

# Climbing the ladder

Lessons from applying design  
approaches in the public sector

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# Agenda

- Context
- The Design in Public Sector programme
- The Public Sector Design Ladder
- Evaluation methodology
- Key findings
- Challenges to using design in the public sector
- Implications for practice

# Context

A combination of events have lead to a growing interest in using design in the public sector:

## Economic

- Pressure on services to make cost reductions and efficiency gains
- Stagnating productivity and the UK govt's 15-point plan to improve it

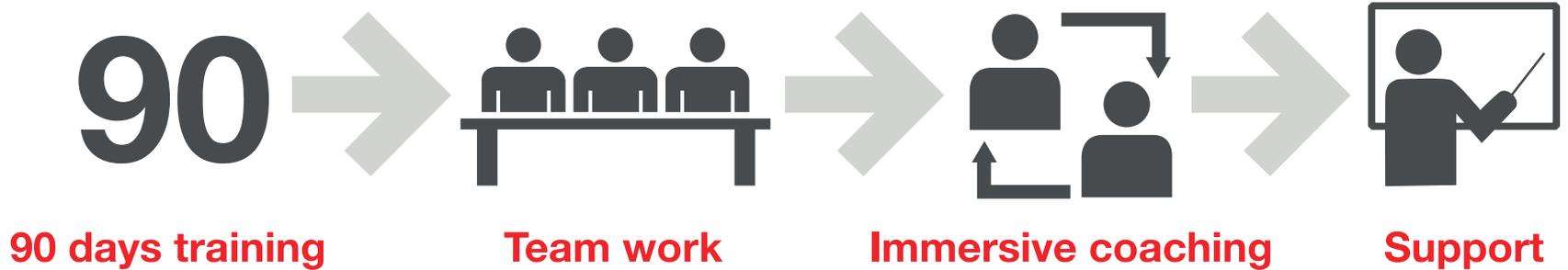
## Socio-political

- Growing criticisms of service quality
- The fragmentation of previously homogeneous social groups
- Growing interest amongst political parties in policy design to deliver on manifesto commitments

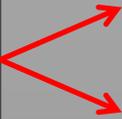
# Context

- Design as a practice has evolved and diversified beyond the aesthetic and tangible into new areas such as digital design, interaction design and service design
- Adoption of design methods to tackle ‘wicked problems’ aided by growing body of evidence and knowledge about the impact and value of design
- 2013 All Parliamentary Design & Innovation Group report, *Restarting Britain II*, paved the way for greater use of design in the public sector.

# Design in the Public Sector



# Design in the Public Sector

Cohort		No of teams		Examples of projects developed
North West		6 teams		Addressing the root causes of domestic abuse in Stockport Developing an improved Parenting Strategy in Liverpool
Yorkshire and Humber (x 2)		7 teams		A housing association becoming a more dementia friendly organisation
South East		5 teams		Digitalising Planning Services in Brighton and Hove

# Design in the Public Sector

## Discover

Insight into the problem

## Define

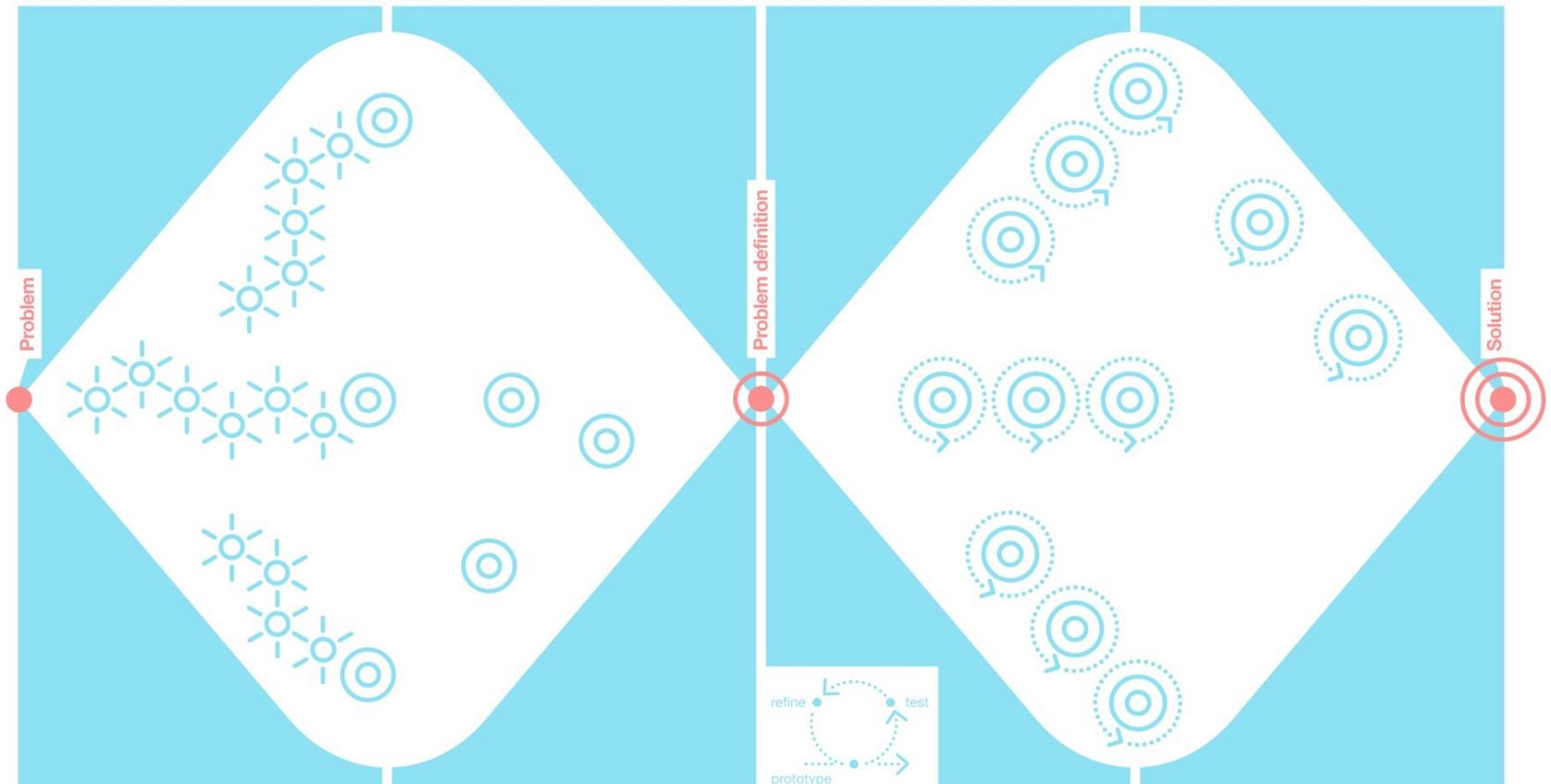
The area to focus upon

## Develop

Potential solutions

## Deliver

Solutions which work



# The Public Sector Design Ladder

## Design for discrete problems

Design projects are one-offs and design thinking is not embedded in the commissioning organisations.

## Design as capability

Public sector employees not only work with designers, they understand and use design thinking themselves.

## Design for policy

A relatively new discipline in which design thinking is used by policymakers

# Evaluation methodology

Evidence comes from an independent evaluation conducted by RF Associates in Summer 2015. Activity included:

- Desktop research
- Telephone interviews with delivery staff
- An online survey of 43 participants (27 responses)
- Fifteen follow up telephone interviews with team leaders participating in the programme

Additional evidence comes from learning and case studies collated by the 'Sharing Experiences Europe' (SEE) consortium in their publication 'Design for Public Good' (SEE 2013).

# Key findings

# Design for discrete problems

Our evaluation of the programme found:

- **Improved knowledge of design and design thinking** – the proportion of participants who rated their knowledge of design as ‘high’ or ‘very high’ rose from 0 to 63%
- **Increased acknowledgement of design’s relevance to public services** – from 70% considering design as having ‘low’ or ‘very low’ relevance to the public sector at the start, to 85% considering its relevance ‘high’ or ‘very high’ by the end of the programme.

Though small sample, highlights both the challenge of increasing the use of design in the public sector, but more importantly how individual engagement is an essential first step in embedding design thinking in organisational approaches and practice.

# Design as capability

Our evaluation of the programme found:

- Improved confidence of public sector staff to continue to apply what they had learned
- Greater focus on the service user/end beneficiary
- Fundamental reframing of challenges



# Design as capability

Extent of sharing of design-led approaches with colleagues.  
(Per cent and count of responses)

	Not at all	A little	Some	A fair amount	A lot	Total
Your immediate colleagues	-	7.40% (2)	33.33% (9)	22.22% (6)	37.05% (10)	100% (27)
Other teams in your organisation	7% (2)	15% (4)	37% (10)	22% (6)	19% (5)	100% (27)
Other organisations	18.54% (5)	11.11% (3)	29.62% (8)	29.62% (8)	11.11% (3)	100% (27)

# Design as capability

Impact on organisation (Per cent and count of responses)

	N/A	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
My organisation is more aware of how design-led approaches can help us			4% (1)	26% (7)	63% (17)	7% (2)	100% (27)
Design thinking has become a permanent feature of the approach to our work			15% (4)	48% (13)	33% (9)	4% (1)	100% (27)
Design thinking has now been integrated into our commissioning process	4% (1)	4% (1)	26% (6)	52% (15)	15% (4)		100%* (27)

# Challenges to using design in the public sector

## 1. Resources and capacity

*“Our Council is currently more focused on cost savings and this has reduced the impact we’ve been able to make. Ultimately making easy-to-identify savings by channel shift has become the objective, rather than reducing demand by improving the quality of the customer-facing first contact”.*

## 2. Organisational culture

*“The idea of stepping back is new [to our organisation], partly because of the required speed of delivery.”*

## 3. Buy-in from senior management

## 4. Buy-in from colleagues

*“I could immediately see the potential of design for public sector organisations, [but] it has been a hard job for me to ‘sell’ it in my organisation because I didn’t have comprehensive enough knowledge to make a convincing case”*

## 5. Personal inclination and time

# Implications for practice

1. **Embed user-centred design principles into core strategy**
2. **Invest in design skills**
3. **Invest in design advice and support**
4. **Include service design as a consideration in commissioning/outsourcing decisions**
5. **Create a culture amiable to new approaches**

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