on the services sector in the UK would help to facilitate more of this kind of engagement. It would also provide an opportunity to work with academics from other disciplines in an integrated way.

3. Two of the most commonly recurring themes in this report have been that of innovation and impact. Any future activity under the suggested umbrella would provide opportunity to cover these two themes. Many service design researchers perceive the relevance of their work to the innovation agenda and competiveness, given the dominance of services in the modern economy. There is a matching growth in the innovation studies and policy communities in understanding the drivers and effects of services innovation, though this discourse has hardly engaged with design research and practice. Given the UK's relative strengths in design, there appears scope for research to stimulate appropriate forms of connectivity between the two meta themes of "design" and "service innovation."

More specifically, it would seem appropriate that any future activity look at ways to link business school academics with design academics to cover these large issues and to consolidate "design in services" as part of the impact agenda.

4. In relation to mechanisms for funding, our research suggests that there is a desire for funding to support service design academics at all levels, at the most junior level through to the most senior, providing opportunities for PhD students, opportunities for mid-career researchers to move up, and support for those most senior in the field to be established as professors etc. However, there is limited appetite for large calls and some lack of confidence around design 'holding its own' when working with other more established disciplines. Given all of this it would seem that any future call would need to work hard to support links being made between academics across the disciplines, and therefore we'd suggest supporting networking and capacity building activities around the core theme of design in services.

However consideration might be given to an element of somewhat larger collaborative research projects as part of the networking activity, to contribute to easing the barriers noted above.

Methodology

Introductory Literature review: methods

This scoping study began with a review of the main bodies of literature that is currently published and available on service design. The review involved:

- Agreeing a working definition of service design

- A review of the main 'service design' academic literature e.g. recent contributions by Kimbell, Voss and others as well as covering a history of existent material e.g. some of the "design thinking" and "wicked problem" materials as the nature of design has to be re-conceived for the services application. E.g. also covering what is a strong "human centric" element in approaches to service design

- Making a note of members of the research community active in this space for follow up either for phone interview / sending a link to the online consultation

- Reviewing grey literature on 'service design' e.g. NESTA projects etc.; web-sites, presentations and reports by service designers e.g. UserStudio (France), Livework, ThinkPublic, UsCreates etc

- A summation of the main lessons and principles from the literature into some broad principles.

This was then analysed and a 'stand-alone' literature review was produced, which is included as part of this report, but will also be published separately.

Service Design Interviews: methods

The Madano Partnership conducted 16 interviews with experts in the field of service design. The interviewees included academics who are active in researching and/or teaching service design; academics active in design or innovation but not service design specifically (although they may have an interest in service design); practicing designers, working in-house client side and for agencies; and those who contribute to policy, for example research councils outside of the UK. The table below shows the breakdown of interviews:

Academic, active in the field of service design	5
Academic, active in the field of design but not service design	3
Practising service designer, agency side	2
Practising service designer, client side	4
Policy	2

The interviews examined:

- What is happening within academia in the discipline of service design

    - Where are the key research/teaching institutions?

    - Current research activity, nationally and internationally

    - Is service design an application of "design" or a sui generis activity??

    - What is the relationship to 'design thinking'?

    - What are the key issues that need addressing to help service design develop as a well-regarded area of discipline and deliver impactful research?

- What is happening on service design within industry

    - Who are the main consultancies delivering service design, where are they and what is their scale and type of business

    - What is the demand for service design work

    - Examples of collaboration with academia

    - How do you measure the value and impact of service design and how do service designers add value to business?

- Service design and innovation: How does service design contribute to innovation?

- Views on future resources: what should a future fund resource?

A copy of the detailed discussion guide is included at Appendix 1

Online survey: methods

Design

An online survey was designed to gather views on service design from a wider perspective, and to provide some quantitative data on views and opinions of service design; a copy is included at Appendix 2.

Sample and distribution

Prior to launching the survey, Madano, with assistance from the Design Council, AHRC and ESRC compiled a list of individuals who have an interest in service design. At the time of survey launch the list consisted of 183 people, from a variety of backgrounds including academics, students, practitioners, researchers, those currently working in design, in innovation or working outside of design but with a knowledge and interest in the area of service design.

A link to the survey was sent to the sample of 181. To encourage wider participation we asked all interview and survey respondents to distribute the survey themselves to people they believed would want to be involved in the

research. The survey was also posted on the Service Design Network LinkedIn page (http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Service-Design-Network-1856454?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr) which has over 3,000 members and sent to Service Design Research (http://www.servicedesignresearch.com/) and the Service Design Network (http://www.service-design-network.org/) to distribute to their members. This means the exact sample cannot be known but efforts were made to reach as many people as possible who could make a contribution to the research.

Response

We received 121 complete responses to the survey. There was a drop off during the course of the survey: 156 respondents started the survey and 121 completed it, giving a completion rate of 78 per cent. As a result sample sizes for each question vary. The table below shows the number of responses for each section of the survey, followed by a breakdown of the type of respondents who answered each section.

Table 1: Number of respondents by section

Section Heading/Questions regarding:	Number of responses
Background	156
Academia	51
Professional practice	98
Future Funding	121

The table below shows how the responses broke down by type of respondent, whether answered by an academic or by a practising service designer. When considering the breakdown it is important to take into account that respondents could tick more than one option, which is why the percentages do not total 100.

Table 2: Breakdown of responses to each section by type of respondent

Section	Academic % of total	Practitioner % of total	Other % of total
Background	45	54	26
Academia	82	35	22
Professional practice	38	67	20
Future Funding	49	54	26

The questionnaire had a number of sections, the academia section was answered mainly by those who define themselves as academics (82 per cent of the total number of respondents for the academic section), whereas respondents to the professional practice section were more mixed (67 per cent of total number of respondents defined themselves as practitioners, 38 per cent of the total number academics and 20 per cent of total number defined as other responses), highlighting that certainly some academics felt confident to give opinion of what was

happening in professional practice and indeed they may be involved in private sector consulting in some capacity.

As shown in Figure 1, below, overall a fairly even mix of service design academics and practitioners was achieved, along with some policy-makers and those who did not fit into either academia or professional practice (defined themselves as other); the 'other' responses included teachers, researchers, curators and students.

Figure 1: Respondent type
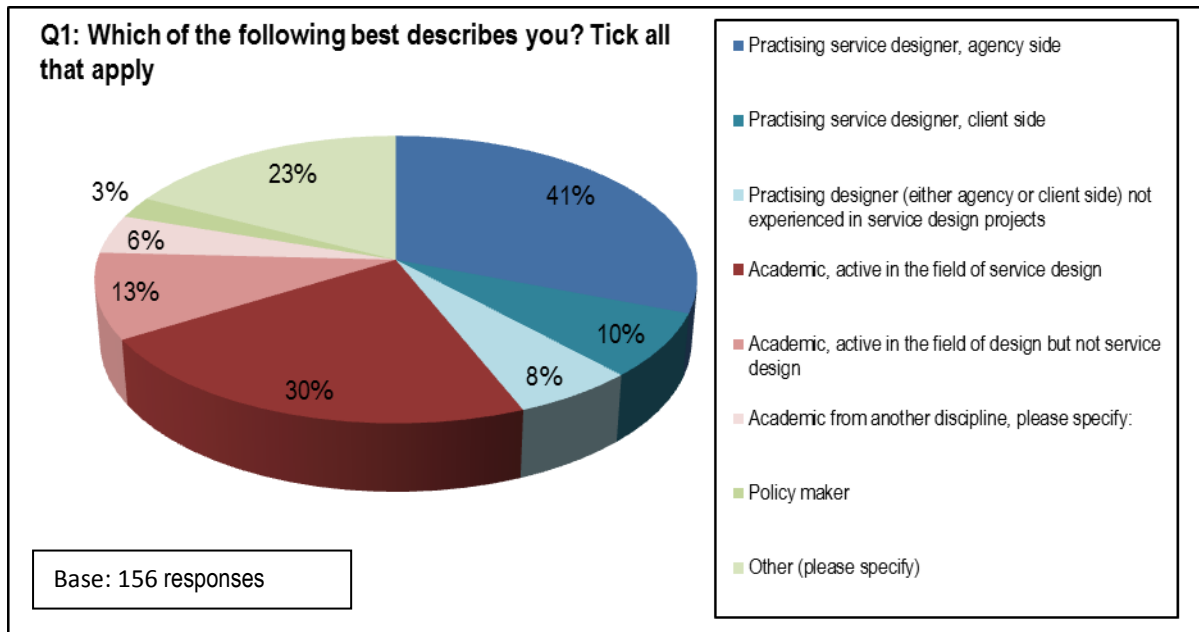
Looking at the geography of responses the majority came from England (56%), followed by Northern Europe (9%) and then the rest of Europe and Scotland (5-6%). The survey did receive a small number of responses from the US, Asia and Australia. The slightly higher number of responses from Northern Europe than other regions outside of England corresponds with the interview findings and desk research that point to Northern Europe as being a 'hotspot' for service design.

Figure 2: Geography of responses

Q2: Where are you based?

- Australia, 2%
- Asia, 2%
- Other (please specify), 6%
- US, 7%
- Southern Europe, 6%
- Western Europe, 5%
- Northern Europe, 9%
- England, 56%
- Northern Ireland, 1%
- Wales, 2%
- Scotland, 5%

Base: 156 responses