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The Good Kitchen: A Design Thinking Case Study

Introduction

Policymaking has traditionally been characterised as an intendedly rational process from problem definition to option analysis and policy development. Given the growing complexities of the public sector, this approach is increasingly being challenged (Shergold, 2015). Scholars and commentators have noted a disconnect between government policy and citizen expectations (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016). Governments around the world are finding new ways to understand policy problems, develop solutions, and enhance decision-making.

To illustrate, the Danish government recognizes the growing complexity of an ageing population. One of the problems is government-sponsored meals for seniors. The government provides subsidised meals for senior citizens who are unable to work and are in need. However, many of the seniors still suffer from nutritional problems and poor quality of life. To address this wicked problem, the Municipality of Holstebro in Denmark collaborated with the agency Hatch & Bloom to improve subsidised food service for elderly (Liedtka et al., 2013). They utilised design thinking as a tool to gain insights into both consumers and staff in order to navigate the possibilities for improving the nutrition and well-being of the elderly by establishing a more appealing food service. Finally, The Good Kitchen program was created, offering higher quality, flexibility, and freedom of choice to government-subsidised meals.

The report will focus on the study of the successful case of "The Good Kitchen" in their use of design thinking to foster innovation in public-sector service delivery. The design thinking process will be divided into six stages, namely understand, observe, synthesise, ideate, prototype, and test, and will be discussed in the case study.

Understand

The Holstebro government and the Hatch & Bloom team organised a kick-off seminar to exchange ideas on all possible aspects of the design challenge. They applied the Charrette method in the seminar to brainstorm ideas and ask questions.

What do we know?

To understand the context of the problem, government officials collected and presented data on nutritional problems among older adults. According to the officials, it is estimated that 60% of the elderly in nursing homes and home care in Denmark have poor nutrition, with 20% of them suffering from malnutrition (Liedtka et al., 2013). The health of the elderly is deteriorating, placing a greater financial burden on governments. The situation will only worsen as the elder population increases and requires more government subsidies in the future.

Who are potential users?

At first, the Holstebro Officer and Director of Food Services believed the problem was simple and straightforward. The only users of the scheme are senior citizens, especially those who are unable to work and in need. Therefore, one of the objectives is to inquire about their food preferences. Apart from senior customers, they also focus on those who have stopped using their service and those who are about to retire. This helps them understand how to reacquire users and cater the needs of the next generation of seniors.

What needs do they have?

Due to the nutritional deficiencies, it is increasingly difficult for older adults to take care of themselves and perform daily tasks. It also marks a decrease in the individual's quality of life, and they will need more care and support in the future. Therefore, they need a more nutritious menu and appealing food service.

What ideas are hidden?

Instead of simply focusing on the needs of senior consumers, the Hatch & Bloom team decided to expand the scope of the project beyond just improving the menu. Public service kitchen staff are also understood to be an issue that needs to be addressed. Working in a public service kitchen is a low-status job in Denmark. Also, there have been negative public narratives of such kitchens serving poor quality or even out-dated food. It is widely believed that those who work in these public kitchens cannot cook well and that the kitchens are in poor sanitation. As a result, instead of only asking the senior users what they preferred, the team would also have to consult the employees who served the food.

Understanding Phase	
Context	Many of the seniors suffer from nutritional problems
Potential Users	Seniors citizens, discontinued users and people who are close to retirement

	age
Needs	A more nutritious menu and more appealing food service
Hidden Problem	The needs of public service kitchen staff also need to be addressed as they are the one who produce the meal.

Observe

Following a thorough understanding of the problem, the Hatch & Bloom team began research in the observation stage. The team performed ethnographic research as a qualitative data collection method to observe and interview senior users and kitchen employees (Liedtka et al., 2013). Additionally, observations are also used in journey mapping to track the emotional journey of users (Sabharwal, 2022).

Interviewing Seniors

The team observed the elderly from the moment they placed their meal order. The information is gathered through observations and interviews, which are then used to make inferences about what the users need.

During the ethnographic interview, the interviewer will focus on listening rather than making assumptions or judgments in order to capture the needs of seniors. Few important questions were asked in this stage:

1. Do you feel socially stigmatised for receiving subsidised food service?
2. Who do you first reach out to if you need help?
3. Do you think there is a free choice of food from the program? and why?
4. Do you like eating alone? Or with companions?
5. Do you have a preference for food? And what specifically do you like?
6. Would you like to customise your meal? If yes, how would you customise it?

Interviewing Kitchen Staff

The Hatch & Bloom team observed their working environment in the public kitchen. They also conducted an interview with kitchen staff. Few major questions are being asked in the interview:

1. What are your major frustrations at work?
2. Are you satisfied with the current menu? and why?

3. Would you like to design a new menu? What would you include in it?
4. Do you believe in your ability to prepare food from a new menu?

Synthesize

The next stage is the synthesis stage, which is a summary of the observation. The team successfully identified some important and unmet needs for seniors and kitchen staff.

Seniors' Interview Results



Fig. 1. Journey Mapping of Senior Users

During interviews, the Hatch & Bloom team discovered that seniors receiving government-subsidised meals felt isolated and stigmatised. Accepting such assistance carries a significant social stigma. In Danish culture, assistance with impersonal needs is acceptable, but assistance with more personal needs is uncommon (Liedtka et al., 2013). Therefore, seniors preferred to receive help from family or friends instead of the government.

Additionally, the team found that seniors didn't have many food options in the program. The team observed that menus were only changed every three months, a typical rational decision by governments as it made logistics easier and allowed for one-off bulk purchases. In addition, they stated in interviews that they do not like to eat alone because it reminds them that their family is not around. All of this was attributed to the loss of appetite the research team observed in older adults.

From the journey map in Figure 1, the team found some interesting information about how older adults prepare meals and set tables. They will customise their meals by adding spices to the meal and using their own vegetables. During the interviews, the researchers also found that the elderly have a preference for seasonal foods and have a strong perception of seasonal foods. For example, they know seasonal fruits such as apples in autumn and strawberries in summer.

Kitchen Staffs' Interview Results

The Hash & Bloom team also interviewed and observed kitchen staff. They found that workers are frustrated and demoralised. They don't have the right to cook the food they like. Since the menu only changes every three months, their job becomes very boring and repetitive. The decision to use a menu

every three months makes sense from both an operational perspective and a traditional bureaucratic approach. However, it doesn't motivate the kitchen staff in any sense.

During the interview, the kitchen staff realised that the team was working hard to help and improve the situation. This creates good momentum for employees to engage in the design thinking process. Because the designers listened to their frustrations and cared about them, they became more open about their own ideas, which played a big role in the show's later success. As the team continued to observe and get to know the employees better, they realised they were more than capable of producing quality food. Contrary to public perception, communal kitchens are staffed by skilled workers. It's the design of old menus that hold them back from their full potential, not a lack of skill.

Ideate

Based on the above findings, the Hatch & Bloom team gathered stakeholders to understand the difficulties of the elderly and kitchen staff and develop solutions. The ideate phase is for them to come up with as many ideas as possible and develop better public food services. To achieve this, they organised three workshops (Liedtka et al., 2013).

Organising Workshops

Firstly, municipal representatives, volunteers, gerontologists, kitchen staff and nursing home staff gathered for the first workshop. The group of about 25 people reviewed the interview findings. To give participants a sense of what consumers will encounter, Hatch & Bloom coordinators first serve meals from the public kitchen to give them an idea of how the food service works and how the food tastes. The goal of the first workshop is to raise awareness of the problem and build a common perspective before the group begins to solve it. During the first workshop, no solutions were explored.

In the second workshop, the facilitator and participants categorised food service processes using mind mapping techniques. For example, the food production and delivery process. They studied every process in public food service and determined which ones needed to be redesigned. Moderators use analogies as trigger questions to help them brainstorm ideas (See Figure 2). To encourage more ideas, the facilitator compared the public kitchen to a restaurant, allowing participants to brainstorm what the public kitchen lacks to become a restaurant.

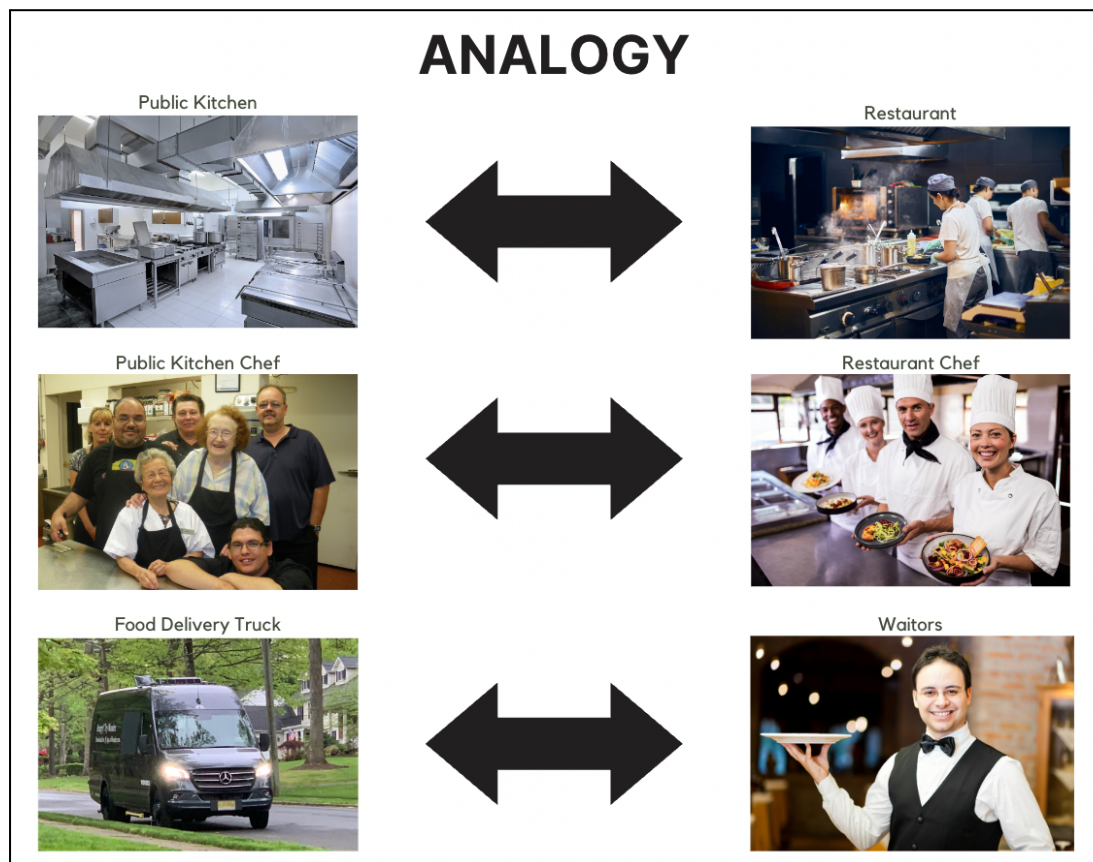


Fig. 2. Analogy used in the workshop

In the third workshop, which was much more hands-on, participants made prototypes and began testing the ideas they had developed together. For example, Hatch & Bloom worked with participants to go through three different iterations of the menu and asked them which ones they liked and how they felt about certain descriptions in the menu, such as which colours they liked to add and whether they liked images or illustrations in the menu.

Breakthroughs

Hatch & Bloom invites a renowned chef to observe the kitchen and attend a workshop. The chef shared in the workshop that he was amazed by the skill of public kitchen staff, which was at a professional level. The reason the food is bad is because public kitchens focus on maximising efficiency rather than food quality, not because they lack skills. The kitchen staff was amazed by the compliments of the professional chef. Being told they were actually good at cooking boosted their confidence and sparked their enthusiasm for the project.

Workshop participants continued to use restaurant analogies and attempt to redesign the old menu. Until then, the menu has always been the simplest description of the food, unlike a menu in restaurants. For example, one of the items in the old menu is "liver, potatoes and sauce". This is

reflected in the workshop and is not an attractive description. Public food services had never given much thought to how their menus should be designed, and that idea changed in workshops where they began looking at how to redesign the menus into more appealing ones.

Prototype

New Packaging

Hatch & Bloom took the results from the workshops and tested the prototype not just with existing customers, but also with people who had stopped using the service and young people approaching retirement age.

It has been observed that older customers like to customise their meals by adding spices to the meal and using their own vegetables. The prototype therefore made some changes on the packaging. The new prototype design separates food into packages rather than mixing them together. For example, instead of mixing potatoes, rice, and sauces together as a meal. They separate potatoes, rice, and sauces into packages. The new design allows customers to order separately and customise their meals by adding homemade fruit and spices. This makes the food service more flexible and customisable.

New ingredients and New Uniform

Hatch & Bloom then consulted with a gourmet chef to work with the team to change Hospitality Food Service's negative kitchen atmosphere. Staff were initially concerned that they might be criticised by the professional chef. However, the chef praises their food and recognizes their cooking skill. This gave them a lot of confidence.

The chef suggested ways to present food more attractively and advised the kitchen workers to bring in more seasonal ingredients. The goal is to make food as appealing as possible. The food was redesigned to emphasise colour more. For example, they decorate plates with carrots and parsley to provide more colour. There is also a focus on properly seasoning the meal. During the prototyping phase, kitchen staff also got new uniforms like restaurant professionals. It gives them a sense of belonging and a sense of pride.

New Name and New Menu

The process also resulted in a new name for the communal food service: The Good Kitchen. This shows their dedication to serving quality food. The Good Kitchen is an ambitious name that drives employees to work hard to live up to expectations.

The new menu mimics that of a professional restaurant. It includes categories like appetisers, main courses, desserts, and more. Also, detailed information is available in the menu. For example, the menu changed from simply "fried veal liver with gravy, potatoes and vegetables" to "fried liver with onions and sauce, potatoes with thyme and vegetables roasted in butter".

Good Kitchen staff have also revised the menu based on feedback from seniors. For example, they developed a two-course set menu after learning that many of their customers are very sociable and like to dine in groups. To allow seniors to tailor their meals to their dietary needs, snacks such as pastries and chocolates are also offered. There are also "weekly surprises" that allow the Good Kitchen crew to get more creative and offer customers more variety .

Building Connections with Users

Kitchen staff are not used to interacting with the customers they serve. So the team created a prototype feedback card that lets customers leave feedback about their meal and suggestions for how it should be cooked (See Figure 3). Staff were able to learn more about seniors' feelings and their needs. During staff meetings, they read these feedback cards and posted them on the notice board in the kitchen. These cards motivate staff and give seniors a voice about their needs.



Fig. 3. Feedback Cards in the Kitchen

In addition, Good Kitchen began distributing articles written by kitchen staff. Details and photos of recent staff, and other special events such as staff birthdays. This helps seniors understand what is happening in the kitchen and facilitates interactions between customers and kitchen staff.

Test

The phases of observation, synthesis, ideation, and prototyping led to a number of significant transformations, including new staff uniforms, menu options, and feedback channels that gave customers and client employees an entirely new experience. Customer satisfaction appeared to improve as a result of changes in how employees saw themselves and the services they supplied.

The prototype was implemented in the test phase and the Good Kitchen project was a success. Redesigning menus and improving dish descriptions led to a 500% increase in orders in the first week alone. The number of consumers increased from 650 to 700 in just three months.

The most critical aspect of transformation is changing the way employees see themselves and their jobs. Improve kitchen staff motivation and satisfaction. As a result, customers are more satisfied with their dishes. Users, partners and colleagues from other cities gave good comments on Good Kitchen. Additionally, with The Good Kitchen's better reputation spread, more unsolicited employment applications are now being received.

Conclusion

In this case study, the Good Kitchen demonstrates how design thinking can be an effective tool for innovation in public sector service delivery. Using a human-centred design thinking approach, the Hatch & Bloom team succeeded in providing better dining services for seniors and motivating communal kitchen staff. They show that government-subsidised meals can also be flexible, high-quality and innovative.

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