

**What stops people from working together?** This was the question Elsevier, one of the largest academic publishers in the world, wanted to address. Keen to continue their development of new products and services, the company were interested to investigate new services to support academics to collaborate – but there was a problem: the insights into current practices they needed simply weren't being delivered via traditional interactions with their customers.

STBY were asked to find a way in which the company could connect to its customers in a manner capable of delivering such insight. This would allow the company to explore potential new areas outside of its existing core business, and offer services that went beyond mere publishing and content distribution. The successful development of such services however depended on a clear picture of the work-environment in which contemporary academics operate. To provide this, STBY adapted the service design methodology in order to build the project around the idea of 'open innovation'.



## *Insights into Collaboration*

### *Sourcing Innovation for Elsevier Publishing*

*“Involving lead users in the creative process inspires idea generation from a fresh, external perspective”*

research techniques, they can indicate how certain aspects of their daily routines are not sufficiently supported by appropriate services or tools. Moreover, once this material is analysed and interpreted the insights gathered can be developed even further. The end result is a customer-led investigation leading to the clear identification of potential opportunity spaces for innovation.

### **Generating ideas: Sourcing inspiration in innovative ways**

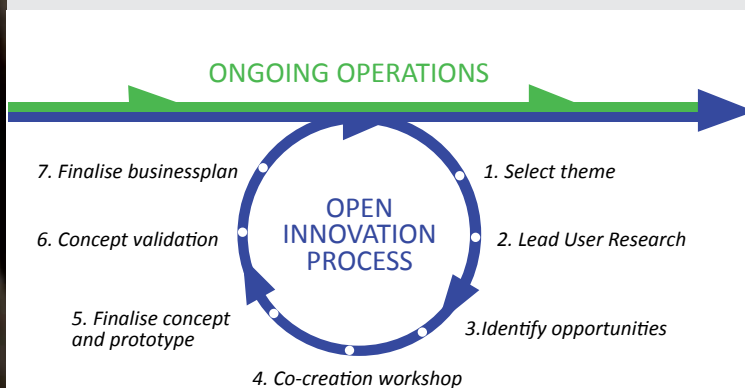
Open innovation renders projects accessible to ideas and suggestions derived from outside the client organisation. This marks a shift from traditional R&D approaches which can leverage a company's technical and marketing expertise, but often fail to identify the new, 'left-field' opportunities that are the key to successful innovation. Using an 'outside-in' perspective, the approach seeks to actively engage in the daily practices of service-users, and thus highlight needs which may currently be unmet.

The added value of such an approach is obvious. These customers have rich experiences of the benefits - and indeed the limitations - of the tools and services they use in their everyday work. When prompted by suitable

### **Designing the project**

When working with Elsevier, STBY used an open innovation methodology to bridge research and design elements in all stages of the process; the investigation of opportunities via lead-user research was combined with the development of service ideas and concepts through co-creation workshops.

At its heart, open innovation is an inter-disciplinary process that requires experts from various backgrounds to work together. For the Elsevier project, STBY thus developed an iterative process consisting of a series of meetings and workshops, which were interspersed with periods of elaboration by individual experts who addressed specific aspects of the issues at hand. In each instance, this was founded upon lead user research aimed at catalysing the innovation process.



• The Open Innovation process takes place in parallel to the ongoing operations of the client organisation. The results catalyse the change needed.



- During co-creation workshops with the client team insight maps were generated to document the evolution of ideas for new service concepts.

### **Lead user research: Identifying opportunities**

*For this project the team conducted a series of in-depth interviews across both the Netherlands and the UK. All interviewees were experienced researchers, based in both universities and the private sector. Each had worked in internationally distributed and multi-disciplinary teams on collaborative research projects.*

*Assembling such a sample was in itself a challenge. The recruitment of these lead users was achieved via snowballing, a method effective in finding participants that are otherwise difficult access. Each was visited at their workplace for an in-depth interview, with a member of the client team often invited to attend.*

*During these interviews various paper-based prompts were used to map the project networks, workflows and interactions of the participants. Sticky notes annotated specific points in these maps with additional comments and insights. Audio recorded and partly photographed, these interviews incorporated social network mapping, activity analysis and flow analysis, which provided a consistently rich data-set.*

*Such an extensive data set is only as effective as the mechanism by which it is used however, and in an effort to keep all stages of the project as 'open' as possible, the team decided to share most of the information via a blog. This allowed both the client team and the lead users themselves to follow the project as it progressed, with the notes, quotes, visuals and pictures displayed there categorised around emerging themes. These themes were developed in part due to the contributions made by users and the client-team in the form of comments attached to each successive post – insight was being delivered via an emphasis on sustained inclusion. Once the key themes were readily identifiable, an analytical framework that could be used as a reference for the rest of the project was constructed. In a workshop with the client team this framework was then further expanded and refined.*



### **Insight delivered**

*It soon became apparent that most users felt that the publication and distribution of their academic papers was relatively straight-forward – their frustrations derived from the actual writing of papers collaboratively (along with the related co-handling of data). They expressed an explicit wish to be better facilitated with dedicated tools and services in their collaborations. Existing, relatively new tools were often neither customised nor secure enough for highly specialised, professional research.*

*As a trusted brand, many expected Elsevier to be able to identify and understand their concerns and wishes - developing and delivering high-quality services is based on long-term and reciprocal relationships, rather than one-off transactions. Attempting to outline just what these services might be was the aim of the next step of the project.*



- For the lead user research academics and R&D researchers were interviewed at their place of work to capture the daily context of their collaborations.

### **Co-creation workshops: Generating innovation**

*STBY next organised a three-day co-creation workshop, inviting an extended team from the client side as well as a selection of the lead users to start generating early-stage concepts. All the participants contributed to the iterative creative process that evolved during the workshop; functioning as a catalysing moment in the Open Innovation process, it built upon the preparations and discoveries from the lead user research, and accelerated the thinking about the topic via a series of quick, small-group exercises.*

*A holistic view on value creation for the future users is crucial in such sessions, whilst results need to be aligned with the company's core abilities and strategies. In practice, the co-creative process in these workshops benefits from being 'design-led'. The design perspective can facilitate and direct the effective exchange of ideas between experts from the various disciplines that are involved. In this stage of the project STBY collaborated closely with Radarstation; their long-term partnership with this London-based design consultancy providing a solid basis for agile and successful team work.*

*Preparation for co-creation workshops is always crucial. STBY and Radarstation processed the insights emerging from the lead user research into an evocative range*

*of presentation and briefing materials: posters visualising the key information on a selection of participants, needs maps that pointed to the main opportunity spaces for Elsevier, and assignments that would trigger more detailed explorations. The workshops incorporated persona and 'day-in-the-life creations', customer journeys, touch points, rapid prototyping and 'thinking hats' feedback - all of which were documented in such a way that the results could be easily communicated to other teams and departments within Elsevier.*

*This enabled the process to be repeated over time for different contexts and domains (as opposed to being a one-off brainstorm-based event); rigorous methods and an emphasis on value creation around customer needs created a sustainable process that could be fixed upon working towards concrete deliverables.*



- Throughout the 3-day co-creation workshop, ideas and business cases for new service concepts they were presented, discussed and improved.

### Opening innovation

*In this project, service design served as an effective perspective from which the open innovation approach could be adopted. It directed the focus of the project towards the 'left-field' thinking desired by the client team. Integrating the lead user research and co-creation activities into a tightly knit project cycle meanwhile strengthened the qualitative hand-over of insights, and aided the translation of these into ideas and concepts for new services. The iterative process of meetings, workshops, and expert elaboration ensured the dynamics needed for creative engagement, without sacrificing the contemplation needed to make analytical, strategic choices.*

*Involving lead users in the creative process meanwhile ensured that idea generation was consistently inspired from a fresh, external perspective – something which proved crucial in maintaining the focus on the people the innovations were ultimately meant for. A natural match for the client, open innovation in synergy with service design philosophy delivered insight, developed innovation, and generated concepts that helped Elsevier make some crucial steps towards the next stage of their operations.*

- To effectively communicate the insights from the research a series of maps was made. They expressed the user needs that emerged from the fieldwork and the strategic opportunities for the company identified in meetings with the core client team. These maps were then used as a starting point for the idea generation in the workshop with the extended client team.



During this project STBY worked closely together with Radarstation. STBY was responsible for the Lead User Research and Radarstation coordinated the design-led ideation workshop with the extended client team. Both companies jointly developed the overall methodology for the project and facilitated the co-creation sessions.