The power of trust and motivation in a designing social system

Working Paper

Dr. Mieke van der Bijl-Brouwer

Senior Lecturer

University of Technology Sydney

Introduction

Design is increasingly adopted in the public and social sector as an approach to tackle complex societal problems. To embed these practices in these sectors new agencies or labs have been established that work within or alongside traditional public and social sector organisations to design products, processes, services, policies and strategies, aimed at generating value for society. These public and social sector innovation labs borrow many methods and practices from traditional design professions, but at the same time a new unique practice is emerging that is tailored to the requirements of working in this new context (Yee and White 2015, UK Design Council 2013, Burns et al. 2006).

One of the differences between traditional design and this new design practice is the way that the designing group of people can be characterised. Traditionally, design has been described as a team activity, building on social interactions between design team members (Dorst 2006, Badke-Schaub et al. 2007). In traditional design teams in the product manufacturing industry, there are clear boundaries between the team and the external world. The external voices of the consumer, user, and client are included in the design process through distinct roles in the design team such as the marketing manager, user experience expert, and project leader. These external stakeholders might also be invited to be actively involved through participatory design processes. However, the design decisions are taken within the confines of the design team's office and it is clear from the start that the client or owner of the design team will implement the solution. In comparison, in public and social sector innovation labs these boundaries between the team and the external world are much less clear. External stakeholders are often not just participants in a co-design process, but are an active part of the design team. Moreover, it is often not clear at the beginning of the design project who will be implementing the result of the design process. For example, many labs organise events such as 'prototyping festivals' to show the results of a design process to a wide group of external stakeholders to find people who might be interested in implementing the ideas. There are two reasons why public and social innovation labs are more connected to the external world than

traditional design teams. Firstly, the complexity of the types of problems that they aim to address requires a 'systemic' approach with input from a wide variety of stakeholders. Secondly, because the labs are aimed at generating value for the public and for society - and do not need to propose designs that generate competitive advantage for a client that requires a 'closing off' or protection of the design process - the labs can optimally benefit from connecting to the external world, by getting as much information and expertise in, and getting as much information and ideas out as possible.

This has moved design beyond the boundaries of the design team, to what Manzini (2015, p38) calls 'designing networks'. He argues that in a connected world, design processes tend to be increasingly distributed among numerous actors who differ in culture, motivation, and professional development. The connectedness of design also has moved its impact beyond individual projects to what Burns et al. (2006) call transformation design. Because organisations now operate in an environment of constant change, the challenge is not how to design a response to a current issue, but how to design a means of continually responding, adapting and innovating (p21).

Although the adoption of design in public and social sector innovation has resulted in promising progress, it has also revealed many challenges and constraints. For example, designers have been critiqued for limiting their contribution to the design stage, and not paying enough attention to the conditions required for successful implementation of ideas (Mulgan 2014, Norman and Stappers 2015). However, rather than just focusing on individual designers, we also need to look at the broader group of people involved in the process, the designing network, and how we can ensure they remain engaged and committed throughout and beyond design projects. As other scholars have argued and shown, engagement of organisational staff and community is a key condition to generate lasting legacy in these innovation contexts (Yee, White, and Lennon 2015, Sangiorgi 2011). This is fundamentally different from traditional design teams, where it is team members' full time job to engage in design processes. For this purpose I adopt a social systems view of this connected and dynamic group of people who are actively involved in designing responses to complex societal issues. I will refer to them as a 'designing social system'.

In the next section I will further expand the social system perspective on design practices in public and social innovation. I will then zoom in on two particular 'internal' aspects of designing social systems, namely 'motivation' and 'trust', illustrated by a study of five public and social innovation labs.

Social systems view of designing networks

A social system is a whole that cannot be divided into independent parts, and within this system both the parts – human beings - and whole are purposeful (Ackoff and Emery 1972). A purposeful individual is one that can change its goals in constant environmental conditions; it selects goals as well as the means by which to pursue them. It thus displays will (ibid, p31). Stacey (2006) similarly argues that in the context of organisational management "unlike (digital) agents in complex adaptive systems, human agents that are part of organisations, are not simple rule-following beings but instead are "conscious and self-conscious beings capable of spontaneity, imagination, fantasy and creative action" (p33). He furthermore developed the theory of complex responsive processes which states that "organisations are not actually existing things called systems but rather are ongoing iterated patterns of relationships between people". A social system therefore consists of 'parts', human beings, that behave in certain ways that are not predetermined, and of relationships between

those human beings. We need to understand both aspects of a 'designing social system' to be able to support these networks in becoming more productive.

The perspective on individual, purposeful aspects and relational aspects of organisations can be further elaborated by applying the four quadrants of Wilber's integral model. The quadrants are based on two axes, one focused on the individual versus the collective perspective, and one focused on the inside (invisible) versus the outside (visible)(Wilber 2006). Wilber argues that these are the four basic ways of looking at anything, including organisations. If we combine these quadrants with the social systems view we can look at designing networks in public and social innovation, from an internal and external perspective, and from a purposeful individual perspective and a collective, relational perspective (figure 1).

	Interior perspective	Exterior perspective
Individual perspective	internal aspects of the 'purpose-ful individuals' in a designing network (beliefs, mindsets, moti-vations, ..)	external aspects of members of the designing network (roles, behaviour, capabilities)
Collective perspective	internal aspects of relationships in a designing network (culture, trust, respect, …)	external aspects of relationships in a designing network (struc-tures, processes practices,…)

Figure 1: the four quadrants of Wilber's integral model applied to designing networks

The external perspective
The exterior perspective includes the 'visible' aspects of the designing network. On an individual level this is about what people do and the corresponding roles they take in a design process. The successful application of design requires at least the following roles and corresponding capabilities. Within each design project you will need people who *inform* the design process through domain knowledge or expertise (for example end-users or service deliverers who know the context or problem well); you will need people who *design*, using domain knowledge to develop proposals for new initiatives or interventions; and people who *act*, who initiate and invest in starting a design project, and/or who take initiative to implement solutions (figure 2). While in traditional design teams these roles are often clearly divided over de design team members, they are less clear cut in designing networks public and social innovation, where people might take on multiple of these roles (figure 3). For example, in one of the case studies described in this paper, the design team decided to implement one of the developed ideas through turning it into a start-up social enterprise themselves, an example of *acting*. In designing networks, the design roles are also often adopted by stakeholders beyond those that are part of the initial design teams.
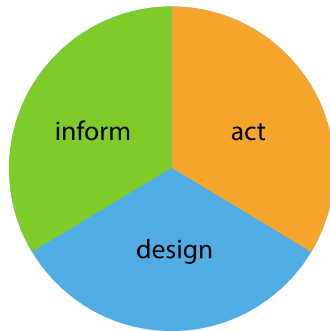
Figure 2: the basic roles required for any design process

On a relational level, the external view is about the visible collective aspects of a designing network. In the context or organisational management, Laloux (2014) describes this quadrant in Wilber's model as being about the organisational systems, including structures, processes and practices. In designing networks in public and social innovation this refers to the systems and resources in place to support the designing network, such as innovation methods and tools, and financial and legal arrangements between stakeholders – as well as the collective innovation practices of the group.
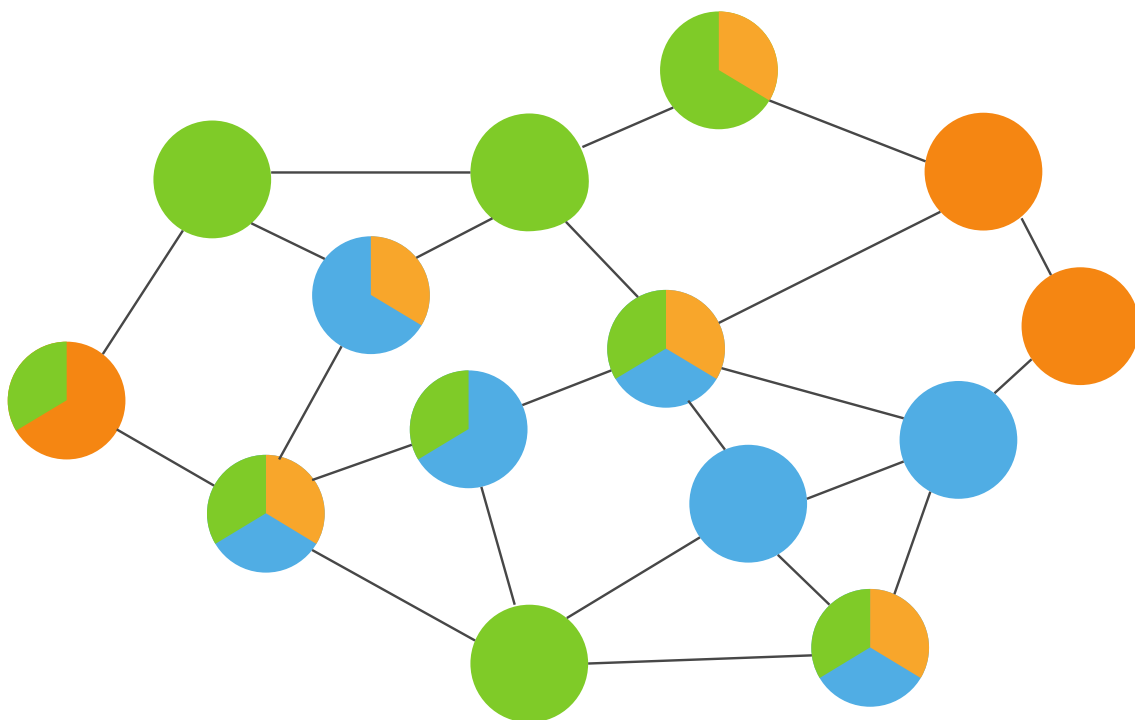

Figure 3: in a designing network, the roles are distributed over various people and people can take on multiple roles.

The interior perspective
In the emerging research field of design and public and social innovation, the main focus so far has been on the external aspects of the designing social system: the capabilities required to practice design, and the structures and processes to support it. However, to advance the field of public and

social innovation, we need to develop a more complete understanding of designing networks by including the internal view. This is in line with the views of Wilber (2006) and Laloux (2014) in organisational management, to include an understanding of people's beliefs, mindsets and of their collective culture to manage organisations effectively. Likewise, in design for social innovation, Manzini argues that we need to add a focus on the socio-cultural world of design to the predominant focus on the physical-biological world of design (Manzini 2016) p55. This will not just help us understand what people do in designing social systems – as outlined above – but also why they do it.

This paper contributes to the development of this internal view of designing social systems in public and social innovation, through presenting preliminary results of study into the practices of five international public and social sector innovation labs. The initial focus of this study was external, investigating what and how the labs were practicing. However, throughout the study two key themes emerged that are related to the internal aspect of the designing social system, namely the role of 'motivation' on an individual level, and the role of 'trust' on a relational level.

A study into the practices of public and social innovation labs

Research method
The study was conducted using a retrospective case-study approach (Yin 2009). We invited five international public and/or social innovation agencies to participate, and selected an appropriate case study within each of the agencies. The research method included document analysis of the reports and design documentation, and interviews with the team members from the innovation lab, as well as their main partners in the public or social sector. All interviews were transcribed, and relevant sections were coded and explored through thematic analysis.

The 'design networks' in each of the case studies consisted of the agencies and their collaborating or funding organisations in the public and social sector, in addition to a broader group of stakeholders. The leading teams from the agencies each had between two and four members. In four of the five case studies at least one member from the funding or partnering organisation had an active role in the design process. Service providers and/or public servants or managers were actively involved in the design process in each of the case studies through participatory design or through being an active member of the design team, taking part in design and research activities, and decision-making. In all case studies except one, end-users or citizens were actively involved through participatory design or being an active member of the design team.

Motivation
One of the themes that emerged related to the internal view of the designing social system, was the importance of understanding what drives the behaviour of human beings who are part it. This was particularly related to why people chose to participate in the project, and why people chose to progress the projects in certain directions. Preliminary results show that some common drivers for people to participate in the projects were related to purpose, frustration and learning.

Purpose
Not surprisingly, purpose was often mentioned as the main driver to initiate or participate in an innovation project. The people who participated all wanted to make a difference. This could be related to any of the three roles, inform, design and/or act. A key insight is that purpose cannot be enforced. Instead, efforts should be focused on finding the willing. This became apparent through the 'champions' who played an important role in each of the client or partnering organisations in making sure that the design process and design outcomes were implemented (act). A nice example

of the inform-role is the following quote about a young citizen who agreed to be interviewed for an innovation project, because she understood that could help other young people:

> *Municipality staff members: "People were happy that they could share their stories, independent of whether you could do something about it [..], but you still feel like you are being listened to."*

> *" Yes, and there was this girl that I interviewed [and she said]: well, I know that this will not impact my own personal situation, because it's too late for me, but that other children [will benefit from it]. So it's important that her story matters "*

Frustration

Various interviewees mentioned that frustration about the lack of impact of their organisation motivated them to participate in the project. This frustration seems to be directly linked to purpose, where participants felt they needed to change their practice to bring it in line with their purpose.

> *Member innovation lab: "I was just very frustrated with how public policy seemed to manifest itself in our particular circumstance here at [government department] but I didn't have any knowledge for why that was"*

However, frustration can easily turn into the opposite of motivation, by making people withdraw from projects. In one case, the design project turned out to be a means to keep people motivated to act, rather than to dwell on frustration.

> *Member innovation lab: "[…] there was so much anger and you know, reluctance about this new [reform]. So all the [service providers] sat there, […], they were really, really mad. I mean, there were strikes and everything [..] So instead of just you know, resigning and saying well, this is an impossible task, then show via this project that okay, well [this idea] was just one thing, but if we can find ten, 15 tools like [this idea], then the chances are actually that this reform can actually work in real life. "*

Learning

Another driver to participate or initiate a project was related to opportunities for learning. In all case studies capability building of decision-makers and domain experts played an important role, ranging from a 6-day training program, to experiential learning through participating in the project for several months. Many interviewees showed a deep interest to learn about new innovation practices, possibly driven by purpose.

> *Participant: "At that point in time I was working on the themes design thinking and social innovation, so it was perfect for me, because I was looking for cases, but did not find cases that had that cross-over, so I was very happy. So that was why I joined the team and from the start I was an enthusiastic member and tried to learn a lot, so yes, I was very active".*

This included learning by challenging yourself:

> *CEO innovation lab: "And we've been really looking for any opportunities to start to really stretch ourselves, but stretch broader thinking about how social innovation and good social innovation methods can really help shift things at a systemic level."*

Making use of motivation in design

Motivation is not just related to participation in a design process, it also plays a role in how the process progresses. Various teams mentioned that when they needed to decide in which direction the project should continue, they looked for 'traction' and 'energy' and which ideas would have the most chance of being adopted and progressed in the designing social system.

> *Member innovation lab: "[In idea selection] we looked at what the teams felt like progressing, at the energy. So therefore we sometimes had to let go of things, because there was no energy or attention for it."*

Two of the five innovation labs did this explicitly by organising 'prototyping festivals' where they would show their ideas to potentially interested stakeholders to investigate which ideas motivated these stakeholders to implement them.

Discussion motivation

So far, the concept of motivation has mostly been discussed in public and social innovation in relation to 'champions', people that drive and support innovation projects. For example Yee and White (2015) showed that project champions are needed to push for and advocate the adoption of new practices, tools and approaches, at all levels of the organisation. A further understanding of why people become champions could help shape of designing social systems that achieve lasting impact.

In the traditional management literature, the role of motivation is often reduced to the role of 'incentives'. This is an extrinsic view of motivation, which assumes that people are mainly motivated to do certain work for money or status. The new management literature, such as for example Laloux' (2014) concept of 'teal' organisations, moves away from the extrinsic view to a more intrinsic view of motivation for work, focusing on 'wholeness' and 'evolutionary purpose'. A popular explanation of intrinsic motivation is Pink's (2009) description of the drivers for creative tasks which include mastery, purpose, and autonomy - which are in line with the preliminary results presented in this paper – and which he shows have a larger impact on creative tasks than the financial incentives. To build a further understanding of this topic in future research, we could furthermore draw on the theory of the positive psychology of self, applied to organisational psychology. Positive psychology is aimed at understanding and building the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000) – rather than traditional psychology, which tends to focus on mental disorders and illnesses. One interesting concept in positive psychology that might shed further light on the intrinsic aspect of designing social systems is the notion of 'job crafting', the physical and cognitive changes that individuals make pro-actively in the task or relational boundaries of their work (Wrzesniewski et al. 2013). Job crafting theory provides insight into how people craft their task, relations, and the way they perceive and interpret these tasks and relationships to change the significance and meaning of their work. Anecdotal evidence in one of the case studies for example showed how service deliverers changed their mindset about the extent to which they thought they were able to improve their own job after they participated in a design project, an example of 'cognitive job crafting'. Future research on designing social systems in public and social innovation could use these theories and frameworks to develop a deeper understanding of how and why people within a designing social system take on certain roles, and continue or change these roles beyond individual projects.

Trust

As suggested in the introduction, a social systems view of designing networks includes an understanding of the *relationships* between people in these networks. The case studies showed that trust played a key role in shaping these relationships. In this paper I will further elaborate on the relationships between innovation labs and their client/collaborators, and between managers of the leading or collaborating public or social sector organisations and service deliverers who participated in and/or informed the design processes.

Trust between innovation labs and their clients/collaborators
Trust played a role between the clients or collaborating organisations and the innovation labs in all five case studies. Trust was essential as designing for complex societal problems can be a very uncomfortable process with a lot of uncertainty.

> *Manager client/collaborating organisation: "And it was a challenge for us as well because we didn't know the outcome. Normally we know like somewhere where it's going but in this project we had to let go and just let them decide on the way."*

Trust is also required because innovation in these complex arenas requires a certain level of 'conflict' to move the project forward. This is a productive type of conflict that is caused by the difference in perspectives of different stakeholders.

> *Member innovation lab: "What I like most about this method is that it is a structured way of having a conflict "*

Trust between collaborators/clients and innovation labs was achieved across the case studies in different ways, including

- Building long term relationships, for example by embedding the innovation labs in the public sector organisations they were part of
- Building credibility through collaboration with academic institutions
- By carefully shaping open and participative communication processes, including setting expectations around flexibility and uncertainty
- Innovation labs being 'independent stakeholders' without an agenda for implementation of ideas
- Equal partnerships and commitments
- Developing informal personal relationships

In one case study one of the collaborators/clients also talked about the negative impacts on trust.

> *Manager client/collaborating organisation: "I think the organisations felt sometimes judged by [the innovation agency], because some of the language that [they] would use was about kind of that old stuffy stuff, you know, those bad services."*

Trust between managers/ innovation labs and service deliverers
Trust also played an important role in the relationship between managers in public sector organisations, and the service deliverers who were informing the design projects or participating in the design projects. At the most basic level of trust, many service deliverers and citizens expressed that they felt like they were being valued by the public/social organisations, because they were invited in the process.

> *Member innovation lab: "Another thing was that the [service deliverers], they were very happy about the acknowledgement from the [government agency] that their knowledge was needed."*

In some cases service deliverers were trusted even further by managers, by not just trusting their domain knowledge, but by providing the service deliverers with the agency and capability to design initiative for their own practices. In one case study this level of trust was achieved through the design of what I have previously called a 'social infrastructure' (van der Bijl - Brouwer in press), a structured way of connecting and empowering people to incrementally improve their services.

Discussion of trust
We can conclude that trust is very important in public and social innovation because of the tensions that are inherently part of these type of projects. Tensions are caused by the level of uncertainty of process and outcomes, as well as the tensions of dealing with the different perspectives of different stakeholders. This will push people outside their comfort zones which requires them to trust each other to remain engaged throughout the project, to have the capability to progress the innovation process, and to do what is in the interest of the common good. This is in line with the results of the study by Yee and White (2015) who conclude that trust is one of the key conditions necessary for a design-led approach to innovation to flourish in an organisation. They argue that trust is required to take a provocateur role and be a 'critical friend', and to alleviate the anxiety many clients have in engaging with a new approach.

Conclusions

In this paper I argued that an internal social systems view could contribute to developing a more complete understanding of how effective designing networks can be shaped and sustained in public and social innovation. This view of the 'designing social system' includes an internal understanding of the purposeful individuals who are taking on a design role in the system, as well as the relationships between these individuals. Based on the preliminary results of a study of five public and social innovation labs, I showed what the contribution is of motivation and trust to this internal view of a designing social system. A research agenda focused on this topic could further investigate:

- A deeper exploration of trust and motivation through an experiential phenomenological lens
- A dynamic study of motivation: how it evolves and changes over time
- Other elements of the internal individual aspects such as beliefs and mindsets
- Other elements of the internal relational aspects such as respect, power etc.
- Developing an integrated understanding of designing social systems by combining the internal and external aspects
- An analysis of case studies that failed to succeed (most studies including the one presented in this paper are based on success stories).

Motivation and trust seem to act like glue that shapes the designing network and keeps it together. A deeper understanding of these elements could help initiators of public and social innovation help find those people who are most motivated to engage actively in an innovation process, and to keep them engaged through developing trusted relationships.

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