Redesigning Assumptions: Challenging public problem spaces

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ABSTRACT

Managers in the public sector are increasingly looking to design to help them drive innovation in policies and services. Design is brought in from external consultancies but also established as an internal capacity through hiring designers into government departments and agencies, or by establishing innovation labs or studios. However, when design is applied in any organizational setting, a complex interplay arises between design methods and processes on the one hand (design practice), and the manager’s actions and decisions on the other (management engagement with design). What characterizes these dynamics in a public sector context? Inspired by Boland & Collopy’s (2004) and Michlewskis (2008, 2014) concept design attitude, this paper explores how public managers relate to design approaches as an innovation tool. In particular, the paper examines the potential role of design in allowing public managers to challenge their own current assumptions about the problems their organization is facing. Which methods and approaches seem to trigger new insights into the problem and opportunity space? How does the attitude, or engagement, of the public manager matter to the process? The research is based on data from qualitative interviews with public managers in five different countries and policy contexts.

Keywords: Design, innovation, public services, policy
INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen a significant growth in both scholarly and practical interest in public sector innovation.

In academia, the governance paradigm of New Public Management has come under intense scrutiny, and attention has been drawn to the emergence of a new paradigm of ‘networked’ or collaborative governance (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Hartley, 2005; Alford, 2009). These researchers have thus turned to the question of which new approaches to public management and leadership might be needed under such a governance model. In practice, public managers have been faced with an almost unprecedented level of turbulence and pressure for change following the 2008 global financial crisis and the ensuing austerity measures and scarcity of public resources. Coupled with other challenges in many the Western economies, such as increasing differentiation of citizens’ expectations toward government, increased immigration and cross border mobility, spiraling health costs and the rise of new networked, social and mobile technology, public managers are thus searching for ‘smarter’ and ‘cheaper’ ways of getting things done.

These developments have been associated with what appears to be an increasingly systematic exploration of what collaborative design approaches can do for public organizations. Empirically, we are seeing a period of increasing experimentation, often framed in the context of new forms of citizen involvement and collaborative innovation. According to Bourgon (2008), citizen engagement aims at opening up new avenues for empowering citizens to play an active role in service design, service delivery and in the ongoing process of service innovation.

Public sector organizations in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, France, Denmark, the UK, Canada and the United States have to varying degrees and in different forms taken up collaborative design approaches as a tool to drive innovation and change (Parker & Heapy, 2006; Bate & Roberts, 2007; Shove et. al. 2007; Bason, 2010, 2014; Boyer et. al. 2011; Cooper & Junginger, 2011; Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). However, the relationships between the new design approaches to public innovation on the one hand, and the role of public managers on the other hand, are still largely unexplored. The quest for spurring public innovation may propel public managers into an engagement with design, but how is this different from their traditional roles as bureaucratic leaders or performance managers? This paper seeks to address the specific question of how design might enable public managers to view the challenges they face differently. In other words, what happens when public managers engage with design to explore public problems?

The paper is structured as follows: First, I present the key research question, methodological foundation and data material. Second, the paper discusses different ways of thinking about the contributions of new collaborative design approaches to public management, policy and service innovation. The section highlights the particular dimension of design as a tool for opening up new perspectives on the problems facing public organizations and the managers who lead them. Third, the paper outlines the concept of “design attitude” as a Segway to understanding the potential roles of public managers in relating to design practice as it unfolds in their organizations. Fourth, the paper presents empirical findings from a range of cases where public managers have experienced the application of design methods.
The paper is concluded with a brief discussion of perspectives for research and practice in terms of wider implications of the contribution of design.

2 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question posed in this paper is:

*As public managers engage with design approaches, to what extent are their assumptions about particular problems or opportunities challenged?*

Methodologically this study, and the wider doctoral research it draws upon, takes inspiration from Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) grounded theory approach to qualitative research. This implies amongst other things a focus on exploration, discovery, qualitative and idiographic research, empathy, judgment, social action and interaction, meanings, cognition, emotion, closeness to the empirical material and successive induction (Alvesson and Skjöldberg, 2000). The emphasis is on eliciting meaning from qualitative empirical data, discovery, identification of patterns, and establishing conceptual ‘building blocks’ that can lead to an emergent theoretical framework (Blumer, 1969; Eisenhardt, 1989; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Empirically I explore multiple entities where change might happen, for instance at different levels of government (national/local) and in different policy domains (such as homelessness or healthcare). The mode of change is largely constructive, as a sequence of events which emerges through “the Purposeful enactment or social construction of an envisioned end state among individuals within the entity” (van de Ven, 2007: 203). This is particularly suited for exploring applied design approaches, since as Rowe (1987: 34) points out, “the unfolding of the design process assumes a distinctly episodic structure, which we might characterize as a series of related skirmishes with various aspects of the problem at hand”. It is exactly these “skirmishes” - large and small - that are explored.

The study focuses on individual public managers who have had key responsibility for, or been engaged in, collaborative design approaches to create new solutions within public policies or services. The criterion for choosing a manager for interview has been that some combination of design approaches have been applied, usually labelled explicitly as “service design”, “co-design”, “co-creation” or “strategic design”. Multiple sources have been used to identify organizations and thereby public managers. I have engaged with the global design and public sector innovation community, essentially through a snowballing approach. Using a theoretical sampling technique implies that focus has been on deriving concepts from data during analysis, and letting the discovery of relevant concepts drive the next round of data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This fits well with the highly emergent nature of the field of study. The interviews have been largely open-ended, following a loosely structured interview guide that seeks to elicit some basic fact (actors involved, timing, main methods used, results achieved etc.), but which as its main component asks the open question: “Please share your own story of how the design project(s) unfolded, and how this made a difference to you as a manager, if at all.”

The number of interviews has been determined by on-going analysis of the key emerging concepts. Additional interviews have been added to the point where I have reached ‘saturation’, understood as the point where no new categories or relevant themes emerge from the material (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:148).
3 DESIGN FOR EXPLORING PROBLEM SPACES

There is no one simply way of analyzing how new collaborative design approaches unfold in public organizations, or how they matter to public managers. The issue has partly to do with how we view design management, partly with the role of design practice.

3.1 Towards a new design management paradigm

As design is applied as a new social technology, often for the first time, within public policy and service organizations, the resulting effects are likely to be both complex and multiple. Cooper and Junginger (2011:1) state that the intersection of design and management has generated decades of “lively debate” in the design and business communities. What are the relationships between design and management, and between management of design and design management? As new and more collaborative approaches to innovation in the public sector come to the fore, this question is increasingly relevant to public managers. As service design, interaction design, human-centered design and strategic design approaches – in their various shapes and forms – are being applied to public problem spaces it becomes increasingly important to reflect on how managers relate to these strategies. Cooper and Junginger (2011) suggest that what we are witnessing is essentially the emergence of a new paradigm of design management, which might be termed ‘design capability’.

Table 1: Paradigms of design management. Source: Cooper & Junginger (2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Design practice</th>
<th>Design management</th>
<th>Design capability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adds value through...</td>
<td>Aesthetics, product innovation, differentiation</td>
<td>Interpreting the need, writing the brief, selecting the designer, managing the design and delivery process</td>
<td>Humanistic, comprehensive, integrative, visual approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solves problems of design relating to...</td>
<td>Products, brands, services</td>
<td>All aspects of design in the organization, but principally products, brands and service</td>
<td>Change in environment, society, economy, politics and organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops and fosters design competency along...</td>
<td>Top management, board members, design leaders, design consultants, design team, cross disciplinary design teams</td>
<td>Top management board members, senior management, design management consultants</td>
<td>Every area of the organization</td>
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Cooper & Junginger argue that this paradigm is particularly salient in public sector settings, as a reflection of the social and human nature of most, if not all, public policy concerns. A global environment characterized by intractable social, economic, environmental and political challenges calls for an increased use of design-led approaches to problem-solving: “Because the skills and methods that constitute design are useful in responding to the challenges facing us today, designing is now being recognized as a general human capability. As such, it can be harnessed by organizations and apply to a wide range of organizational problems.” (2011:27).

The question then becomes not only how design approaches are in practice applied in public sector organizations to tackle public problems, but also the evolution of design capability: how public managers themselves “design” in their quest to proactively affect human and societal progress. Boland & Collopy (2004) frame the potential of design in management in their edited volume Managing as Designing, suggesting that:

Managers, as designers, are thrown into situations that are not of their own making yet for which they are responsible to produce a desired outcome. They operate in a problem space with no firm basis for judging one solution as superior to another, and still they must proceed (Boland & Collopy, 2004:17).

This indicates several interesting challenges for the public manager as designer: What kinds of situations do they find themselves “thrown into” and how do they relate to the nature of the type of problem space this entails? To what extent may this problem space be redesigned?

### 3.2 Dimensions of design practice

Design appears to offer a different set of approaches to the task of understanding public problems. In the present research, three such overall approaches, or design dimensions, have been identified as shown in the table below:

Table 2: Mapping design approaches and related management action by cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>Exploring the problem space</th>
<th>Generating alternative scenarios</th>
<th>Enacting new practices</th>
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Revista D.: Design, Educação, Sociedade e Sustentabilidade
First, design is associated with an array of highly concrete research tools, ranging from ethnographic, qualitative, user-centered research, to probing and experimentation via rapid prototyping, to visualizing vast quantities of data in new and powerful ways. Drawing on elements of systems thinking and behavioral economics, design research seems well positioned to help policy makers better understand the root causes of problems and their underlying interdependencies - the “architecture of problems” (Boyer et al. 2010; Mulgan 2013). Given that many, if not almost all, demands for innovation in public policies and services are triggered by the recognition of some kind of unsolved societal “problem”, this should position design centrally in the policy makers’ toolbox.

Second, the emergent and more collaborative aspects of design suggests that alternative scenarios could be increasingly co-designed through an interplay between policy makers at different levels of the governance system, interest and lobby groups, external experts and, not least, end-users such as citizens or business representatives themselves. Graphic facilitation and the use of tangibles and visuals for service and use scenarios can provide the means for cross-cutting dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective ownership of ideas and solutions.

Third, design offers the devices - concepts, identities, interfaces, graphics, products, service templates, system maps - that can help give form and shape to public initiative in practice: The ability to create deliberate user experiences and to make services and products desirable and attractive, impacting human behavior and outcomes, is at the heart of design practice.

The key concern of this paper is the first of these three design dimensions: Exploring the public problem space. How can design - often framed as design research, design anthropology or ethnography - provide a qualitatively different way of understanding public problems and possibly also new opportunity spaces? What characterizes the ways in which public managers experience these methods, activities and processes, and how do they relate to them? To what extent do they generate appetite for further development work and potential innovations, opening up for the generation of new ideas and concepts? This delineation means that wider research questions raised by the two additional dimensions are not addressed; for instance, the (very relevant) question of the extent to which design adds ‘more’ or ‘better’ value than other more traditional approaches to strategy and change is beyond the scope of the present paper.

**4 FIVE DIMENSIONS OF DESIGN ATTITUDE**

How might we understand ways in which managers can relate to design practice? In an exploration of what Boland and Collopy’s notion of design attitude might entail, Kamil Michlewski (2008) undertook doctoral research in which he interviewed a number of design consultants and managers from firms like IDEO and Philips Design and mapped how these people viewed their roles and practices. On the basis of this study he subsequently proposed five characteristic dimensions of design attitude. More recently,
Michlewski has developed his thesis into a book and has tested a number of the design attitude dimensions statistically through a questionnaire-based survey among nearly 240 designers and non-designers. According to Michlewski (2014) the survey showed a statistically significant difference in the attitudinal dimensions between designers and non-designers.

I will describe these attitudinal dimensions briefly in this paper, not with the intent to use them as a testable set of hypotheses for the present research, but rather as a conceptual frame that might provide a useful interpretative lens for my exploration of public managers’ approaches to problem-solving by engaging with design. The design attitudes presented in Michlewski’s most recent and developed (2014) work are as follows:¹

- **Embrace uncertainty and ambiguity.** Michlewski perceives this dimension in terms of the willingness to engage in a process that is not pre-determined or planned ahead, and where outcomes are unknown or uncertain. It is an approach to change that is open to risk and the loss of control. According to Michlewski (2014), true creative processes are ‘wonky’ and often stop-start. The challenge for managers is to not resist, but to allow for the creative process to unfold.² One might say that this reflects an acceptance of Boland and Collopy’s (2004) point that managers operate in a problem space where the basis for judging one solution as superior to another is at best questionable. Managers who embrace uncertainty and ambiguity are likely to say “why don’t we just do it and see where it leads us?”

- **The power of five senses.** According to Michlewski, designers have a fondness for using their aesthetic sense and judgement whilst interacting with the environment. As a dimension of design attitude, this is not only about ‘making things visible’, or about creating beautiful designs, but about merging form and function in ways that work well for people. Designers recognize this and are likely to work with more than one or two senses.

- **Engage deep empathy.** Michlewski finds that designers intuitively “tune in” to people’s needs and how they as users relate to signs, things, services and systems. What do people want, what kind of quality of life are they seeking? Using true empathy requires courage and honesty in abandoning one’s mental models. Engaging personal and commercial empathy is in Michlewski’s interpretation also about listening to better understand the human, emotional aspect of experiencing products and services.

- **Playfully bring to life:** To Michlewski this means creating traction in an innovative process/dialogue designers truly believe in the power of humor, playfulness and bringing ideas to life.) This dimension has to do with an affinity for creating things, and bringing new solutions to life and with creatively bringing ideas to fruition. One designer in Michlewski’s research describes this as the process of visualization and rapid prototyping – a core activity of many, if not all, designers.

¹ The original (Michlewski, 2008) terminology on design attitudes was a little less straightforward, which perhaps reflects that his recent work is intended for a wider and also non-academic audience: 1) Embracing discontinuity and openendedness; 2) Engaging polysensorial aesthetics; 3) Engaging personal and commercial empathy; 4) Creating, bringing to life; 5) Consolidating multidimensional meanings.

² Based on email correspondence with author (February-March 2014)
Create new meaning from complexity: Michlewski argues that what is at the heart of designers’ ways of doing things is the ability to reconcile multiple, often contradicting points of view into something valuable that works – they use empathy as the gauge. This describes the designer as a person who “consolidates various meanings and ‘reconciles’ contradicting objectives” (Michlewski 2008: 5). This reflects an ability to view a situation from a wide variety of perspectives, essentially creating a landscape for exploring further problems. Michlewski defines this process, essentially of consolidating multidimensional meanings, as the managers’ ability to operate in an analytical-synthetical loop in order to achieve a balance between the cohesion of the organization on the one hand and external constraints on the other.

These five dimensions were empirically derived from the design consultancy community and a significant number of the interviewees were themselves trained designers. Most public managers have a professional and experiential background that is vastly different. My aim is therefore not to test the transferability of these conceptual dimensions to the public management domain, but rather to draw, where relevant, on the interpretative prism offered by Michlewski and Boland and Collopy in a discussion of my findings.

I will thus examine how managers experience design practices that are focusing on exploring the problem space by looking at ways in which they understand and interpret “what is going on”. Dealing with public challenges such as family services, work injury or care for the elderly, what is the contribution, if any, of design in helping managers understand the problem space? Given the particular nature of public problems – complex, interdependent, ‘wicked’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973) - how do managers relate? Are some of the insights by Kamil Michlewski (2008) concerning design attitude helpful in interpreting how the managers respond to design practice? For instance, to what extent are managers in fact able to keep an open mind about the problem at hand while working on a practically focused solution?

5 CHALLENGING THE PROBLEM SPACE: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Among the public managers interviewed, there is a recurring pattern that they systematically tend to question the assumptions on which they base their decisions. This manifests itself in different ways, but part of it does concern the managers’ ability to confront their understanding of problem space. By understanding the problem space I refer to the process of exploring the characteristics, dynamics and boundaries of the problem at hand; and making those dimensions explicit: “Formulating the mess” one might call it (Ackoff et. al., 2006: 44).

In defining the notion of ‘challenging assumptions’, let us examine some ways in which design seems to catalyze the ability of public managers to do this, drawing on some particular examples.

5.1 Suspending judgment

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¹ This section partly builds on Bason, Christian (2014) "Design Attitude as Innovation Catalyst", in Ansell and Torfing (2014, forthcoming)
Carolyn Curtis is a public manager in family services in Adelaide, Australia. She conveys the process of involving end-users (at-risk families) in a design-led innovation project. For nearly eight months she conducted field work together with a sociologist and a designer from The Australian Centre for Social Innovation to explore, in-depth, how vulnerable families lived their everyday lives. To her the project had a profound effect:

*It is bottom-up, it has end-user focus, and there is no fixed structure, criteria or categories. The work has been extremely intensive. We have focused on motivation and on strengths within the families - identifying the ‘positive deviances’ where some families are actually thriving, even though they shouldn’t be, according to the government’s expectations. We have focused on finding entry points and opportunities, rather than just trying to mediate risk. It is a co-design, or co-creation approach, and it has been entirely new to me. We are ourselves experiencing the actual interactions within and amongst the families, and breaking them down to examine in detail how they might look different. It is very concrete, capturing what words they use (...) It all looks, feels and sounds different than what I did before. Taking an ethnographic approach is entirely new to me. It has helped me experience how these citizens themselves experience their lives, and has allowed me to see the barriers. I have had to suspend my professional judgment.*

In this case it is the deep dive into citizens (families) experience through ethnographic research which seems to allow this manager to shift her professional knowledge and experience to the background, and to ‘suspend judgment’. A key theme here is the shift in the managers understanding of the problem from mediating risk and assessing the legal basis for taking action and removing children from families to ‘finding entry points and opportunities’. In a sense, what this manager used to understand as a problem space is shifting to an opportunity space.

5.2 Questioning staff behavior

Paula Sangill is Head of Secretariat of the City of Holstebro’s department for Elder Care in Denmark. Having worked with a team of service designers from Danish design consultancy Hatch & Bloom, Sangill explains how she has increasingly come to question her staff’s practices as they carry out in-home services for elderly citizens. Whereas the design project focused on the city’s “meals on wheels” programme, Sangill tells of a recent situation where she challenges the entire workflow her employees carry out as they spend perhaps 15 minutes with a senior citizen in that person’s apartment, delivering dinner but also helping with other personal matters:

*So when they say we cannot manage to do it, how do you assess that message, and what quality is it in fact that you will support them in being able to provide? What kind of service is it? Do you talk with them about how to get in the door, and do you talk with them about it from a service experience approach?*

What Sangill is explaining here is that by working with the design team, she has found that what matters is the citizen’s entire service experience, rather than the details of the ‘delivery’ of professional’s practices. But this is not something that is
ever articulated by her staff. At a staff meeting, Sangill even engages in a bit of role-playing to challenge her staff to explain to her why there cannot be time for a personal conversation with the citizen, all the while they help that person use the toilet or as they prepare her meal. Sangill's message to her staff, she explains, is that:

Have we talked about what our approach is, how the citizen must experience it when you have walked out of the door? Do we talk about that? No, we do not.

This mode of challenging assumptions then very much has to do with placing the citizen's experience at the centre, insisting that the outcome of the process needs to be a better service experience. Working with the design team has sensitized this manager to the importance of the experience as viewed from a citizen perspective. And it prompts her to insist on taking up this conversation with her staff.

5.3 The eye opener

Anne Lind was until the end of 2012 the Director of the Board of Industrial Injuries (BII) in Denmark. She explains how she had the sense that something in her organization needed to change, although she could not be precise about what it was.

The Board of Industrial Injuries is a government agency in Denmark and part of the Ministry of Employment. The responsibility of BII is to handle worker’s injury claims and ensure that the case management is legally correct, so that insurance settlements (which are generally paid by private insurers) accurately reflect the degree to which citizens have lost their ability to work. It has also historically been a key emphasis in the organization to ensure highly efficient case management. Tools such as lean management, team-based work and performance-based remuneration, and the introduction of digital systems in case and workflow management, have been used extensively in BII’s pursuit of increased productivity.

Meanwhile, in the period 2007-2012, BII collaborated with various designers, including MindLab, a government-run innovation unit that is part of amongst others the Ministry of Employment, and Creuna, a private service design firm, to explore how its services are experienced by citizens. The methods included ethnographic field research (contextual citizen interviews recorded on video and audio) as well as numerous workshops with staff and management.

To Ms. Lind, leveraging design approaches to better see how her organization’s services impact citizens, was “a shift in perspective”. Referring to the experience of watching video-taped interviews with injured citizens who share their stories of the case management process, Lind says:

It is an eye opener ... it is more concrete. [The design process] has made me aware that there are some things we have to look at. ... So far we have been describing a service to citizens, not giving them one.

This quote reflects a questioning by Ms Anne Lind, the Director: What is the ultimate contribution of an organization such as the BII? What does it mean for us to provide a service? At a more fundamental level, the questions derived from this work became an issue of the mission of the agency: Is it to efficiently handle the case process to settle insurance claims and payment in accordance with legal standards, or is it to produce some kind of longer-term outcome for citizens and society? By challenging her assumptions, the Director implicitly asks questions about the
underlying purpose of her organization, and hence of key policy and governance issues that need to be addressed.

5.4 Design attitudes in the mix

The types of management engagement with design that happens in the cases here focus in various ways on challenging assumptions. This reflects Boland & Collopy’s point that “the first step in any problem-solving episode is representing the problem, and to a large extent, that representation has the solution hidden within it.” (2004:9). In using the term ‘episode’ they may implicitly be referring to Peter Rowe (1987) who likens the solving of design problems as a process unfolding in ‘skirmishes’ or ‘episodes’. Rowe points out that the problem, as perceived by the designer, “tends to fluctuate from being rather nebulous to being more specific and well defined” (1987:35). It appears that the examples above all address the issue of challenging and (re)framing the problem as it is understood by the manager, and in some instances also the staff. Another way of interpreting this style of thinking and questioning assumptions is to draw on Michlewski’s concept of design attitude, Embracing uncertainty and ambiguity, which reflects managers “[…] keeping an open mind while working on a practically focused solution […]” (Michlewski, 2008: 381). So for instance the way in which Ms. Sangill, the manager of the local government elder care services, begins to explore new solutions by playing them out and by challenging her staff and her own thinking about their practices.

There are also, in the stories we hear from the managers, clear elements of engaging “deep empathy” (Michlewski, 2014), where the manager herself becomes affected. All three managers in these cases are in different ways empathizing with citizens, end users: Carolyn Curtis by seeing the potential of service transformation from a risk-based approach to helping families thrive; Paula Sangill by asking questions about the whole service experience; and Anne Lind by emphasizing the eye-opening fact that whereas citizens may be provided by a service they do not experience a service. And in the case of both Ms. Sangill and Ms. Lind, they allow the rich qualitative material to affect the organization, by prompting new conversations with their staff.

6 DISCUSSION: DESIGN AS A TOOL FOR OPENING PUBLIC GOVERNANCE?

From a broader public management perspective, what is the significance of challenging and redesigning assumptions in the ways we have seen above? Fundamentally, the design processes seem to open up questions that concern the underlying way in which public organizations carry out their missions (or, indeed a question of what those missions are). Design not only becomes an approach that allows for the exploration of public problems; it becomes a catalyst which may drive the opening of new governance models.

To Carolin Curtis, the manager in family services in Adelaide, it becomes a governance issue of the fundamental effectiveness of her organization’s current efforts; the model she envisages (and has subsequently built in the form of the independent organization Family by Family) is one that shifts from a focus on the legal grounds for removing children from their families, to one that focuses on what it will take to help families thrive again.

To Paula Sangill, the model she is allowed to explore is one which shifts from a professionally defined standard of efficiency and ‘quality’ to citizen’s holistic
experience of their interactions with public employees becomes. It is a model that may be built on ‘quality’ as defined by the citizen.

To Anne Lind she challenges the notion of her agency as the steward of a legally correct application of rules and regulations to work injury cases, and to questions of rehabilitation and of placing return to labor market as the core mission of the Board of Industrial Injuries.

The type of governance model that implicitly becomes explored through these various challenging processes might best be characterized as peer-to-peer production, or co-production. While by no means a new concept (the term was coined in the early 1970s by Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom), what is interesting is how design approaches seem to elicit highly concrete considerations by managers which recognize that they might be able to produce...

...public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change. (Boyle and Harris, 2009:11)

Hereby design catalyzes the emergence of a new governance model, which is reflected in “the growth of new and different ways to involve users of social services as co-producers of their own and others’ services.” (Pestoff, 2012:15). As discussed in the initial sections of this paper, design offers approaches and methods which may enable managers to steward their staff through the process of taking the organizational consequences of these types of discovery, and of enacting the new practices that may eventually enable a shift towards co-production a de facto model of governance. Not only does design thus contribute to challenge public managers’ appreciation of the problems they are facing, design might catalyze the identification of much more effective ways of dealing with them.

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