

# THE COMMUNICATION OF SERVICE DESIGN

HOW DO SERVICE DESIGNERS COMMUNICATE  
SERVICE DESIGN TO (PROJECT) STAKEHOLDERS?

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**The Communication of Service Design – How do Service  
Designers Communicate Service Design to (Project)  
Stakeholders?**

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## ABSTRACT

Service design is a relatively new discipline (when compared to graphic design) that draws on the methods and concepts of various other disciplines, inside and outside of the design realm, to achieve innovative solutions that cater to all stakeholders alike (business, user, staff, customer, delivery, etc.). The discipline's practitioners are known to be skillful and resourceful in retrieving qualitative data from service and project stakeholders and pushing them towards collaborations by applying methods and tools that support the stakeholders in bridging silo-thinking and language barriers; a cross-disciplinary language is established, and communication is used as a tool. However, service designers were found to continuously make negative or exhausting communication experiences when explaining their jobs and discipline to other people and when trying to acquire jobs or projects by selling the discipline to project stakeholders in decision-making positions.

Therefore, this study first aimed to investigate and create an understanding of the currently applied communication by service designers (including processes, hardships, and obstacles), especially at the beginning of projects (Research Questions 1–3), to understand the causes of service designers' negative communication experiences. In addition, this study aimed to update this communication in a fit-for-purpose manner that enables service designers to better steer the communication of their discipline to project stakeholders and hence achieve more desirable communication experiences and outcomes (Research Question 4). To meet these aims, service designers' currently applied communication process was reconstructed, pitfalls were uncovered, and an improved communication process in terms of a "how-to" roadmap (that caters to the practical nature of service designers) was established. Furthermore, this research aimed to explore the topic holistically, although the outcomes were directed towards service designers and their enablement.

The needed data to create the previously mentioned study outcomes were derived from in-depth interviews with service designers, secondary literature, and communications in which the researcher also acted as a service designer (testing with a managing director, lecturing students of "UART1105" on service design, and journaling about further made communication experiences). The research participants of this study came from diverse geographical, experiential, educational, and professional backgrounds, meaning that the formed understandings and outputs focus on service design and its practitioners worldwide. The collection focus for this research lies with the experiences the research participants, specifically service

designers, had made and the applied communication process. Hence, this research is of a qualitative nature and focuses on practicing service design, phenomenography, and action research.

Through this study, the understanding was formed that the communication of service design, early on in projects or the setup of projects, is a crucial information sharing and expectation management activity that heavily impacts the trajectory and success of projects and the perception of service design. However, the reconstructed currently applied communication process was found to be an unaligned and vague structure of suggestions, doings, and thoughts-to-look-out-for that does not support service designers in adequately introducing and selling their discipline to project stakeholders, correcting project stakeholders' misconceptions or assumptions about the discipline, or catering to project stakeholders' communication expectations. Hence, this dissertation dives deep into the "how" (process and activities) and the "what" (content) of the communication of service design to improve and meet the needs, expectations, and requirements of all communication parties to ultimately enable service designers in strengthening the discipline's involvement in projects and the commitment from project stakeholders.

*Key words:* service design, service designer, strategic communication, communication process, experiences, understanding service design

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## List of abbreviations

*MD: Managing Director*

*RQ: Research Question*

*SD: Service Design*

*USP: Unique Selling Proposition*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research focus

Um... I mean, when you do service designer, or when you do service design, as a service designer, you need to communicate service design like all the time. And sometimes, that even feels like a burden because some people just don't get it [laughs]. And because of that, you really need to communicate the design, or service design, methodology, philosophy, why service design is involved, what are the methods we use, why do we use these kind of methods, what does it help [laughs]. Um... who does it help. Because sometimes it seems pretty challenging to get, um, people on your side, within those projects. Especially if there are a lot of stakeholders involved, uh the more complicated the projects become and the structures of the projects. Um, I mean, so many stakeholders it's... it's kind of a... a mess, and it's... it's really important to communicate because if they don't really understand what it is and what it means, then the project basically is doomed. They say, yeah, you are using service design, but then you can start questioning that oh, OK, are you really using service design because of, case that service design is something super awesome at the moment? But are you really using service design because it's taken as the project strategy? Because the case is basically that if service design is used in the project, the leadership and the leaders should already understand what it is and why service design is used, because if they don't really understand the role of it, or they don't understand what's the meaning of it, then the case is that service design is there. But it's then there for nothing. Because then it's always going back to the old ways of doing... um... the existing old philosophies of business or, or, uh, strategy or, other departments' bullshit, kind of [laughs], and not... not really taking serious design into account. Then it's like it's there just to have, the polish, you know. Making the apple more shiny, but then it's not really, taking serious design into... into the strategical doing itself, should I say. – Interviewee\* #2

\*The term *interviewee* in this dissertation always refers to service designers who have participated in the in-depth interviews of this research

As the excerpt displays, service designers face a multitude of challenges when practicing service design. However, one of the biggest challenges is encountered

when ensuring that service design is practiced in the first place in a project—communicating the discipline persuasively to the project stakeholders to ensure the involvement of service design and establish commitment for the discipline. **Why?** Unlike disciplines such as graphic design, which already started its explosive development in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century and provides outcomes that are in close proximity to the discipline’s name (Gomez-Palacio & Vit, 2012), service design is a newly emerging, research-focused, and overlapping design space (Sanders, 2002; DeVlylder, 2016/2019), which was first proposed in the 1980s (Shostack, 1982) and is currently on the rise in today’s academia and industry. When looking at service design in more detail, the discipline focuses solemnly on researching, creating, and improving services and their environments (though experiences, emotions, and interactions, among others, are considered as well and thoroughly) by focusing on uncovering and creating processes to make intangible elements, such as dependencies, emotions, and experiences, tangible through methods, tools, and the constant inclusion of relevant stakeholders (DeVlylder, 2016/2019; Tuominen & Ascenção, 2016). Hence, the term “service design” conveys ambiguity (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018) to people unaware of the discipline, in the sense that a visual design outcome as learned and expected from more established, as well as related, disciplines of design are not provided or attempted in service design. In design-inclusive projects, this ambiguity, together with the lack of knowledge or the unawareness of the project stakeholders about the discipline and the linkage of service design to tangible outcomes (e.g., visuals, prototypes), leads to a misconception of the discipline and the activities of service designers within the project. Consequently, project stakeholders are not aware that the actual focus of service design lies in researching an *activity* (service) and its environment.

Additionally, the successful application of service design requires its project stakeholders to be open-minded due to the discipline’s qualitative, innovative, human-centered, emotions-driven, and error and trial-driven nature, which often opposes the pre-dominant numerical and outcome-focused mindset found within project stakeholders in leading or decision-making positions (van Oosterom, 2009). Hence, the approach of service design and its application offer a certain amount of “newness” to projects and project stakeholders that need to be understood and made relevant for the project and its problem through communication. In detail, project stakeholders in decision-making or leadership positions need to be made aware of the mindset required for practicing service, without being repelled by it, and further receive information that will support them in their decision-making process before and during the project to support the involvement and practice of service design in the project. Thus, communication in terms of education and persuasion is needed to support the decision-makers of a project in seeing the benefits service design could provide to them.

This study uncovered (or, if already discussed in the literature, supported) issues that explain and highlight the importance of explaining, educating, creating understanding for, raising awareness of – in short, communicating – the discipline, as well as the roles, responsibilities and tasks of a service designer, the applied process, the possible non-physical and physical outcomes of service design, and the need for and benefit of applying co-creation to the project stakeholders. Furthermore, this kind of communication was found to be essential when aiming to include service design in a project, introduce/onboard a project, project team or company to service design, introduce students to service design, or sell service design to secure a new job as a service designer.

Since service design is a trending discipline (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018) and service designers do manage to ensure the discipline is involved in projects, communication about the discipline is practiced in some way. Yet, this is neither explored nor discussed in scientific literature or practical material and therefore occurs without guidance or unification and is not spread to further strengthen the communication of service design. Hence, to understand and ultimately improve the communication of service design to project stakeholders, the following aspects require investigation:

- communication in general
- communication in the setup (the project is not decided yet, e.g., pitch situation) and initial phase of a project (the project was officially launched and the project stakeholders meet officially, e.g. kick-off)
- the communicated content (including approach, roles and tasks of a service designers, involvement in the project)
- the people involved in the communication (including their mindsets, expectations, needs).

“(...) they [project stakeholders] don’t see things like I see, so I have to explain it.” – Interviewee #6

When considering the general importance of communication in projects (Turner & Müller, 2004), the complexity of communication itself and the communication setting (Creasy, 2018; Rittel & Webber, 1973), as well as the experiences of service designers and the little information scientific literature and practical material (e.g. blogs) offer for the topic of communicating service design to project stakeholders, this study provides insights into a relevant blind spot within service design (see Figure.1 Identifying the research gap).

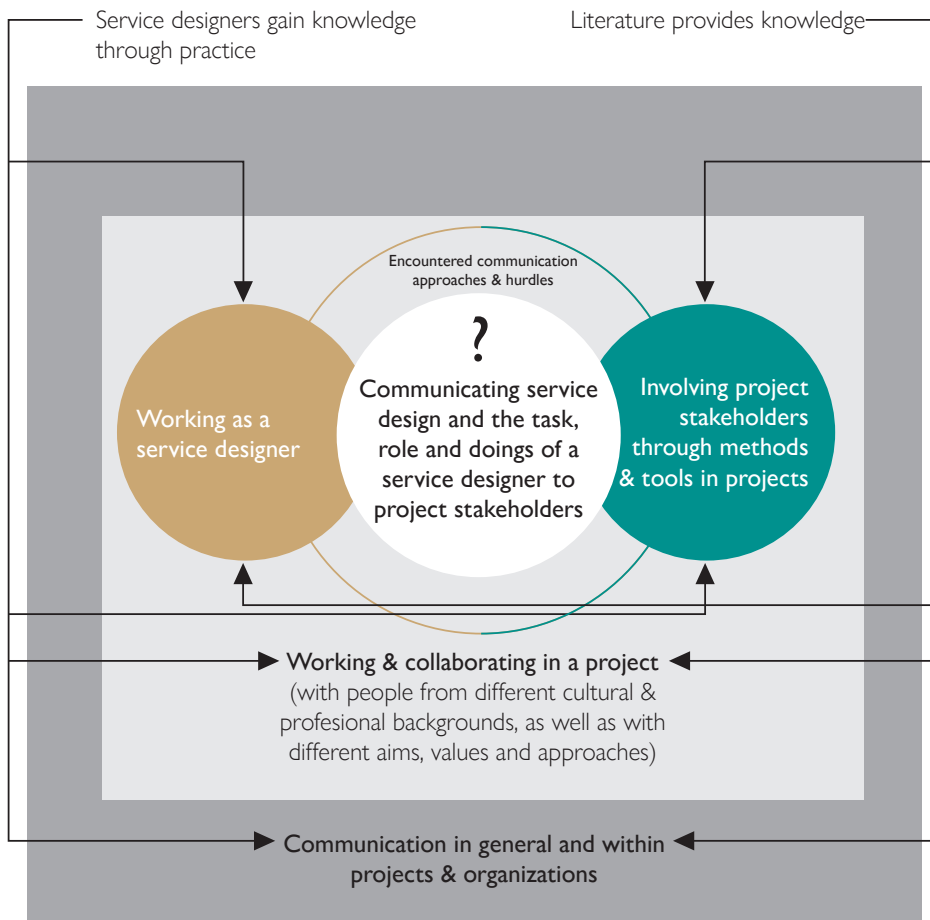


Figure 1. Identifying the research gap

## 1.2 Research intent and research questions

The methods used to communicate service design to project stakeholders in the specific situation of a project setup and the initial phase of a project is currently unknown, not gathered and not processed to fit the mass of service designers facing this situation. Therefore, two main intents and two consequential intents are covered by this dissertation:

- Main intent 1: to uncover and reconstruct the service design communication process currently applied by service designers in the setup and initial phase of a project, including its content.
- Main intent 2: to enhance the reconstructed communication process and content (testable solution/improvement in the form of a process) in a fit-for purpose manner (“how-to” roadmap) for service designers.

- Consequential intent 1: to investigate the communication environment and therefore the communication audience, including the needs of service designers and the project stakeholders.
- Consequential intent 2: to investigate if, when, how, and why the communication of service design to project stakeholders fails in the research situation (including hardships faced).

To meet these intents, four research questions (RQ) were created and a qualitative research approach, in conjunction with service design, phenomenography, and action research, was selected (further details about the research paradigm and methodology can be found in 3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH).

- **Research question 1: What are the current perceptions of communicating service design in a project?**

This research question focuses on uncovering the current position of service design communication in projects by investigating the perceptions of service designers and project stakeholders, and literature on the discipline, communication and projects (creation of a holistic view). This question is answered by findings from in-depth interviews, lecturing, and testing, with a focus on displaying the communication expectations of service designers and project stakeholders.

- **Research question 2: What issues do service designers face in the communication of their discipline?**

The aim of this research question is to further explore the challenges and hardships faced by service designers when communicating their discipline, role, and tasks to a communication audience (i.e. anyone to whom service design can be communicated – e.g. project stakeholders; for more information see 3.4 Data collection and research participants) that is unaware of the discipline or has a misconception about it. To meet the aim of this research question, the service designer and the communication experiences of services designers, as well as the different concepts service designers and the audience being communicated with have about the discipline and the practitioner, are explored. The data used to answer this question derive from the in-depth interviews, testing and lecturing (providing a holistic view by involving multiple perspectives).

- **Research question 3: What does the communication process currently applied by service designers look like?**

The intent of this research question is to uncover and reconstruct the current communication process applied by service designers. To answer this question and reconstruct the current process, service designers' communication approaches were retrieved through the in-depth interviews and secondary material (blog posts and books). After analyzing, interpreting, and clustering



these insights, a *first foundation* of the currently applied process was reconstructed and provided. In this context, it is also crucial to uncover what is communicated in this setting (content) and why it is communicated in this context.

- **Research question 4: What could an improved and fit-for-purpose communication process look like for service designers?**

This question aims to enhance the previously reconstructed *first foundation* in a fit-for-purpose manner for service designers. To create a “how-to” roadmap that suits the practical nature of service designers (and answers this question), insights from the previous research questions as well as insights from the experience journal (reflective journal writing) and the research background were used.

### 1.3 Dissertation structure

**How?** To explore the topic of communicating service design, answer the four research questions extensively and fulfill the previously mentioned main intents, the dissertation is divided into six main chapters (excluding References and Appendix). The dissertation is further structured to start with introductory material on the topic and from there slowly transition into a deep-dive into the key topics. In chapter 1, an introduction and overview of the dissertation topic is provided (INTRODUCTION), followed by the research background based on a literature review in Chapter 2 (THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH). Chapter 3, in which the selected research paradigms, methodology, research participants and data treatment is described (IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH), is an introduction to Chapter 4. Therefore, Chapter 4 (RESULTS) is dedicated to answering the research questions by presenting the empirical data retrieved through the applied qualitative methods. Chapters 5 and 6 form the end of this dissertation by proposing the conclusion of the conducted research and by discussing thoughts and ideas to consider and be aware of. Chapters 2–6 provide information in the following ways:

- **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH:** Here, a literature review is used to introduce readers to the theoretical landscape of the research and prepare them for the data presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 2, the main concepts that define the topic of this research, the research gap, and the research questions (namely communication, communication in projects, service design, communication of service design, and service designers) are discussed and investigated from multiple views to highlight the current understanding of these topics.

- **3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH:** This chapter provides an in-depth description of how the study was implemented. In the first part, the applied research paradigms and the research intent are discussed. This is followed by a presentation of the research process and the milestones within it that supported the study. Then, more emphasis is placed on the research methodology, the selected research methods, and the research participants, as well as the data collection and analysis, to provide the reader with a better understanding of how and from whom the insights were gathered and further, how the data was processed.
- **4 RESULTS:** This chapter is divided into four sections – one for each research question. Each section displays empirical data deemed relevant to answer the research questions. Just as the research questions build upon each other, so does the content provided in each section. Hence, empirical data that displays the current state of communicating service design early on in projects (RQ1) and issues faced by service designers in their communication (RQ2), is provided first and is followed by the reconstruction of the currently applied communication process (RQ3) and the updated fit-for-purpose communication process (RQ4). For the investigation of the research topic, the experiences, expectations, communication approaches, and perspectives of service designers, project stakeholders and the communication audience on the topic were deemed most relevant and therefore dominate the chapter.
- **5 CONCLUSION:** The conclusion highlights and summarizes the key findings of the empirical research data in accordance with the research questions. This chapter also discusses the treatment of ethical questions and evaluation within this dissertation.
- **6 DISCUSSION:** In the final chapter, the dissertation is positioned in the field, a reflection that also discusses further research opportunities is provided, and the limitations of the research are highlighted.

## **1.4 Researcher's personal interest**

I have been educating myself on the topic of service design for over 11 years and have practiced the discipline in the industry (outside of university studies) for four years. During this time, I have encountered many situations in which I became frustrated about project stakeholders (or the audience being communicated to) not being able to see the discipline for what it is, its benefits, how it works, and what it will require from them to make it work. From another perspective, I could not develop a communication approach, structure, or process that would allow me to educate and convince the communication audience of the discipline, especially in pitching situations. The literature and the years of academic education seldom

mentioned how to communicate service design in a timely, informative, and simple manner to project stakeholders (especially with the aim of persuasion). Instead, I was trained how to explain the outcomes to project stakeholders (especially people from mid-management or the workforce), and how to acknowledge and use all the other disciplines and methods entangled in service design.

As I continued to practice, I realized that as a service designer I created understanding of the discipline, my role and the outcomes by practicing with project stakeholders together in workshops, but I could never make them understand beforehand what service design is and what it would do for them. My favorite memories of such situations are from workshops with management personnel and end-users, where I could explain what service design is and why it was important for the service, product, project or organization we were working on, which always ended with me seeing the confusion on the recipients' faces, and saying, "Don't worry, we will do the first few exercises and then you will see what I mean." I do not regret choosing this way, because there was a lack of time and patience in these workshops, and most participants understood service design and its value better after practicing with me. However, this approach did not work in pitching situations (setup of a project) or when I entered a kick-off meeting (initial phase of a project) and had to explain service design to board members, managing directors, and fellow project partners from other fields in a setting with little time, room for discussions, and patience. In these situations, people wanted to know why they should use service design and not block the approach, and what it would mean for their own work to apply service design in a project.

Most often "riots" started in these situations when research and the human- or user-centeredness approach were discussed as core essentials to the practice, as for various (unknown) reasons, a majority of project stakeholders opposed the step and the approaches. I remember project stakeholders demanding that I deliver what they expected me to do due to my job title: provide them with a visual design of some sort. Discussions as to why visual designs were not my responsibility and that I needed to be involved early on in the project to do research were endless and often pointless, as the person who sold service design to the project (and therefore me) had done little education and persuasion work for service design or ensured that the project stakeholders understood that service design was not about developing visual outputs. The increasing trendiness of human-centered design, design thinking, or service design did not help the communication and position of service design in projects, as the discipline, in my opinion, had been portrayed as a "cure" to any sort of problem; project stakeholders did not know and did not care to know how it worked.

At some point in my career I realized that many of the issues I faced as a practitioner started with the image of service design and how it is communicated. I further realized that my own experiences and view were quite limited on communication

and the needs of project stakeholders in this setting, and that I limited myself and the view I had by not exiting the position of a “firefighting” service designer who joined conversations not from the setup of a project but much later in the project process when fundamental changes were unlikely to be approved. Since working in the industry did not provide me with the required time resources to investigate the communication of service design to project stakeholders or the communication audience, I decided to leave the industry and start my doctoral studies on this topic to better understand the dynamics of the activity of communication. I met many more service designers through my doctoral studies and this research and realized that this issue was a universal and global problem for service designers, which caused frustration and desperation (and at times even initiated health problems) for the practitioners and therefore needed investigation. I further uncovered a variety of pitfalls (in detail) that lie ahead of a service designer and that some cannot be overcome. However, I also realized that there are many pitfalls that simply need a little extra planning, research and a road map to help guide service designers through these pitfalls and manage their expectation for the communication so that no matter the outcome of the communication, improvement and learning can be achieved.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

### 2.1 The composition of communication and its importance in projects

#### 2.1.1 About communication in general

Communication is an *activity* carried out by human and non-human entities with the aim to share knowledge and “make things common,” although how communication is regarded for non-human entities may differ, the aims appear to be the same (Rosengren, 2000). For humans, communication provides the ability to predict or control their environment, create knowledge of themselves, create knowledge of others, establish relationships with fellow humans, and support them in fulfilling their everyday needs (Griffin, 2016). Hence, communication between entities, no matter the size, complexity or the results of the communication (e.g., conflict or community), increases the shared knowledge and creates common sense by supporting humans to learn through reason and experiences and consequently form concepts, terms, phenomena, and typologies, among others (Rosengren, 2000). In detail, the main activities within communication are to share information (from the sender), which requires interpretation and the attachment of meaning (by the receiving entity) to be understood and turned into knowledge, as well as elicit a reaction from the receiving entity (Miller J. F., 2002; Gillard & Johansen, 2004; Choon Hua, Sher, & Sui Pheng, 2005). Speech is an influential part of, and a method used in communication to support this transmission of information, the interpretation of the information, the attachment of meaning to the information, and to create the previously mentioned common sense (Flanagan, 1965; Pearce, 2012).

One of the complexities found within communication is that a message can be received by various stakeholders and hence is interpreted individually, which ultimately results in many different interpretations (attached with different meanings), even though the original message has not changed. Therefore, continuously training communication (not practicing/applying), which includes clear language as well as careful planning and structure of formal communication (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002), is considered a necessity to heighten the chances of transporting the original meaning of the message to the various stakeholders. According to Allen (1958), the focus should not be reduced to the applied techniques and methods when trying to enhance communication or enable people to communicate more effectively as this would not do justice to the extent, depth, and complexity of communication. For Allen (1958):

Communication is the sum of all the things one person does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. Communication is a bridge of meaning. It involves a systematic and continuing process of telling, listening, and understanding. (p. 144)

Hence, communication needs to be viewed as a system of (inter-) actions that aim to share information to influence another's mind in a certain way and cause a reaction by practicing and applying telling, listening, and understanding iteratively, and by considering the applied methods and techniques. Examining Gluch and Räsänen's (2009) statement that "communication needs to be viewed as social practice, involving the interaction of interlocutors, contexts, semiotic systems, artefacts and technologies" (p. 166), it seems that the scope of what needs to be considered in communication should be extended beyond the sum of the doings of one person. Instead, the scope of communication needs to include entities of all sorts that contribute, influence, and are affected by the communication (e.g., physical environment, devices, society, norms). Pearce (2012) also highlights the social aspect within communication by defining it as a social process that, in his opinion, involves aspects such as interaction, reflection, and context, and further, is defined as a supporter for developing consciousness.

Accordingly, these insights lead to and align with Hall's (1959/1973) concept of communication being culture and vice versa, as "culture is the link between human beings and the means they have of interacting with others" (p.188). Hence, when communication occurs, senders not only carry out actions and activities, share a message, and affect the receiving entity, but they also share their culture, which in return shapes the knowledge, experiences, future interpretation, and the culture of the receiving entity. The scope, components, and entanglements within communication (together with culture) are further explored in subchapter 2.4 The complexity and wickedness provided by humans and communication.

### **Meaning-making and effectiveness in communication**

Beginning with the conclusion that the main activity of communication is the transmission of information among different entities, which triggers interpretations as well as meaning-making and the creation of knowledge (Gillard & Johansen, 2004; Miller J. F., 2002), meaning-making appears to be a key aspect of communication. Interestingly, the first known and published process of communication, provided by Shannon in the late 1940s, excluded the focus on semantics. This process was established from a technical point of view by focusing on delivering the content of the sender efficiently, reducing interrupting noise, and treating communication as an engineering problem (Catasús, Mårtensson, & Skoog, 2009; Shannon, 1948). Shannon's (1948) mathematically driven communication approach consists of five parts: information source (producer of a message), transmitter (transforming the message into a suitable signal for transmitting), channel (transmitting medium),

receiver (reconstructing the original message), and destination (desired receiving entity). This communication process poses problems, according to Weaver (1949/1963), at technical (accuracy of transmitting from sender to receiver), semantical (accuracy of intended meaning of used symbols by sender vs. accuracy of interpreted meaning of symbols by the receiver) and effectiveness (effectively affecting the receiver according to the sender's intent) levels, as these levels are interrelated. The technical level is the level that influences the others and therefore should not be separated. Hence, semantics and effectiveness cannot be left out in communication, even if they might not appear relevant on a technical level.

Meaning-making is a coping process for dealing with information of various forms to *create understanding*, reduce discrepancies, and achieve acceptance. Therefore, meaning-making appears to be crucial in stressful situations such as pitching or briefing situations for a project. Meaning itself can be divided into global (orienting system of individual, which is constructed from a young age on and modified upon each individual's experience) and situational (referring to a specific environmental encounter) and therefore has the power to be shaped by the individual and by the environment the individual grew up in or interacts in (Park, 2010). The meaning-making process has the power to influence the individual on both a personal and social level, as well as on an organizational level when treated as a project member. Further, the meaning-making process is dependent on and interrelated with the processes of sense-making and memory-building, and appears to only be fulfilled once all processes have an outcome and meaning is created. Sense-making differs from meaning-making as it develops an account of the received information (e.g., an activity or a text) that needs to be interpreted, while memory-making focuses on dealing with the information through a framework constructed of hints and patterns to interpret the sent information. Hence, sense-making and memory-making are processes that support the individual in (re-) positioning information (Dransart, 2013). Therefore, communication should be treated as a two-way process of making and managing meanings, as well as a process of coordinating actions (Pearce, 2012).

According to Nilsson and Ryve (2010), effective communication is "the intrinsic interplay between intentions and interpretations of intentions (expectations)" (p. 243), which is considered successful when the receiving entity reacts in a way the sender expects and an exchange is started. This form of communication focuses on anticipating likely responses, based upon previous messages and communication exchanges, and influencing one another's expectations to solve complex problems and establish strategies that are understood and acted upon accordingly (Choon Hua, Sher, & Sui Pheng, 2005) To transmit intentions and expectations, as well as shape expectations and reactions successfully, an investigation and understand of how humans communicate and who communicates/is involved in the communication is required according to effective communication literature. The question of "how" refers to the tools and methods used, and also to the message itself, in the attempt

to create persuasion (Lee & Oh, 2014) and raise awareness of the sender's intentions (Liu & Mattila, 2016). The question of "who" is relevant as the interplay of communication is again seen as inherently social – shared social identity is considered a driving force in effective communication (Greenaway, Wright, Willingham, Reynolds, & Haslam, 2015). Therefore, it is suggested that the involved individuals are identified in as much depth as possible to anticipate expectations (Duarte, 2012). Furthermore, an examination of interpersonal communication and how different age categories influence an individual's communication through their perception (sensory system – vision, hearing; kinesthetic sense – smell, touch), speed and time (time allocations, response time, processing of information), cognitive interference (handling of interference and dealing with excessive or irrelevant information in the communication – determines/affects quality and style of the communication), and motivation (social reinforcement and rewards throughout) (Giordano, 2000) is needed. Canary and Lakey (2012) propose the following four-phase process of perception:

1. **Stimulation:** selecting and deeming a tiny fraction of information within an environment relevant through the five senses and the inability to process further sensory data. The selection is based upon emotions and triggered by the intensity of the communication.
2. **Organization:** handling and clustering the gathered information into a known and learned framework to interpret behavior.
3. **Interpretation and evaluation:** understanding the organized information by reflecting upon previous experiences and regarding the current emotional state of the individual.
4. **Recall:** memories in terms of information (usually those that affected the individual's perception of something) are being accessed, reconstructed, and transformed into a meaningful and triggering thought that causes an idea.

It is crucial that this process is understood when trying to practice effective communication and creating a strategy as it points out the fragility of the human mind, the dependence on emotions and the fraction size of the message that is processed and interpreted by the human, which poses a challenge for messages and communication.

### **Strategies in communication**

Communication itself is defined as essentially strategic and implicitly learned. Yet, people use communication without being aware that they have established and apply certain strategies or are mindful of established and applied strategies in their (daily) communication. Instead, they hold on to internalized approaches for certain situations, such as, "What would you like to drink?", not considering switching their approach to "What do you have to drink?" or "I'd like to go to a café and get something to drink there" (Canary & Lakey, 2012). For Canary



and Lakey (2012), a strategy in communication is revealed and enhanced when the individual considers and adapts to the context and the situation, and applies flexibility and creativity – is mindful. According to the literature, strategies in communication are usually uncovered, created, and applied when a change is to be made, a conflict is to be managed/avoided, or a goal is to be fulfilled. In such cases, strategies/approaches are mindfully created and applied with the aim of steering the behavior of participating internal and external organizational human parties through planned actions and purposeful communication, resulting in strategic communication (Canary & Lakey, 2012; Falkheimer, 2014). In detail, strategies enable planning and executing purposeful communication by framing the message (according to the previously defined purpose and the intentions of the sender), as well as by analyzing and reacting to the different parties, which also results in shaping the organization's reality (Aggerholm & Asmuß, 2016; Falkheimer, 2014; Lee & Oh, 2014). Hence, strategic communication should be treated as an intersection between management strategy and communication as it focuses on managing messages and impacting environments (e.g., social structures) according to a previously defined purpose and to the sender's intentions (Aggerholm & Asmuß, 2016; Thomas & Stephens, 2015).

Three interrelated events are used in and affect strategic communication and therefore must be considered when developing a strategy (Canary & Lakey, 2012):

- Individual differences (characteristics of the individual that affect the choice of strategy, actions, and communication)
- Conflict interpretation (the individual's explanation of the conflict that affects the choice and composition of the strategy)
- Goal assessment/establishment (identifying personal goals and the effects they have on the communication behavior).

These three events (together with the previously mentioned insights) point towards a deep subjectivity, not only within communication, but within strategies. Furthermore, these events give the impression that strategic communication is of a one-sided nature. While subjectivity is a given factor within communication, the one-sided perspective is not. Today's concept of strategic communication is of a holistic nature and therefore considers functions, roles, and activities beyond organizational departments and the organization itself. The significance and the need for involving strategic communication beyond organizations has grown due to today's to-be-catered-to globalized and mobile society, which craves transparency, attention for the individual, and alerts for risk notions. This society forces organizations to justify their actions and strategies beyond the aspect of financial consequences for organizations due to society's own involvement, which increases the complexity and fragility of stakeholder relationships and forces organizations to include society's perspective in their strategies. Therefore, this type of communication can be viewed from an organizational perspective due to its impact on the organization's

effectiveness, culture, governance and management, and from a social perspective due to the impact it has on society, the public, democracy, culture and behavior (Falkheimer, 2014).

### **2.1.2 Communication in projects**

#### **Projects in general**

According to the literature, projects are temporary systems that emerge from and are used by organizations (permanent systems) as a tool to primarily develop and practice a culture of performance (which is driven by values such as time, costs, quality) and secondarily to develop and practice a culture of innovation (Johannessen & Olsen, 2011; Monteiro de Carvalho, 2014; Metz, Terziowski, & Samson, 2007; Project Management Institute, 2017). This means that the stakeholders of a project are operating (consciously or unconsciously) in two systems at the same time. Each system applies different social structures, which are accompanied by tension not only between the stakeholders but also between the systems. Hence, a different communication style is required in each system – communication needs to be managed. Even when projects seem quite similar in terms of context, resources, or planning, the communication will differ due to the various stakeholders and systems and the subjective nature of sending, receiving, and perceiving information – as discussed previously. Therefore, as proposed by Johannessen & Olsen (2011), projects will be treated as social communication systems in this research.

#### **Communication in projects, components of the social communication systems, and project success**

For Tai, Wang and Anumba (2009), communication in projects is considered as the means to link stakeholders to achieve their common goals and the core of management itself, which ultimately also affects the project and its outcomes. For Harshman and Harshman (1999), a close connection between performance problems and communication problems exists in projects and organizations, corporations and agencies of any sector. When investigating the communication within a project on a deeper level, message, time, and media are named as crucial and influencing elements for the performance of project members and consequently for meeting the project goals. For project members to perform “well,” the delivery of the most important message to the people in demand, through the most appropriate approach (e.g., media) and within the most appropriate time, is of major importance so the project members can execute their tasks and the project goals can be reached (Chen, Wei, Huang, & Wei, 2013).

When investigating the message, the people in demand, and the approach, the various venues within a project where communication takes place must be considered – presentations being the most crucial venues. According to Baker (2007), presentations are required (regardless of the content) to cause persuasion

for and within the audience through accurate and credible material. The sharing and creating of understanding is also of concern to Ramsing (2009), who deems communication as the activity to share information in a project and therefore create a fundamental understanding of the tasks that need to be performed, the resources that are available to perform the tasks, as well as the objectives the organization and projects are striving for and that are entwined in tasks and resources. Ramsing further describes communication as “the individual” at the center of a project and, depending on the personal ability and style of the applier, of “the individual,” projects can become more or less successful.

Communication between stakeholders and organizations, especially within a project, provides a high level of complexity due to factors such as semantics, political and power dynamics, organizational and technological issues, goals, perspectives, asymmetries, priorities, which at first glance might be perceived as negative. Yet this complexity can also contribute to enriching the ecology of a project when attention is being paid to the communication in the form of managing it (Monteiro de Carvalho, 2014). Therefore, when researching the communication within projects, the complexity of the previously mentioned environment needs to be examined according to the question of “how” a project sends and receives information within this environment (Zaremba, 2010). For Metz, Terziovski and Samson (2007), external (focus on encompassing the knowledge, interactions and involvements of the insiders with outsiders) and internal (focus on encompassing the knowledge, interactions and involvements of insiders with insiders) communication is needed for such environments, structures, and cultures, as both communication forms enable the sharing of information across the said environment and the innovation process. In this sense, investigation of the question of “how” must be extended by the question of “who communicates within a project?” given the stakeholders’ entanglements and the relationships. Harshman and Harshman’s (1999) progressive organizational communication model is of relevance to answer both questions as this model builds its stakeholder relationships on ethical principles. This model states:

(...) communication processes are designed to help employees understand the business, their role in it, and how the organization is performing. The communication process and content are based on, and demonstrate, values such as respect, dignity, trust, and shared authority. (Harshman & Harshman, 1999, p. 4)

Furthermore, communication can only be effective when integrity is displayed to the employees through the behaviors of leaders who follow the values of the organization. Hence, what makes communication so powerful and needed in organizations, and also in projects, is the fact that it “is a strong, tangible sign of the underlying beliefs” (Harshman & Harshman, 1999, p. 9), which supports stakeholders in finding their place within the systems, and consequently works

as a crucial predictor for commitment (Postmes, Tanis, & de Wit, 2001). The mentioned beliefs must be transmitted accordingly and through a vision, but require commitment from senior and top-level managers to set an example for the company's and project's communication strategy and a guideline for the communication of all other managers and stakeholders within a company or project (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). Therefore, communication within an organization is linked to the culture of an organization and how all entities (including the organization) have to act, think and believe (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). This model and thought can be adapted for projects as they are temporary social systems within organizations. If people with authority (influencers and decision-makers) are not using communication to position themselves as active proponents of the significant topics (e.g. service design) in a project, to show their investment and visibility in said project, and focus on linking the project members' task orientations with their emotional interactions, then topics, people and communication of significance are being relegated to a passive and administrative level (Gluch & Räsänen, 2009).

When further focusing on the individual ("who") within a project, it is noticeable that the various individuals involved have access to different information, can dispose of different professional and cultural backgrounds, work on different tasks and within different project phases, which causes miscommunication and information asymmetry between the various project stakeholders and therefore can lead to one or multiple stakeholders not fully understanding the decision-making process and reasoning of others (also caused by a simple lack of information). An asymmetry in information can be the cause of potential mistrust in a project and result in an unsupportive relationship between the stakeholder groups and accordingly in diminished project results (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005; Turner & Müller, 2004; Johnson, 2005). Hence, trust is necessary for cooperation and communication and for building relationships, which all heavily influence the development of successful project results (depending on the individual's definition of success in a project). Therefore, creating and encouraging communication in a project appears to provide the key aspect of trust, especially when considering the interplay between trust and commitment within and beyond the hierarchies in both systems. While it seems that communication can be practiced "right away" when stakeholders meet for the first time, it is suggested that trust, relationships, and cooperation take time to develop. In particular, trust between stakeholders seems to be established over time and individually, either in an affect-based (through emotions and eventually "at first sight") or knowledge-based (through professional communication, revealing the individual's values, expertise, integrity, consistency, and loyalty and is built steadily over time) manner (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005).

Although relevant components of communication within projects (e.g., information asymmetries, trust, cooperation) have already been addressed to a degree, it is important to further investigate characteristics of style and quality of

communication. Investigation of relevant literature revealed that to provide quality of information, the communication must be relevant to the individuals (sender and receiving entity), delivered in a usable as well as a timely manner, and it needs to provide accurate and reliable information (Byrne & LeMay, 2006; Zaremba, 2010). Provision of such quality will inevitably result in improved work performance, motivation, satisfaction, and work relationship by the entity receiving the information (Byrne & LeMay, 2006). The abovementioned criteria can be extended when considering the results of a study conducted by Marques (2010) that suggests the inclusion of:

- *responsibility* regarding content (sending and receiving messages through formulation of sender and interpretation of receiving entity) and context (delivery format)
- *conciseness* (presenting organized thoughts that get to the point)
- *professionalism* (in writing and expressing of emotions)
- and *sincerity* (to improve trust and respect from receiving entities).

When considering and practicing these criteria in communication, the understanding, interaction, trust, and efficiency of the receiving entity (and consequently sender) can be positively influenced.

### **Structure of communication in projects**

In a simple model for the communication structure in organizations, and therefore projects, only horizontal and vertical communication are addressed. Vertical communication is considered as work-related communication throughout the hierarchies of an organization (bottom-to-top or top-to-bottom) and horizontal communication is considered as informal interpersonal communication that involves socio-emotional interaction with proximate colleagues and stakeholders that operate on the same organizational hierarchy level (Postmes, Tanis, & de Wit, 2001; Bartles, Peters, de Jong, Pruyn, & van der Molen, 2010). In a more complex model with multiple types of communication, like the structure provided by Price (1997), communication is analyzed in further depth through the following four categories:

- Formal (officially transmitted information) and informal (unofficially transmitted information)
- Vertical (transmitting information between the superordinate and the subordinate) and horizontal (transmitting information between peers)
- Personal (e.g., face-to-face conversation or phone calls) and impersonal (e.g. mass media) – depending on the mutual influence the stakeholders have on the communication
- Instrumental (transmitting information crucial to fulfill a task or job) and expressive (transmitting information that is not task or job related).

While both models offer further insights on the affects and importance of communication in projects and can support the identification of elements that heighten the commitment or project stakeholders, the style and quality of vertical

communication was found to be more relevant for creating commitment within an organization and project than other communication types/categories (Postmes, Tanis, & de Wit, 2001; Bartles, Peters, de Jong, Pruyn, & van der Molen, 2010).

### **Commitment in projects**

Commitment is defined as a positive psychological attachment that is shown by superiors as well as employees in an organizational setting. It is achieved and enhanced through communication (means to transmit information and emergence of perceptions and attitudes) and aims to create motivation (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Jyoti, Sharma, Kour, & Kour, 2021; Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, & Foroudi, 2017; van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007). Furthermore, commitment is a result of loyalty (willingness to stay or be attached) and trust (acceptance of vulnerability and expecting non-harming and well-wishing intentions of others), which together create long-term relationships (Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, & Foroudi, 2017). A positive psychological attachment (commitment) is considered a complex and problematic multidimensional concept that is influenced by the following underlying aspects (Thornhill, Lewis, & Saunders, 1996):

- Personal characteristics
- Tenure
- Desire to achieve
- Feeling of competence
- Feeling of professionalism.

These aspects are transmitted as information or expectations through communication in projects and ultimately create the conditions and support the spreading of commitment. Furthermore, the communication style influences the commitment of the recipient (van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007). According to Bambacas and Patrickson's (2008) study, interpersonal communication was mostly found to need an accurate, clarifying, credible, language-recipient adjusted, respectful delivery of a message to establish commitment within subordinates, which most leaders currently lack.

#### ***2.1.3 Relevant communication genres and strategic actions for the communication project setup and initial phase of a project***

##### **Sales Communication**

For a salesperson's communication (referred to as negotiation), knowing and adapting to cultures and motivating the audience is key to developing relationships (Chairsakeo & Speece, 2004; Charoensukmongkol & Pandey, 2020). In particular, individuals with high cultural awareness and sensitivity and who learn and are aware of how to act in a new cultural environment quickly are likely to practice an effective negotiation style as well as the problem-solving approach (PSA) effectively, no matter if the organization is one of low-context culture

(Western organizations, where words transmit the message) or high-context culture (Eastern organizations, where context carries the message and implicit information). According to the literature, there are two negotiation styles in sales (Chairsraeko & Speece, 2004):

- Problem-solving approach: the negotiation aims to create mutual gain for both the salesperson and the recipient. Hence, the focus is on catering to the recipient's needs, wishes, and preferences and requires the salesperson to adjust their behavior to these. The adjustment displays the willingness to cooperate and the intent of being recipient-focused during the information exchange.
- Competitive approach: the negotiation is individualized to persuade the recipient and is conducted with the intent to change the recipient's attitude, ways of thinking and goals to the advantage of the salesperson. In this approach, the salesperson is not afraid to use bluffs or threats in their pursuit to ultimately exit the negotiation with more gain than the recipient.

It is noteworthy that these negotiation styles are heavily influenced by the negotiating individual and their level of confidence in the communication and context, and that these styles are almost indistinguishable once the negotiation turns cross-cultural (Chairsraeko & Speece, 2004; Charoensukmongkol & Pandey, 2020).

### **Solution selling**

Solution selling is a sales process in which a measurable improvement is sold according to how negotiation recipients buy. To practice solution selling, situational fluency is required from a salesperson by disposing of situational knowledge, capability knowledge, people skills, and selling skills to empathize with the target group. The following principles of solution selling are also crucial (Eades, 2004):

- A pain needs to be identified, as otherwise the target group has no reason to change (provide a compelling reason for the target group)
- A pain is interdependent, and the target group needs to be made aware that by solving the initial pain of an individual, a pain for others will also be solved (provide a holistic view of the pain)
- A solution can only be sold when a diagnosis has been made first, as otherwise discomfort arises within the target group and the sale comes to a halt
- The pain-level the target group belongs to needs to be identified and acted upon accordingly:
  - o Latent pain: The target group is not looking or trying to actively solve the pain (target group makes claims that solutions offer too much risk, expenses, complications and that the problem simply cannot be solved), hence the problem needs to be sold before the solution can be sold.
  - o Admitted pain: The target group is aware of a pain but is not taking action as they lack a vision and guidance to dissolve the pain. Hence, the

salesperson needs to provide a vision and roadmap the target group is comfortable with implementing.

- o Envisioning the solution: The target group is aware of a problem, is ready to take action and has a vision of the action to be taken, making the salesperson a supporter or adjuster of the vision through expertise.
- An overwhelming majority of the target group is in latent pain and not committed to buy. To win this group, a sales negotiation needs to take place first, where the salesperson can support the target group in defining buying requirements and a vision. This formed vision and requirements will later be used internally by the target group when listening to other salespeople negotiating their solutions – meaning the people pitching their solutions afterwards have to live up to the requirements and expectations that were established by the first salesperson.
- Selling must be done with people in a decision-making-position and should be done when situational knowledge is given about the target group. The situational knowledge can be gathered from people from the target group in a non-decision-making position.
- The buying target group runs through phases in the process of buying where they:
  - o first admit to their pain, collect their needs and categorize them to dissolve the pain (phase 1)
  - o afterwards explore and evaluate the possible solutions (phase 2)
  - o lastly, start questioning their own decision-making according to risks and price, which will lead to renegotiations of the solution's terms (phase 3).
- Sales success is made up of the target group's admittance of a pain, the power the target group has to make the buying decision, the overlap of both parties' vision for the solution, the compulsion of the value proposed through the solution, and the level of control the salesperson has over the buying process.

Hence, the solution selling process focuses on knowing the target group's buying process, aligning the sales process to the buying processes, measuring the steps of the sales process through the target group's responses, using tools to engage in selling actions that require expertise in certain fields, and monitoring the sales through a management system. Regarding creating commitment, Eades (2004) points out the necessity of not providing consultations for free in the beginning (aiming for financial commitment from the buying side) and for providing the buying side with a perception of the situation they are in up-front, to display further commitment from the salesperson, to manage expectations and to understand early on if the perception of the "anticipated" situation is shared by the buyer. Furthermore, one of the greatest challenges organizations face when selling a solution, is that they have a minority of intuitive top sales personnel with whom they cannot cater to their biggest target group – called "difficult-to-sell-to" (pragmatists, conservatives, and



laggards) – and therefore need to send their less persuading and sales promising personnel to the said target group.

### **Effective communication and communication influencing factors**

Hua, Sher and Pheng (2005) demonstrated that effective communication occurred in projects, when the various stakeholders were proactive, as well as when all stakeholder parties were reactive in their communication. They named the following reasons for effective communication: sufficient resources, scheduling of information, retrieving client-provided feedback, work experiences, stakeholder (especially clients') attitudes, suggestions matching the interest of the client stakeholders, using visualization and checking information with user party. Reasons for ineffective communication are:

(...) differences in personality and interest, lack of checking of information with users and craftsmen; use of inappropriate visualization techniques; insufficient resources – time and manpower; timing of information; working experience; client's attitudes; site constraints, cultural barriers and organizational cultural barriers. (Choon Hua, Sher, & Sui Pheng, 2005, p. 249)

Clearly, aspects that sometimes worked in favor of effective communication were also the cause of ineffective communication. Hence, planning the sharing of information (including selection of language, methods and tools) does not guarantee fulfillment of the sender's expectations. Two more pain areas were identified through this study: the modes used for communication and the communication gap between the different stakeholder groups. Depending on the preferences of the stakeholders, their personality, their attitude, the type of sent information, or relationship between the stakeholders, channels might be selected or might influence what kind of and how information is displayed, as well as the tone the communication will take. The communication gaps were identified when, in the stakeholders' opinion, direct communication was required but was not provided (Choon Hua, Sher, & Sui Pheng, 2005). Therefore, the expectations of the different stakeholders for direct and indirect communication need to be examined before (and during) the communication and adjusted accordingly. In another study about effective communication, in the field of health care, Slade et al. (2016) suggest that influencing factors can be found within the areas of *handover information* and *organizations and institutions*. The influencing factors found within *organizations and institutions*, target the provided eco-system from physical environment to working hierarchies and activities:

- Physical constraints: provided by the working environment, such as interruptions, noise level, (insufficient) space.
- Lack of prep-time and scheduling: e.g., relevant stakeholders aren't present when needed, the handover of information is stalled, or insufficient information is handed over.

- Cultural diversity: is considered a general cause of misunderstandings.
- Employment conditions: like little familiarity or compliance with protocols and guidelines, or increasing of inconsistencies within the various processes.
- Interdisciplinary boundaries: creates the necessity of training employees for collaborative working.
- Hierarchical barriers: are considered the cause for imbalance and insecurity between the different hierarchical levels.
- Lack of training for handover: e.g., little priority is given to the handover, as well as little time resources for the carry-out.

Within the area of *handover information* Slade et al. (2016) mention factors that target the handover process:

- Lack of structure: within the handover document, which causes poor content quality.
- Lack of process explanations: e.g., decisions and intermediary steps are not explained to the people carrying out the handover.
- Lack of user/stakeholder involvement: which causes incomprehensiveness of and misunderstandings with stakeholders.
- Poor written documentation/high reliance on memories: results in recording inaccurate information, leaving out relevant information, ultimately and poor content quality.
- Poor quality of written documentation: such as information storage across various locations, inconsistency naming of documentaiton, inaccuracy of information recording, or the missing of templates.

### **Management plan for communication**

One suggestion to improve the communication to the audience and manage their expectations is to have a management plan in place. A management plan for communication is a strategic approach to investigating what should be said, who will receive the communication, who will send it, and how to best send the message to achieve audience persuasion given the retrieved information and the intent of the sender. Eskerod and Lund Jepsen (2013/2016) propose the following steps for the said management plan:

- Aim of the communication (what): The focus lies on creating a simple yet consistent message that highlights the purpose (and sub-purposes). This message should be adapted to the different audience members and include their motivators. In the communication of the message, it is crucial to provide the audience members with a positive attitude, with a message and communication that indicates the benefits and values provided by the topic at hand. Members with a negative attitude require information that eradicates their concerns about the said topic (Eskerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016). The attitude of the individual can predict their behavior when measured in

the categories of action, target, context, and time (the more known categories, the higher the prediction rate) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981/2018).

- The person responsible for communication (who): The communication to the audience is most effective when done by someone influential who possesses knowledge about the audience and the issue at hand, shares characteristics with the audience, is on eye-level with the audience, and that the audience deems trustworthy and attractive (e.g. a role model) (Eslerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016).
- Reaching the audience (how): The focus lies on the presentation of the previously created purpose and message through elements such as text, graphics, and metaphors in terms of intention and planned impact. To choose the right presentation resources, media richness and strategy, the audience's commitment level, motivations and ability to process the message need to be investigated as these three factors affect the willingness to listen and spend cognitive effort on the provided information (Eslerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981/2018). Hence, Petty and Cacioppo's (1981/2018) the "Elaboration-Likelihood Model of Attitude Change" should be applied and divided into two steps:
  - o Investigating the motivation and ability to process the information of the audience
  - o If motivation and ability to process are given, investigate the attitude type the audience displays towards the message.

In this setting, commitment (or involvement) is derived from the previously discussed attitudes of the audience members (positive, negative and indifferent) towards the purpose and message. As communication is not a one-size-fits-all solution, the attitudes of the different audience members create an opportunity for a segmentation (that can be extended and enriched through further overlapping characteristics of the audience) and identification of the best possible presentation and communication style. When audience members have a negative or indifferent attitude towards the purpose and message, the simple message can be continuously repeated in combination with nonverbal communication (peripheral route) to slowly condition these audience members for the main message and "nudge" them towards a positive association through rewards (mixture of classical and operant conditioning) – create a change of attitude (persuasion). If the audience members already show a positive attitude towards the message, it is best to provide further material and exploration on the purpose that enable these members to become better supporters of their attitude (direct route in combination with verbal communication) (Eslerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981/2018).

As communications will not only occur with one audience segment, a mixture of verbal and non-verbal communication needs to be provided that addresses the desires of the different segments and provides enough information in the

presentation for the indifferent and negative segment to still be engaged, while providing further information options for the positive segment (e.g., through links or attachments). The communication type must further be decided according to the segments, as well as the purpose and message. In this setting, four communication types, which can also be applied in a matrix format, are available (Eskerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016):

- o Interpersonal (communication between people – e.g., a dialogue)
  - o Impersonal (communication through mass media – e.g., website)
  - o Push communication (information is imposed on the audience – e.g., presentation)
  - o Pull communication (information can be willingly retrieved – e.g., links to further sources).
- Aligning time and audience segment for communication (who and when): It is important to time the communication throughout a project. This sharing of information can be done either when the audience is in need of information or when the organization deems that information needs to be spread. Further, the information can be spread synchronously (information is sent and immediately received; e.g., in-meeting presentation) or asynchronously (information is sent and received when convenient/needed; e-mail) (Eskerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016).
  - Possible constraints: The elements used to create an effective and ideal communication (e.g. what the audience would like to hear most to be convinced), might not overlap with the constraints offered by the project and hence the alignment between ideal communication and project constraints needs to be considered in the communication management plan (Eskerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016).

### **Involvement, persuasion and shaping the message**

According to Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983), the messages conveyed in communication are a key aspect of creating involvement with the recipients (e.g., greater personal relevance and connections within the audience can be witnessed when applying high involvement messages). In their example about high and low involvement, Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) discuss two stakeholder groups and their involvement and further needs and their perception of the provided information when purchasing a refrigerator. The stakeholder group that was looking to purchase a refrigerator (high involvement) examined the provided product information through a central route and therefore either developed a positive attitude towards the product, when the provided information was cogent and persuasive, or a negative attitude when the information was weak. The stakeholder group that was not looking to purchase a refrigerator (low involvement), and hence would not put effort or assign importance to investigating the provided product information,

focused on the image and attractiveness provided by the refrigerator's endorser (peripheral route). This initial separation does not display the reality of society and the individual's psyche, as Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) discovered in other testing situations for messages. Here, the attractiveness of the endorsers was decisive in decision making for both groups (high and low involvement) and hence influenced their attitude (especially with the low involvement group). Therefore, shaping the message and considering the endorsers of the message are seen as crucial for affecting relevant stakeholders positively.

When shaping or framing a message, the fluency of the information processing and the effectiveness of the message is enhanced to further influence the audience members' behaviors and attitudes according to the sender's intention. The message's content should be presented in one of two opposing valences (positive or negative), depending on the individual, while still providing the same intended outcome and persuasion effect (Lee & Aaker, 2004; Lee & Oh, 2014). The content or information can be shaped on three levels (Lee & Oh, 2014):

- Regulatory factors: are the addressed receivers promotion- or prevention-focused?
- Construal level: is the message phrased psychologically close or distant (e.g., addressing present or future occurrences/possibilities)? And is the message phrased at a high or a low construal level (abstract or concrete/detailed)?
- Message relevance: is the message self-referencing to the receiver or referencing to others?

### **Organization culture and commitment**

As previously mentioned, commitment can be seen from two angles: a) commitment provided by the employee, and b) commitment provided by superiors and decision-makers. Both are part of and enforce the organizational culture. Employees are attracted by projects and companies that support them in achieving their goals, offer jobs/positions that fit their characteristics and, in the best case, also meet their psychological needs. The more these attraction criteria are fulfilled by projects and companies, the higher the job involvement of the employee will be. When an individual manages to identify with their profession or its values through high involvement in their job, confidence is created, and career commitment can be established. This commitment type can be followed by organizational commitment: when companies offer career-related resources to the individual and therefore support the individual's career development (positive psychological attachment is achieved). Companies crave organizational commitment as it produces loyalty and trust from the employees' side. However, it is also the hardest commitment type for companies to maintain (Jyoti, Sharma, Kour, & Kour, 2021).

A high level of employee engagement reproduces a greater trust and loyal relationship between the individual and the organization which builds

up a higher degree of commitment among the employee towards their organization. (Jyoti, Sharma, Kour, & Kour, 2021, p. 114)

Organizational culture describes the norms and values that were put in place to shape employees' everyday lives and enforce a certain behavior from them (Pinho, Rodrigues, & Dibb, 2014). Hence, organizational culture affects employees' commitment. To keep the organizational culture alive and encourage commitment, there is a need for effective communication in which the employees can perceive leaders' integrity and credibility through behavior that is consistent with the organizational values (Harshman & Harshman, 1999). The need for a company to hire individuals that fit their organizational culture is shared by the individuals and their need for embeddedness, for which they are willing to give up a part of their own individuality (Josselson, 1994). However, this craving of individuals can come to a halt when goals no longer match, and/or the integrity of leaders is not visible in their communication and behavior. According to Ebaugh, in this case a "process of withdrawing from the normative expectations associated with a role" is started (1988, p. 3). The individual lets go of the role and the rights and obligations that are associated with and assigned to the role, which can lead to rebellion, disidentification, or complete disengagement by the individuals (Ebaugh, 1988; Harshman & Harshman, 1999).

### **Design management and its briefing process**

The literature describes design management as an ongoing activity within a project or organization, where information is exchanged and managed alongside people, technology, and resources, so strategic goals can be identified, outcomes can be produced, trust of personnel at the top and board-level management can be built, and designers can be enabled to perform to the best of their abilities (Cooper & Junginger, 2011; Emmitt, 2014; Farr, 1965/2011).

The activity consists of defining a design problem (or interpreting a need), breaking the problem into manageable chunks, creating and spreading the brief, identifying and assigning the most suitable designer (for the problem and task), communicating the required resources – from a designer's point of view – to project stakeholders, supporting the allocation of resources, and managing the design and delivery process, while keeping the strategic goals of not only the organization, but also the project and design, as well as the enablement of the designer, in mind (Cooper & Junginger, 2011; Farr, 1965/2011). To enable the designers and encourage their best possible performance, design management entails planning the integration of the designers in the project or organization and passing on collected, filtered, interpreted, and translated information from stakeholders to the designers, who require the information to start the "production" – sorting out relevant information for the project brief and the designer's brief. To setup the right environment for the designers to start working and the strategic goals to be achieved, and to

establish trust, design management also entails the distribution of information about the thought, production, and delivery process of design (Farr, 1965/2011). Hence, design managers are required to possess excellent communication skills, interpersonal soft skills, and leadership skills, alongside the ability to make informed decisions (strategic decisions to set the long-term direction of a project; operational decisions for solving everyday workplace issues) and willingness to collaborate and incorporate a collaborative working approach in their daily work, to carry out the activity of design management (Emmitt, 2014).

With regard to the brief, design management suggests treating the brief as a document that enables the design, and as a dialogue (activity) between project stakeholders and the designers that enables the creation of the document through a learning journey. The focus of the learning journey is set on discovering, interpreting, and interacting to create a brief that contains guiding information for designers (Reifi, Emmitt & Ruikar, 2014). Hence, the project stakeholders propose the outlines of the problem (expectations and requirements) and the most relevant information about themselves as a first step and then collaborate with the designers (mostly through meetings and sketches) on possible strategic and project goals, as well as solutions, before venturing into planning (e.g., resources, tasks) (Ormerod & Newton, 2004; Reifi, Emmitt & Ruikar, 2014). It is further suggested that lean management principles are applied to the briefing process so value-adding and non-value-adding steps can be identified in the learning journey and briefing process to enhance its efficiency (Plenert, 2011; Reifi, Emmitt & Ruikar, 2014). Ultimately, the produced brief needs to be “tight” enough so the designers can start working efficiently and to the best of their abilities, but “loose” enough to allow an evolution of the brief as the project is also likely to evolve. On a final note, it is worth mentioning that the reviewed literature pointed out that the client side in a project often does not meet or is unwilling to meet the level of open-mindedness and commitment that is needed to carry out this briefing process (Ormerod & Newton, 2004; Ravasi & Stigliani, 2011; Reifi, Emmitt & Ruikar, 2014).

## **2.2 The treatment of communication in service design**

### **Evolution and definition of service design**

Service design helps organizations see their services from a customer perspective. It is an approach to designing services that balances the needs of the customer with the needs of the business, aiming to create seamless and quality service experiences. Service design is rooted in design thinking, and brings a creative, human-centered process to service improvement and designing new services. Through collaborative methods that engage both

customers and service delivery teams, service design helps organizations gain true, end-to-end understanding of their services, enabling holistic and meaningful improvements. (Miller, 2015)

The idea of service design was first introduced by Shostack (1982) at the beginning of the 1980s and functioned as foundational work for the concept of *design of services* (Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021). At this time, the aim of service design was to address service failures and establish service quality more efficiently and earlier by directly enabling thorough analyses and control in the development of new service offerings (Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021). Over the past three decades, service design has grown and matured as a research discipline, as well as a practice, together with the concept of a service (switch from thinking of services as exchange outputs, to exchange that enables value-in-use). This led to the emergence of *design for service*. In this concept, service design aims to create wider social change and transformation, as well as provide value-in-use of a service instead of developing a service offering itself (Sangiorgi, 2011; Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2015; Kimbell, 2011; Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021). For the future, scholars predict service design will evolve towards *service eco-system design*, in which the aim is to uncover entire service eco-systems and redesign them holistically with the intention of creating value for situations and establish long-term change by considering aspects such as the system's interdependencies, actors, cultures – the factors that cause complexity in a system – on a more abstract level (Vargo & Lusch, 2011; Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021). Junginger and Sangiorgi's (2009) view of service design in projects appears to correlate with the expected evolution of the discipline. Yet, according to their insights, all concepts from *design of services* to *service eco-system design* are practiced in projects according to the discipline's engagement depth in the organization:

- Service interaction design: mainly (re-)designing service interactions on a product interface level (artifact), which will lead to contingent impact on the organization if the norms, values, and beliefs beyond the artifact are not questioned.
- Service design intervention: (re-)designing and improving service interactions on a service experience and organizational element level, which requires questioning and challenging the values and norms of the organization but not about fundamental assumptions or beliefs.
- Organizational transformation: challenging and (re-)designing the fundamental assumptions of the organization, which requires strong commitment from and heavy collaboration with the organization over a long period of time (when compared to the other two depths) so fundamental change can take place within the organization.



Further, the different depth levels were found to not only provide different kinds of impacts on the organization but also to provide different kinds of outcomes for the organization and the project. The definition of service design provided by Miller (2015) emphasizes that this definition is positioned in the concept of *design for services* and on the depth level of service design interventions. Therefore, this definition suits the current state of perception of service design. At this point, the definition of service design is sufficient as the main focus lies on retrieving information on the communication process used to convey service design and the communication environment in which the process takes place.

### **Communication in service design**

Based on the scientific literature review, it is clear that when the academic and scientific communities, as well as practical leaders in the field, discuss service design in relation to communication, they mostly address communication in two ways:

- a tool to create understanding with by practicing empathy and collaboration (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018) – communication is used as a tool to practice service design
- a tool to describe/discuss the opportunities, challenges, and limits of service design in theory and practice and in the project context (Junginger and Sangiorgi, 2009; Miettinen, 2018).

When communication is discussed as a *tool to create understanding with*, the literature often focuses on methods used within the approach of service design to transfer and spread information between stakeholders throughout and after the design process and to create a dialogue (Shen, Shen, & Xiaoling, 2012; Götzen, Morelli, & Grani, 2014). The methods and processes of retrieving codes from and transforming them with the stakeholders through the approach of service design are of particular interest as these codes are translated from abstract requirements into concrete objects and outcomes in a relevant and relatable language (Cross, 2006). Furthermore, in this context communication is treated as a collaborative business that is responsible for developing abilities in verbal and non-verbal form (Lawson, 2005; Cross, 2006).

The literature also addresses communication as a tool when discussing the definition of service design (Miettinen, 2018) or describing the perception or behavior of service design in the project and organizational context (Junginger and Sangiorgi, 2009). In the case of definitions, lengthy complex texts are provided (either focusing on concrete project examples or theoretical concepts) with the aim of discussing the elements that make up service design in detail, provide outlooks on the discipline, and to define the limits, challenges and possibilities of service design. In the case of perceptions or behaviors, communication is purely used as a descriptive tool for witnessed situations, the hurdles service design encounters regarding communication and eventually, on an abstract level, how the communication was overcome.

Yet, the reviewed scientific literature on service design regarding communication does not discuss how to communicate service design to project stakeholders from a service designer's perspective. However, the literature does point out that the design itself should be treated as a communication process that caters to various stakeholders (Erickson, 1995). It further points out that the beginning of a project (the initial phase and project setup) is one of the two most significant and intensive communication phases between designers and project stakeholders, and is where an increased need for communication is perceived (Shen, Shen, & Xiaoling, 2012). The proposal, the process of creating the brief, and the brief itself are also crucial elements in the communication of service design to project stakeholders at the beginning of a project (Reifi, Emmitt & Ruikar, 2014) (see section Design management and its briefing process in 2.1.3 Relevant communication genres and strategic actions for the communication project setup and initial phase of a project).

### **Known hurdles in the communication of service design**

According to Van Oosterom (2009), the biggest hurdle in the communication of service design is in the project setup (pitching situation) with project stakeholders within the top-level management who make the decision whether or not service design will be involved in a project. These project stakeholders are usually not available to be introduced to new disciplines and approaches due to time constraints and their view on service design (lack of importance and high unawareness). Instead, project stakeholders in lower positions are made available for involvement discussion as these people look forward to creating satisfaction and success on multiple levels and hence are aware of the importance of customers and stakeholders and their internal and external influence on projects and organizations. These people have (Reason, Løvlie, & Flu, 2016):

- a strategic or commercial role, with a focus on performance and business results
- an organizational internal maintenance role with a focus on providing improvements and solutions to ensure business-as-usual
- a caring role for customers and stakeholders, with a focus on turning intangible insights into tangible and marketable outputs
- a leading role, with a focus on business and strategy.

Hence, these project stakeholders do not usually have the decision power needed to ensure that service design is involved in a project. If an opportunity does arise for an introduction talk with project stakeholders with the required decision power, the risk-averse mindset they apply to projects (project requirements and final outcomes are clearly defined upfront by the project stakeholders without considering the outcomes that can be provided by service design) and their “mindset of comfort” (service design requires an open mindset) are hurdles that service designers rarely manage to overcome, especially in realms outside of start-ups (start-ups often display

a different mindset) (van Oosterom, 2009). This risk-averseness and comfort-seeking becomes even more apparent and difficult to overcome when service design projects aim to achieve organizational change, which requires heavy engagement and commitment from the organization itself and particularly personnel from the top-level management (Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009). In addition, the business of design is treated as “something new” and “unknown” by organizations and project stakeholders and therefore faces mistrust from the outset (Farr, 1965/2011).

Another hurdle found within project stakeholders and organizations that influences communication and the approach to service design is their idea of the economy (hard or soft) they are in, their manufacturing aim (goods or needs) and, consequently, their idea of their customers (Brinkmann, 2008). According to Parry, Newnes and Huang (2011) the best value proposition and competitive advantage for organizations nowadays is found in hybrid solutions, which combine product and services, goods and needs. However, organizations tend to stick to their “old ways” and rely either on services or products, as hybrid solutions require much testing, adaptations, and hence bring uncertainty with them. Furthermore, the value of a service or product does not necessarily lie with their core offer anymore, but in the made interactions and experiences of customers (Blocker & Barrios, 2015; Pine II & Gilmore, 2011; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018). In addition, customers do not want to be seen or treated as simple consumers with little to no individualization needs, but as co-creators. Within service design, customers are not seen as sole purchasers and consumers of artifacts or activities, but as active co-creators who need support in learning their options, choosing from the multitude of options and adapting them to their needs (Brinkmann, 2008). Service design relies heavily on customers taking on this engaging and collaborative role, to further support the investigation of the perceived value phenomena on a regular basis, since the goals, desires, and tastes of customers change over time and the retrieved values only display a current state. Hence, continuous research, collaboration, validation and adaptations are needed to ensure enduring change and quality in which the co-creators need to partake (Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021).

According to Junginger and Sangiorgi (2009), another hurdle is that peripheral level service design projects tend to start at service intervention and interactions. Generally, the focus on elements and aims that are relevant to the company and the service quality and the types of outcomes these projects provide differ from what service design would require from and provide to organizations when aiming for organizational change. According to their experience, the transmission from the peripheral to a deeper level is one that requires time, trust, commitment, collaboration, and participation from the service designers, the organization, and the project stakeholders to create transformative insights and sow seeds for further projects that start at a level closer to fundamental assumptions. Therefore, the

chances of managing to involve service design in an organizational change project for organizations and projects without any prior experience with service design solely through communication appear to be limited.

In general, another communication hurdle designers face is the poor exchange of information between project stakeholders and designers when creating proposals and briefs. This impacts their involvement in projects (and ultimately the produced outcomes). Project stakeholders tend to identify apparent gaps (no deep-dives and identification of fundamental issues) and consequently create “simple” solutions for which they hire designers. The stakeholders’ lack of imagination, experience, and familiarity with design (including people, process, daily activities, impact, and outcomes), in addition to collaborations and the information designers need to create exceptional or desired outcomes, result in the hand-over of ambiguous and meta-level data (no involvement of the project’s fundamental goals and boundaries or the commercial side of the project and organization) and poorly phrased expectation. This information is then processed by designers into a proposal that does not adequately meet the project’s needs and the stakeholders’ expectations and is likely to be rejected by top-level management. If the proposal is accepted, the project stakeholders take their own information and the proposal information and create a brief that does not support the designers’ tasks and the ambiguous goals they are supposed to achieve (Ravasi & Stigliani, 2011; Shen, Shen & Xiaoling, 2012).

From a more general point of view, hurdles in the communication of service design can be found in the discipline’s name, its roots, its repertoire of methods and approaches, as well as fields of discussion and the communication audience’s reductionist understanding of service design. Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence and Schneider (2018) highlight the name of the discipline as a hurdle in projects and communication due to the ambiguous nature of the words *service* and *design*, and suggest that this leads the audience to make the following assumptions:

- Service design deals with aesthetics and cosmetic issues regarding the frontend and the usability.
- Service design solely addresses customer service and customer support (e.g., staff in call-centers help returning a product).
- Service design is applied only when an error occurs and as an *after sales* process.

Additional ambiguity is provided by the entire term as it is not exclusive to design and its subfields. Instead, the term can also be found within fields such as service marketing, service management, service operation, and service delivery, yet with different meanings and concepts behind it, which creates further hurdles in communication for service designers (Dhaliwal, Macintyre & Parry, 2011; Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009; Kimbell, 2011; Yu, 2016).

Furthermore, the currently sold and communicated core approach of service design from a design perspective – enabling innovation – only provides a reduced view of the discipline to the project stakeholders, who are therefore unable to grasp

the extent and complexity of service design (creating multi-actor service systems that highlight dependencies and institutional arrangements), as well as the tasks and role of a service designer in a project. As a result, projects do not incorporate the discipline and its practitioners thoroughly (i.e., they return to old ways of working, remaining within their mindset), which leads to the creation of simplified and isolated solutions that are not designed with intention for longevity and enduring change (Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021). The currently communicated core approach of service design limits the engagement of service designers in projects as the focus is on creating new services (area of service innovation). Yet, according to Ostrom et al. (2010), “service design sits at the intersection of service strategy, service innovation, and service implementation” (p.17), meaning service designers are currently not planned, placed, and enabled to work to the best of their abilities and capabilities (Farr, 1965/2011).

Service design draws on methods and approaches from a range of other designs and disciplines including participatory design, co-creation, ethnography, design thinking, and psychology to create the mentioned holistic view of services (including the systems they are embedded in) and to ultimately achieve its goal of displaying complexity and creating value-in-use with intent for a wide range of service relevant stakeholders (DeVylder, 2016/2019; Marquez & Downey, 2015; Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021). While this drawing on methods and approaches from other disciplines is one of the main strengths of service design, it also poses one of the most significant communication and comprehension hurdles for the discipline’s practitioners, as service design becomes barely distinguishable from other disciplines, especially those of close proximity such as UX design and design thinking. As a consequence, the communication audience requires answers to the questions of what service design is and what it is not and where it begins and ends (DeVylder, 2016/2019; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018).

There are many more hurdles service designers encounter in their communication in the pursuit of a project and the project itself. Those mentioned in this section illustrate the closest correlation to the topic of this research. In conclusion, the communication of service design must overcome ambiguity, misleading information, a lack of information, mistrust, and unwillingness to change to convey the possibilities, outcomes, and values the discipline can bring to projects and organizations.

## 2.3 Profile of a service designer

### Identity

One's identity depends on and is at the mercy of the constant changes, responses and views provided by others and the social world the individual is living in (Josselson, 1994). The need to create an identity is constructed during childhood and continually alters according to the experiences the individual has, the responses from others, and the social world, as well as the roles the individual takes on in the social world (Ebaugh, 1988). Identities within the working environment are further shaped by working relationships (relational identity) through consequent interplay on the individual, interpersonal, and collective identity levels. While the individual identity level focuses on the being itself and the self-esteem derived "from interpersonal comparisons of traits, abilities, goals, performance" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 9), the interpersonal level refers to the role-related relationships one has with co-workers and/or superiors and fulfilling the obligations that derive from these relationships. Further, the individuals (on an interpersonal level) are seen as interdependent beings that place significance on the nature of their interactions "and the potential for personal connection and intimacy" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 10). The collective level is considered as the platform for social identity theory, which sees the individual as a prototypical member of a collective (e.g., organization, group, social category). At this level, self-esteem is gathered through intergroup comparisons, while all basic norms, interactions, and motivations are developed and aimed to provide for the welfare of the collective.

### Roles

In the course of this research, roles (although originating from the theater background), are considered as the basic building blocks within an organization or collective that display patterns of human behavior and convey a set of norms, values, and shared expectations depending on the position within the social structure. Therefore, roles as such are interdependent and become meaningless without one another, the collective, and the social structure – which generated the role and expectations in the first place (Biddle, 1979; Ebaugh, 1988; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). It is important to note that roles are seen and treated as sole abstractions, which are defined by one-sided expectations until an individual takes on the role and "brings it to life", therefore infusing the role with social behavior and with an aim to be meaningful, predictable, and consequential for the individual – leading to role behavior (Ebaugh, 1988; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). According to Biddle (1979), shared expectations for role behavior between the different parties induces a role in the first place. The person who enacts the role is either willing to follow the expectations (due to prior internalizing of these expectations or due to their own expectations for this role) or the person enforces their expectations on other people in the same role. Expectations

are considered to be beliefs about future occurrences that are shaped and triggered by personal experiences, shared information, heuristic thinking, and perception. Furthermore, they act as motivators, supporters in decision-making and also affect humans' behaviors in a way that supports expectations frequently becoming reality and therefore are considered forecasts of events and actions (Hoorens, 2012). Biddle's (1979) example of physicians wearing white coats in hospitals (taught by instructors and nurses to wear them, learned that wearing a white coat is considered appropriate, experienced that wearing a coat fulfills the expectations of instructors, staff and patients), illustrates the interdependence of roles within a social structure and provides further incentive for exploring the perspectives and expectations of service designers and project stakeholders given the research area of this dissertation.

### **The role of service designers – a multiple-angled view**

From a design educational angle, the (extended) designer's role is that of a homo universalis that encompasses:

(...) all the aspects that touch on the design process – to weight all of these against their influence on form and content of the design – the designer has to have knowledge of an incredibly broad array of social, creative, communicative, and technical processes. (Bruinsma, 1998, p. 60)

From an artistic angle, the role of the designer is to create a world of human scale in a reflective manner (who and what they are) as the changes they make to the environment of the humans have influence (Hagman, 2010). Sanders (2002, 2006) defines the role of a designer from a workshop and facilitation angle where designers are responsible for accessing stakeholders' *dreams*, understanding these *dreams*, using the designers' own creativity, and amplifying the creativity of said stakeholders so designers can become builders of scaffolds for experiences and services. Hence, depending on the angle from which designers are viewed and the field they work in, they are generally seen as "uncoverers," "enablers," "creators," and "connectors." To fulfill these roles, a designer's primary issue in their work is the utilization of various kinds of representations or languages, which requires multilingualism (Moran, 1973). Generally, designers have undergone an evolution from being the makers of objects to becoming the instruction-givers to the stakeholders, who will actually make the objects (Lawson, 2005), which is crucial for the role of service designers. Kimbell (2009) suggests seeing service designers as design-sociologists since the assumptions and hypotheses made by service designers about stakeholders and their activities shape the mapping, construction, and thought of services. Norman's (2013) view of designers correlates with Kimbell's (2009) suggestion by claiming that service designers hold a bridging role when it comes to supporting people in execution and evaluation. Ultimately, the role of service designers appears to be of a social and cultural nature, which therefore makes them cultural intermediaries (Dennington, 2017).

## **2.4 The complexity and wickedness provided by humans and communication**

### **2.4.1 The human as a communicator**

Given the previously discussed knowledge, humans appear to be the “wild cards” in communication or, according to Creasy:

(...) human activities are generally characterised by both unexpected and unintended consequences (...) humans are not automatons and their behaviour is often at odds with what may have been anticipated or planned. (2018, p. 13)

Broadly, technology, devices, and the environment influence the communication process, but it is up to the humans to give, receive, and interpret the communication and to attach meaning to it – which is usually based on prior experiences and created behaviors. This conclusion is supported by Griffin’s definition of human communication: “Human communication is an attempt by people to create meaning in and for their experiences, circumstances, or larger environments, both for themselves and for others.” (2016, p. 1)

Considering the human actors as the main players in a project, the human is considered the communicator as well as the receiving entity depending on the form of communication (interpersonal, intrapersonal, group, public, mass or machine-assisted). According to Gamble and Gamble (2002), not communicating is not an option for humans as it is linked to their behavior and the effect it has on those who receive the behavior and interpret it. Little non-verbal communication (re)actions can cause different interpretations and follow-up actions, as they are bound to the culture of both the sender and the recipients (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002, p. 40). Hence, communication is ruled by reaction and instigation and vice versa. A human’s communication is further defined through decision-making (in the form of conscious verbal and non-verbal communication) as an individual or group, which adds to the complexity of decision-making and information (Ruhe, 2010).

Regarding humans as communicators, another aspect that adds to the complexity of communication is the diversity of communicators participating in the setting of a project. This diversity can begin with gender diversity but is likely to move into professional and cultural diversity and diversity in numbers. Hence, the human in a project is exposed to and engaged in intercultural communication, which (depending on the people in the project) may incorporate interracial, interethnic, international, and intracultural communication (Gamble & Gamble, 2002). The complexity of the communication for the human (especially in a business setting) will arise when a meeting with a human from, for example, another hierarchy level and department, takes place and social identities become relevant. In this scenario, both individuals will think, feel, and act as members and according to the norms of the group they belong to, no matter the topic of the meeting (intergroup communication takes



place) (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). Hence, culture is not only communication (or vice versa) (Hall, 1959/1973), but diversity is culture and communication and vice versa.

Furthermore, it appears that the human as the communicator is set up for failure as the possibility of knowing all possible compositions of diversity and acting upon them accordingly is impossible. This is supported by the concept of interpersonal communication and Hartley's (1999) suggestion that to be understood by another, one needs to know their own social identity (in terms of role and status), one needs to be able to interpret the behavior and characteristics of another correctly (social perception), both have to be aware of their choice of expression (coding), both have to be aware of the dual nature of the messages (including information and relationship aspects), and both have to be aware of the influence of the social context.

#### **2.4.2 Wicked problems in general**

The concept of wicked problems arose in the 1970s as so-called *planners* and other professionals could not solve the ongoing societal, governmental, and policy problems as promised. The original concept of planning and problem-solving needed to adapt the provided problems and uncovered complexities to a concept that highlighted problem definition, location of problems, and what-is and what-ought-to-be before moving onto problem-solving. Problem-solving in the case of a wicked problem does not mean to provide a solution, but to provide an enhancement of the current situation and a *taming* of the problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Today, wicked problems are considered problems of a social and cultural nature that are impossible to solve; rather, they can only be tamed due to their complexity, their interconnectivity, their formulation, and ultimately due to the person who formulates the problem (Protzen & Harris, 2010, p. 149; Wong, n.d.). These unsolvable problems are formulated by one or multiple people and their perspectives on a situation, which are based on social, cultural, disciplinary, and political factors and the influence of these factors on the individual (Wickman, 2014). Further, wicked problems are defined by entwined intangible ecological and social processes (including the interactions within these processes) and therefore are only solved (albeit rarely) through traditional command and control approaches (Davies, Fisher, Dickson, Thrush, & Le Heron, 2015). Hence, the complexity of wicked problems not only affects the establishment of an explicit definition for the problem or the uncovering and grasping of involved elements and connections (establishing of ecosystem), but also the decision-making process, which conclusively characterizes the complexity of wicked problems as cognitive complexity (Ruhe, 2010). Additional wickedness and "impossibility" are added to projects that deal with social challenges within developing countries as a) a restriction to resources is given, as well as b) a previously defined goal or aim of the project neglects the

diverse needs of the stakeholders, as well as the different relationship dynamics within the project-relevant sectors (e.g., commercial, public, industrial) (Polaine, Løvlie, & Reason, 2013). *Wicked problems* are different from *tame problems* as they cannot be (easily) manipulated, controlled, and simulated in a laboratory setting (Rittel, 2010). Further, these kinds of problems are (Weber & Khademian, 2008, pp. 336-337):

- **Unstructured:** Provides great difficulty when trying to identify models, causes and effects. The lack of structure adds complexity while also triggering uncertainty and raising the chances of conflict as consensus (for either problem or solution) is not likely to be reached.
- **Cross-cutting:** This means they overlap and are interconnected with one or more subsets of problems from various fields, hierarchies, structures, and disciplines and therefore add further complexity, uncertainty, and the likelihood of conflict. Wicked problems further involve and affect stakeholders from various social, cultural, and professional backgrounds. Depending on the problem, the stakeholders can stay the same for a longer period of time or they can vanish/move on fast.
- **Relentless:** They cannot be solved completely, yet every change will affect other areas of this problem or entity due to the high interconnectivity of problems, fields, and stakeholders.

#### **2.4.3 Wickedness in communication and service design**

When applying Rittel and Webber's (1973) set of 10 characteristics for wicked problems and their identification, as well as the three indicators for wicked problems mentioned by Weber and Khademian (2008) to communication and the communication of service design to project stakeholders, both situations could be identified as wicked problems. The differences between communication as a wicked problem and communication of service design as a wicked problem on this theoretical level lies with the fact that service design seemingly only addresses one topic in its communication. Since the communication of service design aims to create understanding, which involves educating project stakeholders on aspects such as the discipline, approach, methods, tools, process, possibilities, and limits, the conclusion aligns with Creasy's (2018) statement that the practice of education is a wicked problem due to the numerous factors involved. However, the communication is not the only wicked part when it comes to making service design understandable and approachable for project stakeholders. According to Buchanan (1992), design thinking, one of the core aspects of service design, was established to solve problems of a determinate nature (problems with definite conditions for which a definite solution can be provided). Yet, designers rarely face problems of a determinate nature as they are considered the most trivial design problems. Instead, designers usually face problems of an indeterminate nature (problems with no definite conditions or

limits), for which no definite solution can be created. This means that service design deals with indeterminate problems. Buchanan further elaborates on the reason to why service design and other design disciplines are equipped to deal with wicked problems:

Design problems are “indeterminate” and “wicked” because design has no special subject matter of its own apart from what a designer conceives it to be. The subject matter of design is potentially *universal* in scope [...]. But in the process of application, the designer must discover or invent a *particular* subject out of the problems and issues of specific circumstances. This sharply contrasts with the disciplines of science, which are concerned with understanding the principles, laws, rules, or structures that are necessarily embodied in existing subject matters. (Buchanan, 1992, p. 16)

This view on design and wicked problems is relevant as service designers not only deal with the wickedness of communication and wicked problems when practicing service design in projects, but also with the following issues (Camillus, 2008; Bottery, 2016; Groff & Jones, 2003; Buchanan, 1992; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018):

- making project stakeholders aware that they definitely face a wicked problem
- having a different mindset and applying a different process to tame the problem (when compared to people from the disciplines of science)
- raising awareness of these differences and their benefits
- only being able to provide a taming of the problem.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, it appears that companies of a non-design nature are reluctant to face the concept and existence of wicked problems and the increasing complexity of problems. The reluctance to face wickedness can be witnessed in companies continuing with their usual approaches and strategies for problem solving, even when they are no longer providing solutions or enhancements, no matter how many times the companies re-define issues, gather additional data, or break a bigger problem into multiple smaller ones. Clearly, companies tend to indecisiveness after attempting to resolve a wicked problem, when they realize that the wickedness will alter the newly defined problem and further changes will have to be made to the strategy (Camillus, 2008; Kay & Schneider, 1995).

## 2.5 Summary of the research background

Communication within a project is an information exchange between stakeholders, shaped by intentions, culture, expectations, interpretations, and meaning-making to create common understanding and overcome information asymmetry, as well as to define and achieve set goals. The project is the temporary (social) ecosystem

in which the communication takes place and is further shaped, enriched and complicated. Communication is considered important in projects as it is seen as an act of managing the ecosystem, the ecosystem's stakeholders, their expectations, information asymmetry, politics, and goals, and also to establish and enhance relationships to achieve trust, commitment, and cooperation, which together heighten the likelihood of achieving success within and with a project.

When investigating the discipline of service design from a literary point of view, it is clear that communication in a project is either treated as a tool to discuss the definition of service design, describe the perception or behavior of service design in a project, or *to create understanding with* in workshops, for its methods, its practitioners, its workshop participants and for the retrieved data. Furthermore, the communication of service design is of importance at the beginning of a project as project stakeholders revealed unawareness of and inexperience with service design, the applied design process, the required mindset, and the possible benefits and outcomes provided by service design, as well as with communicating and working with service designers in a project. Hence, future communication of service design needs to be of an educative nature.

The literature review further highlighted the wickedness that is entangled in communication itself, the communication of service design, and the practice of service design, which consequently suggests that the solution provided in Section 4.4, Improving the current communication process for service design, will not resolve the uncovered problems, it will merely tame them.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

The focus of this research is to explore the currently applied communication of service design by service designers to project stakeholders in the context of the initial phase (e.g., pitch) and the setup phase of a project (e.g., kick-off) and enabling service designers in their communication by creating a fit-for-purpose process. The research also aims to uncover project stakeholders' perceptions of the discipline, strengthen the discipline's involvement in projects, and establish commitment within project stakeholders for the practice and the practitioner. Hence, in the said communication, two main stakeholder groups are of relevance and are therefore involved in this research: a) service designers and b) project stakeholders (part of the communication audience). This research topic is mainly investigated through the lens of service designers. To enrich the data set, add lenses, and achieve holism, multiple groups belonging to the communication audience (MD as a project stakeholder in a decision-making position and students) were involved in this research through testing and lecturing. Given the heavy emphasis on service design, the communication of service designers, and perception of service design, the key foci of this research are:

- service design and service designers
- strategic communication
- communication processes.

#### 3.1 Applied research paradigms

The graphic below provides an overview of the selected and applied research paradigm, strategies, and methods in a format partly proposed by Saunders and Tosey (2012/2013). Chapter 3, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH, is designed to provide further insights into the selection, its application, processing, and usage of the retrieved data.

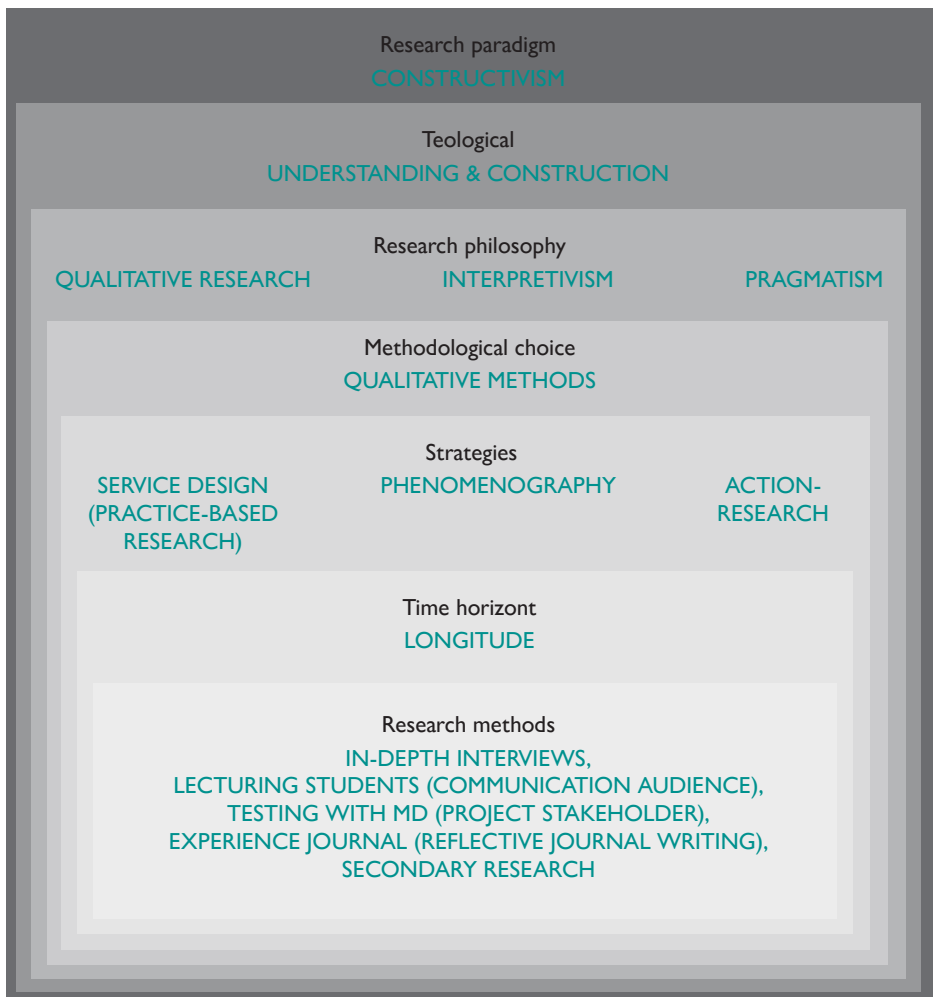


Figure 2. *Research onion*

### Detailed research intent

The research intent entailed retrieving experiences and perceptions about service design, service designers, and communication from relevant people involved in the communication of service design in projects (including the researcher, who is a service designer), to ultimately re-create and update the communication process (a testable solution/improvement in the form of a process) for the use of service designers. Hence, the research paradigm is constructivism, with the purpose of:

(...) understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113)

Further, the creation of a process as a strategy departs from social constructivism and therefore supports the selected research paradigm (Aggerholm & Asmuß, 2016). When choosing the constructivist paradigm, the ontology is of a relativism nature (realities are considered social and experiential constructions, which results in multiple possibilities), while the epistemology is of a subjective and transactional nature (resulting from relativist ontology), where no unbiased observations can be made given the context and dependencies (the researcher and the research object are interlinked and insights are created as the research proceeds), and the methodology is of a hermeneutical (interpretation) and dialectical (pursuit of truth) nature (the interplay between hermeneutic techniques and dialectical interchange shape the previous and current construct) (Bhaskar, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Xue, 2017). Consequently, the axiology in constructivism is inclusive and formative (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Given the intent, the retrieval methods, and the collected data, the research also qualifies as an abductive research – the creation of new understandings and theories within the research context is desired, by abandoning previous notions (own made experiences) and focusing on new observations and embracing the unexpected findings – as well as pragmatism (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Further, research is conducted among two stakeholder groups to understand their behavior, experiences, expectations, and meaning-making about service design. Therefore, pragmatism, interpretivism, and qualitative research define the research philosophy (Saunders & Tosey, 2012/2013) as first, information from the literature and experiences from service designers and the communication audience/project stakeholders were retrieved (e.g., in-depth interviews, teaching) to establish a foundation, so secondly, the author can become a research subject who uncovers, adapts, and evolves the communication process (research object) in the position of a service designer (aligns with Guba and Lincoln's view that the researcher is "cast in the role of participant and facilitator in the process" (1994, p. 113)). Therefore, the research strategy involves service design (considered part of practice-based research), phenomenography and action research, as for this topic knowing has become real-life practice in which the lines between practice and theory have been blurred – "living the theory in action" (McNiff, 2013, p. 51). Due to the involvement of interpretivism and the aim of reconstructing the current communication process of service design, the application of phenomenography is vital, as experiences and perceptions of service designers (and the researcher) and the communication audience are retrieved and linked to uncover the conceptions, meanings, awareness of service design, and the ways of experiencing the communication of the discipline – the collected data must be interpreted in relation to other material such as interviews for similarities and differences to create an overlap that can be concluded as outcome space (Åkerlind, 2005). The involvement of action research and the aim of reconstructing and updating the current communication process of service design

applied by service designers results in the time horizon being longitudinal (Saunders & Tosey, 2012/2013) and involves a variety of qualitative research methods that, depending on the number of participants, can at times be analyzed in a quantitative way to established rankings of categories.

### **3.2 Timeline and process of research**

The studies for this doctoral degree and the research for this dissertation officially began in January 2018 and continued until the end of 2021. The following subchapter provides an overview of the research schedule, the methods, the milestones, and the involvement and merging of the different research strategies. This thesis is split into four milestones to ensure that the research paradigm is addressed, all phases of the research strategy service design (exploration, creation, reflection, and implementation) (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011) are conducted and the overall aim of this research is achieved, together with the dissertation as a final deliverable (including the defense):

- M1. Initial literature research: to narrow the scope of the research and explore the topic of communicating service design (collect material for the research background) in preparation for a qualitative in-depth exploration.
- M2. In-depth interviews with service designers and lecturing “UART1105” Spring 2019: to explore the communication and entanglements of the research topic through the experiences of relevant and contributing stakeholders (including the researcher as a service designer).
- M3. Testing with a managing director: to fulfill the aspect of reflection (in the form of testing) from multiple perspectives (with a relevant project stakeholder and decision-maker) and from a qualitative point of view.
- M4. Final dissertation version and defense: to share the research insights and outcomes and receive approval from the scientific community.



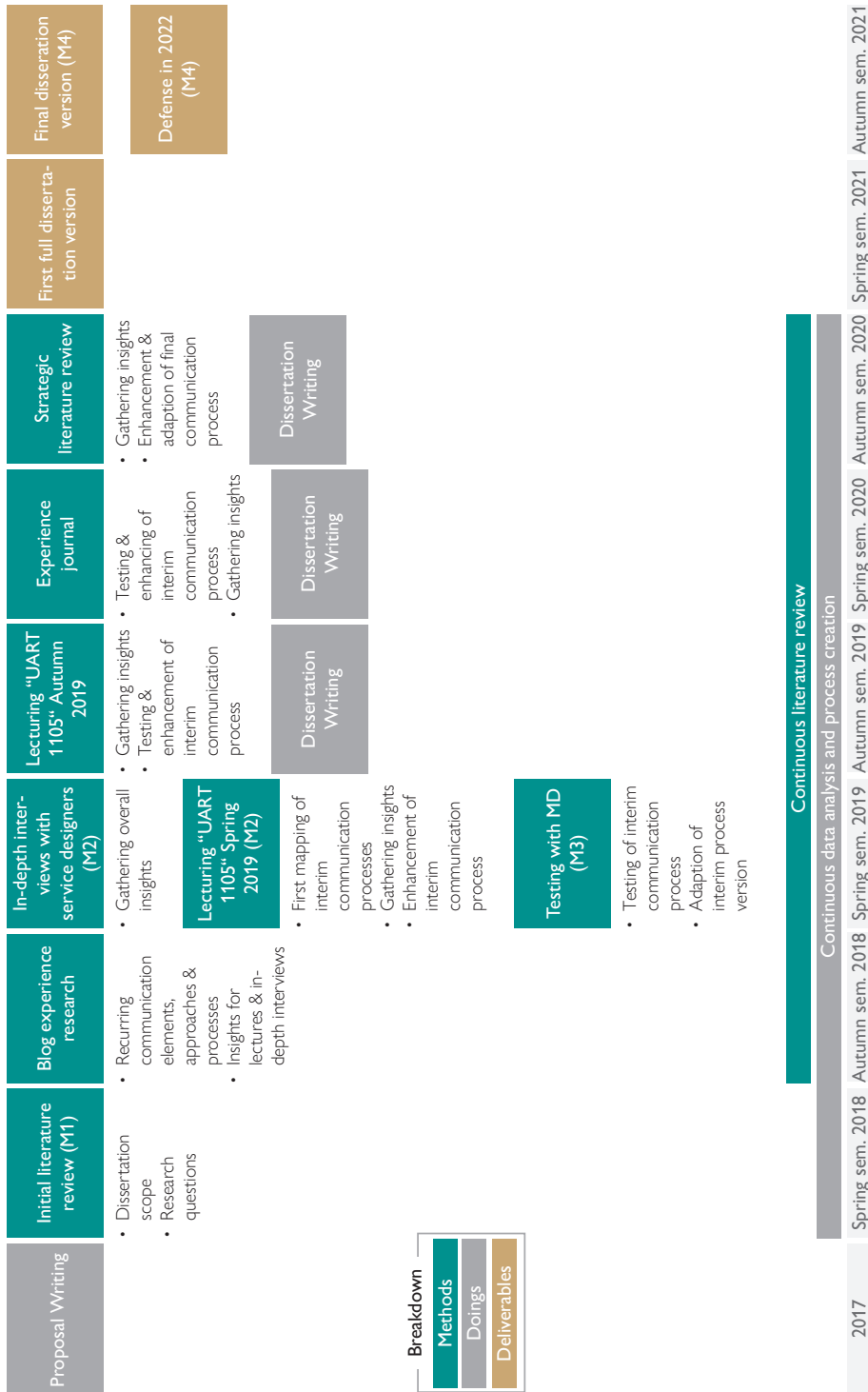


Figure 3. Research schedule

## **Involvement and merging of research strategies**

As previously elaborated, this thesis has a constructivist paradigm that relies on three different, yet overlapping, research strategies. Since the communication process needs to be uncovered from multiple points of views, as well as reconstructed and enhanced through the lens of a service designer, experiences of service designers and the communication audience were used as the main research sources. These resources include the experiences and perceptions of the researcher as a practitioner of service design. Within this research, service design is used as the “deliverer” of the research plan, “suggester” of methods, and the “ensurer” of iteration, as the research intents should be expressed as processes or journeys. Service design is a practice-based approach of a pragmatic and interdisciplinary nature, which makes it “blurry” and hard to distinguish from overlapping research strategies or disciplines when investigated in detail (Dalsgaard, 2014; DeVlyder, 2016/2019; Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patrício, & Voss, 2015; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018). Although a differentiation of research strategies takes place in theory, this differentiation becomes blurry in practice. While the service design literature suggests four phases should be carried out in iterating cycles, the figure below applies the service design processes to the overall research project process in a linear manner (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011). Within each phase and method, the phases explore, create, reflect, and implement have been applied, together with the cycle proposed by human-centered design, as it is also part of service design (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018). Action research is applied sporadically when the researcher functions as a service designer and records her own doings, learnings, and thoughts before, during, and after a communication of service design (e.g., when lecturing or communicating service design in the industry). The process with the steps plan, act, observe, and reflect was applied for action research (Townsend, 2013). Phenomenography, in this research, is the way in which data is retrieved (verbatim) and interpreted, as well as analyzed, and is applied according to the three criteria proposed by Marton and Booth (1997) to assure the quality of the data clustering for outcome space:

- the established individual categories need to stand in relation to the investigated phenomenon, while at the same time show differences in experiencing the phenomenon
- established categories need to have a logical relationship with one another (leading to a hierarchy of categories)
- as few categories as possible should be established and only those that capture the critical variations within the data should be highlighted (parsimonious outcomes).

In terms of the research schedule and research project process, a division of methods and action in three phases was devised to achieve the reconstruction and strategic enhancement of the communication of service design:

- Phase 1: creating a foundation (exploring the topic, identifying the main pain points and opportunities, planning of research).
- Phase 2: forming processes and understanding and testing them (planning methods, in-depth insight gathering, analyzing data, establishing interim communication processes, estimation of outcome).
- Phase 3: concluding and aligning data and creations (analyzing data, *final* communication process updates and alignments, finishing monograph).

When returning to the applied research strategies, each one has its own intent within this research and its own approach to retrieving, interpreting, and analyzing the gathered data and experiences. The research strategies were applied as follows:

- Service design was applied with the intent to uncover, create, and understand the processes, actors, interrelations, hurdles and its ecosystem and streamline them, specifically through mapping the communication and experiences.
- Phenomenology was applied with the intent to better understand the phenomenon at its core and analyze the data gathered through interviews and secondary literature for the categories of impact, relationships, and differences, specifically through content analysis, interpretation and clustering.
- Action research was applied with the intent to plan communication events, conduct them, capture them, and later, reflect on them to improve the communication, before processing the captured data through phenomenology and service design and integrating this data in the data sets of the other research strategies.

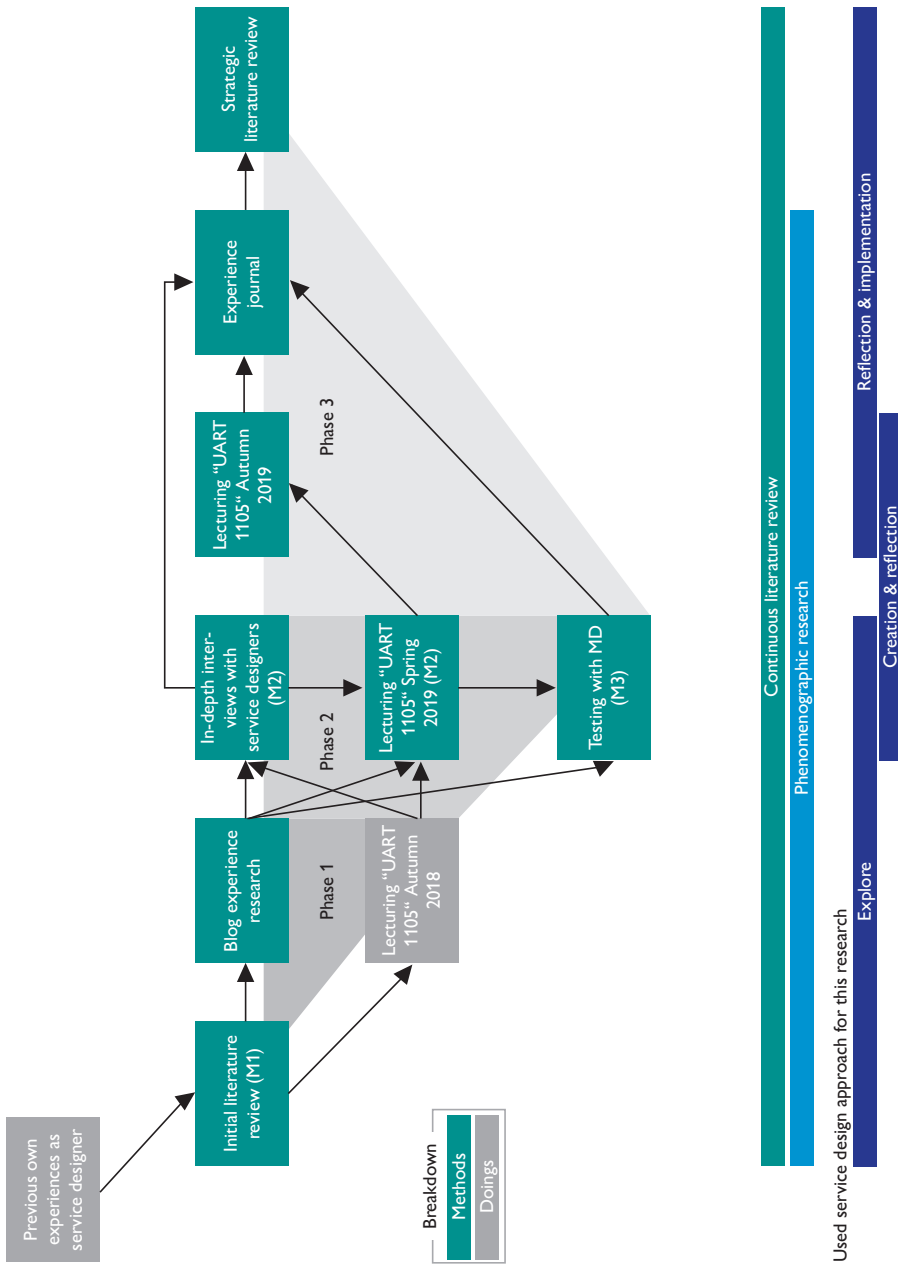


Figure 4. Research project process and strategies

### 3.3 Methodology and research methods

The aims of this dissertation are to uncover and reconstruct the currently applied communication process by service designers when communicating the discipline of service design to project stakeholders and to further update the process in a fit-for-purpose manner, which requires a constructivist research paradigm at its core (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Leavy, 2017). Under this paradigm, the interaction patterns of individuals and their interpretive processes (used to assign meanings to situations) are researched and each individual's subjectivity is prioritized in the research process. As every communication attempt is unique and currently no unified or detailed structure is proposed for the communication of service design in theory or practice, the phenomenon is researched in terms of how people experience the communication – phenomenography. Therefore, the applied qualitative methods focus on either retrieving communication experiences from service designers (including the researcher as a service designer) and the communication audience (of which project stakeholders are part) on this topic or on extracting processes from scientific and practical literature, as well as practical material (e.g., blog posts) – secondary research that discusses the research topic (Leavy, 2017). The selected methods supported the retrieval of data from multiple sources and through differing channels and were designed for the retrieval of open-ended forms of data so participants could share their concepts and experiences freely, without having to “press” them into predetermined scales or categories (therefore also allowing the inclusion of experiences noted in the form of articles and blog posts in the research) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the course of the qualitative nature of the research and the methods, patterns and categories were established and organized to form more abstract data packages (inductive), checked against existing information (deductive), and ultimately (given the research foundation and aim of the thesis) used to create new understanding for and within the research context by focusing on the newly uncovered and unexpected findings (abductive) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). The different methods were used to fulfill the research intents mentioned in Section 1.2, Research intent, which involved:

- understanding the current positions service design, service designers, and the discipline's communication have in projects
- uncovering how, what, when, and why service designers communicate their practice in projects
- learning about the perceptions and expectations of project stakeholders (and the communication audience) regarding the communication of service design.

By following these intents for the research and using a qualitative approach, the current situation in which the communication of service design is taking place could be uncovered, as well as the currently applied communication process, the gaps and overlaps in terms of expectations that both service designers and project stakeholders

have about the discipline, its practitioners, and the communication of the discipline, which ultimately allowed an update of the reconstructed communication process in a way that aligns and merges the collected expectations and insights and hence caters to both parties.

As previously explained (see 3.2, Timeline and process of research), this research was organized in three phases (see Figure.5 Research methods process). Each phase had dedicated methods that provided valuable information to understand the current situation regarding communication of service design, reconstruct the currently applied communication process, and retrieve insights to improve the process.

### **Phase 1 – Creating a foundation**

This phase focused on identifying the research topic (including the research gap), forming the main research questions, as well as the research foundation in terms of existing literature and knowledge on the topic.

- A literature review (as secondary research) was applied to uncover the research gap, create the research foundation, and help framing the research and thesis at its core, while pointing out the “non-existence” of a coherent and streamlined communication process applied by service designers.
- The blog experience research was conducted as a qualitative content analysis (under the aspect of hermeneutic circle) to retrieve experiences from service designers about the communication of their discipline to project stakeholders and their approaches for their communication (in terms of strategy, explicit doings, and thoughts to look out for) and relied on blog posts in which these designers discussed their experience (secondary research content). The retrieved content underwent systematic investigation and categorization from thematic to evaluative and analytical, as the retrieved data was further analyzed, compared, and processed (Kuckartz, 2002/2014; Leavy, 2017). This method contributed data specifically for the reconstruction of the currently applied communication process by service designers (RQ3).

### **Phase 2 – Forming and testing process understanding**

In this phase, immersion in the communication process, dynamics and environment of service design took place to better understand its framework and the participating parties.

- The in-depth interviews were designed as semi-structured, open-ended and the major parts applied the enabling technique of storytelling to support the participating service designers in sharing their experiences on communication in a language they were comfortable with and that supported the later interpretation, analysis, coding, and comparing of the data (Josselson, 2013; Leavy, 2017). The participants were asked to share their experiences, opinions, and thoughts about communication in service design projects and

the communication of the discipline itself, as well as the service designers' roles, tasks, and responsibilities within projects (the catalogue of questions is provided in Appendix 1. In-depth interview questions). The interviews were split into four sections:

- o Section one focused on retrieving general information about the service designer's profile, tasks, and experienced perception of service design from project stakeholders
- o Sections two and three focused on retrieving one *successful* and one *less successful* project story with a focus on the communication of service design in the project
- o Section four served as an opportunity for reflection on the interview answers provided.

The data retrieved through this method contributed to RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 and functioned as the main source for understanding the environment of communication, the communication of service design, and the hurdles faced in communication.

- Lecturing “UART1105” in both semesters was viewed as a mixture of a case study (Simons, 2009) and a quasi-experimental design (Leavy, 2017), in which how people belonging to the communication audience learn about service design was uncovered, as well as their conceptions about the discipline and the practitioners before and after the lectures. Furthermore, hurdles in the communication could be perceived and adaptations made to improve the communication to the general audience. Contribution of data: communication hurdles (RQ2), learning approach of service design (RQ2), and evolution of the communication process (RQ4).
- The testing with a project stakeholder in a decision-making position (MD) took place in a workshop presentation (as proposed by the retrieved insights from service designers) and therefore is a mixture of the methods:
  - o a qualitative testing of an interim communication process (understanding) (Leavy, 2017)
  - o an observation (recording of the communication and responses to gain a comprehensive picture, observing incidents, norms, values, expectations and cross-checking otherwise retrieved data) (Simons, 2009)
  - o an in-depth interview with storytelling as an enabling technique (in the sense of the feedback session that took place with the MD after the communication of service design in a workshop style took place) (Leavy, 2017).

After conducting the methods in this phase, further insights about the communication of service design with the aim of education and persuasion had been gathered (including the uncovering of previously unrelated fields like sales), as well as insights into the mindsets, motivations, and profiles of service designers and

project stakeholders in decision-making positions, and a *first foundation* process of the communication was created, along with various interim process versions. Hence, the data retrieved through this method contributed to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4 and also functioned as the main source for creating understanding and updating the process.

### **Phase 3 – Concluding and aligning data and creations**

The final phase focused on aligning the data to create the *final* and updated communication process and conclude the dissertation by gathering further data for validating and updating the previously gathered data and process understanding through another iteration of lecturing the course “UART1105” (same methodology approach as previously mentioned), journaling about the communications about service design in the industry as a service designer (observation, analysis, and interpretation) and through another cycle of secondary research that specifically focuses on strategic communication literature.

- The methodology for lecturing “UART1105” stayed the same as described in the previous phase, but due to the previously retrieved, analyzed and interpreted information, emphasis was placed on retrieving further information on the conceptualization of service design before and after lecturing, and on testing an interim version of the updated communication process.
- Reflective journal writing (experience journal) was applied as another qualitative method to capture the experiences of the researcher (as a service designer) in the industry when communicating service design (testing interim communication processes and further investigating the communication environment). Journals of this kind are used to facilitate reflection, encourage critical thinking, uncover applied beliefs and concepts and support the integration as well as the development of personal theory and practice – hence a learning outcome was achieved with this journal (Bain, Ballantyne, Packer, & Mills, 1999), which was then used to evaluate and update the previously gathered data. This experience journal also has a descriptive observational (Leavy, 2017) part in which the researcher noted comments made by the communication recipients about the communication to create a more holistic picture of the communication situation and reflect upon it. The data retrieved through this method contributed to the evolution of the communication process and the formation of the “how-to” roadmap (RQ4).
- As a final method, secondary research was applied again to enhance the updated and modified communication process through strategic communication literature (quality assurance). The result of this phase was a *final core process* for the communication of service design that was further developed into a “how-to” road map (RQ4) to support the practice-led service designers in their daily work.



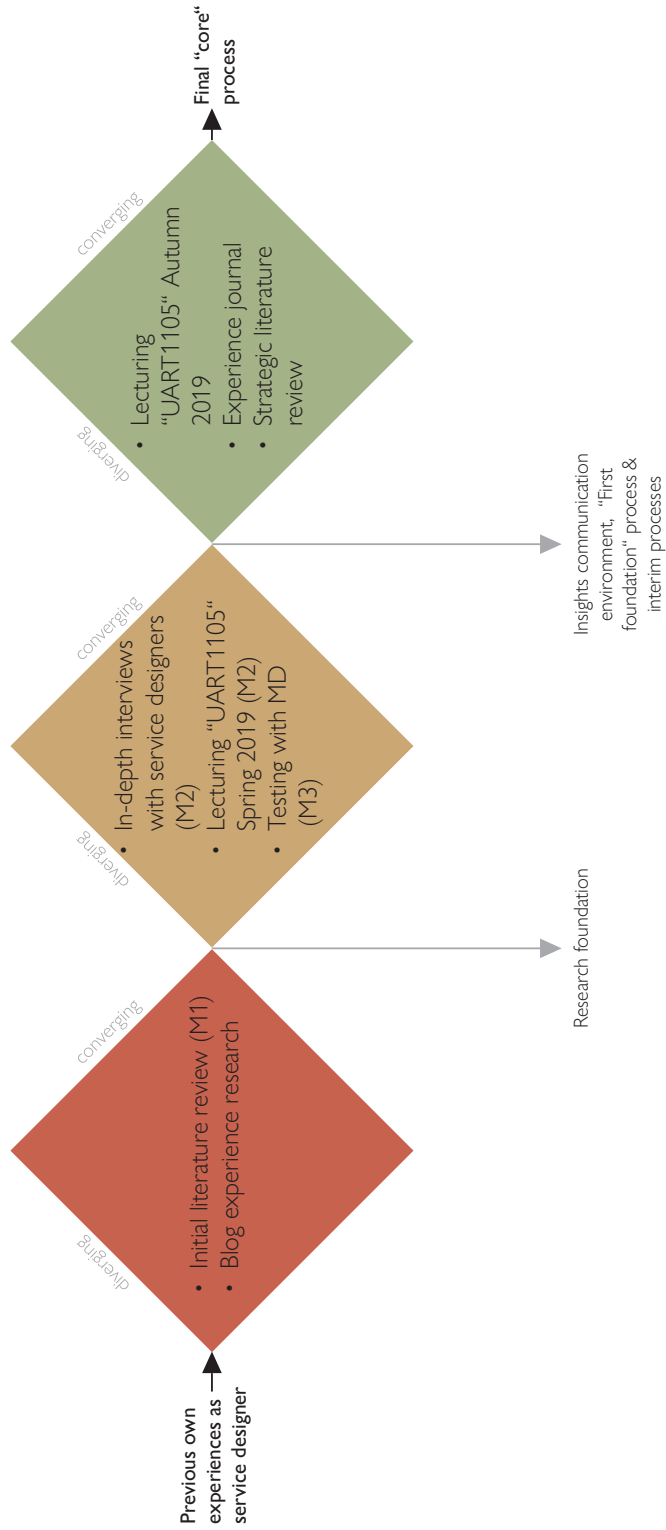


Figure 5. Research methods process

### 3.4 Data collection and research participants

The data collection took place in phases to create outcomes at the end of each phase that could be compared, evaluated, and analyzed with data from the previous phase(s) in an iterative cycle to validate, analyze, and conclude the data (e.g., *first foundation* process). The data was collected from an international and experience diverse audience as the issue of communicating service design is both cultural and international.

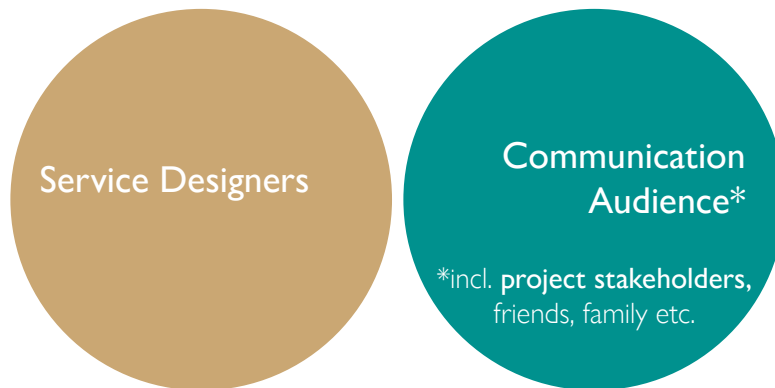
Table 1 Overview of research participants

Type of participants	Number of participants	Details
Interviewees	11	10 service designers 1 managing director
Research participants	44 (registered students throughout both courses)	Spring course: 14 Autumn course: 30 (for a further breakdown of data, read the following sections)
Continuous research participant and subject	1	Researcher, service designer and author of this dissertation

#### Research target group

Due to the reviewed literature, the retrieved empirical data, and the research topic, it must be clarified that this dissertation reviews the perspectives of two main target groups: service designers and project stakeholders. Service designers are considered the initiators of communication or presenters of service design information, while project stakeholders are the recipients of the communication and therefore part of the communication audience that influences the communication (project stakeholders are a subcategory of the communication audience). As clarified in more depth in 4.1.1, Perception of communication from the perspective of service designers, the service designers in this study suggested that the communication process stay the same for all communication audience individuals, whether they are project stakeholders, family, or friends. Hence for this research, service designers (including the researcher as a service designer), a project stakeholder in a decision-making position, and students (who took an introduction class in service design) were recruited for input on the communication of service design to explore the communication applied by service designers and strengthen the discipline's involvement in projects and the commitment from project stakeholders. As project stakeholders and students were deemed to belong to the same target group (communication audience), the feedback of both parties is relevant for this research. However, the students were not deemed equal to project stakeholders in

decision-making positions. Instead, the students' feedback (given the feedback of service designers) was viewed as a more general nature on communicating service design, while the feedback from the MD was viewed as in-depth in nature and more applicable to the research context. Hence, the input of the students was used mainly to explore the general conception (or misconception) the audience has of service design, the major conceptual details (jargon) that need to be explained, and the learning approach the audience undergoes.



*Figure 6. Main research target groups*

### **Creating a holistic view**

The purpose of this research and its outcomes are of a practical and an educational nature and are intended to provide value beyond the academic audience – spreading and creating further business opportunities for service designers while also staying true to the empathic and honest nature of service design. To uncover the communication process used by service designers to create understanding and desire for the discipline with project stakeholders, the practice and communication of service design had to be retrieved from multiple points of view. As a result, two investigation streams formed:

- How do service designers educate and convince the project stakeholders of their discipline?
- How does the communication audience, specifically project stakeholders, learn about service design?

Together these two streams formed a holistic perspective that displayed the overlaps and gaps between what is currently provided by service designers and what is needed and expected by project stakeholders and therefore enabled the creation of an updated and fit-for-purpose communication process.

## **Phase 1 – Creating a foundation**

The data collection process in this phase was based on secondary research to create a knowledge foundation to phrase questions for the methods in Phase 2 and also to compare/evaluate the Phase 2 data. The initial literature review (secondary research) started with scanning scientific material and relevant projects on the main topics of communication, communication in projects, and communication of service design to support the researcher in setting the scope of the dissertation and to phrase the main research questions. Further, the initial literature review of scientific material led to the conclusion that the communication of service design has not been discussed or elaborated regarding projects in their setup or initial phase (beyond hurdles and necessity). Therefore, a scan of practical literature was undertaken to gather insights about the communication of service design from another perspective. As the practical literature only provided basic and scarce information on the research topic, blog posts and similar article styles were scanned for communication experiences of service designers (and designers from related fields such as UX design) about their own discipline to project stakeholders. During the retrieval period of the blog experiences (Autumn 2018), not many postings about service design existed; hence, the scope was extended to communication experiences made in related design disciplines. These posted experiences needed to:

- tell a story of how the blog author experienced the communication of their discipline, their encounters and an outlook of how to better manage the communication or a story of how they overcame issues
- discuss/list the crucial key aspects used in communication to convince, persuade, sell, and create understanding for their discipline according to their experience (with an explanation for the mentioned aspects).

Sixteen blog posts that met these criteria were filtered and analyzed. The analysis revealed that no coherent process was currently named by these designers for the communication of their discipline. Instead, they relied heavily on naming explicit actions, thoughts to look out for or example stories to resolve a pain/meet a communication need. The list of all used blog posts is presented in Appendix 3. (Table 16 References used for blog experience research).

## **Phase 2 – Forming and testing process understanding**

In this phase, data was collected to immerse further into the research situation and receive primary data from service designers and the communication audience affected by the communication of service design. The aim of this phase was to create new data, validate or disprove previously collected data (Phase 1), extend the current knowledge base and test and adapt the *first* communication process through iterations. In the first step of this phase, in-depth interviews (M2) with ten service designers from Canada, Chile, China, and Finland were conducted to explore the communication environment and situation from a practical view (see also Table 9.

Breakdown of interviewees). The following selection criteria had to be fulfilled by the service designers to be accepted as research participants:

- hold an academic education in service design and have worked in research and industrial projects under the job title service designer
- are currently undergoing an education in service design and have worked in research and industrial projects that applied the concept of service design, yet they themselves have worked under a job title from a related design field
- have worked in research and industrial projects under the job title service designer.

The participants' years of experience in service design rank between 0 years (just started) and 30 years. A ranking system was introduced to group the interviewees according to their experience in service design:

*Table 2 Experience levels of participating service designers*

Years of experience as a service designer	Title based on experience in service design, according to years
>2 years	Junior
3>6 years	Intermediate
7< years	Senior

The interviews took place either in person or remotely and lasted between 90 and 120 minutes depending on the interviewee. The in-depth interviews were conducted between January and April 2019 and were transcribed verbatim.

In the second step, a mixture of case study and quasi-experimental design took place. This supported the investigation of the communication audience as students, their learning path of service design (how service design is learned), as well as their understanding and concept of the discipline and its practitioners before and after the lectures. The lectures were used to retrieve information from the communication audience about their knowledge on and expectations of service design to better understand what the audience desires from the communication and how they learn about service design (the learning approach was a resulting consequence). Further, the lectures were used to test the reconstructed communication process (as well as develop interim versions), to further uncover and identify applied actions, thoughts, and content, to ultimately update the communication process from a more general point of view – full iteration circles that apply to service design, human-centered design, and action research took place. Therefore, the researcher in this case was also a participant in the research as a service designer (for more information about the researcher see 1.4, Researcher's personal interest and 5.2, Evaluation and ethical questions). The students participating in the UART1105 course in the 2019 Spring (M2) and

Autumn semesters at the University of Lapland were participating in this research. The students' information was retrieved from their handwritten introduction and final feedback posters. Due to dropouts, course overlaps, sicknesses, and overtime-duration of lectures, all 44 registered students were not present at all lectures (see Table 3 Student Overview "UART1105, in which only 35 students participated). An overview of the students participating in the first lecture of both courses is provided below.

Table 3 Student Overview "UART1105"

Student overview from the first lectures (Spring and Autumn 2019)	
Countries of origin	Germany Kazakhstan Poland Australia Hungary Iceland Netherlands Portugal Norway China/Hong Kong Spain Russia France Czech Republic Japan Finland
Academic levels (current degrees studied)	Bachelor (17x) Master (16x) Doctoral degree (2x)
Academic fields <sup>1</sup>	Media Design Industrial Design/Product Design Art/Cartoon/Animation Design Communication/Graphic Design Media & Fine Art Sculptor of fine Arts Art Education Graphic Design Arctic Art & Design <sup>2</sup> Arts & Crafts Art Education Arctic, Art & Design Mediavisual Mediaculture Industrial Design Engineering Engineering and Product Design Communication Design General Design Media and Entertainment Media Art and Visual Education Industrial Design Engineering and Product Development

<sup>1</sup> One student did not mention their field of studies, only their latest finished academic degree (Master's degree), as this person was working at the University of Lapland and taking the course for private educational reasons.

<sup>2</sup> For the students from the masters course Arctic, Art & Design, the course was mandatory to graduate from this program.

In the final step of Phase 2, qualitative testing of an interim communication process took place in a workshop style presentation as proposed by the retrieved insights from service designers (testing, observation and in-depth interview) with a project stakeholder in a decision-making position (M3). This testing was carried out not only to validate the process or uncover enhancements but also to validate, compare, and be able to interpret the previously retrieved data (insights from secondary research, research participants, and the lecturing situation) in a holistic manner. The selection criteria for the tester were:

- Must hold a decision-making position within a company that provides services.
- Has no working/collaboration experience with or in-depth knowledge about service design (is ideally only aware of the name of the discipline).
- Is open to discussing project opportunities regarding service design.
- Is willing to provide feedback on the workshop style presentation for the enhancement of the communication of service design.

The selected tester was a managing director (MD) of an Australian company with versatile branches in the construction and delivery business. The MD (or the company) has had no touchpoints with service design but was willing to listen to the concept and approach of the discipline, explore the potential of the discipline for their business, and provide feedback on the communication process and style. The testing with the MD took place in person in June 2019 and lasted for about two hours.

Ultimately, this phase provided further insights into the communication of service design by exploring the environment from a more holistic viewpoint, pointing out the different expectations and mindsets between the service designers and project stakeholders/communication audience and the requirements the different target groups have for communicating the discipline.

### **Phase 3 – Concluding and aligning data and creations**

The final phase was used to enable and validate understandings, conclusions and alignments and to delve deeper into specific topics that were either deemed relevant but lacked data or needed further investigation due to their significant impact on the communication environment (aspect of holism), to support the development of the updated fit-for-purpose communication process (*final core process*). Therefore, the previously described audience of “UART1105” from the Autumn semester participated in this phase (emphasis was placed on retrieving further information on the conceptualization of service design before and after lecturing and on testing an interim version of the communication process). Afterwards, reflective journal writing (experience journal) was applied. Here, the researcher as a service designer noted communication encounters with people belonging to the defined communication audience during the Spring semester of 2020 on the topic of communicating

service design to project stakeholders in the setup or commencement of a project or when introducing the discipline to an organization (communication audience: visual designers, industrial designer, usability consultants, marketing personnel, and researchers). Consequential adaptations followed from the experiences, which shaped several interim communication processes and ultimately supported the development of the updated and fit-for-purpose communication process. Therefore, the gathered insights of the experience journal served as quality assurance for the interim and *final* communication process. In the final step, strategic literature was scanned for explicit actions, content, and communication structures to validate and enhance the final interim version of the communication process as another measurement of quality assurance.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The procedure for data analysis (e.g., coding, categorizing) is where the gathered data was organized to make sense and produce findings and an overall understanding of the researched situation in the first instance, and in the second instance an understanding of the phenomenon of communicating service design to project stakeholders (Simons, 2009). As Figure.5, Research methods process illustrates, the different phases in the research methods process followed the system of the double diamond by first increasing the amount of data (diverging) and then reducing (converging) the amount of data (Howard, Culley, & Dekoninck, 2008). Increasing was done through the previously described research methods and was followed by the process of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification in the diverging part of a phase (Simons, 2009). The cycle of data preparation/organization, initial immersion, coding, categorizing/theming, and interpretation was applied for the data analysis of this research (Leavy, 2017).

#### **Data organization and initial immersion**

The types of data collected through the applied research methods, differ in their content and original form, yet their organization and the initial immersion into the data shared a similar approach: 1) foreseeing the needed data, 2) collecting the data, 3) transcribing, scanning, journaling retrieved information in a suitable format, 4) sorting through the data for big sectioning/theming, 5) immersing in the data for the bigger picture, 6) developing initial ideas/understanding and reducing data through prioritizing (Saldaña, 2014; Leavy, 2017). In the first instance, the secondary research material, such as the blog posts, were screenshotted then transcribed and organized into a spreadsheet. Afterwards an in-depth analysis of the content, as well as an analysis of applied communication processes was undertaken. Through these analyses, understanding of the content and the applied communication processes



were developed, overlaps within the different sources were uncovered, categories were established, and a prioritization of categories and processes took place. These actions resulted in the creation of a *first foundation* of the communication process. In-depth interviews and the workshop style presentation with the MD as a project stakeholder in a decision-making position were voice recorded and (when appropriate) also recorded with pictures. The recordings were transcribed strict verbatim, scanned for themes, immersed in (with the research context in mind), and later reduced before developing further understanding or comparing the newly reduced data to existing data. In the case of the in-depth interviews with the service designers, more data were available for analysis and, given the number of participants, also allowed a comparison. Hence, the collected experiences were also reviewed for overlaps and discrepancies in general topics, such as the importance of communication or the education and work path of the participants, and also for the successful and less successful projects they shared, to create categories, identify trends, and allow potential conclusions. The lectures were recorded with pictures of noted answers by students and with the presentations created by the researcher as a lecturer. All data gathered in and for the lectures were transferred to a (reflective style) journal in which the journey of the lectures was displayed. Each single lecture is documented through a set of slides that focus on the preparation and a set of slides that focus on the presentation (“holding”) of the lecture, which comprises the data gathered from students and the consequences of the findings. The data sets from questions like “What do you believe service design to be?” were also transferred to a spreadsheet for further sectioning, immersing, prioritizing of the data, and developing of understanding (see Table 10 Clustering of statements in categories and Table 11 Statements “What do you believe service design to be?”).

## 11.10.– 12.12.2019

PREPARATION

<p>Journal/Thoughts: The following lectures were changed in task length or task elimination or homework as the number of students had almost doubled from the previous taught courses, yet not the available time.</p> <p>Lecture 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The task of exploring service design terminology in groups, before elaborating how they are used in service design, was skipped and only used definition in service design were shown for the terminologies.</li> <li>• The task of “why are you studying</li> </ul>	<p>your discipline” was skipped due to the number of students and the missing time to discuss their task outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The task of “interviewing” was concretized (more framework) and changed from improving the cafeteria to the arrival of exchange students at ULapland. Also, the task of observing was added and concretized.</li> </ul> <p>Lecture 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This lecture was changed in concretizing the framework of the student projects and proposing partly new and different projects for this semester students.</li> </ul>
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Figure 7. Excerpt 01: Lecturing “UART1105” Autumn 2019 Journal

# Day 4 – 12.12.2019

HOLDING – 9<sup>th</sup> Lecture

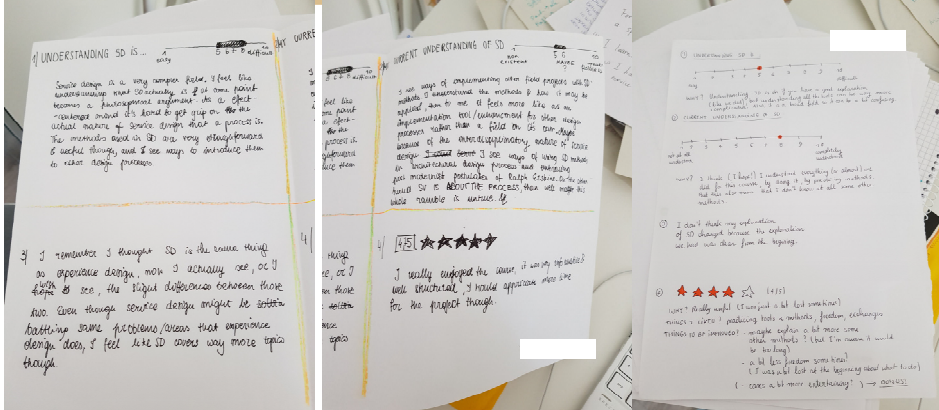


Figure 8. Excerpt 02: Lecturing “UART1105” Autumn 2019 Journal

# Day 4 – 12.12.2019

HOLDING – 9<sup>th</sup> Lecture

Rate “Understanding Service Design is ...” from very difficult to very easy and elaborate on your choice - in-depth Summary (rated very easy as 1 and very difficult as 10):

- 6: quite difficult to understand in the beginning without prior knowledge, but gets easier as the course unfolds.
- 8: “the final task might be a bit too much.”
- 5-8: “Service design is a very complex field. I feel like understanding that SD actually is at some point becomes a philosophical argument. As a effect-centered mind it's hard to get grip on the actual nature of service design that a process is. The methods used in SD are very straightforward & useful though, and I see way to introduce them to other design processes.”
- 5: “Understanding SD is ok if you have a good explanation (like we did), but understanding all the tools can be way more complicated. Also, it is a broad field so it can be a bit confusing.”
- 6: “It's quite abstrakt sometimes, because it's a process. An example especially at the beginning would be maybe good for the understanding.”
- 5: “I think SD is easy to understand, but when I went deeper (read books like “This is service design thinking”...) things get complicated.”
- 6-7 (estimation: no number written, but marking on the graph): “Once I understand “no assumption in the

process” it is getting easier for me to do that. But at first it took time for me.”

- 6 (estimation: no number written, but marking on the graph): “I feel like SD can be easy, at the same time, it can be very difficult.”
- 5: “Is a solid balance because the methods and approaches of SD are sometimes not know but they are also very easy to hold on to.”
- 6
- 5: “outside the persons field “It is a wage concept, and I don't study design at all, so my fault.”
- 7 (estimation: no number written, but marking on the graph): “Completely new field / totally new form of tasks + workshop.”
- 4: “Probably because I never had course with this topic, but I'm working in boy Scouts community so it is sometimes bit similar.”
- 3 (estimation: no number written, but marking on the graph): “You just need to know how research based humans works and them apply it.”
- 5 (estimation: no number written, but marking on the graph): “It is easy to understand when you are familiar with the process, however still difficult (sometimes) to explain people what it is in a few words.”

Figure 9. Excerpt 03: Lecturing “UART1105” Autumn 2019 Journal

The data from the experience journal was gathered, stored, and processed in a similar manner to the data from the lectures (reflective journal), with pictures of handwritten notes and of experiences and responses. In addition, this journal is designed to document the experience and journey of communicating service design and therefore contains reflection sections. The collected data within this journal was analyzed for overlaps of already uncovered hurdles from previous methods, as well as for new hurdles (e.g., organizational culture and commitment), on a regular basis to allow continuous update of the interim communication process. Further, the journal displays the evolution of the applied and created interim communication processes, their content, and the perceived acceptance by the communication audience.

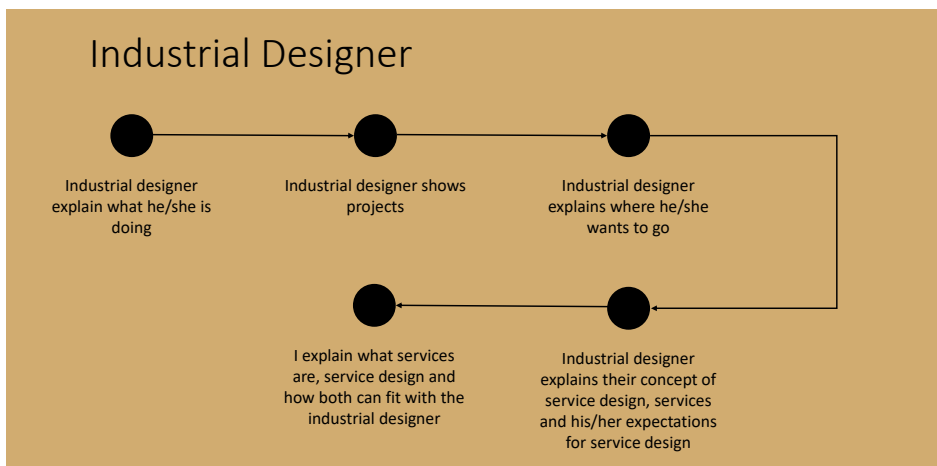


Figure 10. Excerpt 04: Experience Journal – Industrial designer investigation process

## Industrial Designer

### Findings

- Product-oriented thinking
- Driven by “what sees, feels, hears the user”
- Driven by “is this idea feasible?”
- Driven by “what does the product need to look like/be in order to be successful in the market?”
- Driven by assuring the quality of the product
- Driven by assuring the intention of the idea, design and product
- Often working on a single touchpoint (not thinking beyond one touchpoint)
- Provide product design, usability & strategy
- Strategy can be provided by the client (depending on the project)
- Creates design and technical concepts for the product
- Creates stories for the products and for the intended market
- Focus in the beginning on the strength & identity of the client and project/product (creation of strategy)
- Support the product until the end of the project
- Range of projects :
  - Projects that start from scratch
  - Further development of a product (-line)
- Is involved in the exploration, but especially strategy phase of the double diamond process in projects

Figure 11. Excerpt 05: Experience Journal – Industrial designer findings

# Industrial Designer

Conclusion

- Hesitant towards sharing work in projects focus
- Appear hesitant towards the benefit other disciplines can bring to the work of industrial design or products and necessity of involving other disciplines
- Seem to put little focus on the user (as claimed) and little consideration about other stakeholders in their work
- Is not entirely aware what a service is or what service design is and can do
- Does not seem to consider the product as a provider of an activity (sequence)
- Material, function and feasibility are the main focus
- Presenting the project and product well is a main focus
- Appears to like working in his/her own less methodical way

Figure 12. Excerpt 06: Experience Journal – Industrial designer conclusion

## Communication process No. 1

My Definition of SD	Types of Service Designers	Process Comparison	Service Design location in organization's process	Data Type	Eco-system	SD Principles	General Definition of SD
Service? SD (use previously established 1 sentence summary of SD? Outcome? Key Buzzwords? Focus? Tools?	Type A, Type B	Tradition Design Process, Service Design Process	-	Qualitative data, Importance of stories, Importance of observation	Uncovered aspects in ecosystem, Asked questions about ecosystem	-	By Megan Erin Miller

Figure 13. Excerpt 07: Experience Journal – Communication process used for communication event with researchers and usability consultants

### Coding and categorization

Coding was used as a method of discovery for the meaning within the scanned and sectioned data (Saldaña, 2014) and in relation to grouping similar or related codes (categorization), which at times became themes (Leavy, 2017) (e.g., when coding and categorizing the statements of “What do you believe Service Design to be?”). The applied codes supported the data patterning and classification so they could later be reorganized into categories. Given that different data types were gathered for the topic of communicating service design to project stakeholders through different methods and formats, and that the research participants provided responses in

(usually) their non-native tongue (English), descriptive coding was applied as a first step to cluster for occurring categories and similarities, to later on detect patterns such as frequency, relationships, and strategic positioning. In the second round, when the extent of the data allowed it (e.g., data from in-depth interviews), the data was coded after values (attributes of importance), attitudes, and beliefs to explore the relationships and cultural constructs behind the data (Saldaña, 2014). Applying these two types of coding supported the identification and reconstruction of the currently applied communication process, as well as the identification and creation of the different mindsets and profiles between service designers and project stakeholders.

### **Interpretation and Validation**

Due to the holistic nature of this research, confidence for the developed summaries, outcomes, and conclusions was created through triangulation in terms of data and theory (Leavy, 2017). It is important to note that the researcher also functioning as a service designer in the Phase 2 and Phase 3, had impact on the interpretation of the data (for more information see 1.4, Researcher's personal interest and 5.2, Evaluation and ethical questions). In Phase 1, theoretical triangulation was applied to support the interpretation by investigating scientific literature on the topics that form the research background from more than one discipline's perspective. As a result, the environment of communication, its entanglements, complexity, and the lack of exploration of communicating service design in projects in general emerged. Phase 2 focused on the immersion in the communication environment and process and hence relied on triangulation of empirical data gathered through in-depth interviews with service designers, lecturing the Spring semester of "UART1105" and testing an interim process version with an MD. Although these different sets of data already indicated trends, literature was scanned again for newly discovered topics (e.g., sales). Phase 3 provided triangulation in terms of investigating strategic communication literature for enhancement and validation, and in the form of testing interim communication processes and gathering further data on explicit topics, for validation and for further development of the *final core process* (lecturing the Autumn semester of "UART1105" and the researcher's communication experiences as a service designer in the industry). The continuous cycles of literature scanning, empirical data retrieval, understanding creation, testing, comparing/evaluation/analyzing of data sets, and scanning through unconsidered literature or gathering further empirical data on thesis-relevant topics again (and therefore starting a new iteration cycle), display the dedication to ensure thoroughness, credibility, and validity for this dissertation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Leavy, 2017). Further, the following questions were applied continuously to ensure the evaluation and validity of the data:

- "What factors make the research findings resonate for you?" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 318)

- “Are you telling a convincing story?” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 318)
- “Try theorizing from your data interpretations. What are some of the major themes in your data?” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 318)
- “Have you reached your findings with integrity?” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 318)

The ultimate validation of this dissertation and its research will be given by the Faculty Council and the dissertation’s opponent.

In terms of general evaluation, the thesis aims to express issues, findings, and the development of understanding by applying repetitive terminology and relevant style (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The flow of the displayed data is designed to support the readers and evaluators in understanding the current situation of service designers in projects and communication first, before immersing into the communication process and its evolution, the encountered struggles, concluded differences in mindsets, and ultimately different expectations and communication needs that shaped the *final core process*. Conclusions and understandings deriving from the research background and the research data from the applied methods in the different phases continuously provide a new facet to the research topic of communicating service design. In Chapter 6, DISCUSSION, the findings, understandings, and conclusions are positioned in the field and a reflection of the data gathered and presented in Chapters 2, THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH, and 4, RESULTS, is presented to further ensure the validity of findings, understandings and conclusions. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the research.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Current perceptions of the communication of service design in a project

#### Research question 1: What are the current perceptions of communicating service design in a project?

This subchapter focuses on uncovering the current position of communication of service design in projects to answer RQ1. Therefore, empirical findings from in-depth interviews, lecturing, and testing situations, which provide the perceptions of service designers and project stakeholders, are presented and discussed in detail.

#### 4.1.1 Perception of communication from the perspective of service designers

##### Importance of communication in service design projects

In the quest for understanding the communication practiced by service designers in projects, participants were asked to rate the importance of communication in a service design project on a scale from 1–10 (1 being completely irrelevant, 10 being very important). In response, the participants rated the importance of communication on an average of 9.3, with the lowest ratings ranking at 8 and the highest at 10, therefore supporting the perception of communication in the literature – communication is crucial in projects (Figure.14, Rating of the importance of communication in a service design project). When clustering and comparing the participants' professional years of experiences/professional levels to their answers, there was no indication at any professional experience level found that communication was not considered important (Figure.15, Rating of importance of communication in a service design project according to interviewee experience). Hence, service designers were aware of the significance of communication in projects.

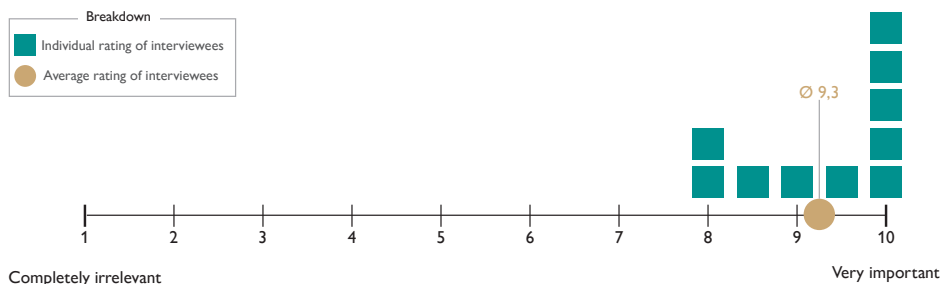


Figure 14. Rating of the importance of communication in a service design project

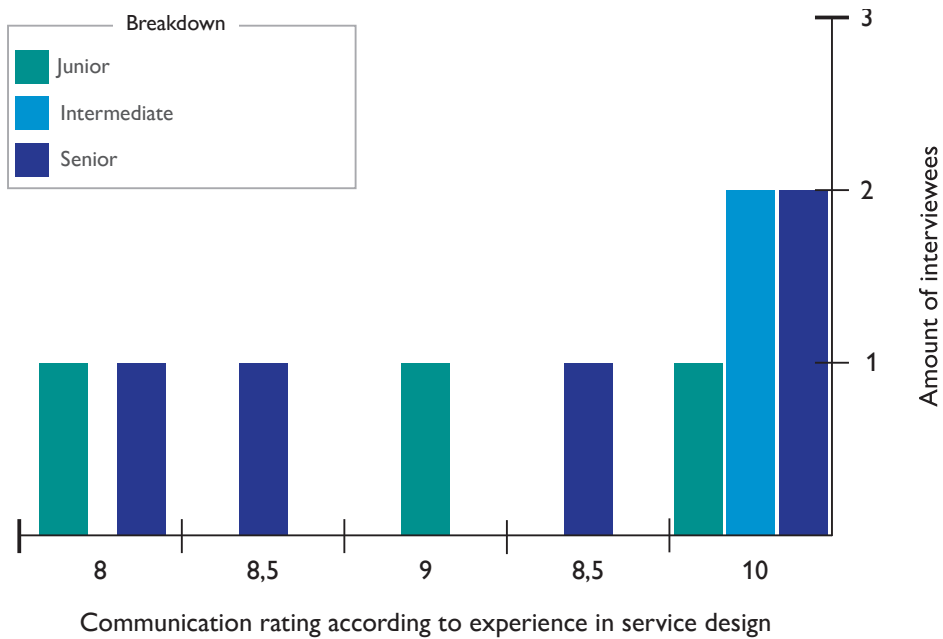


Figure 15. Rating of importance of communication in a service design project according to interviewee experience

### The essentiality of communicating service design early on

The questioned service designers agreed that continuous communication of service design (in terms of explanations) was needed throughout a project. Further, as project stakeholders learned more about the discipline as the project progressed (clarifying misconceptions) and new stakeholders entered the project regularly, they also emphasized the project setup (pitching) and the initial phase of a project (kick-off) as points of time of crucial importance for the communication of service design in a project. During this time, the different stakeholders within a project (e.g., different organization, teams) got the chance to introduce themselves, their identities, their role, and their claimed/demanded positions within the project, as well as their disciplines and the contribution they would make to the project. Ultimately, these phases in a project demonstrate a clear focus on introduction and project, role, and task as well as output shaping.

Um, usually at the very beginning, we will say that, uh, for example I'm the designer of this project and I will work with you along the way. And then, um, I think you can explain the roles, uh, like.. in a detail at the beginning of the project but I think for them to understand what's your role, um, the most common way is, uh, because you are having a project together so you have lots of meetings and phone calls probably or message exchange so in that sense, uh, they will get to know what's your role, uh, better. But, uh uh, kind of brief



at the beginning is always good but later they will understand better through the whole project. – Interviewee #9

### **The initial communication of service design is a denominator for ease and success in projects**

For this research, the participating service designers shared 20 stories about *successful* and *less successful* projects they were part of. These stories shed light on the communication service designers applied, the position they were in, and the circumstances of these projects (e.g., service designers worked alone or in a multidisciplinary team, communicated the discipline and their role to project stakeholders themselves or never at all, entered a running project, or in the setup phase of a project).

According to the service designers, projects were likely to fall into the category of *less successful* when the project stakeholders were not aware of service design beforehand (e.g., had not worked with service design before) and the education/communication still needed to be done during the project setup or the initial phase of the project. In *successful* projects, the answers provided by service designers indicated a tendency for either having worked in follow-up projects or having entered running projects that involved service design, as well as having worked with project stakeholders/a company that had hired another (house-internal or external) service designer to take over the communication and lead. In these cases, the communication had already been carried out when the service designer had entered and most project stakeholders had already experienced the impact of service design in a prior project. Hence, the success rate for involving or carrying out service design to a certain standard or expectation the service designers or project stakeholders had appeared to drop when the project stakeholders were inexperienced with service design and the hurdle of communicating the discipline to and educating the client on the discipline still needed to be tackled (further information on this topic can be found in 4.2.1).

### **Perceived aims, responsibilities and focus of service designers in the communication of their discipline at the beginning of a project**

Because we, I had experience that not every client they, they, how to say they understand why they are having this project so at the beginning it's very important to kind of lead them, uh um, so they can have a clear goal about this project and what kind of thing they will get out of this project, that's also very important. – Interviewee #9

Given the retrieved insights, communication in the form of an exchange, management and alignment of information and expectations, as well as the establishment of trust (building towards commitment) took place during

the beginning of a project, in which service designers perceived themselves as active participants but also as managers of this communication. The answers, elaborations, and concrete wording provided by the service designers framed their communication aim in a project as *create understanding for* – an empathy and open minded driven approach – which aligns with the core concept of service design (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018; Sanders, 2002). This creation of understanding was discovered to be a driving aim and repetitive task within the communication practiced by service designers, which targeted their need for establishing trust between the project stakeholder in the discipline, in the used methods and tools, and the service designer itself to ultimately achieve commitment from project stakeholders (especially in decision-making positions) for service design, service design in regard to the project, and the service designer itself (see Table 4, Summary of service designers' communication aims). The analysis of the retrieved data reveals that service designers take on the following three responsibilities in the communication carried out during the setup and initial phase:

- Educating the project stakeholders on the basics of the discipline: Focus lies with creating understanding for the discipline by displaying the basics of service design.
- Preparing the project stakeholders for working with service design in the project: Focus lies with creating understanding for the discipline and ensuring the aim and outcome of the project by displaying how service design would contribute to and enable the project, as well as call for adaptations of the project planning and process.
- Support the project stakeholders in understanding the roles, tasks, and expectations of others in the project and the purpose of the project: Focus lies with creating understanding and awareness for all roles, tasks, expectations, and contributions of project stakeholders to spread information evenly and ensure the aim of the project.

Together, these three responsibilities form the service designers' approach to creating trust among project stakeholders, as well as trust and credibility for their own discipline and roles. It is important to point out that these communication responsibilities changed depending on the position the service designer held in a project, and also in the company (in-house designer or external consultant). These impacts are further addressed in 4.2, Issues faced by service designers when communicating their discipline.

Table 4 Summary of service designers' communication aims

Summary of service designers' communication aims
<p>Aims regarding service design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create understanding for the application and limits of service design (what is service design used for and what is it not used for?)</li><li>• Broaden the perspective on service design and for the project itself, the business and the stakeholders</li><li>• Create understanding for service design, the tools and methods applied in service design, as well as the role, tasks and responsibilities of a service designer</li><li>• Create understanding for the application of service design in the project and the concept</li><li>• Highlight the added value of service design</li><li>• Create understanding for the service designer's decision making so stakeholders will accept and appreciate the decisions</li><li>• Explain when, where, and why the participants/stakeholders will be part of the project</li></ul>
<p>Aims concerning the project and stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare the stakeholders for trajectory and goals of the project</li><li>• Share, transform and integrate mental concepts, emotions and behaviors in a project</li><li>• Create understanding for the different stakeholders participating in the project</li></ul>
<p>General aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Get all project stakeholders involved in the discussion and the project</li><li>• Get all project stakeholders on the same page (dim information asymmetry)</li><li>• Ensure the aim of the project</li><li>• Manage the expectations of the stakeholders and team</li></ul>

### The assumption of communicating service design

During the in-depth interviews, the service designers were also asked if the communication differed when they communicated service design to an audience that was not made up of project stakeholders but family and friends instead. Almost half the participants believed that the communication of service design to the communication audience, no matter if family and friends or client, should not differ, while the other half opposed this view, mainly due to the following factors:

- **Trust** (no estimation of harm)
- **Familiarity** (with the audience)
- **Casual setting** (of the communication).

The opposing service designers believed that the established level of trust and familiarity with family and friends, as well as the casual setting in which the communication took place, were determining factors for the difference in the communication. These service designers argued that through the mentioned factors, the topic of service design was discussed more often in a trusted but casual setting and in a simplified manner (e.g., language, setting) with day-to-day examples that friends and family could relate to. Further, all three factors made these service designers confide sensitive details about projects and their issues to family and friends. Conversely, communication of service design to project stakeholders was described as formal and driven by the context of the project and the company. Hence, the audience of family and friends appeared to be provided with a more thorough

(in terms of time, details and examples) and relatable explanation of service design compared to project stakeholders. Even so, the service designers suggested that the overall communication process stays the same for all communication audience individuals (e.g., project stakeholders, friends, family). In addition, the insights highlight that the level of service design knowledge of the communication audience defined the content, process, and depth of the communication.

“My family, we are kind, you know, it’s easy because you’re, in your family you’re the same as others [laughs]. You have same kind of minds set (...).” – Interviewee #2

#### **4.1.2 Perception of communication from the perspective of project stakeholders**

##### **Communication expectations of a project stakeholder in a decision-making position (MD)**

A project stakeholder in a decision-making position’s communication expectations for service design were found to be triggered by their mindset, experiences, and comfort zone, as well as the project’s or company’s aims. Further, how the concept, key-features and values of service design targeted and catered to the previously mentioned aims, mindset and communication expectations of the stakeholder were found to be crucial for the decision-making process of said project stakeholder.

The research data revealed that a project stakeholder in a decision-making position expected that the communication in a pitching situation was carried out in a sales, business, or marketing manner, in which persuasion was pointed out to be created by:

- providing the situation to be improved upfront
- possible solutions
- the road to achievement
- and the effect these solutions (achieved through service design) would have on the revenue stream.

This desired communication style was found to cater to the stakeholder’s ambition in finding new solutions that customers would be willing to pay for and hence create further revenue. The communication of service design in a pitching situation was also expected to display the need the project had for service design. An example of the need for service design was proposed to be given by providing research results that displayed what the company believed to provide and what the customers believed to need and value, as well as by providing the discrepancies between these beliefs and how service design would close this gap. Hence, this stakeholder expected to be persuaded by examples and information that targeted the “bottom- or top-line” of a business or/and project.

The MD further insisted on being persuaded and entertained through memorable anecdotes or project examples that were easily shareable and pointed out the project’s challenges and how they were overcome. These stories were required to be

entertaining through unexpected turning points that created a “wow” effect. Further requirements for these stories were perceived to be:

- reduced information (enough detail needed to be provided so the storyline could be followed)
- faced challenges (that the stakeholder could either easily relate to or were similar to the challenges at hand)
- the ways they were overcome (creating a “wow” effect).

The information and stories provided in this communication also required a strong message that was tailored to the project stakeholders (needed to be able to identify with the message), easily identifiable, memorable, and supported the audience in their decision-making process (to choose or not to choose service design).

Ultimately, a project stakeholder in a decision-making position looks for the grand scheme (impact on company, project, revenue, customers) and therefore requires the communication of service design to cater to this grand scheme while providing minimal (yet relevant) information. Hence, the communication needed to address the USP of service design, the benefit the discipline could bring to the project (in terms of improvements and project suggestions), and the planned recognizable positive impact on the revenue stream of the company the project was part of (the impact needs to be recognizable in numbers). As previously discussed, this audience had learned and found comfort in the persuasion tactics of business, marketing, and sales personnel. Since service designers were perceived more as practitioners of the discipline and less as business or sales personnel, the MD questioned if service designers should be the ones to present the discipline in these situations. The table below displays an in-depth summary of the analyzed and clustered feedback from the communication testing with the participating MD.

*Table 5 In-depth summary of testing with an MD as a project stakeholder in a decision-making position*

In-depth summary of communication testing with a managing director as a project stakeholder in a decision-making position

Mindset and general communication expectations

- The MD expects communication in a presentation as learnt in a business school, including the presentation of focus points and a presentation in a “language” that he is familiar with (business or marketing).
- The MD is used to receiving presentations by marketing or sales unit personnel that focus on proposing solutions that increase the business’ sales revenue (e.g., communication focuses on supporting the differentiation of the given commodities\* to improve sales and uncover sales opportunities). Therefore, the MD has the same expectation for communication provided by a service designer in a pitch or introduction talk.
- The MD questioned whether service designers should be the ones to sell the discipline and instead simply stand their ground as the people practicing the discipline.
- Further, the MD’s main focus is to improve processes that will recognizably affect the businesses revenue (improving internal processes would not affect the revenue stream enough in the MD’s opinion). Therefore, the communication by a service designer is expected to target this focus.
- The MD’s feedback revealed that they have no experience in or expectations and mindset for a communication/presentation that does not focus on the commodities per se or selling them. Further, no recognition of the value of the environment and the associated aspects that surround and affect the commodity was indicated unless they affected the revenue.
- To consider service design, the MD would have liked to see a commodity turned into a service, which would be an “extra” the business clients would be willing to pay for. The mindset of the MD lies with what they are used to when it comes to “enhancing,” which is the commodities. Steering the focus away from the commodities to other areas of improvement would need to show an impact on the bottom- and top-line. Otherwise, the MD would not see the need or relevance to invest in his business’ internal or external ways.
- The MD pointed out that people in top-level management believe they operate rationally and consider themselves conscious decision-makers, while actually not being either and operating “off their gut,” for which they will try to find a logical justification after the decision has been made.
- According to the MD, the service designer in this setting is expected to act as a salesperson and drill early on into the areas of opportunities when communicating service design. The MD’s expectation of a good salesperson is that all the research has already been done before the communication takes place and the salesperson provides the client with solutions – solution selling.

So, not that you’re a sales-, you, you are a salesperson but you’re not at the same time. (...) I mean, that’s what the solution selling is all about. It’s about finding a problem and then presenting them a solution. (...) This is not, this is not the service design process (...) this is selling. (...) You need to find a reason why it’s important to me. (...) Otherwise I’m gonna cut you off, I’m not interested. (...) Like very quickly I’m like “this is not relevant to me.” – MD’s answer

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Communication expectations for the shared stories

- The MD wants a memorable story that starts with the situation the main character (a company) found itself in, the measures it took, and the constraints the main character could not overcome as a starter, followed by telling how service design “swooped in” and supported the main character in overcoming said constraints.
- Further, a story with a challenge, to which the answer is not immediately clear, is desired – a story with “wow-moments” that people can easily spread. Whether the story is one the communicating service designer has experienced themselves is of no relevance. According to the MD, there is no place to “be so black and white about it.”
- The communication of service design, especially the story, needs to support the audience in mapping the concept of service design to the audience’s businesses and projects.
- For the example story, the MD mentioned they would be looking for a high-level view on the project that briefly touches upon the idea around: a) what the client was not aware of, b) what the client had in mind and in terms of information, and c) what the project uncovered, to form a strong and memorable message. To further elaborate their point, the MD provided a story example about rental cars, which in their opinion was good as it had a strong message and had stuck with them for 15 years:

But Hertz or Budget are number one, and Avis was, you know, they couldn’t compete, they were never gonna be up there at number one. So their marketing strategy was, “Avis, we’re number two”. [...] “We’re number two, we try harder.” –MD’s answer

- Although a high-level view on a project is required, the example stories should also point out the process of the project, type of solutions, and the influence the approach (e.g., service design) has on the project.

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Core information expected in the communication

- According to the MD, the communication of the possible solutions is *core* in the presentation as “that’s more concrete to hang it off then,” since the description of service design itself was “very, broad and grey.”
- In the MD’s opinion, companies need to be made aware of what they think they are selling, vs. what the customers crave and are actually buying, as ignoring the customers can be a breaking point, even for successful companies. Their example to support and clarify this need was that “nobody needs a drill bit. (...) They need a hole.” The drill bits are “the means to the end.” Therefore, the story needs to show what the actual need of people is and then how to get there.

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Slides and style

- Given the craving for stories, the MD wants the presenter to elaborate verbally on the content that is otherwise written on presentation slides.
- The use of service design jargon is accepted by the MD, but only if the terminologies are explained first (e.g., interdisciplinary projects). Yet, the preferred jargon in this situation is of a field the MD is experienced in (in this case business, sales, or marketing).

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\*The MD runs a commodity business.

### 4.1.3 Summary

#### Research question 1: What are the current perceptions of communicating service design in a project?

Generally, service designers recognize the importance of early communication in projects (setup and initial phase). The experiences of service designers indicate a tendency for projects to be *less successful* when project stakeholders receive minimal or poor education and communication on the discipline. The perception of the communication of service design was found to differ and clash between service designers and project stakeholders due to their opposing communication

approaches and expectations. Service designers focus on their communication about the discipline at the beginning of the project to create understanding for themselves and others and aim for an alignment of information and expectations between all (empathic *we* approach). Conversely, project stakeholders' expectation focus is on the communication of service design being persuasive and the benefits they would receive (numerically driven *me* approach).

## **4.2 Issues faced by service designers when communicating their discipline**

### **Research question 2: What issues do service designers face in the communication of their discipline?**

To answer this research question and uncover possible challenges and hardships faced by service designers in their communication of their discipline, data deriving from the in-depth interviews with service designers, as well as data deriving from the methods in which the researcher acted as a service designer have been used. Before discussing the uncovered issues in detail, more insights about the service designer and his/her role in projects are provided, to equip the reader with further information that form and contribute to the said issues.

#### **4.2.1 The role of a service designer in a project**

The service designers who participated in the in-depth interviews described their role within projects foremost as a social one. They stated that they act as connectors, communicators, and mediators to create understanding for and between the different entanglements (human or non-human) within a project to ultimately solve problems in a human-centered and co-creational manner (see Table 6, Summary). The data indicates that the main tasks of a service designer focus on:

- informing stakeholders (e.g., about the project, service design, problem at hand)
- retrieving information about the project, stakeholders, problems and their circumstances
- creating understanding for themselves and between the stakeholders (e.g., sharing different points of view, addressing individual and stakeholder group needs)
- functioning as connectors, mediators, and links between stakeholders and information
- collaborating and creating together and across disciplines/stakeholder groups (e.g., when retrieving information, sharing information, creating solutions)
- providing holistic solutions (involvement of various stakeholders).



These tasks were identified as role and identity shaping for service designers. The data further highlights on a first level the importance and enabling function of communication for the service designers regarding fulfilling the tasks and role.

*Table 6 Summary of interviewees' role descriptions*

Summary of interviewees' role descriptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Middleman</li><li>• Bridge</li><li>• Connector</li><li>• Glue</li><li>• Company developer (developing services for companies through negotiation with a company's internal and external stakeholders)</li><li>• Facilitator</li><li>• Expert in social field</li><li>• Empathic, open minded and creative</li><li>• Help framing problems</li><li>• Shows design has a social role in society and has impact</li><li>• Providing a people and social point of view</li><li>• Designer</li><li>• Creative thinker</li><li>• Human centric problem solver</li><li>• Influencer of decision-making</li><li>• Being the communicator, link and intermediary is the key role of a service designer.</li></ul>

Services designers mentioned that their role, responsibilities, tasks, and interaction with project stakeholders differ depending on whether they work as:

- an external consultant (e.g., at a design agency)
- as an in-house service designer (e.g., in a large corporation).

When the service designer was acting as an external consultant, a limited amount of data and a limited view of the client (project stakeholder in decision-making position) and its users was provided by a selected source (client), with whom most of the communication was conducted on a daily basis. The aim of the external consultant was to understand the provided data and clarify for themselves – as well as for the client – the client's goals and what could possibly be provided by the external consultant. Hence, the service designer not only took on a leading position in projects but also in the communication of service design. When a service designer was acting as an in-house designer in a corporation, an extended yet intrinsic view of the corporation as the client was provided. Therefore, the service designer had access to a variety of data and also received data from multiple sources (relevant corporate stakeholders), which led to an overall increase in communication (not necessarily on service design). At the same time, the intrinsic view of the corporation meant the service designer could consider aims and intents in projects that were corporation-specific and not known and therefore could not be considered by external consultants

(extension of project goals and scope). Hence, the work focus of in-house designers was spread between corporation projects and other internal problems that needed to be solved. These differences in work environments might not affect the concept and actions (in terms of methods and tools) of a service designer, but they shaped the designer's role, responsibilities, and identity and therefore need to be considered accordingly in the communication of service design.

*Table 7 Service designers: Design agency vs. large corporation*

External Consultants	In-House Designers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have limited access to the client, project stakeholders, users and relevant data</li> <li>• have a limited view on the client and project</li> <li>• need to spend an extensive amount of time to get to know the client, client's business, users, users' aims, etc.</li> <li>• have a clear idea of what they can help the client with and the goals of the client</li> <li>• are responsible for making the client understand and are aware of the project goals</li> <li>• take on more responsibilities within a project than in-house designers</li> <li>• have direct and almost daily contact with selected client stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have extended access to project stakeholders and relevant data</li> <li>• have an in-depth view of the client and project stakeholders</li> <li>• have a different aim than external consultants in a project</li> <li>• receive the business requirements from different stakeholders within the corporation</li> <li>• have the responsibility of starting and continuing discussions within the corporation</li> <li>• are required to solve a variety of issues that are unknown to consultants outside the corporation and acknowledge them in the project</li> <li>• focus less on leading projects and the communication</li> </ul>

- "(...) I feel the role of leading is less like, emphasized in big corporation (...)" – Interviewee #9
- Um ... because as a consultant you're external. You don't see everything; you see as an in-house designer. And when you're an in-house designer, you need to also take care of the internal stuff, that are not shown or are not seen by the consultant. – Interviewee #2

### **Success in projects according to service designers**

The communication of service design was uncovered to not only be influenced by the service designers' role, identity and mindset, but also their definition of success in a project. Success in projects was found to be based on the topics of impact, recognition, creation of understanding, and receiving support (see Table 8, Aspects that define success for service designers in projects). Projects were deemed successful when the (positive) impact of service design was displayed and recognized by the environment of the project, especially by the stakeholders and businesses involved. Further, service designers needed to witness the impact their work had on "people" (e.g., through individual stories) and the project or organization they worked for. Service designers mentioned the significance of receiving support from project stakeholders in decision-making positions in the form of participation, access to resources, and sufficient resources, to consider a project successful. Lower ranked aspects of success in a project included managing to understand the problem

themselves, as well as receiving recognition beyond the project environment. Hence, service designers not only craved recognition, support, and impact for the actual work they performed, but also for the field of service design itself. Service designers deemed their projects as less successful when:

- they could not establish the desired understanding for the concept and the value of service design with project stakeholders in decision-making positions (e.g., client)
- the service design output did not meet their own desired level of quality
- the created output did not support the stakeholders (especially users) as desired by the service designer
- they did not see the value of service design in a project or project stakeholders “misused” the discipline and the practitioners for design-related tasks and output

*Table 8 Aspects that define success for service designers in projects*

Category	Details of category	Mentions	Total
Impact of design on people and businesses/ Recognition of the SD work	• Supporting people in their work through SD/ Seeing people understand their work	2	8
	• Witnessing the impact of design on people and businesses (supporting them)	3	
	• Seeing the developed material being implemented/ Seeing things coming together	3	
Impact of work on people and receiving support from people	• Impact of work on people (e.g., users) including positive feedback and work was valued	5	7
	• Receiving support from people (e.g., users)	2	
Impact of work on organization and receiving support from organization	• Impact of work on organization, including receiving positive feedback and work was valued	5	7
	• Receiving support from organization	1	
	• Great relationship with project stakeholders (e.g., clients)	1	
Creating understanding/Seeing understanding being created	• Understanding the problem (including managing to visualize the problem)	3	5
	• Making stakeholders understand that their contribution and participation is important, even if they are not service designers	1	
	• Making stakeholders understand the problem	1	
Sufficiency of and access to resources, thoroughness in project (linked to support)	• Getting to do thorough research and the design process	1	4
	• Getting the access to participants (e.g., users)	2	
	• Receiving sufficient resources from organization	1	
Commercial success	• International/commercial success	2	4
	• Winning a competition	1	
	• Grade	1	
Teamwork	No details for category	2	2

Creating new workshop methods	No details for category	1	1
Interesting case	No details for category	1	1
Define roles within project	No details for category	1	1
Little to no need for communicating with SD, role of service designer etc. in project	No details for category	1	1
Having to deal with little to no bureaucracy in project	No details for category	1	1

#### **4.2.2 Encountered issues related to the communication of service design in projects**

##### **Examples of insightful experiences of service designers, their role, work, communication, and perception**

So, and I also think, one, and this is something that I find I don't really read often in texts when they talk about, what's the value of design is. The er, the when we're trained in design schools, we're, we always have to do like presentations, whether it's your final project or, you know, your first prototype or, you know, it's for me, I had to do it all the time. So, it kind of, teaches you to be able to explain projects in a more simplified or, in a way that other people will understand what you're talking about but also, visually represent what you're trying to say so that people can again understand. And I thought that was something, um that was, a role that I felt I didn't always take but I felt, 'cause I didn't have necessarily have the time or wasn't assigned to do it but sometimes I felt, we had people from, er let's say we were at the table with some artists, some people from the cultural center, some people so people that have completely different backgrounds, and when people don't really understand, what everyone's talking about or, I find if you're using these um, presentation skills or, visual skills to try to gather what everyone is trying to say and then visualize it and then people can be like, "Oh, actually this is not what I'm saying," "Oh, this is," "Oh yeah, that works." Just to make it, easier to develop a project and people to either agree or disagree on things. I think it's um, maybe a role that's not exploited enough in design, especially when you're working with, in projects, er where there's people from different fields, which I think is the case a lot in service design. – Interviewee #7

Um ... there are these experience that, um, strategic decisions are made that which project gets to use service design and which don't. And then someone in the meeting shoots out and says, yeah, they make so nice looking

presentations that we need and want to have service design in here. And [laughs] then the one who understands a bit more, might say, “Yeah, if you said that to service designers, they might not like it.” And, [laughs] the case is that, this is not really what service design is used for. The reason must be a bit deeper than that. And [laughs] that was the person for example to whom I’ve had these positive communications experiences for, because he understood it. So [laughs], so, service design, many times it’s labelled, labelled as, you know, those, those who make pretty things. Because that’s what they see. I mean, the content is right but it’s also made, made look nice. So, suddenly we are the pretty-doers or we are the beautifiers. – Interviewee #2

Um, I feel labelled from engineer-engineering, er like a, like a soft way to develop projects, like a, it’s, it’s, it’s more superficial than engineer-engineering, er, way to develop the same project. Because they sometimes they, when I explain the, how is, what is service design they, they tell me that okay that, ‘This the same thing that we are always doing like a organization process. – Interviewee #8

### **Overview of main issues faced**

Based on the insights gathered from the in-depth interviews with service designers and the communication testing situations in which the researcher functioned as a service designer, a set of main issues that cause difficulty for service designers in their communication to project stakeholders (especially at the beginning of a project) were identified. Each main issue is discussed in detail in this subchapter:

- Becoming a service designer was a practice triggered event
- Service designers were often not the ones to carry out the communication of service design to project stakeholders
- The audiences’ concepts of service design were abstract and ambiguous
- Service designers explained service design to project stakeholders through practice/Project stakeholders understood the concept and value of service design after a project
- Project stakeholders did not share the mindset of service designers and were reluctant to open up
- Maturity, expertise, and commitment of the service designer influenced the communication.

### **Becoming a service designer was a practice triggered event**

(...) and I was really, sceptic about this whole concept of service design. And it took me really long time to really realize what it's about. So, I think, my friend who I mentioned to you about, um, she has been working a lot with service design so I have been, I've had the privilege to follow her, like been, I've been documenting the workshops and planning and like discussing with these and then, during this time, I have come to realize what this service design is about and I'm really into it now. (...) design, it's really like, I think it's like really, really a concrete thing, like really designing a product. So I had this, and I think it might be with lots of people that they are thinking still a bit like, what is this whole thing, this service design. – Interviewee #4

Although service design can be studied at a bachelor level and outside of the realm of design (e.g., tourism) (Fachhochschule Graubünden, 2020; SCAD, 2020), none of the participating service designers had started their higher education (e.g., bachelor studies) or first job in service design. Instead, they held bachelors' degrees in the disciplines of (international) business, media communication, (product and) industrial design, design, visual communication, and sports and leisure. The service designers pointed out that participation in service design projects was the main path to learn about service design, igniting interest in the discipline and becoming a service designer. Only a few participants were provided with discipline-specific courses at a graduate level that supported the awareness-raising and the learning process. Further, the data indicates a rise in awareness and interest in service design for the participants once they had entered their graduate studies. It seems that the road to becoming a service designer entails venturing from a broad and more commonly known discipline to either service design directly in the master's program (through projects and courses) or to work on projects in the industry that entail service design that then spark further interest in the discipline. It is also worth mentioning that at times participants realized through further education (of academic or professional nature) that they had already been practicing service design in projects for a while, but with different job titles and without being aware of the discipline's existence or details. Hence, learning about service design (in terms of raising awareness and becoming familiar with the discipline) was triggered through practice. This finding aligns with the hands-on attitude and mindset of the discipline and the practice-led nature of design itself.

Table 9 Breakdown of interviewees

Interviewee	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Years of experience with service design	1	5	1.5	7	8
First higher education degree (Bachelor)	Business	Media communication	Industrial design	Product and industrial design	Industrial design
Second higher education degree (Master)	Service Design	Industrial Design	Industrial Design	Applied Visual Arts	Industrial Design
Doctoral degree with service design as a focus	In pursuit	In pursuit	In pursuit	In pursuit	In pursuit
Became a service designer through a project or studies	Studies and project	Project	N/A	Project	Project
Interviewee	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Years of experience with service design	30	0	7–8	8	4–5
First higher education degree (Bachelor)	International business	Design	Visual communication	Industrial design	Sports and Leisure
Second higher education degree (Master)	International Politics	Design Research	Strategic communication	Service Design	Industrial Design
Doctoral degree with service design as a focus		In pursuit	In pursuit		
Became a service designer through a project or studies	Project	Studies	Studies and project	Project	Studies

### Service designers were often not the ones to carry out the communication of service design to project stakeholders

When analyzing the project stories shared by service designers, it became apparent that the communication of service design to project stakeholders in the project setup and at the beginning of a project was mainly carried out by superiors, leaders, or managing personnel of the service designers (e.g., project coordinators, team leads, mentors – leaders were not necessarily service designers themselves) and rarely by themselves. This pattern was found in both project categories, *successful* and *less successful* projects. The analysis of the *less successful* projects revealed that when the service designers were in charge of the communication, the communication failed because they were not experienced enough in service design (knowledge and working experience) and in persuasive communication (in terms of aspects such as wording, content) and therefore could not provide the required communication and inform project stakeholders convincingly. The service designers could not communicate the possibilities and benefits of service design to the project stakeholders, manage their expectations, and reassure them about the approach, which led to rejections of the discipline and consequently the service designer. Generally, the stories shared by service designers highlighted a lack of encouragement and assignment to learn and practice the communication of service design to project stakeholders

(communication of created project outcomes was encouraged), both in their daily work lives and in their academic education (project experiences were shared about working in the industry and projects as students).

(...) it would give more confidence to the designer 'cause I find, with what I've heard like not just my experience but I feel with the people, that I've been, talking with that are also in design, I find it's often a misunderstood field or people don't, they think it's just about, er when you're working in a project with people that aren't in design they might just think that, you're in the project to make things look nice and you know, make nice uh, little graphics and, uh, renderings and [giggles], all that. But you can bring so much more, to the project. So I think, on both sides um, if the designer, is really maybe even trained in school to learn how to explain, what they're doing or their added, value to a project and then on the other side, if people that aren't in design or that hire designers can really undestra-understand the full potential of a designer, like on both sides it's a win-win. (...) But I think one of the issues is also, or is that when I'm, when I was in school, like they don't teach you how, to work, how it's gonna be in like real life (...). – Interviewee #7

### **The audiences' concepts of service design were abstract and ambiguous**

The data gathered from communication testing situations with students and the MD highlighted that the current concepts of service design provided a significant level of abstractness as well ambiguity. The students and the MD mostly built their concept of service design on the name of the discipline, buzzwords related to the discipline, and the project outcomes they had heard of, seen, or imagined to be provided (given the name) by service design. In particular, the outcomes of a project were used as anchors for clarifying the discipline.

“(...) maybe I've got it wrong and maybe I'm not understanding it, but that's where I'd be looking (...).” – MD's answer (when talking about using project outcomes as clarifying anchors for the discipline)

According to the service designers' experiences, the *project outcome anchor* became problematic for the practitioners of the discipline as they did not display the reality of the created outputs of service design. What project stakeholders (especially in decision-making positions) identified as outcomes of service design were mainly project outcomes, meaning further processed service design outputs (e.g., UX/UI Design). Hence, the project stakeholders did not base their anchors on “real” service design and research-driven outputs.

To further investigate the perceptions the communication audience might have about service design, the statements provided by students to the question, “What do you believe service design to be?” were investigated. Besides relying on project outcomes, the students relied on:



- the aspects that make up service design (e.g., human-centeredness, systems, interactions)
- the environment it is used in
- the target group it is applied to
- the concept that serves the discipline (thought or actions of service design; e.g., problem solving, organizing people and structures) to explain or make sense of it.

Methods and work examples of service design were rarely used to explain service design.

*Table 10 Clustering of statements in categories*

Categories	Total Number
Outcomes	19
Aspects	13
Environment/Target group	10
Concept	9
Universal concept	4
Methods	3
Examples	1

In an in-depth analysis of the 32 relevant statements regarding the communication/explanation style, expectations, and knowledge, as well as awareness of the discipline, the following was discovered:

- The explanations lacked depth. The answers revealed a metalevel depth in terms of grasping and explaining service design, whether outcomes, environments, or other uncovered categories were discussed. Details or relatable content was rarely provided within these statements. Further, a significant majority of the students decided by themselves to answer the question in one-sentence statements (at times only listings of possible service design-relevant aspects were provided), which supported the creation of abstractness.
- The statements relied on jargon. The abstract explanations of service design were filled with either design-relevant jargon or commonly used project-relevant jargon without providing further details or linkage between the terms.
- The statements lacked contextual conjunction. The majority of statements displayed little linkage between the mentioned concept, the environment, or the outcome. Instead, universal thoughts about the discipline were provided or only a list of aspects and buzzwords.
- The statements did not discuss the differentiation with other known disciplines. What differentiates service design from other design or closely related fields was not mentioned/used as a starting point to explain service design.

Table 11 Statements “What do you believe service design to be?”

Students' statements in response to “What do you believe service design to be?”	
Bachelor's degree	<p>“A process of designing better services.”</p> <p>“Easier to work and understand for a service design to help communication.”</p> <p>“Working with systems and data to design large scale solutions.”</p> <p>“I think it is about managing and designing service and people.”</p> <p>“Service design, the complete process of a service to make it smooth and structured. Example: Netflix, Spotify. It's analytic and human-centered. It's about methods.”</p> <p>“Customer satisfaction? Solving problems?”</p> <p>“Organizing. If I remember correctly. (I probably don't).”</p> <p>“To learn how to give the best service to a customer. How to work with the customer. Strategy of working with a client. How to give the best service.”</p> <p>“A lot of work and research stuff ... probably? (working on some concepts for services, organizing stuff for customers and workers).”</p> <p>“The structure companies are working (more logistic things), making communication easier.”</p> <p>“Service design is making/designing a service by planning and organizing infrastructure/people and improving interaction.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“Design for the user, to detect problems and solve them.”</p> <p>“I think, something like team work, have some project.”</p> <p>“I believe that service design will make the communication between people much easier.”</p> <p>“I believe it is easy communication with people.”</p>
Master's degree	<p>“Service design is the type of design that is being used in service industry.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“Customer oriented approach, use of various methods, playful methods, empathy, co-operation, facilitation involving various stakeholders.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“I believe service design should be human-centered.”</p> <p>“In my view, service design is like having a god perspective; it needs to take into account all aspects of design work. Service design need to effectively plan and organize the people, infrastructure, communication materials and so on involved in a service, to improve user experience and also service quality.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“I know about service design from previous studies (briefly). In tourism service design makes life easier by help of technologies and great ideas.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“I believe service design to be a way of making a connection, where a certain type of message goes from one area expert to another one, or a group, in a way that is fully understood (or at least I think so).”</p> <p>“I believe service design to be a mindset. It gives tools to design customer and user experiences in holistic and human centric ways, in digital and physical environments, but also to develop processes.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“Customer Journey. Customer Interaction. Customer Needs. Customer Experience.”</p> <p>“Multidisciplinary design method(s)/ way of approaching a problem to help people/ solve problems.”</p> <p>“Designing for people and their needs.”</p> <p>“I feel like it's a bridge to connect consumers with company. Better service design, better sales as well as it can enable people to live happier.” Prev. Knowledge</p> <p>“I know service design is about concepts, rather than product. I know that it is a fairly new discipline. I believe it is about creating experiences.”</p> <p>“Maybe something that improve people's experience in a standard procedure. Improve efficiency so that it will be user-friendly. Something we need in home country.”</p> <p>“I guess it's a wide field ranging from creating experiences and making the services more convenient and easily understand.”</p> <p>“Service design is broadly about user experience.” Prev. Knowledge</p>
Doctoral degree	<p>“Designing the process of reception and/or interaction.”</p> <p>“Multidisciplinary tool for problem solving and participatory projects in organizations that changes the structures and ways of working (with communities).” Prev. Knowledge</p>

Overall, the majority of the statements indicate that service design is ultimately perceived as a concept that enables people and companies in their actions by enhancing communication, experiences, or services. Therefore, the students viewed the role of a service designer as one of an enhancer of communication, experiences, and services, as well as an enabler of people who support the creation of solutions through collaboration. These conclusive thoughts and the consequential expectations of the discipline and the service designers are valid but lack detail (e.g., what does enabling or enhancement look like or result in?) and contextual conjunction and therefore lead to misconceptions and ill-fitting expectations about both. According to the statements and the insights retrieved through the analysis, it can be concluded that the concepts the students have about service design are rather universal, not thought-through, and build upon jargon that was not investigated beyond a surface-level. Consequently, the expectations of the students were based on “abstract” knowledge and therefore did not meet the reality of service design, especially when it comes to the process of service design, the actions involved, and the provided outcomes.

### **Service designers explained service design through practice to project stakeholders/Project stakeholders understood the concept and value of service design after a project**

(...) people think that because you are a service designer and you are an artist [laughs], so then you can, do pretty things let's say with a PowerPoint and then they think that of course we can give these cases to you that you can make these things looks beautiful, like visually beautiful. So that was the, I think at the beginning that was more the problem that they thought that I'm just doing pretty things. But then when you get more, references and, when people get to know what you have done and what are the outcomes from your workshops and projects and case studies, they start to somehow maybe like appreciate more of your work and then also this labelling has changed. Thank God. – Interviewee #5

(...) I realized is that if I just talk about design in a more general sense, people, they just have no idea what you're ta- or they kind of, they just want examples. And that was the main thing that I realized, um, during that time is that I need, examples even if I understand what I'm talking about when I'm talking to people, that don't, that don't, er don't really know what design is or they think they don't know 'cause design is all around them but they don't realize it. Um, it's, to use concrete examples and I think when I'm talking to people that are not in design, that's like the main thing I do is I give examples. – Interviewee #7

According to the experiences shared by the participating service designers, the concept projects stakeholders have of the discipline, its values, and its practitioners, and the consequential expectations they have for the outcomes delivered by service designers, do not meet reality. Although the service designers provide an upfront communication about service design and what should be expected, this communication appears to be of little relevance as, according to the service designers, the project stakeholder learns about and understands service design better when practicing together with them in the project. Hence, the service designers relied on their own learning approach about service design, in which the awareness and appreciation of the discipline and the service designer was established by participating in the project, practicing together, contributing to the outcomes, and witnessing the process first-hand. This mindset aligns with the experiences from service designers about communication in the project, where working with project stakeholders who were unexperienced in and received little information about service design could be linked to projects that are *less successful*. Ultimately, the service designers' experiences guided them to accept that the concept and value of the discipline and the service designer would likely be more understood and appreciated by project stakeholders once the collaboration has ended, the practice and the outcomes could be witnessed, and the project was finished. Since the learning approach to service design by service designers was found to be of significant importance to its current communication, an investigation on learning service design was undertaken.

A deep dive into the communication affecting the learning approach of service design: Through the gathered feedback from the students participating in the lectures, a trend in the learning approach to service design was uncovered: The concept of service design provides complexity, which is eased by the practice of the discipline in projects. This trend aligns with the experiences and communication approaches of the participating service designers. The learning approach to service design is made up of five interdependent categories that provide an interplay of ease and complexity:

- **Concept.** The concept was identified as the ultimate trigger for complexity within the learning approach to and communication of service design. The vocabulary used, the various entanglements of service design, and the lack of concreteness about what service design is and can do made the students view the discipline as “abstract” and “difficult” to comprehend. Yet at the same time, the concept was also considered as the starting point according to the literature and the service designers.

“It seems to be very abstract at the beginning. Best learnt through trial and error. Takes time to grasp.” – A student’s answer for the question “Understanding service design is ...?”

- **Practice.** The complexity and abstractness of the concept was eased through supporting project examples and participating in a service design project. The

practice was viewed as a step in which service design could be experienced from another perspective and one could make their own sense of the discipline.

“Service design is a very complex field. [...] The methods used in SD are very straightforward and useful though, and I see way to introduce them to other design processes.” – A student’s answer to the question “Understanding service design is...?”

- **Methods.** Although methods are part of the practice and hence provide the means to explore, learn, and understand more about the discipline, the students considered them as added complexity as well as ease. Complexity appeared to be added again as the students needed to learn about the various methods available, their interdisciplinarity, and their application purpose, field, and use. Yet once they were known, understood, and practiced, the students considered them as an easy way to understand service design better.

“Is a solid balance because the methods and approaches of SD are sometimes not know but they are also very easy to hold on to.” – A student’s answer to the question “Understanding service design is...?”

“Understanding SD is ok if you have a good explanation (like we did), but understanding all the tools can be way more complicated. Also, it is a broad field so it can be a bit confusing.” – A student’s answer to the question “Understanding service design is...?”

- **Time.** Time was identified as the resolving element to ease complexity as it was needed to practice, iterate, make sense, and create further understanding for the discipline.

There is a lot of vocabulary and terms that need to be understood and known. A lot of different steps, methods and ways of doing/making the project. It can be very confusing and hard to understand in the beginning, but little by little it became easier and easier. – A student’s answer to the question “Understanding service design is...?”

- **Vocabulary.** Vocabulary was identified as an enforcer of complexity, especially in the beginning of the learning approach. According to the students, the vocabulary (or jargon) provided newness to their own language of comfort, as well as to the concept of the discipline due to its extent and its interdisciplinarity (e.g., introduction of user experience, human centered design). Further, the approach required the students to rethink their current concepts of vocabulary used in their language of comfort (e.g., service). Generally, the amount of new and unknown vocabulary was seen as an obstacle to understanding service design.

“It uses a lot of difficult words.” – A student’s answer to the question “Understanding service design is...?”

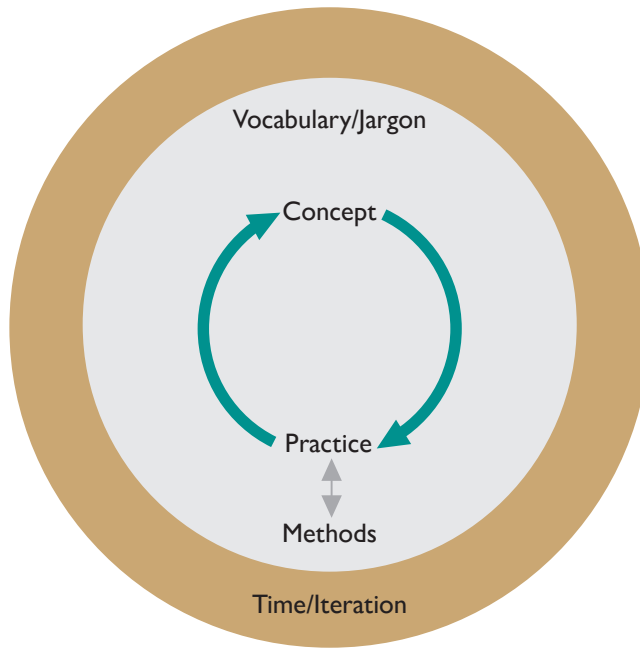


Figure 16. Learning approach to service design

Ultimately, the students rated service design as “moderately” difficult/easy to understand ( $\bar{O}$  5.8 on a scale from 1–10; 1 being *very easy*; 10 being *very difficult*), as long as the theory and the concept of service design and its methods were followed by practice and examples and they were provided with sufficient time for exploring, explanations, and number of iterations.

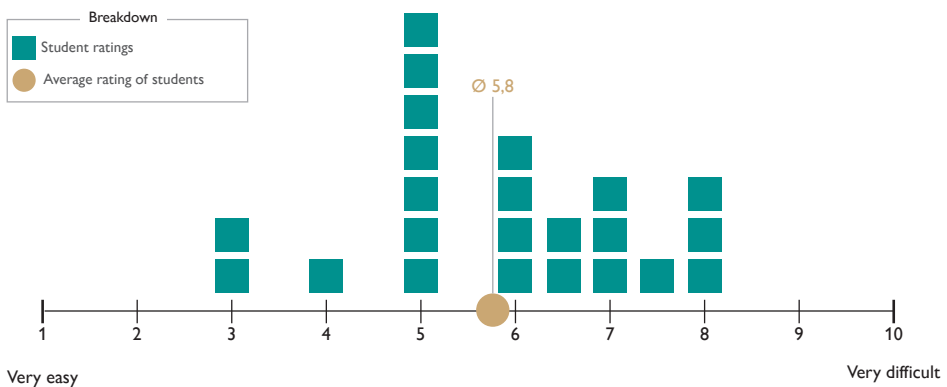


Figure 17. Overview “Understanding service design is...?”

### **Project stakeholders did not share the mindset of service designers and were reluctant to open up**

“Mm, I think it’s about not being ready to let go of the, er, like the current mindset, like not being ready to, jump into to the changing process.” – Interviewee #10 (on reasons as to why the communication to project stakeholders fails)

(...) with service design, you’re not designing alone, because you’re involving so many stakeholders, including the customers and users, you cannot be anything but sure, that the project is going to succeed, if you do it like, openly, with open mind. You do the study first, you listen to the customers and then, from an empty table start developing what you need to, or what, whatever it is you need to develop. So, I think, the, the success of service design is really the, um, cooperation with so many people that, you get sure that it’s going to be worth it. – Interviewee #2

Due to the feedback from and observations made in the in-depth interviews with service designers and the testing with the MD, it became apparent that the mindset of both service designers and project stakeholders differed. These differences were displayed in their communication styles and expectations (as mentioned in sections 4.1.1, Perception of communication from the perspective of service designers and 4.1.2, Perception of communication from the perspective of project stakeholders), and also in their perception of what service design is and should provide, which together affect the communication of service design. According to the participating service designers, the communication of service design (and its practice) was likely to fail when the project stakeholders were unwilling or unable to open up their minds and ways of working to the approach and mindset of service design. The service designers seemed to be aware of the differences in mindsets (especially with project stakeholders in decision-making positions) and showed willingness, to a certain degree, to let go of their own mindset in their communication to remain in their bridging function and keep service design involved in the projects. The previously mentioned learning approach to service design, in which stakeholders were made aware of the concept, its process, outcomes, and value through practice, appeared to be an influencing factor in the partial relinquishing of the service design mindset in the communication. Yet, the questioned service designers also pointed out that letting go of their mindset completely was not an option, as this would have meant to let go of the mindset and approach to service design and therefore the value the discipline provided, which would have compromised the purpose of its involvement. Although the service designers argued that the communication of service design for project stakeholders or family members and friends should be the same, the mindset played an important factor in the communication. The key factors of trust, familiarity, and casual setting are not necessarily present with project stakeholders

(especially those in decision-making positions), but communication expectations that catered to the comfort and security of the project stakeholders (leading to no changes for the stakeholders). Hence, the different mindsets and expectations created an obstacle for service design and for its communication in projects.

### **Maturity, expertise and commitment of the service designer influenced the communication**

According to the analysis of the shared stories from the participating service designers, the maturity level of the service designer (in terms of work experience and age), their level of expertise, and their commitment to the discipline and project were uncovered as influencing factors for the communication, its outcome, and the decision-making process of project stakeholders.

- Maturity level. Service designers with a higher maturity level in age and work years appeared to attract trust more easily from project stakeholders than service designers with a lower maturity level. The gaining of trust through maturity was identified as a crucial influence in the decision-making process of project stakeholders.

(...) it depends when I I was, five years ago maybe I need more, er, show my portfolio and my experience and starting the the meeting with, with a a brief introduction about myself. Er, but, I think after, when you are growing older and white er, hair, a little bit, you don't need to show and try to make more, er, try to show more credible to people. – Interviewee #8

- Expertise level. Service designers who were new to the discipline and hence had a low level of expertise, a variety of knowledge gaps, and insecurities in themselves or the disciplines, showed a greater tendency to complete the communication or project *less successfully*. The lack of expertise and certainty displayed by service designers about their own discipline was found to affect the way they portrayed their discipline and roles to project stakeholders (the portrayal was different to what was expected or needed by the project stakeholders and the differences were not overcome in the communication). “And I think if we also had more experience as service designers, then we might have done it better.” – Interviewee #3 (on why service design was not understood by the project stakeholders and the communication had to be repeated continuously)
- Commitment. Service designers who did not feel heard or appreciated in a project or by project stakeholders mentally let go of the project (for various reasons), which resulted in reduced communication efforts and *less successful* projects.

It made me feel bad. I felt like, I'm not, or I wa-, I was thinking that the fault is in me. I'm not doing what I should be doing or I'm not



doing correctly what I should be doing or what else is it, what is it that I should be doing? And I was questioning like, why is service design really in this project when it's not listened to, it's not taken into account? – Interviewee #2

The influencing factors specifically posed a problem for new service designers, which in two cases could only be overcome by time (maturity and expertise). However, although maturity, commitment, expertise, and the consequential resulting certainty within service designers were found to be influencing factors on the success of communication, they did not always guarantee a successful communication outcome or project.

### **Further minor and consequential issues**

The research uncovered further minor or consequential issues triggered by/related to the previously discussed main issues. These minor issues are only elaborated on briefly due to their nature and their relationship to the main issues:

- Project stakeholders were not committed to service design:  
According to the participating service designers, project stakeholders who were uncommitted to the discipline due to a lack of understanding and/or different mindsets posed an obstacle for daily work life and communication. The service designers felt unheard, unappreciated, and provided with the wrong or insufficient resources due to the lack of commitment and widespread misconception about the discipline.
- The process of service design and the application consequences were unknown to project stakeholders:  
This was a consequence of the lack of practice service designers received when it came to the communication of service design, the misconception of service design by project stakeholders, and the mindset differences of both parties.
- Service design was not involved or introduced to a project by project stakeholders for the right reasons:  
As project stakeholders were ill-informed about the discipline and viewed service design as a visual practice, the discipline and its practitioners were not involved according to their intended purpose or their intended phases in a project (research matters require early involvement in a project, while visual design matters are likely to start later).
- Project stakeholders ranked values that affected the project's revenue stream before values that affect the experiences of service staff and service users:  
According to the testing situation with the MD, the value provided by a discipline in a project was measured by project stakeholders in decision-making positions according to the effect the discipline had on the "top- or bottom-line" of the project's revenue. Other values provided by a discipline,

such as human-centeredness, were ranked below (or dependent on) the financial benefit provided by the discipline.

- Project stakeholders were likely to construct their own separation of service design from other disciplines if none was provided:

In the testing with the MD, it was found that when a project stakeholder was unsure of where to place service design (concept and the role of the service designer was not clear), the stakeholder would rebrand the discipline in a term and with a concept they were familiar with to make sense of the discipline, separate it from other disciplines, and receive a clearer picture of what to expect.

- Project stakeholders were unaware of the evolution and extension the field of design in general had undergone over the years:

Project stakeholders, as well as service designers in their early professional design career/education, seemed to be unaware of the change and the consequential extension the field of design underwent over the past few decades (see 2.3, Profile of a service designer). Therefore, an unawareness of the possibilities design can offer and the variety of forms it can take appears to have formed.

“(…) when I studied the my bachelor degree, we had the, we still had this conception about the, designers are er, people, that draw very good and make products very pretty.” – Interviewee #8 (discussing that the interviewee needed to change their own view to be able to see that design can be more than just making things pretty).

### **4.2.3 Summary**

#### **RQ2: What issues do service designers face in the communication of their discipline?**

The issues faced by service designers that impact their communication about the discipline to project stakeholders fell into four categories:

- Current learning approach to service design and becoming a service designer
- Conceptualization of the discipline by project stakeholders and consequential expectations
- Differences in mindsets (both parties)
- Maturity and expertise of the service designers.

Service design was found to be a learned, experienced, and practiced discipline. Service designers therefore rely on transmitting information about the discipline to project stakeholders in a practical manner due to their own learning and understanding experiences. The reliance on the learning approach, which encourages a de-prioritization of further upfront communication, was found to not align with the decision-making process project stakeholders apply when considering the involvement of service design in a project. Further, the maturity and expertise level of service designers displayed in the communication were found to be influencing

factors for project stakeholders in their decision-making process. In addition, both parties were found to have different mindsets regarding the communication approach/expectations, as well as aspects such as their work methods and project goals. The communication profiles below, display the mindsets, expectations and issues that service designers face and need to overcome in their communication of the discipline (profiles were created through empirical data from communication situations with the MD, students, and service designers, as well as through material from Chapter 2, THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH).

*Table 12 Communication profiles*

Project stakeholders in a decision-making position	
General needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort</li> <li>• Safety</li> </ul>
Project goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding risks and expenses</li> <li>• Not wasting time</li> <li>• Impacting the “bottom- or top-line”</li> <li>• Avoiding heavy commitment to and engagement in a new discipline</li> <li>• Identifying project goals and needs based on apparent gaps</li> <li>• Encouraging impact and outcomes on the levels of service intervention and interaction</li> </ul>
Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stoic/firm</li> <li>• Sticking to the “known” and conventional (concerns engagement, commitment, view of customer, view of own economy, view of manufacturing aims)</li> <li>• Part of “no flaws” society</li> <li>• Lack of imagination for concepts, procedures, outcomes that do not fit the “known” and conventional</li> </ul>
Communication expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catering to their need for comfort</li> <li>• Catering to their need for safety</li> </ul>
Communication content expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailored to their company and project</li> <li>• Tailored to their mindset</li> <li>• Targeted to positively impact their “bottom- or top-line”</li> <li>• Solution selling</li> <li>• Receiving upfront commitment to project outcomes or deliverables from service designers</li> <li>• Receiving memorable and shareable stories</li> </ul>
Create understanding for service design through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project outcome</li> </ul>
Issues related to communicating service design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rarely available for communication about service design</li> <li>• Limited communication time</li> <li>• Disposing of a misconception of service design</li> <li>• Requiring upfront information and commitment to project outcomes in communications carried out in the setup of a project and the initial phase of the project</li> </ul>
Communication approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handing over of ambiguous and meta-level data in briefing</li> <li>• Poor phrasing of expectations in briefing</li> <li>• Creating a project brief that does not focus on enabling service designers</li> </ul>

Communication approach expectation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being entertained and convinced by stories and research</li> <li>• Being sold solutions</li> </ul>
Service Designers	
General needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honesty</li> <li>• Impacting relevant project stakeholder and gaining recognition for it</li> <li>• Creating understanding for service design, the project stakeholders, the problem solved by the project</li> </ul>
Project goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncovering problems and providing a solution that “all” stakeholders benefit from</li> <li>• Creating with intent</li> <li>• Ensuring enduring change and quality</li> <li>• Creating and experiencing recognition/impact</li> <li>• Identifying project goals and needs based on apparent and hidden gaps</li> <li>• Encouraging impact and outcomes on all possible levels including organizational transformation</li> </ul>
Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open minded</li> <li>• Empathic</li> <li>• Innovative</li> <li>• Human-first</li> <li>• Part of the “admit to flaws” society</li> </ul>
Issues related to communicating service design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insecurities the service designer has concerning service design</li> <li>• Communication to project stakeholders is carried out by leaders/superiors (little chance to practice)</li> <li>• Learning about service design through practice</li> <li>• Relying on “getting the message of service design across” to project stakeholders by practicing in the project with them</li> </ul>
Communication approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an understanding and appreciation for service design by involving project stakeholders in their practice in the project (collaboration)</li> <li>• Creating proposals based upon poorly phrased expectations and ambiguous information from project stakeholders (stakeholders’ expectations and project needs are not met)</li> <li>• Communicating a reduced view of service design that does not elaborate on the discipline’s complexity, extent, and practitioners</li> <li>• Communication focus lies with creating service innovation</li> </ul>

### 4.3 The communication process currently applied by service designers

#### Research question 3: What does the communication process currently applied by service designers look like?

To reconstruct the communication process currently applied by service designers, the communication approaches they described in the in-depth interviews and secondary material (blog posts and books) were analyzed, interpreted, and aligned. The alignment resulted in the *first foundation* of the current process. This question is answered by first focusing on the analysis of the secondary material, followed by analysis of the relevant data from the in-depth interviews, which together form the *first foundation*.

#### **4.3.1 Communication proposal formed through secondary research material**

One of the first investigations conducted in this research was a review of blog posts (secondary research material) from service designers or designers from closely related fields (e.g., UX design) about their communication approach to project stakeholders. This investigation was used to extend the research foundation (as scientific literature did not provide relevant data about the communication approach or process) and uncover recurring topics, components, actions, patterns, and processes in the communication approaches of the various designers. **Disclaimer:** At the time the blog posts were collected as secondary research material, few practical blog posts from service designers regarding their communication existed. Hence, the decision was made to involve blog posts from designers of closely related disciplines that treated the same topic, the communication of their discipline to project stakeholders. In the extraction phase of processes and suggestions from these blog posts, only information deemed relevant to service design was forwarded and analyzed (e.g., actions on how to better communicate final visual deliverables or color choices were left out as they have little relevance for service design). Therefore, all data presented below about the investigation and content analysis of the collected blog posts is addressed as service designers communicating service design to project stakeholders.

#### **Retrieved and analyzed suggestions**

The majority of the reviewed blog posts provided less of an explicit process (a structure to follow) and more of suggestions (few explicit actions and many things or thoughts to look out for), as the blog posts were written from experience and seemingly with the intent that the reader adapt the suggestions to their own communication situation.

In the course of this investigation, 112 relevant suggestions for the communication of service design to project stakeholders were retrieved (Table 13 displays the rephrased suggestions). While analyzing the data in detail, the suggestions could be clustered or identified as follows. Note that the allocation of the suggestions into the different clusters depended on the original phrasing in the blog posts and summarizing reoccurring suggestions.

- **Actions:** explicit steps the service designer can/needs to take in the communication with project stakeholders.
- **Thoughts:** a concept/mindset that either needs to be communicated to the project stakeholders or the service designer has to consider in the communication throughout the project (also called thoughts to look out for).
- **Thoughts and actions:** a thought that is connected to one or more explicit steps the service designer can/needs to take in the communication with project stakeholders.

*Table 13 List of suggestions relevant for communicating service design to project stakeholders from a service designer's point of view*

List of suggestions relevant for communicating service design to project stakeholders from a service designer's point of view
Actions
Use simple language (no jargon)
Use visual material for support (use visuals instead of telling results – “seeing is believing”)
List information in an easily understandable way (structure information)
Know what is and is not working in the project/product/company at the moment
Inquire what made the client realize that they need to hire a service designer
Inquire what success would look like for the stakeholders in this project
Talk about the problems of the client that you can solve instead of presenting your skill set
Inform your audience (keep them up-to-date and be honest)
Do not overexplain or oversimplify
Stay serious, but entertain the audience
Interact and communicate with the audience
Use a communication style that is engaging and creates trust
Communicate the holistic nature of service design
Communicate the goals of service design
Communicate the goals of the meeting
Figure out the goals and the needs of your target group/client/audience/project members
Present in a context that is native/known to the client/stakeholder/audience
Support your position through information from your design research and best practice examples (share a success story)
Support your position by sharing why others hired you for projects
Show the worth of and need for your position by sharing a story that creates a tangible connection
Work together with the audience/students/stakeholders (involve them)
Take on the perspective of the stakeholders/clients/project members/audience
Keep (relevant) stakeholders in the communication loop and avoid singular communication when it is hand-over time
Equip stakeholders with information that is relevant for them
Prepare for meetings from different points of view and with your materials and goals, feedback, and language
Explain your actions to create understanding of yourself to stakeholders
Teach the client how to work with designers (including processes, needed materials) through the designer
Address the different stakeholders individually to understand and uncover their concerns and reduce comments and questions by doing so
Speak slowly and clearly, leave personality in your voice, be enthusiastic
Provide opportunities for feedback
Document feedback and share it
Set expectations for the project, resources, outcomes/deliverables and the working relationship (also helps to determine if the parties make a good match)

Set a framework or patterns for your communication activities and distribute these patterns or framework to start the communication process
Rephrase feedback to address issues
Use the stakeholders' language learned from previous questions or briefing material in your communication and argumentation
Create a tangible connection through stories to create understanding
Explain the design process and approach to show the value and make the end result more feasible
Figure out what service design means to the client/project/stakeholders and which results their understanding of the discipline would have for your work. Explain what service design means for you as a designer.
Explain what the service design process looks like in detail, the effect it has on the timeline, and why you work with this process (provide an example of a project where the processes was effective)
Explain why you give advice
Put stakeholders at ease through effective and active communication as well as requiring feedback
Make yourself accessible
Messages need to be clearly formulated to prevent misinterpretations
Communication tends to be more affective in person. Arrange face-to-face meetings.
Ask instead of making assumptions of stakeholders and their knowledge, expected needs, wants, and experiences
Ask the stakeholders what is needed to improve the communication to overcome the issue
Use reassuring language
Translate highly subjective words to avoid misunderstandings or interpretations
Prepare the defense of your position and decisions in advance
Explain your approach for the project through the design process, proposed solutions, and foreseen issues/challenges to cure the HIPPO syndrome (highest paid person in the room is allowed to make the decisions, though they are only involved at a micro level)
Show political and emotional awareness in your communication
Articulate how your approach/process/discipline solves the proposed problem
Be prepared for issues to arise that were unaddressed in previous conversations/meetings
Designers are hired for their expertise in a field; make use of your expertise in a simplified manner when communicating
The solutions will provide value in various areas (beyond the aesthetics); make sure you inform the stakeholders about it
Use tangible and relatable end results as motivators to help stakeholders see the project all the way through
Address the question of <i>decision-power</i> at the beginning of the project (who?)
Confirm decisions like the strategy of research with stakeholders
Make your audience feel comfortable and safe
Whenever possible, be precise and effective (fast) in your communication (do not ramble)
<b>Thought</b>
Everyone is important in this process
Feedback is a two-way street
What are your and others' concerns?

The stakeholder's perspective will broaden during the design process (as will yours)
Stakeholders adapt and learn at their own pace; hence, iterations of information and continuous expectation management is necessary
Consider other "lenses" (views) when presenting and explaining
Each stakeholder is unique and their understanding, response and process will change according to their position (role, expertise, authorities), mood, and relationship
Data needs to be understandable and it needs to provide value
Stakeholders are experts in their own fields and designers need to treat and think of them as such
Not all clients and designers make a good fit (do not jump on the first offer)
Stakeholders will ultimately decide how much they want to push their boundaries with the interpretation (and in the project)
Being able to articulate your process, research, and solutions to others efficiently creates trust
Designers are hired for design decisions not options
Know when to move on/let go
Stay open-minded and empathic
Do not take things personally
Communication about design is a negotiation that goes beyond design matters (e.g., business, politics, execution)
Communication is a two-way street that requires attention in terms of listening from both service and project stakeholders
(Service) design is a team effort
Do not present information or work you are not confident in
Know your audience
Know the business of your client/stakeholders
<b>Thought and actions</b>
Inform the stakeholders that the service design process is about (and works best when) taking the client's specific situation into account and the resulting timely need for involving service design early on, as well as the need for receiving and gathering as much data about the project and stakeholders as possible
Show why service design is a priority (show the value)
Create understanding and (re)educate clients, project members, and the audience
Be an active listener (repeat and conclude)
Be organized and well prepared to make the jobs of others easier (e.g., in data)
Provide consistency in your work, communication, and display of data
Show respect and value for the input provided by stakeholders. Seek to understand the input
Input from others is needed and collected in an empathic and practical manner
Encourage feedback and accept it
Consider the context of a conversation and then choose a fitting medium
Build a relationship with stakeholders
Work is a collaboration (that needs to be made visible – invite as many stakeholders as possible and inform them about activities)
Make stakeholders aware that service design is not an "afterthought" in a project or company
Communication is key, especially at the beginning of a project. Extract needs, wants and expectations during this time.



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Use effective communication to simplify the job and create understanding of the design industry, the job to be undertaken and the skills and resources needed to finish the job

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Look out for the amount and style of communication and adjust (given the individuals and situation)

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In the case of communication issues, address your own behavior first

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Share expectations

---

Understand each stakeholder's identity

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Your decisions are based upon how you understood the client/stakeholder and on your expertise – argue accordingly and inform the stakeholders about it

---

Establish yourself in business discussions and show confidence in voice, words, and body language

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Be aware and make others aware that the role of the designer is also one of authority that inspires, motivates, and leads others, as well as communicates with other authorities

---

Create an atmosphere of collaboration and trust by reaffirming feedback and statements from stakeholders instead of shutting them down and building the perception of superiority and disrespect (“Yes, I will take your concern into consideration” instead of “No”). Create safety for the stakeholders.

---

Join the conversation when you have a message that provides value, not with the intent to fill a void

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Each discipline differs and therefore needs an individual communication approach

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Depending on the individuals involved in the communication (and their relationship), more or less communication is needed. Too little communication with unfamiliar individuals in the beginning can lead to increased communication mid-project and an extension of the project.

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The amount of project background and design process story you need to share depends on the role of the person you are talking to, when they entered the project, and what kind of feedback you are looking to receive. For people who entered your team mid-project, a more extensive run on the background is needed than for someone who was part of your project team from the beginning.

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How the designer presents themselves often has more impact than their formal qualifications

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Using extensive jargon with project stakeholders does not necessarily lead to establishing credibility and intelligence with them

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Feedback is wanted and encouraged

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Overall, the analysis of the blog posts pointed out that communication between service designers and project stakeholders is a requirement for finishing a project, as is a mutual dependence between these parties for communication (which aligns with the literature review). The experiences mentioned by the various service designers indicate that they saw their communication skills were as important as their visual and strategic design skills, since being able to communicate their decisions and managing expectations and people either made or broke a project. Hence, service designers are dependent on communication. Furthermore, the research highlights that the communication of service design is not done by stating the basics of the discipline. Instead, the communication needs to be extended by the context (project) to which service design should be applied and the dependencies that are created by applying the discipline to a context. This extension does not affect “what service design is” for the service designer, but “what it can be, do, and result in” for the project and therefore defines what needs to be communicated to the project stakeholders to create understanding for the discipline and the service designer – a

shift in perspective and needed information takes place. This conclusion led to an analysis of the retrieved and clustered suggestions for the needs they fulfilled in the communication of service design to project stakeholders:

- Message. Concerns the content and formulation of the message, as well as the meaning transmitted within message.
  - Language. Concerns the style/type of wording used in the communication.
  - Styling/presenting information/data. Focuses on the communication style for information and data in the project.
- Creating understanding/engagement/connection. Concerns the creation of understanding, engagement, or connection for, of, and with certain topics and stakeholders through communication.
- Comfort and safety. Communication focuses on creating and providing an environment of comfort and safety for the project stakeholders.
- Knowing others and the individual. Creating and raising awareness of the entities within the project through empathy and communication.
  - Other's views/concerns/goals/experiences/expectations. Communication focuses on other's views, concerns, goals, experiences, and expectations for topics and aspects of the project.
  - Own views/concerns/goals/experiences/expectations. Communication focuses on one's own views, concerns, goals, experiences, and expectations for topics and aspects of the project.
- Value. Concerns displaying or providing benefits for the project through communication.
- Effects on the process. Fundamentally shaping and impacting the project process through communication.
- Meetings and accessibility. Being accessible for communication as a service designer in meetings and other presentation venues, as well as being accessible for discussions of new and repeating topics, and stakeholder views and wishes.
- Feedback. Exchanging information and viewpoints in the communication.

This further analysis of the suggestions reveals that the needs are, more often than not, interdependent or built upon each other. By selecting one need as the main need to be fulfilled or served by a suggestion, a chain reaction is set off that indicates interdependent or entangled needs that are fulfilled by the suggestion. Therefore, needs that initially started out as single needs could be grouped and ranked as, for example, language and styling/presenting of information/data directly or indirectly affecting the message and therefore making the message the overarching need. Yet, depending on the suggestion, the main identified need might still be a sub-need (e.g., selecting styling/presenting information/data for “use simple language”). Further, the analysis indicated an entanglement and dependence of the suggestions themselves and together with the uncovered needs they serve, their focus lies with providing value to the individual, the project stakeholders, and the project itself

through an empathic and understanding-creation approach while upholding the main aim of communicating their discipline.

### **Communication embedded in a bigger picture**

While the data revealed specific insights in forms of actions, thoughts, and needs into the communication approach of service designers about their discipline and project stakeholders, it also pointed out a structure in which the initial communication or the setup of a project is not only embedded but also tied to. This structure is, given the nature of the suggestions and fulfilled needs, an influencing, if not dependent, one since every phase in this structure sets standards and expectations for the phases to come for the service designer, the project, and the project stakeholders. Hence, communication standards need to be created and spread early, as well as maintained throughout a project. The structure of the communication used and proposed by the service designer through blogposts, comprises four phases:

- Mindset for the project and communication. This is a thought or concept that needs to be considered throughout the project and therefore also for the communication of service design (a thought to remember and be prepared for, which supports the shaping of a communication strategy). This thought can turn into explicit actions later on in the structure according to the opinion and experience of the service designers.
- Preparation of communication. Explicit actions that support the preparation of communication throughout the project (especially for communication venues) and therefore also the communication of service design.
- Communication at the beginning of a project. Meetings, presentations, and similar communication events during the setup and the initial phase of the project, in which the project is shaped, and expectations are managed, and therefore the communication of service design also takes place.
- Communication throughout the rest of the project. Meetings, presentations, and similar communication events following the initial phase until the end of the project, in which the communication of service design continuously takes place as the project stakeholders gather more knowledge about service design through practice (and therefore need clarification) and new project stakeholders enter the project.

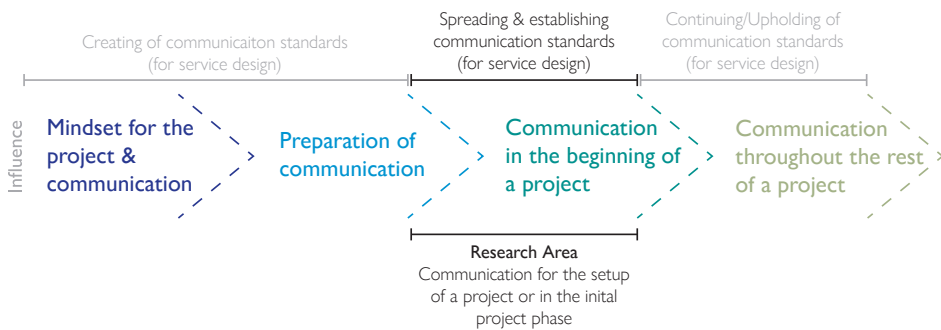


Figure 18. The service designer's communication embedded in a bigger picture

Given the practical and detailed nature of the suggestions, it is difficult to distinguish between suggestions only relevant for the project, project communication, and the communication of service design. The beginning and the development of the project influence and shape the concept of service design in terms of what it can do, be, and result in for the project and project stakeholders, which consequently also shapes what details of service design, and how and to whom these details need to be communicated to. Further, the suggestions set expectations and standards in the communication provided by the service designer for the project and its members and consequently for the communication of what service design can be, do, and result in. This dynamic ultimately creates an interplay of dependencies for the communication of service design in a project that lasts throughout the proposed four-phased structure.

#### 4.3.2 Communication processes used by service designers to communicate their discipline

Although this thesis focuses on the communication of service design in the setup and initial phase of a project – “communication at the beginning of a project” (Figure.18, The service designer's communication embedded in a bigger picture) – the data indicates that the preparation of communication should also be considered in this context. In fact, most communication suggestions and processes retrieved from the blog posts focused either solely or mostly on the preparation of and mindset for the communication, as well as the conduct of the communication (the presentation). The content of the communication (“what”) and its structure, on the other hand, were mostly left undiscussed. For this subchapter, communication processes from the secondary research material and the in-depth interviews with service designers were retrieved and can be clustered into the communication processes of “how” and “what.”

## **“How”**

This process is applied by service designers as a framework to create the presentation of service design and conduct the presentation. The processes that formed the “How Process” below are derived from the analyzed blog posts and enhanced by the processes suggested from the practical presentation literature of Baker (2007) and Duarte (2012). Together, the various processes formed a five-phase guideline for creating and conducting a presentation that concerns service design in a project (the communication of service design). Overall, the process focuses on being prepared, knowing the communication audience (stakeholders addressed by and listening to the presentation and participating in the feedback), catering to the audience, and engaging them for feedback and clarification discussions about service design as a discipline, the project, and the various views of the project stakeholders. The process suggests setting goals for the presentation, encouraging feedback and discussion in advance, developing a message according to the set goals and the communication audience’s needs (including the selection of a fitting language and data presentation), and creating a safe space for feedback through encouraging language, sufficient time, and the empowerment of others’ ideas.



Figure 19. The how process

### **“What” – Information, message and value**

The “how process” defines a framework of actions and practical steps. However, the content and topics of the communication are rarely discussed, and especially not in which order, to which level of detail, and with which timely manner they should be presented. To receive further insights into the content and its structure, used for Phase 3, Present in the how process, processes were retrieved from the analyzed blog posts, the in-depth interviews with service designers, and from the book “This is Service Design Thinking” by Stickdorn and Schneider (2011). By analyzing the individual processes, a four-phase structure of what is currently suggested to be presented could be established (see Figure.20, The what process). This process indicates that an understanding of the basic concept and principles of service design needs to be established before elaborating on the service design process and supporting the information through the presentation of a stakeholder-relatable project example. In the final phase, an outlook for the project should be presented in terms of proposed solutions (if applicable at that point of time in the project) and expected issues. The common thread throughout all phases is the relatability that has to be created for the project stakeholders and the project towards the discipline and therefore following the assumption made previously that the communication of service design needs to deliver “what it can be, do, and result in” for the project, the project stakeholders, and also the service designer.



Figure 20. The what process



### **4.3.3 Summary**

#### **Answering RQ3: What does the communication process currently applied by service designers look like?**

As the scientific literature did not propose a communication process for service design in any communication setting, practical material (blog posts), empirical data, and practical literature had to be retrieved and analyzed to reconstruct the communication process currently applied by service designers. By reviewing and analyzing the communication experiences of service designers, it became clear that no unified communication process was currently known and applied by service designers in projects (or other communication situations). Generally, the retrieved answers from service designers revealed that their communication strategies were based on numerous explicit actions and thoughts that they treated more like suggestions:

- they were not aware of a properly working communication process
- they had better communication experiences when keeping their communication adjustable to the communication situation at hand (e.g., project stakeholders, project problem).

These suggestions focused on getting into the right mindset (e.g., consider others' perspectives, do not take things personally) for the communication and on explaining the communication actions (e.g., use simple language). Hence, the suggestions allowed for the formation of a bigger picture view of the communication of service design in a project. Within this view, phases were found to exist before the actual communication of service design (at the beginning of a project). They are crucial for planning the communication, as well as for creating and setting communication standards in a project and for service design. The data from service designers also revealed that currently little focus is placed on the content ("what") and on "how" this content should be communicated. These were two issues of utmost importance for the communication, as it is shaped not only by the presenter of information, the communication audience, and project context, but also the content of the communication in terms of the intended message (service design – what it is, can be, can do, and can result in). Consequently, the current communication strategy applied by service designers was found to barely focus on the service design information that should be communicated, the detail level, and in a timely manner – length and extent of content and communication – as Figure.20, The what process displays. This means that the currently applied suggestions and re-constructed process did not provide the answer to a fundamental concern for service designers: what information should specifically be shown to support project stakeholders in understanding the discipline and convincing them to support the practitioners in the project within the timeframe of a pitch or project kick-off?

The retrieved and re-constructed processes displayed in this subchapter were treated as a *first foundation*, which was used to further evolve and enhance the communication of service design in the setup phase and initial phase of a project (see RQ4).

#### **4.4 Improving the current communication process for service designers**

**Research question 4: What could an improved and fit-for purpose communication process look like for service designers?**

This research question caters to the second main research intent – enhancing the reconstructed communication process and content (testable solution/improvement in the form of a process) in a fit-for purpose manner (“how-to” roadmap) for service designers. The *first foundation* was tested, evaluated, and adapted in iterations through communications made in different settings to meet the aim and retrieve relevant enhancement insights. The final outcome of the research is presented in a “how-to” roadmap that suits the practical nature of service designers and caters to the aspects of “how” and “what” that were found to be unaddressed in the currently applied communication process for service design. This subchapter provides an overview of the evolution from the *first foundation* to the “how-to” road map, as well as an in-depth explanation of the later one.

##### **4.4.1 Evolution of the communication processes during the research (list of interim processes)**

One aim throughout the research was to test the *first foundation* communication process in various communication settings with different stakeholders of the communication audience (students and project stakeholders), different compositions of the *first foundation* and with varying content to uncover which of composition of phases, actions, and content worked best for the communication of service design at the beginning of a project. Overall, the phases “know your audience” and “prepare in advance” from the “how process”, as well as the entire “what process” were found to be unspecific with regard to their content in the first foundation. Yet they were also found to be the most crucial phases and processes in the communication of service design to consider, design, and conduct. This understanding and further insights retrieved through this study highlight what structure, topics, and content details must lie at the *core* of communicating service design, so foundational knowledge could be shared with project stakeholders in a comprehensible and persuasive manner. To further heighten the effectiveness of the communication, it was also discovered that extensions to this *core* of the “what process” were needed depending

on the communication situation. The gathered insights regarding the “how process” pointed out which questions, methods, and actions needed to be considered and applied to better identify the project stakeholders and choose a communication style that reaches them and achieves persuasion.

### **Evolution of the “what process” – pain points to overcome**

Due to the lack of content and details in the reconstructed *first foundation*, the follow-up research (communications and testing) focused on retrieving and evaluating the information relevant in these communication settings (e.g., set-up, kick-off, briefing), as well as the duration and the phrasing/presentation of the information. The *final core* process provides an overall structure of relevant topics to discuss, as well as a variety of instructions and examples of critical topics that received positive feedback from the communication audience, including:

- the definition of service design
- the definition of a service
- how to possibly describe the relevance of service design in such settings.

The graphic and table displayed below (in Figure.21 and Table 14), illustrate the evolution from the *first foundation* to the *final core* of the “what process.” Although the “what process” ran through multiple iterations, resulting in various interim processes, only the (interim) process versions with significant impact on the *final core* are displayed in Figure.21 and Table 14 (including the setting in which the process was created or the setting the process was created for, the results and feedback (learnings) retrieved by testing these versions). Through the research, testing and analyzing of communication processes, “V0.7” was deemed to be the structure for the “what process” to meet the needs of project stakeholders and service designers the most when it came to sharing and establishing a foundation of service design within project stakeholders. The content detail within the process still needed further work to cater to the possible settings in which to communicate service design and hence a version 1.0 needed to be created (for more details see 4.4.1, The final service design communication process for delivery to project stakeholders).

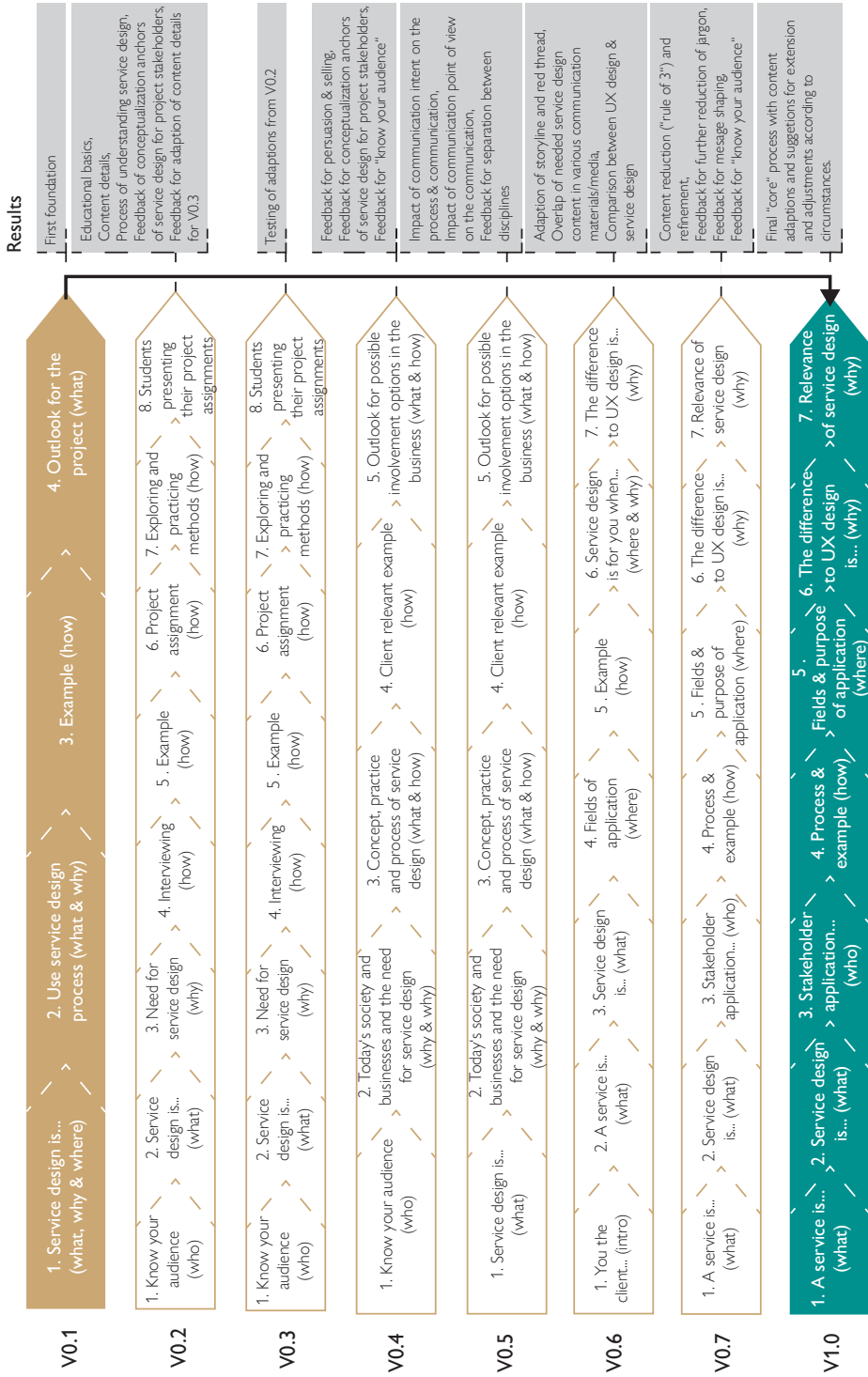


Figure 21. The "what process" evolution

Table 14 List of main “what process” versions

Version	Description
V0.1	The process retrieved from the insights provided by service designers and blog posts ( <i>first foundation</i> ). This process neglected getting to know the audience during its application.
V0.2	The process used to communicate service design to students as the communication audience (lectures Spring 2019). This process included getting to know the audience during its application.
V0.3	An adaption of the process V0.2, also used to communicate service design to students as the communication audience (lectures Autumn 2019). This process included getting to know the audience during its application.
V0.4	The process applied to communicate service design to the MD as a project stakeholder in a decision-making position. This process included getting to know the audience during its application.
V0.5	The process created to communicate service design in the industry to possible project stakeholders (including designers and researchers). This process neglected getting to know the audience during its application and focused on presenting service design solely from a service designer's point of view.
V0.6	The process used to communicate service design in the industry to possible project stakeholders. This process neglected getting to know the audience during its application.
V0.7	The process used to communicate service design in the industry to possible project stakeholders (including designers, marketing). This process neglected getting to know the audience during its application.
V1.0	The <i>final</i> process created to communicate service design to project stakeholders.

### Evolution of the “how process” – pain points to overcome

The retrieved insights gathered through the communications highlighted an “unprecise” identification of the audience in the current first foundation. The communication was not tailored to the communication audience in the phases “know your audience” and “prepare in advance” of the “how process,” which led to less involvement of the audience and less success in conveying the message of the presentation. Therefore, adjustments were made within the phases (introduction of further questions to answer prior to the “present phase,” as well as research methods and communication actions), which provided further options for identifying the communication audience, their position towards the project and service design, and their preferred communication style. In addition, a new phase (“repeat and adjust the presentation) was added due to the feedback and the literature that was consulted to further enhance the communication of service design for the needs of the individual project and stakeholders. Generally, the feedback and insights through the testing situations furthered the aim of achieving persuasion through the communication, instead of solely creating understanding.

### **Results of the evolution**

Ultimately, the reconstructing and testing of the *first foundation* and interim versions in different communication situations and with communication audiences of different origins allowed for an update of the *first foundation* to an extended and enriched “how process” that incorporates a detail-rich *core* “what process.” The “what process” can be extended on demand depending on the audience, the communication situation, and the context of the project, and therefore will evolve together with society, its (i.e. society’s) information level about the discipline, its mindset, its faced pain, and its need to solve this pain over time and communication iterations. Furthermore, the updated “what process” enables service designers to better identify the communication audience, select a fitting communication style, and ultimately persuade project stakeholders about service design.

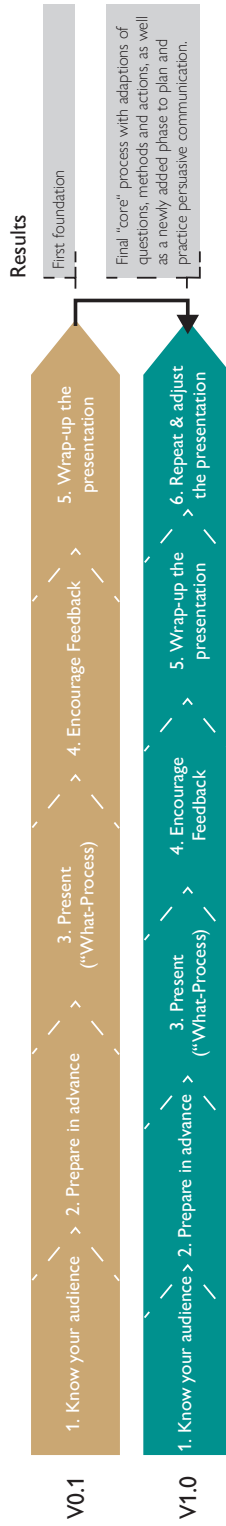


Figure 22. The "how processes" evolution

#### 4.4.1 The final service design communication process for delivery to project stakeholders

In this subchapter, the updated, fit-for-purpose and holistically viewed *final* service design communication process is provided and explained in detail – an in-depth exploration of the “how-to” road map, which contains the “how process” and “what process”, is applied (Figure.23, The final service design communication process ).

### Change of strategy

Table 15 Problems to solve in the communication processes

Communication process	Identified problem
First foundation	Service designers are struggling to communicate service design in one communication session and without practice, in a manner that establishes understanding of the discipline, its approach, practitioners, and methods to project stakeholders.
Final core	Service designers are struggling to persuade project stakeholders to consider and involve the discipline in projects and committing to the discipline. The service designers crave a communication process in which they can stay true to the values and concept of the discipline and its mindset.

Although the setting for both communication processes is the communication of service design to project stakeholders at the beginning of a project, the focus and identified problem to solve shifted within the processes and a change in the communication and content strategy needed to take place. The *first foundation* communication process aims to create understanding for the discipline, its practitioners, and approach in one communication session, while also convincing project stakeholders of the discipline’s benefits and suitability. This communication process focuses heavily on educating project stakeholders (compared to the *final core process*) on service design to sell the discipline (use of service design concept details) and create understanding for the approach and the practitioners, while neglecting the needs of the project stakeholders, their decision-making process, and the phase the project is in. The updated strategy treats the beginning of a project as a persuasion phase in which communications provide minimal yet guiding educational information about the involvement of service design in projects and hence the decision-making process of project stakeholders. The deep-dive into service design in terms of elements such as concept, application, and role is created through the planned communication iterations and ultimately through practice in the project.



The new strategy applied to solve the problem of the *final core communication process* aims to persuade and educate project stakeholders about service design and its practitioners in a simplified and more audience-tailored way, without giving up the approach and mindset of the discipline in the process for the sake of persuading (and selling). To achieve this aim, more awareness and further investigation of the needs, expectations, and applied communication of project stakeholders, their current concepts of customers and their own business, as well as their current “location” within their journey of either learning about or deciding to invest in the discipline, is provided. Furthermore, an in-depth exploration of “how” and “what” needs to be communicated to cater to both service designers and the project stakeholders is conducted. The strategy is designed for multiple planned communication iterations (and multiple communication audiences), in which the communication content and actions are adapted so the persuasion and education can steadily increase (at the beginning of the project) and ultimately cater better to the different project stakeholders and the aims of the service designers. Hence, this strategy provides a situation adaptable puzzle approach with several fixed core puzzle pieces. It is important to note that once the setup and initial phase of a project are over (introductions and negotiations are over), and the “actual work” inside the project starts, this *final core* is not likely to fit the communication needs of service design, the project, and its stakeholders anymore (unless new stakeholders join the project throughout its duration), especially when considering the involvement of “practicing together.” Yet, this process and strategy can help to establish a new, or enhance the current, communication process for service design when “practicing together” in terms of communication inside the project (formal vs. informal, vertical vs. horizontal communication, shaping of messages) and the location of the project stakeholders in the service design journey (experience level, needs, participation, relationships, professional background).

### **The final service design communication process – using the “how-to” roadmap**

This roadmap displays the phases (e.g., know your audience), steps (e.g., 1, 2.a), methods, actions, and questions a service designer should (and is likely to) run through when communicating service design in the setup of a project (where more persuasion than education is needed) or the initial phase of a project (where more education than persuasion is needed). It further points out pitfalls (marked “X”), hints (marked “!”) and thoughts (dashed speech bubbles) in the process of communicating service design. This *final communication process* of service design is a strategical accumulation of all the materials gathered, evaluated, tested, and revised for this study (see also material from 2, THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH and 4, RESULTS) and deemed useful for the communication of service design. When considering this roadmap in terms of time and work resources, the communication of service design should not be treated as a task undertaken on the side of practicing service design due to its extensiveness and the individual circumstances provided by the communication audience, project, and organizations. Note: when explaining the “how-to” roadmap, the term audience or communication audience is usually used to refer to project stakeholders to create a symbiosis with communication literature.

# THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS FOR SERVICE DESIGN

## HOW-PROCESS

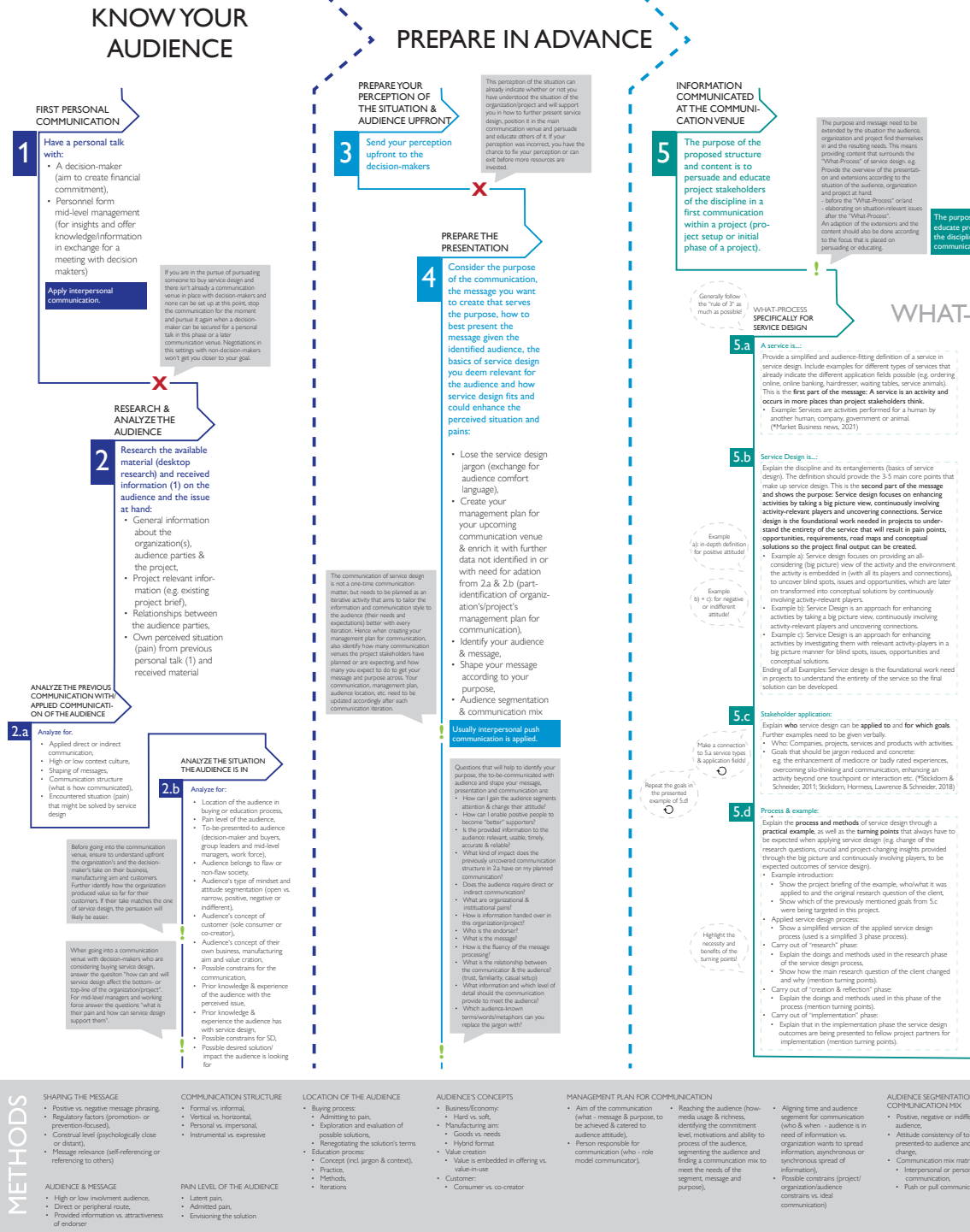


Figure 23. The final service design communication process

# SERVICE DESIGN (SD)

## PRESENT

## ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK

## WRAP UP THE PRESENTATION

## PROCESS

WHAT PROCESS SPECIFICALLY FOR SERVICE DESIGN

5.e

**Fields & purpose of application:**  
Provide the range of sectors/fields service design can be applied to, as well as the range of purpose for its application. Highlight the biggest or most audience-relevant industry sectors in which service design can be applied to and further point out that because the term "activity" is the limit of service design, organizational change can also be done.

- Applied sectors:
  - Present 3-4 fields or sectors in which service design is applied the most (public, finance etc.).
- Further application fields of service design:
  - Point out that the limit of service design lies with the concept of an "activity".
  - Point out that service design can also be applied for organizational change.

Make a connection between organizational change and the behavioral change achieved in the example!

5.f

**The difference to UX Design is...:**  
Present how you as the service designer define service design and UX design as its core to point out their differences.

- Service design:
  - Range of stakeholders (e.g. all affected and effecting players in the big picture)
  - Range of research (e.g. taking a big picture view on the service and all its connections/entanglements with people, other services and products).
  - Outcome (e.g. foundational work to understand the entirety of the service so the solution can be developed – pain points, opportunities, road maps, requirements, conceptual solutions, etc.).
- UX design:
  - Range of stakeholders (e.g. business players and users).
  - Range of research (e.g. uncovering the product or service on a detail-view mainly from a user's and content point of view).
  - Outcome (e.g. foundational work to understand the user and his/her interactions, as well as the development of interaction plans, concepts and visual solutions).

Refer to the 3-5 main core points of service design (5.a & 5.b)!

Use your own or an ideological definition of UX Design!

5.g

**Relevance of service design:**  
Provide a conclusion of the most obvious and easiest perceivable values and benefits provided to the audience. Refer to the main core points, message and purpose again when elaborating on the values and benefits for project stakeholders.

- Example: Knowing the service inside-out and creating a reason that caters to the needs of its players, means to create a reason for them to choose you over your competitor. Services are essentially complex, and humans are essentially emotions driven. Service design can help you understand both and support you into transforming this knowledge into satisfaction and revenue increase. (Mayou, 2017; Stockdom & Schneider, 2011; Ritter & Weber, 1973; Buchanan, 1992)

Project stakeholders in decision-making positions, benefits & values need to meet the bottom- or top-line! (see example)!

Regular project stakeholders benefits & values need to display practical and emotional support

Adapt and extend the presentation after 5.g to the individual circumstances of the audience, project and service design.

\* for sources see dissertation

6

### ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK

Open a discussion to to receive feedback, address open questions from the audience and pose your own open questions:

- Give the audience time to think about the received information.
- Encourage a dialogue /Ask questions to the audience.
- Practice active listening (especially for step 7).
- Reframe the audience's feedback.
- Use encouraging language and stay polite.
- Discuss options.
- Manage Expectations.
- Discuss next steps in the buying or education process

7

### CLARIFICATION

Clarify the main concept of service design again after listening to the feedback, questions and dialogue of the audience.

8

### SUMMARIZE THE COMMUNICATION

Summarize the presentation, discussion, feedback and next steps briefly as a final consensus to "where the audience and the presenter left off and what is to be expected as a next step".

9

### UPDATE THE COMMUNICATION

Given the feedback and insights you gather during the communication venue (and the feedback you might have received afterwards), the communication and management plan need to be updated accordingly to meet the needs and expectations even better in the next communication.

Again: The communication of service design is not a one-time communication matter, but needs to be planned as an iterative activity that aims to tailor the information and communication style to the audience (their needs and expectations) better with every iteration. Further, more communication iterations mean a repeated exposure of the audience to the message.

## REPEAT & ADJUST THE COMMUNICATION

- MANAGING EXPECTATIONS
- Adapt.
  - Compromise.
  - Dismiss.
  - Ignore.

## STRATEGY

The new strategy aims to persuade and educate project stakeholders of service design and its practitioners in a simplified and more audience-tailored way, without giving up the approach and mindset of the discipline in the process for the sake of persuading (and selling). To achieve this aim, more awareness and further investigation of the needs, expectations and applied communication of project stakeholders, their current "location" within their journey of either learning about or deciding to invest in the discipline is done. Furthermore, an in-depth

exploration of "how" and "what" needs to be communicated to cater to both service designers and project stakeholders is carried out. The strategy is designed for multiple planned communication iterations (and multiple audiences), in which the communication content and actions are adapted, so the persuasion and education can steadily increase and ultimately cater better to the different project stakeholders and the aims of the service designers. Hence, this strategy provides a situation adaptable puzzle approach with several fixed core puzzle pieces.

## **Know your audience**

The phase “know your audience” is the first in the “how process” and one of the most crucial and foundational phases for successful communication. The foundation for any communication is to get in touch with relevant project stakeholders and to understand where the communication audience and project is at in their opinion and in the opinion of the service designer. For example, where is the audience in its buying and education process? What pains are they willing to acknowledge? What resources are they willing to invest? What level of commitment do they show for the project and service design?

- 1) First personal communication. This step occurs some time before the actual communication of service design event (“present”). The aim of this step is to gather the first batch of information about the communication audience (project stakeholders), the project, and the situation they are in. Here, service design might have to be explained at its core to determine if there is any possibility of working together.

A reminder for proceeding with the communication: commitment has to be established at this point within decision-makers in the project. Moving forward without the said commitment of decision-makers (also if it is only financial commitment) is likely to result in the service designer spending further time and effort explaining and promoting service design to project stakeholders who are not in a decision-making position, which leads to an increased communication effort and a delay in talking to the “right” people, getting a foot in the door, and setting up the required communication event discussed in the phase “present.”

- 2) Research and analyze the audience. Once a communication event for service design in which decision-makers will participate is agreed upon, the audience (as well as the project and organization), the situation they are in (desktop research) and the information retrieved through the personal talks (e.g., existing briefs) need to be investigated. The information needs to be analyzed with the aim of identifying the situation and tailoring the communication to the audience’s and project’s needs. Step 2.a. and 2.b suggest topics that should be investigated and analyzed, as well as methods to apply (for the specific methods and structure, see Figure.23, The final service design communication process and Figure.24, Methods – final core “how process”). The actions in these steps need to result in:
  - locating the audience, project, and organization in their buying and/or education process
  - creating a profile of the audience including their most obvious pain, their admittance of pain, their concept of customers, and their current understanding and application of services and products

- investigating the audience's concept of their business/economy, manufacturing aim, value creation and customer understanding
- identifying what the location and audience profile mean for service design in the project and in the communication
- creating an upfront perception of the situation and audience.

Note: within this research, the project brief is considered as a source of information that can influence the preparation of the communication and the investigation of the project and audience (if one is already given in step 1 or 2), and as a future document that is shaped by the communication presentation. The creation of the brief or a proposal is not part of this communication process, given the research scope and the identified problem solved in the *final core* process (see Table 15).

### **Prepare in advance**

The second phase of the “how process” focuses on shaping the communication of service design for the upcoming “present” phase by identifying the purpose of the communication, creating a message that supports the purpose, and by creating a management plan for the communication to better understand the audience, the message, purpose, and how to change the audience's attitude through communication and the message.

- 3) Prepare your perception of the situation and audience upfront. Before the actual communication event, a perception of the project situation and audience can and should be sent to the decision-makers upfront to display the service designer's understanding and correct misperceptions. This step transmits commitment and effort from the service designer's side to understand the audience, project, and organization. In the worst case, both parties see that a fit is not likely early and resources can be saved.
- 4) Prepare the presentation. At this point, the plan for the further communication events (including how many iterations of the communication might be needed until the persuasion and education is completed) is made (for the specific methods and structure, see Figure.23, The final service design communication process and Figure.24, Methods – final core “how process”). The main point is to uncover the purpose of the communication, create a message, and create a plan of how to display both (message and purpose) in the communication to either support the audience in their attitude or change their attitude (management plan for the communication). The purpose should derive from the service designer's aims and the aims and pains of the audience and project, and be transformed into a simple and memorable message that remains unchanged, and that is repeated and interlinked throughout the planned communications.

# METHODS

## AUDIENCE'S CONCEPTS

- Business/Economy:
  - Hard vs. soft,
- Manufacturing aim:
  - Goods vs. needs
  - Hybrid format
- Value creation
  - Value is embedded in offering vs. value-in-use
- Customer:
  - Consumer vs. co-creator

## LOCATION OF THE AUDIENCE

- Buying process:
  - Admitting to pain,
- Exploration and evaluation of possible solutions,
- Renegotiating the solution's terms
- Education process:
  - Concept (incl. jargon & context),
  - Practice,
  - Methods,
  - Iterations

## COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE

- Formal vs. informal,
- Vertical vs. horizontal,
- Personal vs. impersonal,
- Instrumental vs. expressive

## SHAPING THE MESSAGE

- Positive vs. negative message phrasing,
- Regulatory factors (promotion- or prevention-focused),
- Construal level (psychologically close or distant),
- Message relevance (self-referencing or referencing to others)

## PAIN LEVEL OF THE AUDIENCE

- Latent pain,
- Admitted pain,
- Envisioning the solution of endorser

## AUDIENCE & MESSAGE

- High or low involvement audience,
- Direct or peripheral route,
- Provided information vs. attractiveness of endorser

## MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR COMMUNICATION

- Aim of the communication (what - message & purpose, to be achieved & catered to audience attitude),
- Person responsible for communication (who - role model communicator),
- Reaching the audience (how- media usage & richness, identifying the commitment level, motivations and ability to process of the audience, segmenting the audience and finding a communication mix to meet the needs of the segment, message and purpose),
- Aligning time and audience segment for communication (who & when - audience is in need of information vs. organization wants to spread information, asynchronous or synchronous spread of information),
- Possible constraints (project/ organization/audience constraints vs. ideal communication)

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION & COMMUNICATION MIX

- Positive, negative or indifferent audience,
- Attitude consistency of to-be-presented-to audience and desired change,
- Communication mix matrix:
  - Interpersonal or personal communication,
  - Push or pull communication

## MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

- Adapt,
- Compromise,
- Dismiss,
- Ignore

Figure 24. Methods – final core “how process”

## Present

When presenting service design, more than the discipline is communicated. The previously identified situation, audience, pains, location in the processes, intentions of the service designer affect what will be presented at the communication event. Hence, the created and displayed “what process” of this thesis only shows the core elements and structure that need to be involved in the communication of service design – otherwise the “what process” is a “living” process and should be adapted to the individual circumstances of the audience and project (e.g., discussing pain points, displaying further example projects where similar pain points have been addressed).

- 5) Information communicated at the communication event. Generally, the aim of the “what process” is to continuously highlight the purpose and message throughout the communication event and create connections between the examples and details used to elaborate service design. For example, 5.a and 5.b contain the message of service design. This message is explained with details like the definition of a service, which again is designed to be connected to 5.c and therefore should be repeated. 5.c also mentions goals of service design (e.g., enhancement of poorly rated experiences), which are again incorporated in 5.d in the example. More connections and repetitions of the message through anecdotes, examples, and discipline details can be found in Figure.25, Final core “what process” or in steps 5.a to 5.g. The purpose and message of service design and its “what process” needs to be adapted, but specifically extended for the audience, the project, and the situation they are in, to address them and shape their attitudes towards a desired aim/intention. This means providing content that surrounds the “what process” of service design with prior steps like an overview of the presentation or a perception of the situation, as well as follow-up steps, which provide extended content that serves the aim and purpose of the presentation regarding the audience, project, and their situation (e.g., a first identification of problems and the ease service design could provide). In addition, each step of the “what process” outlined below should be presented in written form and elaborated further verbally. The written words and graphics are the guideline for the audience; they contain the bare minimum to be processed and remembered by the audience. The purpose in this setting is to persuade and educate project stakeholders of the discipline in a first communication.

5.a) A service is ... (what):

Present the preferred **definition of a service** (which applies to the context of service design) in a simplified way and in language and jargon the audience is comfortable with. Include examples of different types of services that already indicate the different application fields possible (e.g., ordering online, online banking, hairdresser, waiting tables, service animals). Further, try to apply as much as possible “the



rule of 3” (the MD mentioned this rule and explained it as proposing only three items of information at a time that the audience could remember – no overload of information) throughout the “what process” to simplify the topic, and enhance the audience’s content and message processing and make the provided content memorable. In 5.a, the first part of the message is provided, which in this case is: a *service* is an *activity* and occurs in more places than project stakeholders think.

- Example: Services are activities performed for a human by another human, company, government, or animal (Market Business News, 2021).

Afterwards, provide the previously mentioned examples of different service types and elaborate on them in relation to the presented definition.

5.b) Service design is ... (what):

Explain **the discipline and its entanglements in its basics** by providing a definition that points out the 3–5 main core points that make up service design (in the service designer’s opinion). Here, the second part of the message is provided, which also shows the purpose, which in this case is: service design focuses on enhancing activities by taking a big picture view, continuously involving activity-relevant players and uncovering connections. Further, service design is the foundational work needed in projects to understand the entirety of the service that will result in pain points, opportunities, requirements, road maps, and conceptual solutions, so the final project output can be created. The discipline is not described as a solution approach, as the work done in service design is likely to not result in something the audience might consider a solution in the sense of a final output of a service/product (project stakeholders and the communication audience use a project’s outcome as an anchor to define service design). Instead, service design is considered an investigation approach that, through the uncovered information and by involving relevant players can (depending on the service designers and the project) result in conceptual solutions (e.g., future scenarios, future blueprints or first mock-ups – unless the service designer also produces XU/UI designs). Below, three jargon-reduced examples for a definition of service design are provided. Example a) is a more in-depth definition and might therefore be a likelier fit for project stakeholders in a decision-making position or any project stakeholders with a positive attitude who have already read-up on or want to learn more about the discipline and become an advocate for it.

- Example a): Service design focuses on providing an all-considering (big picture) view of the activity and the environment the activity

is embedded in (with all its players and connections), to uncover blind spots, issues and opportunities that are later transformed into conceptual solutions by continuously involving activity-relevant players.

- Example b): Service design is an approach for enhancing activities by taking a big picture view, continuously involving activity-relevant players and uncovering connections within the big picture.
- Example c): Service design is an approach for enhancing activities by investigating them with relevant activity-players in a big picture manner for blind spots, issues, opportunities, and conceptual solutions.
- Ending for all examples: Service design is the foundational work needed in projects to understand the entirety of the service so the final solution (project output) can be developed.

5.c) Stakeholder application (who):

Explain **who** service design can be applied to (**company, projects, services, or products**) and **for which goals**. Examples need to be given verbally to enhance the presented information. Besides mentioning who service design can be applied to, the **goals of the application** should also be mentioned (e.g., **the enhancement of mediocre or badly rated experiences, overcoming silo-thinking and communication, enhancing an activity beyond one touchpoint or interaction**) (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018). Further, the mentioned goals should be encountered in the main example presented in 5.d, to create further connection between the “what process” steps and the provided information. These goals and “who” should be brought into connection with the definition from before (5.a and 5.b) verbally (create continuous information connections and cycles to repeat the message and purpose of service design).

5.d) Process and example (how):

Elaborate the **process and methods of service design through a practical example**. Besides showing how service design works, the *turning points* that “always” have to be expected when applying service design need to be supported by the example itself and again be highlighted in the verbal presentation (they are common in service design projects and therefore need to be expected for other projects). Identified turning points through this research were :1) change in the research questions, 2) the crucial and project-changing insights provided through the big picture and continuously involving players, 3) the expected outcomes of service design (which are not the expected

final output of projects by the project stakeholders) and that they are handed over to other project partners to develop the final project output (final solution). A structure could be:

- Example introduction:
  - o show the briefing of the example, who/what it was applied to and the client's original research question
  - o show which of the previously mentioned goals (from 5.c) were being targeted in this project.
- Applied service design process:
  - o Display the applied service design process for the project. Since the double diamond process requires more processing capabilities (from the audience) than a waterfall process, Stickdorn & Schneider's (2011) four-phase process is used in this case, but reduced to three phases, as the phases "create" and "reflect" are seen as interdependent steps.
- Conduct of the "research" phase:
  - o explain the actions and methods used in the first phase of the service design process
  - o show how the client's main research question changed and why (highlight turning point 1 and 2).
- Conduct of the "creation and reflection" phase:
  - o explain the actions, events and methods used in this phase of the process (including graphics of the service design outcome) (highlight turning point 2).
- Conduct of the "implementation" phase:
  - o explain what the service design outcomes are and that in the implementation phase the service design outcomes are being presented to fellow project partners for implementation (including graphics of the service design outcome) (highlight turning point 3).

5.e) Fields and purpose of application (where):

Show the range of **sectors/fields service design can be applied to**, as well as the range of **purpose for its application**. The main point (if the example in the previous phase was not of an organizational change nature) is to highlight the biggest or most audience-relevant industry sectors to which service design can be applied and further point out that because the term *activity* is the limit of service design, organizational change can also be undertaken. Verbally add why an activity and service design apply to organizational change. It might also be possible to return briefly to the previous example of 5.d and

elaborate how behavioral change was achieved there and across structures, which is a mild form of organizational change.

- Applied sectors:
  - o Present 3–4 fields or sectors in which service design is applied the most (e.g., public, finance).
- Further application fields of service design:
  - o Point out that service design's limits lie with the concept of an *activity*.
  - o Point out that service design can also be applied to organizational change.

5.f) The difference to UX design is (why):

It is proposed that the service designer presents how they **define service design and UX design at their core, to point out their differences**. In the industry sectors in which service design finds and is trying to find application, UX design is usually already more established/spread and therefore a) a main competitor and b) a block to build the explanation of service design on. The aim and purpose of the presentation, as well as the audience itself, can affect the language, examples, and definition of UX design used in the presentation. The definition should be of a metalevel nature and show harder cuts for project stakeholders in decision-making positions and the communication audience in general. The separation of XU design (or a related but relevant field for the audience) and service design, as well as the level of detail displayed throughout the communication of service design must change from a metalevel to a detail and practice level when communicating with design researchers or UX designers. In these cases, the blur between the disciplines is significant and the separation “lies in the details. In this differentiation, again refer to the 3–5 main core aspects from the service design definition from 5.a and 5.b (message and purpose).

- Service design:
  - o Range of stakeholders (e.g., all affected and effecting players in the big picture)
  - o Range of research (e.g., taking a big picture view of the service and all its connections/entanglements with people, organizations, other services and products)
  - o Outcome (e.g., foundational work to understand the entirety of the service so the solution can be developed – pain points, opportunities, road maps, requirements, conceptual solutions).
- UX design:
  - o Range of stakeholders (e.g., business players and users)

- o Range of research (e.g., uncovering the product or service on a detail view mainly from a user's and content point of view)
- o Outcome (e.g., foundational work to understand the user and their interactions, as well as the development of interaction plans, concepts and visual solutions).

5.g) Relevance of service design (why):

Provide a **conclusion of the most obvious and easiest perceivable values and benefits provided to the audience and project**. Refer to the main core points, message, and purpose again when elaborating on the values and benefits for project stakeholders. For project stakeholders in decision-making positions, the values and benefits must be related to the bottom or top line of the project or organization; for regular project stakeholders, the values and benefits need to display the practical and emotional support service design can bring to them to solve their problem.

- Example for project stakeholders in decision-making positions. Knowing the service inside-out and creating a service that caters to the needs of its players means creating a reason for them to choose you over your competitor. Services are essentially complex, and humans are essentially emotion-driven. Service design can help you understand both and support you into transforming this knowledge into satisfaction and revenue increase (Mayou, 2017; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Buchanan, 1992).

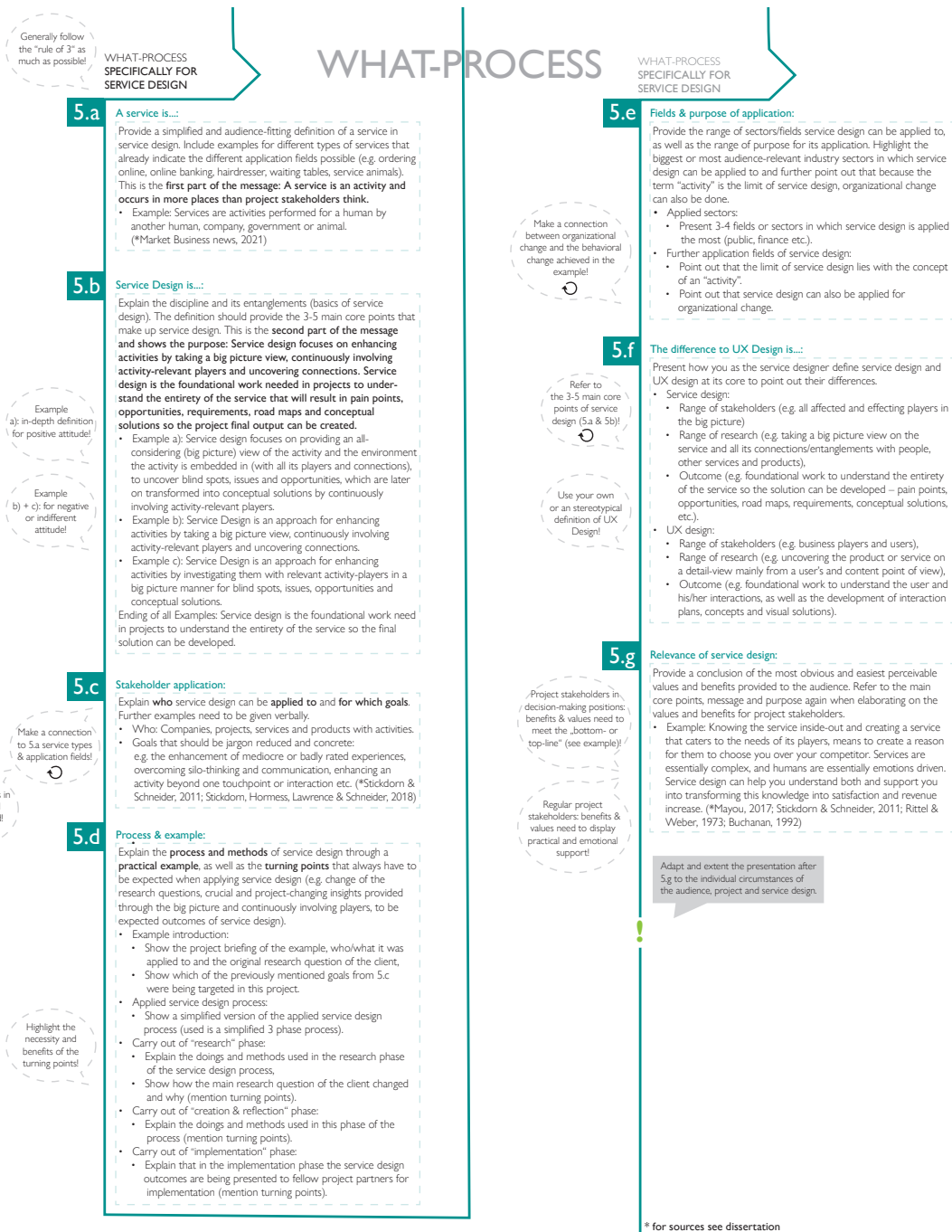


Figure 25. Final core “what process”

### **Encourage feedback**

After the presentation of the purpose, message, examples, basics of service design, and benefits, a feedback slot for questions and discussions about the recent presentation needs to occur (ideally at the same communication event as the “present” phase). This feedback slot creates a space for clarification about the project, perception of the situation, audience, and service design.

- 6) Encourage feedback. Here, feedback is received and questions can be asked by the audience, as well as from the service designer, to better understand the situation and what the different parties aim for. This is the point to manage the expectations of the audience in more depth, discuss options, and practice active listening to later conduct steps 7 and 8.
- 7) Clarification. During the feedback slot, the audience will pose questions about service design, but also present their understanding of the discipline, what it can bring and what it should bring to the project and them. This is the time to identify and clarify the main misunderstandings/misconceptions the project stakeholders have about the discipline, repeat the message again, and in the worst case, adapt the message (e.g., through jargon, level of detail, examples).

### **Wrap up the presentation**

- 8) Summarize the communication. The communication event needs to close with a summary of the presented material, a repetition of the message, the main and most crucial points from the discussion, feedback and clarification, as well as an outlook on the proposed next steps for the project. This summary needs to be a simple and memorable consensus of where the audience and the presenter left off and what is to be expected as a next step, which both parties can connect to in their next communication.

### **Repeat and adjust the communication**

- 9) Update the communication. Due to the received feedback, insights, and the proposed next steps from the communication event (or information received later), the communication and management plan need to be updated to meet the needs and expectations of the audience and the service designer even better in the future (reshaping the message, elaborating differently on service design to overcome the uncovered misconceptions). In addition, the insights can be clustered and processed for the creation of the brief and proposal. At the end of this process, it is again important to point out that the communication of service design (especially in projects) is not a one-time communication. Instead, it is a series of communications and therefore needs to be adapted after every iteration. A resulting benefit of this series of communications is that the audience is more often and continuously exposed to the message and further information can be collected.

#### **4.4.2 Summary**

##### **Answering research question 4: What could an improved and fit-for-purpose communication process look like for service designers?**

The updated communication process for service design is a combination of two processes (“how” and “what”), method details, content details, and communication actions that function as a core building block for the communication of service design in the setup of a project and the initial phase. This core can and needs to be extended with further steps and phases depending on the audience, the project, and the communication situation they are in. The strategy of the updated communication process aims to persuade and educate project stakeholders about service design and its practitioners in a simplified and more audience-tailored way, without giving up the approach and mindset of the discipline in the communication process for the sake of persuading. To create an updated and fit-for-purpose communication process, data from all research methods were used, as well as sales and strategic communication literature as proposed by the MD.



## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of the research

This research has demonstrated the importance and complexity of the communication of service design to project stakeholders outside of the actual practice of service design in projects, as well as its neglect in (academic or industrial) education, practice and literature until now. The findings reveal that service design is a highly overlapping and ambiguous discipline that is misunderstood by project stakeholders and therefore needs further attention and clarification when setting up and starting a project (e.g., pitching situations or kick-off meetings). The data further reveals that the communication process currently applied by service designers in such situations is rather vague, not unified and also not shared, which creates difficulties for service designers of all experience levels. Further, the mindsets and expectations of service designers and project stakeholders do not align when it comes to communication in the project setup and the initial phase of a project (including the outcomes of service design). These unmatching expectations and mindsets further lower the chances for successful involvement and integration of service design in projects and for establishing commitment for the discipline with project stakeholders (both the setup and the initial phase were found to be crucial for the future trajectory of projects and service design in these projects). Hence, these findings highlight the need for this dissertation and research in which the communication applied by service designers to strengthen the discipline's involvement in projects and the commitment from project stakeholders is explored. To sufficiently investigate this communication (i.e., its environment and entanglements) and to provide an enhancement of the communication, the following four research questions were formed:

- Research question 1: What are the current perceptions of communicating service design in a project?
- Research question 2: What issues do service designers face in the communication of their discipline?
- Research question 3: What does the communication process currently applied by service designers look like?
- Research question 4: What could an improved and fit-for-purpose communication process look like for service designers?

To further support these research questions, two main aims (1. Uncovering and reconstructing the currently practiced communication process of service design by service designers in the setup and initial phase of a project, including

its content, and 2. enhancing the reconstructed communication process and content in a fit-for-purpose manner for service designers) were formed, which led to consequential intents of this research that supported the exploration of the communication environment and the communication process applied by service designers. To explore the communication from relevant points of view and create an understanding for possible issues/obstacles within it and for the communication environment itself, the research mainly relied on retrieving and analyzing communication and project experiences from service designers with a diverse professional, experience (in years), and international background. Supporting and clarifying information was also collected from stakeholders that fit the project stakeholder (and communication audience) profile. Consequently, this research relied on phenomenography, service design, and action research as research strategies to provide a practice-based view of the topic of communicating service design. This allowed the exploration of the currently applied communication and the development of an improved process that supports service designers in their everyday work life. Hence, the focus also lay with uncovering “what” needs to be communicated in these situations (e.g., the benefits service designers see and provide, and the benefits project stakeholders crave) and “how”, as well as with the steps that need to be taken prior (and post) to the communication, to heighten the chances of service design being involved in projects. This focus led to the creation of a “how-to” roadmap for the service design communication process, which functions as the ultimate outcome of this dissertation and the answer to RQ4. Although an updated, enhanced and fit-for-purpose communication process could be developed (through relevant stakeholder feedback and testing), communication needs to be treated as a wicked activity. Therefore, no success guarantee can be given for communication.

## **5.2 Evaluation and ethical questions**

This subchapter provides the information that reflects the ethical position of the research by displaying the applied values system, ethical praxis, and reflexivity (Leavy, 2017).

### **Conduct and influence**

The research for this dissertation was conducted by one person who functioned as the researcher and author of this dissertation as well as a service designer (test subject and subject to conduct tests). The author/researcher funded the research, dissertation, and studies by herself (privately). Therefore, no other stakeholders than the thesis supervisors (form of dissertation and guidance in research questions), the supervising university (form of dissertation), and the people participating in this

research (research data, conclusion, and trajectory), as well as material included in the research (research questions, gathered understandings, and conclusions), had an influencing position on the research and dissertation. As this dissertation is designed as a monograph (no articles published), no data was shared in any other format outside of the monography or handed over in its original or in a modified format.

### **Data privacy, anonymization, and storage**

This dissertation follows the data privacy, anonymization, and storage guidelines applied in H2020 projects and proposed by the European Commission and the University of Lapland – hence relying on the regulations proposed by the General Data Protection Regulation (European Parliament and the council of the European Union, 2016) and the EU code of ethics for socio-economic research (Dench, Iphofen, & Huws, 2004). By following the regulations and ethical principles provided in these and additional documents, the following research-relevant topics could be assured (Dench, Iphofen, & Huws, 2004; European Parliament and the council of the European Union, 2016; Schröder-Bäck, Duncan, Sherlaw, & Brall, 2014):

- the autonomy of research subjects
- the avoidance of individual or social harm
- the protection of privacy and security of data
- the quality of research and accuracy of data throughout the project.

The data collected from and about research participants or organizations/institutes that the researcher, as a service designer, analyzed and reflected upon were anonymized and handled under the aspect of confidentiality, so participants cannot be identified retrospectively. Further, all research participants were provided with information about the thesis and research upfront, asked for consent (for interviews and recordings – see Appendice 2. Informed consent for students) and could withdraw from the research at any time during or after the active participation in this research (providing transparency about the data retrieval and handling process). The retrieved data will be stored on two secure servers for a maximum of three years after the defense of this dissertation, once on a cloud storage and once on a physical hard drive in Europe. Since the topic of this dissertation does not focus on genetics, crime, or generally deal with incriminating or delicate personal data, the research has a low level of risk.

### **Subjectivity statement**

The following subjectivity statement provides an overview and summary about the dissertation author/researcher's relationship to the research topic (including personal history, experiences, beliefs, cultural and professional standpoints) and

aims to support the readers of this dissertation in their evaluation of the provided research's validity, quality, authenticity, and credibility (Preissle, 2008).

The author/researcher of this dissertation has undergone education in media design (bachelor level) and service design at bachelor, master and doctoral levels in multiple countries. Further, the researcher has also acquired relevant (international) work experience in the field of service and experience design by practicing both disciplines in the industry over several years before deciding to start the doctoral education and research for this dissertation. During her time in the industry, the author encountered numerous moments in which miscommunication on behalf of service design and the service designer seemed to occur, as well as a lack of communication on behalf of either topic. Through these experiences, and the personal perception of not having received sufficient education for communicating either topic in a quick, simple and efficient manner, the author/researcher deemed the area of communication of service design from a service designer's point of view to project stakeholders as worthy of further investigation, which was supported by the dissertation's supervisors. Hence, the author/researcher's personal beliefs, experiences, and perceptions have shaped the research topic.

For this research, three research strategies were applied. In service design, the researcher is as unbiased as possible in the role of an observer and learner when entering a situation to investigate a certain topic without making claims beforehand. Since the goal was to reconstruct and update the communication process, and the researcher possessed relevant knowledge and experience in the field of service design, action research was selected as another research strategy and hence made the researcher participate in this study as a service designer (to conduct the communication). Both research strategies rely on retrieving qualitative insights. Therefore, this research is of a partly subjective nature given its qualitative approach and methods and the position of the researcher as a test subject and subject to conduct tests (fitting the research paradigm of constructivism). To lessen the eventual subjectivity provided by the researcher, contributions were collected from an international audience that were deemed part of the communication audience (application of phenomenography). These contributions consisted of service designers, students and an MD's communication experiences, which were used as the guiding insights within the study. To refrain from proposing suggestive and provocative claims about the research topic, literature was consulted first, before interviewing the research participants, conducting tests, and lecturing. Subjectivity from the author/researcher can be found in the gained and analyzed insights from the lectures, testing, experience journal, and the process creation/evolution.

Given the resources for this research and dissertation, as well as the research approaches applied and the research topic, the amount of subjectivity from the author/researcher was kept at a minimum and when applied, used to enrich the data set in the form of a new perspective or to create understanding/prototype. Therefore,

the credibility, authenticity, quality, or validity of this research was not affected by the author/researcher's beliefs, experiences, professional and cultural standpoints in a negative way.

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Positioning the dissertation in the field

As mentioned in Chapter 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH and displayed in the empirical data presented in Chapter 4 RESULTS, the communication of service design to project stakeholders in the setup and initial phase of a project poses significance to the spread of the discipline and the success of projects, as well as a range of hurdles. This communication is currently not considered/discussed in scientific and practical literature or within academia and the industry in an explicit manner – as an activity that needs to be taught to service designers or an activity that shows worth for further exploration. Instead, the current focus within service design literature (with regard to communication) either lies with treating communication as a tool to create understanding (in terms of methods applied in workshops with stakeholders) (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018) or as a tool for discussing the definition, as well as opportunities, and limits of service design (Miettinen, 2018). This take and focus on communication in service design is strong and leaves little room for investigating the communication of service design itself, even though managerial and project literature (2.1 The composition of communication and its importance in projects), as well as design literature (2.2 The treatment of communication in service design) point out the importance of communicating expectation and project shaping information in the setup and initial phase of a project. This information includes details about service design and its practitioners. The empirical data presented in 4.2.1 (The role of a service designer in a project) revealed that the focus in academia, as well as in the industry, lies with practicing service design and the communication needed to practice service design (methods and tools), yet not with exploring and educating service designers on the communication of their discipline to project stakeholders to strengthen the involvement of the discipline in projects and the commitment of project stakeholders. Hence, the communication process, content, and style currently applied by service designers, as well as the communication situations, the communication audience and the communication relevant issues faced by service designers are unexplored and unknown in detail, as is their entanglement in a big picture view from a scientific, practical, and educational perspective.

This research offers insights into the need for effectively communicating service design early in projects, the communication applied by service designers, and the struggles service designers encounter and try to overcome in their work and also

private life when it comes to explaining their discipline, tasks, role, professional identity, and the benefits service design can bring to projects from a practical and experiential point of view. Therefore, this dissertation caters to a crucial knowledge blind spot, provides information that supports the identification of need for further research in this area and views the communication regarding service design from a new perspective. Together with the reconstructed *first foundation* and the created “how to” road map (provided in this dissertation), novelties, and contributions to the following topics are provided:

- Importance of the (early) communication of service design in projects
- Importance of communication itself in service design, beyond its application in methods as a tool (e.g., workshops, interviews)
- Lack of theory and educational material in service design that does not concern the practice of methods and tools
- Lack of communication focus in the education of service designers in academia and the industry
- Insights into service design related issues the practitioners need to overcome through communication (e.g., misconceptions)
- Insights into the profile and responsibilities of service designers (role, tasks and success requirements)
- Lack of communication responsibilities given to service designers (communication is often handed off to superiors who are not service designers)
- Influence of project stakeholders and service designers on the communication (expectation, mindset, maturity, expertise, commitment)
- Road to understanding service design and becoming a service designer (including the impact of practice)
- Placement of service design in the context of communication in projects
- Importance of a unified, strategic, and situationally adaptable communication process for service design.

## 6.2 Reflection

The project setup and the initial phase of a project were identified as a collaborative, complex and social process that demands iterations and actions from all involved project stakeholders as requirements will change and develop and mutual knowledge will be created and enhanced during this time (Collinge, 2017). The communication occurring during these phases is considered a key action for collaboration and information exchange, as well as a semiotic process. Here, meanings are delivered, new meanings are created, relationships between the stakeholders are established and affected, expectations are shared, and stakeholders, as well as their roles, are

identified and positioned (Collinge, 2017; Ebaugh, 1988; Gluch & Räsänen, 2009; Harshman & Harshman, 1999). Hence, communication is used as a management strategy (Aggerholm & Asmuß, 2016). Communication itself is seen as an implicitly learned social activity of transmitting and receiving information, which consists of an inherent strategy (Canary & Lakey, 2012). Yet to improve communication, set intentions for the communication, and meet these intentions, mindfully prepared strategies and their continuous practice are required (Aggerholm & Asmuß, 2016; Canary & Lakey, 2012; Falkheimer, 2014). According to the reviewed literature and the data from the participating service designers, communication as an information, stakeholder, and project management strategy is especially crucial at the beginning of a project given the lack of information, relationships, commitment and trust at this point in time (Aggerholm & Asmuß, 2016; Diallo & Thuillier, 2005; Shen, Shen, & Xiaoling, 2012).

Furthermore, the communication taking place during this time was found to be important for enabling and improving the involvement of service design and its practitioners (Farr, 1965/2011), as well as for a better scheduling of resources and distribution of project-relevant information between project stakeholders. Given the gathered and interpreted data of this study, communication is currently not treated as a communication strategy within service design. Unlike design management, service design (in the literature, academia, and practice) rarely discusses, teaches, or involves service designers in the phases and communications that lead up to the practice of the discipline in a project. In addition, no mindful and unified communication strategy and process was found to be in place for the persuasion of first time considering or applying project stakeholders of service design as of right now. This means that the communication of service design is currently practiced solely from an implicit and inherent point of view, which only allows for little improvement. The current communication process was found to be an accumulation of thoughts to look out for and explicit actions, which were phrased as suggestions but not in a process or structure that service designers knew about or could apply immediately. As previously noted, service designers are rarely placed in situations in academia or the industry where they could develop their own mindful communication strategies. Instead, service design, in terms of education and communication strategy, was found to rely heavily on learning and sense-making through practicing in projects (no matter if it concerned future service designers or project stakeholders in decision-making positions), which included a de-prioritization of the upfront communication about service design. According to the service designers and empirical research data, there are two reasons for the de-prioritization and consequential reduction of upfront communication about service design:

- the complexity that makes up service design, such as the discipline's abstractness, its novelty, the extensive use of jargon, the multitude of overlaps with other disciplines



- the experiences in projects about achieving clarity – for project stakeholders, clarity about the discipline was achieved by working together in the project. Project stakeholders get to witness and make sense of the discipline and its application firsthand through explicit actions.

Hence, expectations and further information were mainly introduced and managed when the projects were already running, which left the project stakeholders (specifically in decision-making positions) to form their own abstract concepts, ideas, and execution of service design and its practitioners based on minimal information. This neglect and reduction of upfront communication was found to ultimately lead to a clash of expectations, experiences, and formed concepts when service design was practiced in projects (clash of expectations and reality). The communication strategy (and process) currently applied by service designers does not:

- meet the communication expectations of project stakeholders in decision-making positions, when negotiating the involvement of the discipline in a project
- support service designers in conveying their discipline, roles, or tasks in an upfront and enabling manner to project stakeholders.

**Why?** There are many contributing elements from various directions that contribute to the answer, given that communication is wicked and service design is a discipline that deals with wickedness (Buchanan, 1992; Camillus, 2008; Creasy, 2018). The following sections reflect on the most crucial topics uncovered and related to the communication of service design, its current process, and its flaws.

### **Mindset**

Project stakeholders in decision-making positions were found to have a comfort-seeking and risk-averse mindset. Stakeholders with this mindset display a craving for clear, known, and verifiable information in the upfront communication, and also throughout a project. Examples of their mindset include their desire for predefined outcomes, little changes to the approach to undertaking a project, and information as well as solutions that forecast visible impact on their revenue stream (van Oosterom, 2009). Yet, to practice and involve service design, the literature (Farr, 1965/2011; Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018; Van Oosterom, 2009) as well as the research data indicated that an open mindset is required. Openness in this sense was identified as welcoming and involving the unknown discipline in its entirety. This involves processes, methods, approaches, practitioners, perspective, as well as the provision of support, resources, and commitment to practicing the unknown in projects, instead of simply aiming to receive its benefits. Service design is a discipline that relies on qualitative research, human-centeredness, and iterations based on trial and error (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018; Tuominen & Ascenção, 2016; van Oosterom, 2009), which when compared to the mindset and work practices of project stakeholders,

lie on the opposing end of the spectrum. In addition to an open mindset, project stakeholders need to show openness in following two areas for the communication of service design to be more fruitful:

- Society's change and its influence on the business. Customers need to be accepted as co-creators, hybrid forms of service and product as the most compatible and suitable offers (Brinkmann, 2008; Parry, Newnes, & Huang, 2011) and fundamental change within the culture of the business need to be accepted as a consequence of the evolution of society, the role of the customer, and the reduction of monopolies (Junginger & Sangiorgi, 2009; Vink, Koskela-Huotari, Tronvoll, Edvardsson & Wetter-Edman, 2021).
- Value lies in interactions and experiences for customers: The concept of value-in-use serves the needs of today's customers and is to be treated as a major craving. By catering to this craving, the offering's desirability and competitiveness is enhanced (Gummerus & Pihlström, 2011; Pine II & Gilmore, 2011).

The difference in the mindsets between project stakeholders and service designers was found to influence the applied communication throughout, which can also be witnessed on a more explicit and in-depth level, as the following section outlines.

### **Unmet communication expectations**

Through the communication process testing with the MD, it became apparent that project stakeholders in this position expect the information exchange to be conducted in a manner that they are familiar with. Hence, a communication in a sales, business, or marketing manner, which already hints at the situation-to-be-improved, the possible solutions, the road to achievement, the issues ahead, and the effects of the solution on the revenue stream, are expected. In addition, these stakeholders require memorable, yet content-reduced service design project stories that highlight the benefits and USP of the discipline, are easily shareable with others and contribute to the persuasive communication style they expect. Stakeholders in this position were also found to require a *role model* (or someone equally influential) as the presenter of this communication, to whom they could relate and who conveyed experience, maturity, and knowledge in the field of service design and with the project problem at hand (Eskerod & Lund Jepsen, 2013/2016). They only require relevant and memorable information that is delivered in an entertaining and brief manner and supports them in forming a high-level understanding of the discipline, project process, project involvement, and outcome to make a decision.

Given the service designers' feedback, the testing with the MD, and the analysis of the content within the process, the reconstructed communication process currently applied by service designers was found to not cater to the communication expectations of project stakeholders (especially those in decision-making positions). On the one hand, the communication style did not meet the audience's expectations

(business, marketing, sales) and on the other hand, the communication did not provide them with the information that they were acquainted with and needed to make a positive, committed, and accurate decision about the involvement of service design. For example, it was found that the information provided within the communication of service design did not match the situation of the client enough in terms of problems faced and the identity of the client. Furthermore, solutions were not sold as expected and the use of buzzwords created ambiguity that led to misconceptions. The communication of service design was found to face ambiguity from the beginning, given the discipline's name and heritage (Kimbell, 2011; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018; Yu, 2016), which induces the creation of misconceptions. The consequences of project stakeholders possessing too little, as well as ambiguous and unknown, information and experience about the discipline (see 4.2.2 Encountered issues related to the communication of service design in projects), as experienced by the service designers, led to:

- no involvement of service design in the project
- spreading of inaccurate information to subordinates (e.g., service design focuses on visual design)
- allocation of “wrong” or too few resources for service design activities (e.g., research resources are short)
- inaccurate involvement of service design in the project process (e.g., using service design to “make things pretty”).

In conclusion, project stakeholders are not able to identify the discipline, the role its practitioners will take on, the tasks they will undertake, and the outcomes that will be produced. If this initial communication is guided by a lack of information or information asymmetry, trust, relationships, and ultimately commitment, are difficult to establish within project stakeholders (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005) and will resurface in the project stakeholders' actions (as experienced by service designers), as well as in the success of the project (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005; Turner & Müller, 2004).

### **Unmet role and outcome expectations**

The communication audience was found to anchor its understanding of the discipline, and consequently its practitioners, on tangible project outcomes (further processed service design outputs), discipline-related buzzwords, and their own concept of service design. In addition, project stakeholders were found to have not only a misconception about service design and its outputs but also the service designers themselves as makers of objects, which aligns with the original role description of a designer (Lawson, 2005). Yet when considering the evolution design has undergone to expand and “birth” service design, the inevitable change of the role of designers from a maker to a social and enabling role must be recognized. This change is supported by the insights from the service designers, as well as Dennington (2017),

Norman (2013) and Kimbell (2009), who define the role of a service designer as primarily social and bridging in projects. Hence, the role service designers undertake in projects is not the one project stakeholders expect them to take on, similar to the produced outcomes.

### **Communication conducted by service designers**

While there are many more findings that tie into the setup of a communication strategy, process, situation, and the enhancement of the communication process currently applied, the role of the presenter of the communication needs to be addressed again. According to the MD's feedback, the experiences of the service designers and the way the literature, academia, and the industry positions and trains service designers, service designers were found to not be the preferred presenters/"role models" to carry out the communication of their own discipline in the project setup and the initial phase of a project. Here, they were solely seen as the practitioners of their discipline. Yet, the experiences of service designers demonstrate that they already practice communication of their discipline to project stakeholders when practicing service design in the project, just in a postponed manner, often and unplanned. These experiences further indicate that service designers are aware that they lack expertise, maturity, and at times commitment to their own discipline, as well as training and guidance to take on the initial communication. However, their experiences also show that service designers regret each failed communication attempt (as this could have led to a new opportunity to progress as a service designer) and are looking for a way to rise to the occasion. Furthermore, taking on this communication and hence the management of information and expectations for the project is considered part of the role of a designer, according to Archer's "Acts of Design" (1970) and therefore supports the idea and highlights the need for making service designers the presenters of their discipline in projects. As previously mentioned, project stakeholders in decision-making positions expect communication in a business-like manner they are experienced and comfortable with. The MD pointed out that salespeople are more a fit for the role of a presenter as they are used to the expected style of communication and could actually sell the solution. Yet, Eades (2004) highlights that salespeople also suffer from not being able to seal deals, being heard by decision-makers, establishing commitment in the needed audience members just like the service designers (2.2 and 4.2.2), which suggests that the communication of a discipline (and consequently a solution approach to a problem) at the beginning of a project is not a problem solely faced by service design, but one of organizational and human nature.

### **Summary and outlook**

Ultimately, the updated communication process presented in Section 4.4 took on the challenges presented (according to the limits of this research) by the discipline, project stakeholders, service designers, and the context of the project setup and the

initial phase of projects, in the form of a “how-to” roadmap. This roadmap enables service designers to take on the challenge of communicating their discipline to project stakeholders (especially those in decision-making positions) and leaving the realm in which they were only seen as practitioners. Besides enabling service designers to take on this initial communication and gain another service design job, the road map also intends to support service designers in a truthful spreading of information about the discipline so they can practice to the best of their abilities and make project stakeholders commit and invest in the discipline early. Through the enhancement and the creation of the “how-to” roadmap, communication was finally elevated from a position as a tool to a strategically planned activity.

Since this research provides a introductory glimpse into the communication of service design in projects, a variety of further research can be conducted. The most promising follow-up topics to this research appear to be:

- An investigation of the education of service designers in academia and the industry concerning the communication of service design: As already discussed, training service designers for the communication of service design to the audience was not found to be encouraged in academia or the industry. Hence, this research could provide further insights into the current education curriculum and professional evolvement of service designers, as well as enhancement opportunities.
- The communication of service design throughout projects. The aim is to track all communications made about service design throughout a project (when, where, how, and why is service design communicated in projects?) to better understand communication occurrences and find further enhancement opportunities.
- An investigation of the willingness and limits of service designers to accept business, sales, and marketing approaches into their initial project communication. As noted in Section 4.2, the service designers demonstrated willingness to let go of their own mindset to a certain degree in their communication to ensure their bridging function in projects and to further the involvement of service design, so long as the values of service design were not compromised. Hence, this research would provide insights into the balance service designers employ in their communication when catering more to the communication expectations of project stakeholders.
- An investigation of the picture the project stakeholders have of service designers in projects. Here, further insights could be gathered about project stakeholders’ perceptions of service designers in general and over time in a project (project entry vs. project exit), which could support the taming of the discipline’s complexity (given the misconceptions and discipline overlaps).

### 6.3 Limitations of this research

This study contains limitations and shortcomings due to the research resources, the research topic, and the choice of research strategies and methods. Since this was a privately funded dissertation, access to resources in terms of research participants was limited, as well as the overall time to spend on this doctoral thesis (four years). Further, this research is seen as an introductory study on the topic of communicating service design (little research is currently provided on this topic), which made the main aim of the research to learn inductively about the communication of service design and, in this way create a robust understanding of the topic, its working ways, and the meanings that are attached to it. Hence, using a qualitative research approach, which allowed exploration and description of the topic in its essence and also allowed adaptations of the methodology according to the acquired findings and understandings, was the right choice (Leavy, 2017). Service design, phenomenography, and action research possess a variety of benefits such as the building of a core understanding of a topic, investigation of how situations are handled, exploration of the relationships between stakeholders, and investigation of an individual's experiences. Yet, they also provide shortcomings, due to (Josselson, 2013; Marton & Booth, 1997; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011; Townsend, 2013):

- their focus on retrieving only qualitative and subjective data
- the retrieval of experiences and stories that are known to be provided in an unstructured manner in interviews
- their focus on the retrieval of qualitative data, which leads to a limited number of research participants.

Even though the research participants were diverse in their geographical, ethical, and professional backgrounds, only small groups and individuals were observed and their perspectives investigated to create understanding for the phenomenon through these qualitative research strategies (Leavy, 2017). This means that quantification of the data was not possible without prejudicing the research. Further, the number of female participants outweighed the number of male participants, particularly the service designers. Therefore, this research and dissertation investigated the experiences of service designers not regarding their gender. Hence, any type of gender-related discrepancies were not found or acknowledged in this research.

A difficulty provided to readers through the selected research strategies can be found in their linkage and the number of strategies used. It might prove difficult for readers to distinguish the strategies and comprehend their implementation when applied in methods. Further, displaying more details and providing more transparency in the analysis of the data would allow the reader to further immerse themselves into the research and hence improve the dissertation's quality.

The most significant shortcoming in this research lies with the shortage of firsthand observations and data collection from other service designers practicing the communication of service design to project stakeholders, besides the researcher as a service designer. Experiences and stories collected in interviews are known to only convey the information most memorable to the interviewees and without the complete proper context and a witnessable sequence. Hence, the dynamics between presenter and communication audience could only be witnessed and recorded firsthand when the researcher acted as a service designer (Josselson, 2013; Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018). Further, when considering the enhancement of the communication process and strategy and the communication expectations provided by project stakeholders, the limited number of participating project stakeholders in decision-making positions in this research provide another limitation (person and industry wise).

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# APPENDICES

Here further material that supported the creation of summaries, insights, processes, thesis and conclusions displayed in the previous chapters, is provided.

## Appendice 1. In-depth interview questions

### Pre-Interview

- What do you believe to be your responsibilities as a service designer in a project (role, tasks, workload, etc.)
- On a scale from 1-10 (1 being completely irrelevant & 10 being very important), how would you rate the importance of communicating Service Design (SD) in a project? Why?
- How do you communicate SD to non-service designers, e.g. a client who has never worked with SD before?
- How do you communicate your tasks and responsibilities as a service designer in a project to non-service designers?
- Would either communication differ when you communicated them to friends or family?
- Can you please recall a positive experience when you tried to communicate SD to non-service designers & tell me about it?
- Can you please recall a negative experience when you tried to communicate SD to non-service designers & tell me about it?
- For this research, I consider identity as “labeling someone” (stigma/description). Do you feel labeled in a project as a service designer by non-service designers? If yes, how?
- Is the labeling positive or negative?
- How do you label yourself as a service designer?
- Is the labeling positive or negative?
- According to your experience, is there a need for having/establishing credibility as a service designer in a project?
- How do you establish credibility?
- Do you view service design as a creative practice?
- Why?

### **Story-Interview – “Success”**

- This research focuses on exploring the world of service designers based on the experiences practitioners made in projects, companies, universities, with stakeholders, users and clients. Hence, please share with me your story of the, in your opinion, most successful service design project you have been part of. (CARRY ME THROUGH THE STORY FROM BEGINNING TO END)
- Why was this the most successful service design project in your opinion? (resources, commercial success, emotionally, etc.)
- Can you recall any specific success moments?
- What was your role in this project?
- What were your tasks & responsibilities in this project?
- What was the size of the project (involved people, different cultures, etc.)?
- What was the duration of the project?
- What did the project hierarchy look like?
- Was there a need to educate the client on service design?
- Did you need to educate the client on something else?
- What did the communication within the project look like?
- Was this form of communication beneficial in your opinion?
- Did you need to communicate SD or your role?
- Who did you communicate them to?
- How did you feel treated by the project members?
- Who had the decision power in the project?
- What did this mean for you as a project member and service designer?
- Can you recall any memorable moments of conflicts that regarded you as a service designer or the discipline?
- How do you recall your well-being during this project?
- In retrospective, how did this project shape you/made you feel?
- In retrospective, how did this project shape your view on SD?

### **Story-Interview “Less successful”**

- Now that you shared the story of your most successful service design project with me, please also share your story of the, in your opinion, least successful service design project you have been part of, with me. (CAN YOU PLEASE CARRY ME THROUGH THIS FROM THE BEGINNING TILL THE END)
- Why was this the least successful service design project in your opinion? (resources, commercial success, emotionally, etc.)
- Can you recall any specific moments that indicated this “unsuccessfulness”?
- What was your role in this project?
- What were your tasks & responsibilities in this project?

- What was the size of the project (involved people, different cultures, etc.)?
- What was the duration of the project?
- What did the project hierarchy look like?
- Was there a need to educate the client on service design?
- Did you need to educate the client on something else?
- What did the communication within the project look like?
- Was this form of communication beneficial in your opinion?
- Did you need to communicate SD or your role?
- Who did you communicate them to?
- How did you feel treated by the project members?
- Who had the decision power in the project?
- What did this mean for you as a project member and service designer?
- Can you recall any memorable moments of conflicts that regarded you as a service designer or the discipline?
- How do you recall your well-being during this project?
- In retrospective, how did this project shape you/made you feel?
- In retrospective, how did this project shape your view on SD?

#### **Post-Interview**

- When you compare your most successful service design project, with your least successful service design project, what are in your opinion the biggest differences & why? Can you point out specific moments or actions?
- How did you become a service designer? (through work, education, etc.)
- How long have you been a practicing service design actively in projects?

## Appendice 2. Informed consent for students



LAPIN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND  
For the North – For the World

### Informed Consent

**Study title:** “How do service designers communicate service design” (Phd project)

**Name of conducting researcher:** Danielle Zsifkovits (doctoral candidate at the University of Lapland)

#### Study description:

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how service designers communicate service design to non-service designers, their roles in (service design) projects, their treatment in (service design) projects, as well as their overall experience as service designers in a (service design) project. The students participating in the UART1105 course “Introduction to Service Design”, taught by Danielle Zsifkovits, are considered non-service designers. The aim of this very part of the research is to investigate and document the communication of service design to non-service designers and the educational process that comes along with the communication. The students’ doings for the UART1105 course (within and outside the course) are seen as part of the research study, including the participants finished design assignments and reports for the course. The research will last throughout the entire duration of the course (26.03.2019 – 16.04.2019), until the final hand-in of the finished design assignments and reports at approx. the 30.04.2019. The conducting researcher has received approval of the University of Lapland to carry out this research study.

Please initial boxes

1. I understand the procedure to be used in the course UART1105 “Introduction to Service Design”.
2. I understand that the participation is confidential and that my name and any other personal data, which could reveal my identity, will not appear in the raw or overall data and will not be used in connection with the results in any way.
3. I understand that in order to take the course UART1105 “Introduction to Service Design”, I need to participate in the research study. (This study also collects group-work data. Hence, single statements, actions and contributions can’t be erased from the group work when withdrawing from the course in the future, especially if future work tasks, definitions, processes, etc. have used these statements, actions and contributions as a foundation.)
4. I understand that all discipline and research study relevant information provided by the participant (no personal information) will be considered “research data” and (when given approval by the conducting researcher) can also be used for studies beyond this phd project.
5. I understand that if I withdraw from the course UART1105 “Introduction to Service Design”, my data will still be part of this research study and used as mentioned above (point 2., 3. & 4.).
6. I understand that parts of the course UART1105 “Introduction to Service Design” will be recorded through pictures, audio-tools, video-tools and service design tools.
7. I understand that the conducting researcher will keep the gathered research data for the minimum period of this phd project and, if evaluated accordingly by the conducting researcher, also beyond.
8. I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participate in this research study and course. I have been given adequate time and information to make my decision.
9. I agree to take part in the above study.

Signature of participant:..... Date:.....

Print name:.....

For more information please contact Danielle Zsifkovits (doctoral candidate at the University of Lapland) via [dzsifkov@ulapland.fi](mailto:dzsifkov@ulapland.fi).

Figure 26. Informed consent students

## Appendice 3. References used for blog experience research

Table 16 References used for blog experience research

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