
THE POWER OF BEING IN-BETWEEN EVERYTHING

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A designer friend works at the British National Health Service as a coach of innovation teams. She told me once that she often gets asked the question: **“Don’t designers make chairs anymore?”** Well... many don’t actually, and for a good reason.



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Making chairs is no longer a designer’s most valuable skill, and many like to set their teeth into something more challenging: creating Product Service Systems that address societal problems or business opportunities. They’d rather design health services than waiting room chairs.

Unlike a chair however, the creation of Product Service Systems requires a holistic approach. Simply put, we need to think of everything at the same time when we create PSS or services, as most people have come to call them. A playground can be seen as a few objects that need to be sturdy and properly fixed and maintained, but once you start to connect playgrounds to helping kids and their families live more healthy lives and fight obesity, there is much more at play than a nice and safe slide. Suddenly,

the design requires, in addition to the engineers and designers, input from social workers, health professionals and city marketers. It might even be relevant to engage artists, software engineers and game developers. Each of these professionals would have something exciting and relevant to contribute to solving these complex problems. The question is, “How can they do this together?”

That is where typical design skills like connecting and synthesising come in, however these are perhaps not immediately obvious to those who see designers as chair makers. Solving complex problems calls for fresh and diverse perspectives that different disciplines, from artists to social workers in the case above, can bring to a project. These perspectives help us to think beyond the limits of each individual

DON'T
DESIGN
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discipline. But when everyone thinks outside the box, how do we bring things together again? After all, we need a coherent answer to child obesity. This is where designers are starting to develop new roles for themselves, as connectors and synthesisers. Designers enable the mutual sharing of expert knowledge, for instance, by bringing it together in strong visualisations that then form a foundation for co-creation.

By positioning themselves in-between all the experts involved, as opposed to claiming their own clearly-bounded turf, designers can overcome some of the limitations of well-defined silo-boundaries found in many projects and organisations. By no longer being chair makers but something less tangible, designers gain the necessary freedom to explore possible solutions on a strategic level, in-between the silos of the

different disciplines involved. They can't do this on their own, but they seek the help of others, from kids to all kinds of experts. If you happen to be one of these 'new' designers, don't forget to tell people why you stopped making chairs!

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KNITTING THINGS
TOGETHER

With Product Service Systems, prototypes can also be used to design touch points, the internal structure of organisations, the value networks, and business models.



A typical design skill is making prototypes. These prototypes are no longer used to get a sense of the actual product to-be-designed.

