

Research profile

My research so far has mostly focussed on providing basic knowledge and a foundation for further research into the young and emerging field of service design. Basic research in design is referred to as *research about design* (Frankel & Racine, 2010; Frayling, 1993; Buchanan, 2007), and focuses on describing “the nature of design activity, design behaviour, and design cognition” (Cross, 2007). My own focus has been on activities, and lately cognition, in service design in general and service prototyping in particular. My point of view is influenced largely by my cognitive science background, with interdisciplinary research and mixed-methods approaches. The strongest philosophical influences come from the theory of situated cognition (Clark, 1999; Holland, Hutchins, & Kirsh, 2000; Lave, 1988; Rogers & Ellis, 1994; Scaife & Rogers, 1996), which has roots in *Cognitive Anthropology* (Lave, 1988), *Systems Thinking* and *American Pragmatism* (Clancey, 2008; Bernstein, 2010).

In my research this has manifested in the ways of conducting research. My approach has been mostly qualitative, because the topics and units of analysis have been most appropriately investigated from that perspective. From a methodological perspective, the approach has been characterized by ethnographic and case study research (Blomkvist, 2014). The situated cognition perspective means that the activity of design is seen as situated socially, culturally and in time and space. Designers form systems with artefacts and locations, and the types of representations that designers use influence the types of knowledge available which in turn affects the outcomes of design activities.

Service design is a field where practitioners have paved the way for much research by sharing their (early) attempts at applying knowledge from other design disciplines (together with knowledge from service marketing and management) to the design and development of services. The initial stages of my research were aimed at describing service prototyping from the perspective of service design practitioners. I conducted interview studies combined with literature studies to be able to compare the approaches to existing knowledge about design, mainly represented by research in *Human-Computer Interaction*, *Interaction design*, and *Experience Design*. My initial findings were summarized in a licentiate thesis (Blomkvist, 2011).

Based on the research presented in the licentiate thesis I decided to conduct some cases to test some of the ideas that had emerged. Hence, conducting and studying cases of service prototyping is currently the main approach to data collection. The main aim is to be able to understand how service designers tackle the specific challenges associated with design for services. These challenges are associated with the scope of service design and the material. Service design attempts to suggest future situations based on a holistic approach that extends across contexts and sometimes across levels of stakeholders (from customers to service providers and even tertiary stakeholders). Service as a design material consists of static ‘things’, interactive ‘things’ and social interactions.

In my research I have described what service designers do to understand how future situations can be understood and represented (Blomkvist, 2014). I have used situated cognition to understand the knowledge that service prototyping generates and suggested approaches that feasibly can negotiate between the holistic approach of service design and the practical constraints of design projects.

References

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