ukgovcamp

Session: 1
Room: Committee Room 2

Session title : Barriers and enablers to design in the public sector

Session leader : Carla Groom

Volunteer to continue conversation after :

Notes taken by : Prateek Buch, Policy Lab

Notes

Merged with a session on constraints to good public sector design

Carla introduced
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-public-design-evidence-review

Enablers and barriers identified during this process, showing the need to adapt the system to accommodate design practices.

Lola shared experience of product management in government, often fighting 'immovable constraints' such as policy not being user centred, not being involved as digital teams early enough - most useful is knowing what to do once digital work has started. Where should we focus efforts to change this dynamic, towards changing the whole system? How can we make agile practice more responsive to wider system constraints such as this?

Contributor says accepting this picture can be helpful rather than always trying to change the whole system. Also finding where can you find places to do things differently, identifying quick wins, deliver what's asked for, then adjust delivery to incorporate agile methods. Helps

when leadership don't have the appropriate mindset for design/digital - this might look like working with people who do have the skills such as design, rather than embedding design into a wider team

Contributor 2 says that embedding a policy person within a design team can be very helpful. Carla notes that their team is unusual, blending behavioural science and other disciplines to support decision-makers. Lola echoes that embedding policy colleagues can resolve apparent conflict between policy and design/digital, to find common ground

Contributor 3 says they've worked when policy people were embedded in a design team, helps discover common language. Works at a team level, harder to roll out to organisation level.

Carla: churn is a barrier identified in review especially in more relational contexts rather than process-dominated types of work, C3 says funding also needs to enable long-term relationships.

Pull-model where a capability is sought and delivered through demand can work: DCMS central analysis team, and sometimes in the private sector. Helps build value incrementally, but fixed budgets don't help create trust or allow iteration towards an agreed end-point. Where there's a longer relationship between supplier/client, across multiple projects, trust can build.

Pull model for specific roles (content design, UX etc) where there isn't enough budget/headcount can work, but needs a pool to be set up - which needs someone to create the budget for a central pool.

Policy can derail design process by being absent from key decision-making meetings, but can only be helpful when present if they can adapt mindset. Also needs a shared agreement between policy and delivery on what success looks like (greater adoption? Another outcome?) - policy and design may have different mental models, and/or different incentives. Legacy systems - both technical/IT/digital, and legislative - especially when designed in isolation and reluctant to change, can block blended working with design. Shows the need for embedding design specialisms.

Can sometimes create new ways of working in areas where there isn't that old way of working, hint of 3 Horizons of where you can create a new culture.

Systems are often designed around available tech, rather than designing both tech and policy alongside each other. Including the data gathering to see whether it's effective.

Emerging from the review, a prize would be policymakers seeing themselves as designers - from experience, both policymakers and designers see their role as 'holding the ring.' Need to teach policymakers how to be designers, through teaching a curriculum via the policy profession, Kings college etc. Could encourage policymakers to consider technical delivery as part of the design.

[James Plunkett disciplines theory of govt](#) cited, mental models of various disciplines often clash. People can hold multiple viewpoints, teams can but can't scale, orgs struggle, complex webs of orgs really struggle to accommodate different models. For instance, economics dominates but often doesn't work in c21 complexity. Is there an equivalent of service standards for policy design - radically changing how design is implemented, enforcing checkpoints that ask is this still the right thing to do? Allows more continuous adaptable design rather than exclusively up front design, and feedback loops.

Political capital also matters, in terms of U-turns when you change what you do when you find that something needs to adapt. "We've listened and learnt" or "we don't know yet" aren't common and aren't well-received.

Policy as a donut: impacts and intent on the outside, measures as the dough, the hole is where creative design can really help.

Away from policy, spaces like where budgets are fragmented can be an opportunity to apply design. Designers may see the need for changes through insights from implementation, but don't often have the systems thinking skills to feed that back to policymakers. Digital has had traction for design thinking, but entirely new policy areas lend themselves to prototype, test, scale etc.

Cyber in large gov dept would love design expertise, as security is often built by security experts, without expertise in UCD. Very little UCD is in turn applied to internal systems/services - you'd think Uber designed something for their purpose not buying off the shelf. Consider officials as users.