

Agile development

Dr Pasi Sihvonen and Palmu Inc service designers **Heikki Savonen** and **Reima Rönholm**, provide an insight into the philosophy and processes of their current project redesigning the work of the centralised services at the University of Helsinki for the benefit of the user



Could you outline the design concept you will use? In what way will you utilise the space within the University to better suit customers?

HS, RR: Our design work starts and ends with people. Services do not exist without people, so it is necessary to involve them in the design of new service concepts. Our approach is based on human-centric methods, which means we involve people who use and produce services at all stages of our work. Involvement goes far beyond surveys – we use contextual interviews, observation, prototyping and the joint crafting of solutions, along with co-design methods where users and service providers develop better solutions together. All of this work is facilitated by us. The end result may or may not affect the actual spaces where the service is delivered, but it will usually affect the behaviour, service models and processes used to produce the service. In the case of the University, most of the services in question are delivered via digital channels or over the phone, as such consideration of physical spaces plays a minor role. However, when the focus is on behavioural change, the context within which people use and produce plays an important role.

Have you received awards from any funding bodies that will aid the project? What are the timescales involved? When will the project be completed?

PS: The project is co-funded by University of Helsinki and Tekes and is part of the Liideri programme – a research programme on



business, productivity and joy at work which runs from 2012–18. Many projects funded by Tekes exist as part of the private sector, but through the current project we hope to demonstrate that public organisations can also play a leading role. The University of Helsinki project began in November 2012 and will run until December 2013.

Will you incorporate a multichannel service model into the design of the project? In what manner will this design be executed?

PS: Yes, we will use a multichannel approach, and particularly during the development phase. Various service models will be explored and tested via pilot studies, and the value of each will be evaluated against the needs of the researchers we have identified. The final decisions will be made within that framework.

In what way will the results from this pilot help to influence the service operation within other Finnish universities?

PS: Aalto University, which operates in the Helsinki region, is integrated into the project and directly exposed to the new ideas arising from it. We also keep other potential users informed, whether in Finland or abroad, via seminars, congresses and the project web pages. In collaboration with Tekes, we have developed a carefully laid-out utilisation plan.

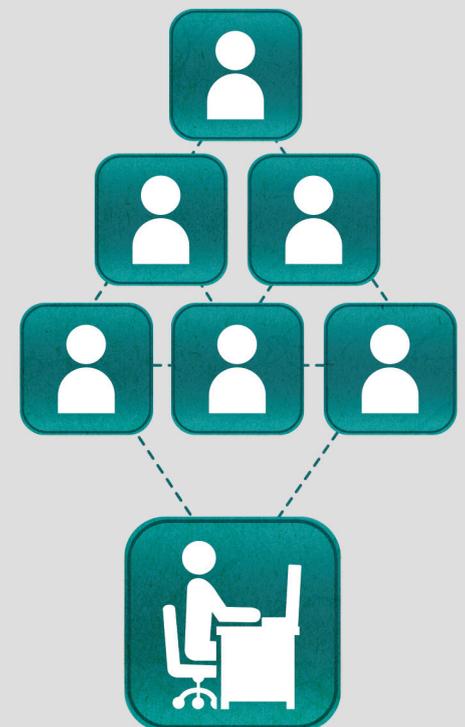
Is Palmu involved with any other projects? How have these projects integrated business services with design? Do you follow any particular philosophy when carrying out your projects?

HS, RR: We have helped hundreds of different companies and organisations, from start-ups to Finland's biggest businesses and public sector entities. We are constantly looking for new opportunities outside Finland and have just opened an office in Denmark. Our goal is always

to improve our clients' business and help them to produce more value for their customers, and often with fewer available resources. This necessitates either better outcomes or improved productivity, which we can measure with customer satisfaction.

We always start with the customers and try to understand their needs, goals and aspirations. Next, we focus on the actual service production and any bottlenecks that restrict value creation. Then we try to find new solutions for those problems and test them in a real context by using the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) method. This testing and experimentation phase is crucial, and often the most rewarding.

Services that work on paper can be a different story in real life, so we experiment extensively in real environments and with real people. The idea, in short, is to find new ways of producing services by doing, iterating, learning and improving. It is a trial and error loop, where we constantly fix a service while we are producing it. In the digital world, this method is known as agile development.



Putting users first

Researchers at the **University of Helsinki** have partnered with leading design agency **Palmu Inc** to coordinate a user-centric redesign of the University's central services with the aim of improving efficiency and saving resources

SINCE 1996, FINLAND has enacted policies which aim to develop working life and improve the organisation of work and its processes, methods and management. One of its latest initiatives is **Liideri – Business, Productivity and Joy at Work** programme, which is coordinated by the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (Tekes). The programme supports business development, helping companies to renew their operations through management development and actively utilising the skills and competencies of their personnel, leading to growth, a sustainable competitive edge, improved productivity and joy at work. **Liideri** is a part of a broader national workplace development strategy, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy.

The programme has two main focus areas. The first of them is employee-involving innovation. This refers to active and systematic participation of employees in ideation, innovating and renewing of products and services and ways of producing them, with a view to creating new solutions that add value to customers. It supports research, development and dissemination of information on management processes and forms

of work organisation and working, which promote employee-involving innovating in Finnish workplaces. The second focus area concerns research and development on new forms of work organisation and working as part of renewal of business activities. Special emphasis is laid on organisational forms, which are based on the idea of shared leadership, networking, distributed work, employee-customised solutions and innovative application of ICT.

CUSTOMER-ORIENTATED

The **Liideri** initiative is benefiting those such as the University of Helsinki which has received a 12-month award from Tekes to reorganise its centralised services. At the University there is currently a fundamental structural problem in the coherence of centrally-delivered services across the institution. While individual services are smoothly and professionally-provided, it is too often the case that the service user – the researcher, teacher, staff member or student – must deal with several service providers in order to manage a single set of issues. The onus is upon the user to ensure that information is transferred from one service provider to another – a difficulty

compounded by the fact that finding a suitable provider is not always an easy task.

The reorganisation project is being conducted under the leadership of Dr Pasi Sihvonen, who is Director of Research Services at the University of Helsinki, with experience in research funding expert positions at the Academy of Finland and the EC, and leading numerous development projects and international research consortia. The main aim of the reorganisation is to transform the University's services from a collection of fragmented service providers into a joined-up set of services with a holistic, customer-orientated focus. Services related to research project lifecycles are being used to pilot this new way of working.

Additional objectives of the project include analysing bottlenecks, providing feedback arenas between service providers and staff, and enhancing personnel engagement by improving staff awareness and skills around service design. "If successful, the results and best practice will be used across other service areas of the University and the concept will be made available to other Finnish academic institutions," outlines Sihvonen.



OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS:

Customer in focus: understanding needs, goals and aspirations.

CREATING POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

Proposing new solutions for identified bottlenecks in the service production.



PROTOTYPING AND CRAFTING SOLUTIONS TOGETHER:

Testing and experimenting solutions using minimum viable product method. Real life testbeds by doing, iterating, learning and improving.



"The ultimate aim of the reorganisation is to improve the university-level services so that they can be constantly produced in a high-quality and cost-effective manner, allowing the researchers to spend more time on research."

The potential benefits of the pilot project are huge. Certain tasks which concern the whole University, whether administrative or expertise based, are produced centrally. Annually, some 4,500 research projects are undertaken at the University. If the service redesign decreases the administrative time of each research project by even one day a year, the resources saved would amount to 4,500 days of work a year – some 20 person-years. The service area employs approximately 1,000 employees catering for some 8,700 University staff and 35,000 students, and comprises 10 service units including for instance Education, Personnel, IT and Research Funding Services. The latter – an integral part of the service design project – operates on the rationale that knowledge around research funding will accumulate in the experts involved, and that this gathered insight can then be used to benefit the University as a whole.

The project has been granted the highest priority by the University's service directors, who comprise the body overseeing service development and have the capacity to suggest and initiate changes where necessary. It will occur in four stages – value analysis, design of the new operational model, specification of the pilot indicators and iteration of the model and tools, enabling wider-scale implementation. If successful, the resultant streamlined and productised service processes across the University will be more efficient and professional, with improved predictability, learning, availability and competitiveness, and crucially, all of this will be achieved while also saving resources.

LESS BUREAUCRACY

Heikki Savonen and Reima Rönholm are service designers at Palmu Inc – a leading service design agency in Finland which employs 50 design professionals. The company specialises in service development across all channels in both digital and physical environments, helping companies and organisations to innovate new service concepts, design better customer experiences, reorganise service delivery and production, and develop their business. With public service specialist Savonen

at the helm, Palmu has been chosen to spearhead the change at the University. "Most of our clients operate in the private sector and their line of businesses varies a lot, from heavy industry and B2B services to retail, but assignments in the public sector have grown steadily in recent years," Savonen explains. "Our goal here is to develop resources for the researchers – the end users – reorganising services to be more orientated toward them, and less toward the providers."

It is hoped that the project will spur growth in the development of business services at the University of Helsinki. A significant part of the work being undertaken by Palmu involves analyses of how services are currently organised and how they could better satisfy the needs of researchers, with the goal of improving services so that researchers can focus more on their jobs while lessening management and bureaucracy. Remodelling in this way may necessitate tighter integration between online and offline aspects of centralised services, and Sihvonen is open to the idea of developing an online portal that connects several existing databases and systems, based on user profiles and service bottlenecks identified during the project.

Longer term, Savonen and Rönholm believe that the redesign will also help the University improve its scientific results. "For us, the concept of service design means developing better services through user-centric methods and processes familiar from, for example, industrial design and user experience design," explains Rönholm. "Our toolbox includes design and ethnographic methods which help us to identify and solve problems. In other words, we are not designers of objects, but rather designers of processes and human behaviour."

'SPILLOVER' EFFECT

As is often the case with the introduction of new ways of working, Sihvonen foresees hurdles ahead, but believes that once staff understand the rationale for the changes they will commit to them. "The challenges may be mental and physical, and the latter may be easier to overcome," Sihvonen admits. "However, it is the task of the directors to engage the staff in the change and commit them to working in a different mode. We will use several tools – for example, workshops and facilitation methods – to communicate the importance of the shift toward new ways of working."

Sihvonen is confident that the service development is moving in the right direction. Even at this early stage, the project has already catalysed new ways of thinking at the University and the positive energy, or 'spillover' effect, is already being seen outside the pilot. "We believe that services are all about people in the end," adds Rönholm. "Service design is a complex task, but we have a talented multidisciplinary team from various backgrounds – education, psychology, marketing, anthropology, diplomacy and business development – a variety that reflects the approach we bring to our projects."

DOCUMENTING AND IMPLEMENTING SERVICE MODEL:

Turning service processes into products. Implementing the new service models in all service units and campuses.

INTELLIGENCE

SERVICE DESIGN AS A METHOD TO DEVELOP CUSTOMER SERVICES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

OBJECTIVES

- To reorganise the University of Helsinki's central services
- To change the operation mode from the fragmented, service provider point of view to holistic, customer-orientated point of view
- To test the new way of operation with services related to research project lifecycle

Results from the pilot will be used in various service complexes of the University and the concept will be made available to other Finnish universities.

KEY PARTNERS

Service designers **Heikki Savonen** and **Reima Rönholm**, Palmu Inc

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DR PASI SIHVONEN is Director of Research Services at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Earlier he worked in research funding expert positions at the Academy of Finland and the European Commission. Sihvonen has led numerous development projects, international research consortia and has received two prizes for his scientific achievements.

HEIKKI SAVONEN is Master of Education and Service Designer at Palmu Inc. He specialises in social design, service design in complex organisations, radical design and developing public services. Recently Savonen has been developing elderly care and studying new ways to reduce food waste.

REIMA RÖNNHOLM is Master of Arts and Service Designer at Palmu Inc. He believes service design is all about involving people, experimentation and finding the right problems to solve. Reima's design aspiration is in working with people and creating environments and settings where people themselves realise new possible futures and get motivated to change their behaviour.



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