

Why ethics and service design must go hand in hand

BY MAGS MOORE

Whilst ‘Digital Transformation’ once referred to redesigning services by making existing processes ‘digital’, today it means something markedly different. Service design has evolved and matured. It is at the forefront of re-imagining public services and improving lives for citizens, employees and organisations. This was a key reflection when I had the pleasure of chairing the panel session on Scotland’s Approach to Service Design and Delivery at this year’s Digital Scotland Conference.

Another theme that emerged was ethics. Following the conference, I asked Jen Rodvold, the Head of Digital Ethics and Tech for Good at Sopra Steria, and she shared some fantastic insights into how service design and digital ethics should fit together. Here are a few of her key takeaways.

ETHICS AND SERVICE DESIGN GO HAND IN HAND

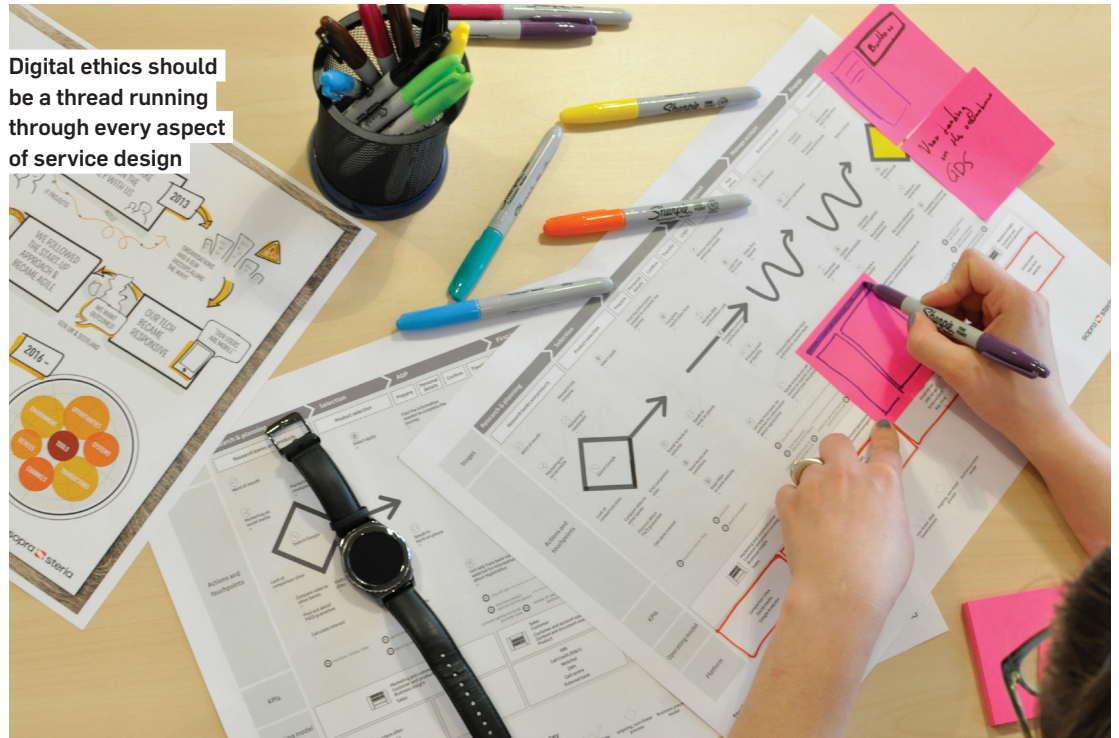
Ethics and service design cannot be thought about in silos. They complement each other because they prioritise the user and focus on better digital outcomes. By considering both from the outset, organisations will design services offering great user experience that deliver on business outcomes (efficiency, cost reduction, risk reduction, etc.) whilst also achieving ethical outcomes for individuals, communities and society at large.

GIVING EVERYONE A VOICE

Digital ethics is a way of understanding and representing those with less or no power and no voices. It is a way of anticipating and mitigating hidden and long-term issues that could pose risk or harm in the future.

For example, whilst service design might aim to remove ‘stickiness’ or ‘friction’ from a

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customer journey, digital ethics will consider the potential negative risks to individuals, groups and behaviours such as obscuring people’s understanding of what they are giving up to use a service.

UNDERSTANDING USERS

We also seek to understand users’ values, attitudes and perceptions of digital technologies, whilst also evaluating their understanding of how digital works. We are upfront and proactive about highlighting digital service dynamics that they might not be aware of.

Public understanding of digital technologies is still relatively low. And as they continue to evolve at pace, we need to offer a systematic way for digital services designers to be responsible. This will only become more important as technologies get more sophis-

tics in terms of AI and how data is used.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

I think everyone would agree that digital ethics is crucial. But how do we move from theory into action to ensure we are designing services responsibly?

At Sopra Steria, we work with organisations to develop digital ethics frameworks, strategies and implementation plans. These are used by service designers to inform how data is used and which tech to select. They also inform non-digital interventions that might need to be developed to maintain ethical principles such as accessibility, safety and privacy. All of our work is underpinned by the leading standards and guidelines for responsible technology from organisations such as the European Commission, OECD and WEF, concluded Jen.

I think, like all the conference delegates, my mind was alive with ideas and actions after this session. I hope the above takeaways on ethics provide some more food for thought.

Our view at Sopra Steria is that digital ethics should be a thread running through every aspect of service design. This is how we can re-imagine public services that produce great outcomes not only for businesses but also for individuals, communities, society and the environment. ●



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