Designing Public Service Systems from Within

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Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

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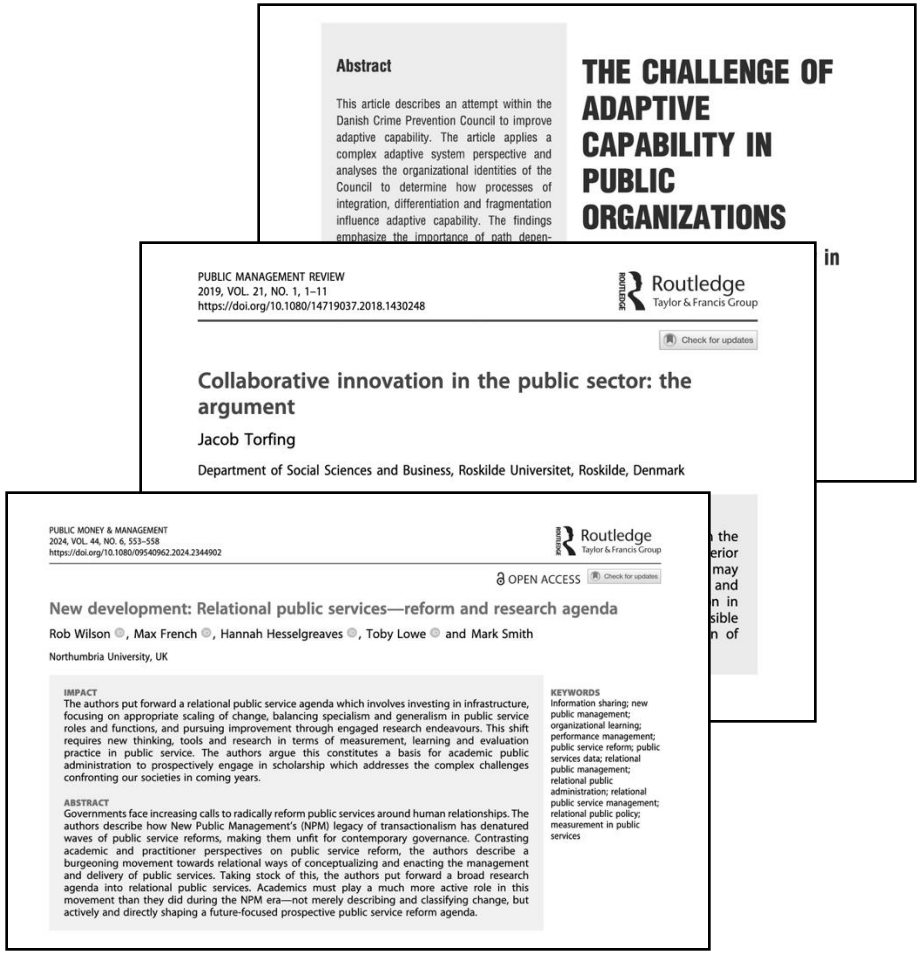
Challenge:

Public services are often shaped through standardization.

While this can make them scalable and safe, it can also lock people into certain ways of relating that are irrelevant or undignified for their situations.



Abstract

This article describes an attempt within the Danish Crime Prevention Council to improve adaptive capability. The article applies a complex adaptive system perspective and analyses the organizational identities of the Council to determine how processes of integration, differentiation and fragmentation influence adaptive capability. The findings emphasize the importance of path depen-

THE CHALLENGE OF ADAPTIVE CAPABILITY IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

in

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REVIEW
2019, VOL. 21, NO. 1, 1–11
https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1430248

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Collaborative innovation in the public sector: the argument

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PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT
2024, VOL. 44, NO. 6, 553–558
https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2024.2344902

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New development: Relational public services—reform and research agenda

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IMPACT
The authors put forward a relational public service agenda which involves investing in infrastructure, focusing on appropriate scaling of change, balancing specialism and generalism in public service roles and functions, and pursuing improvement through engaged research endeavours. This shift requires new thinking, tools and research in terms of measurement, learning and evaluation practice in public service. The authors argue this constitutes a basis for academic public administration to prospectively engage in scholarship which addresses the complex challenges confronting our societies in coming years.

ABSTRACT
Governments face increasing calls to radically reform public services around human relationships. The authors describe how New Public Management's (NPM) legacy of transactionalism has denatured waves of public service reforms, making them unfit for contemporary governance. Contrasting academic and practitioner perspectives on public service reform, the authors describe a burgeoning movement towards relational ways of conceptualizing and enacting the management and delivery of public services. Taking stock of this, the authors put forward a broad research agenda into relational public services. Academics must play a much more active role in this movement than they did during the NPM era—not merely describing and classifying change, but actively and directly shaping a future-focused prospective public service reform agenda.

KEYWORDS
Information sharing; new public management; organizational learning; performance management; public service reform; public services data; relational public management; relational public administration; relational public service management; relational public policy; measurement in public services

To meet diverse needs and situations in rapidly changing societies, public services must be continuously adapted by those involved.

But how?

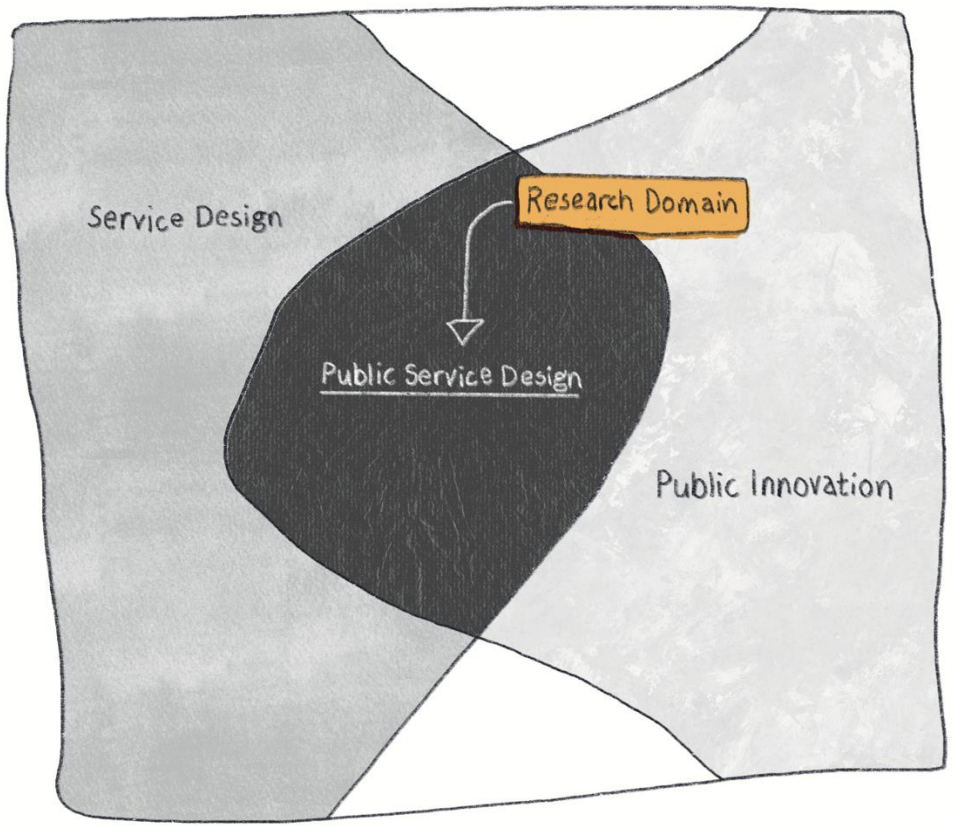


Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Design is increasingly adopted as a means for more participatory and adaptive innovation in public services.

The promise of design is being a distinct, collaborative, human-centred and creativ approach.

But is design a silver bullet for increasing people's ability to shape and adapt public services?

Four problematic tendencies in the current literature…

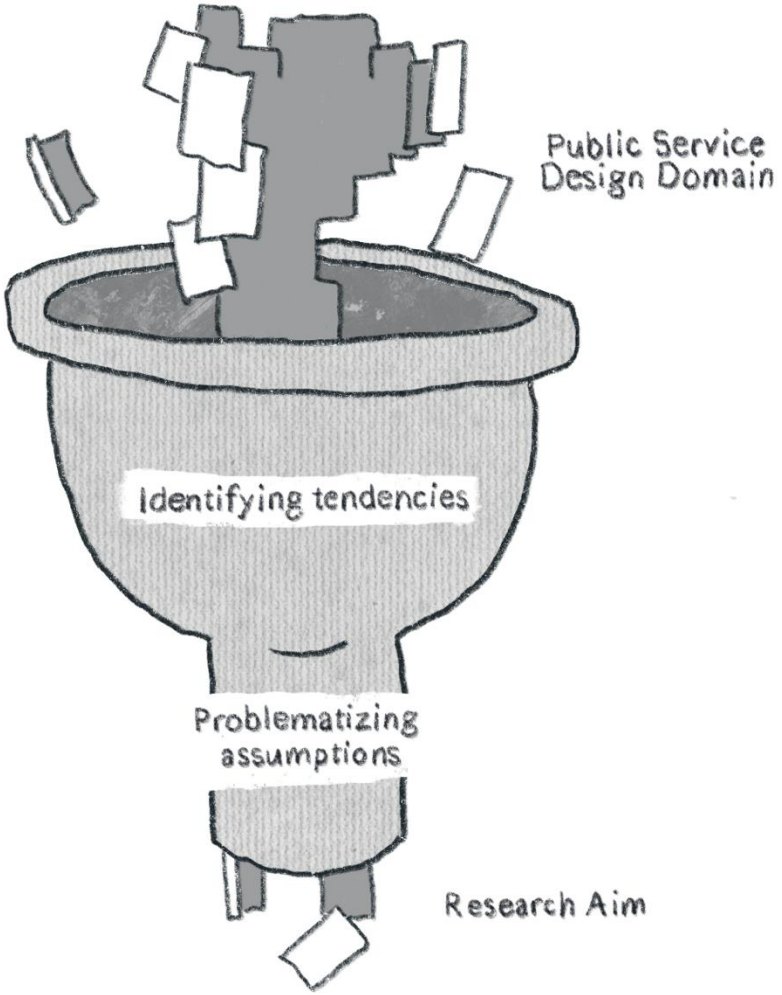
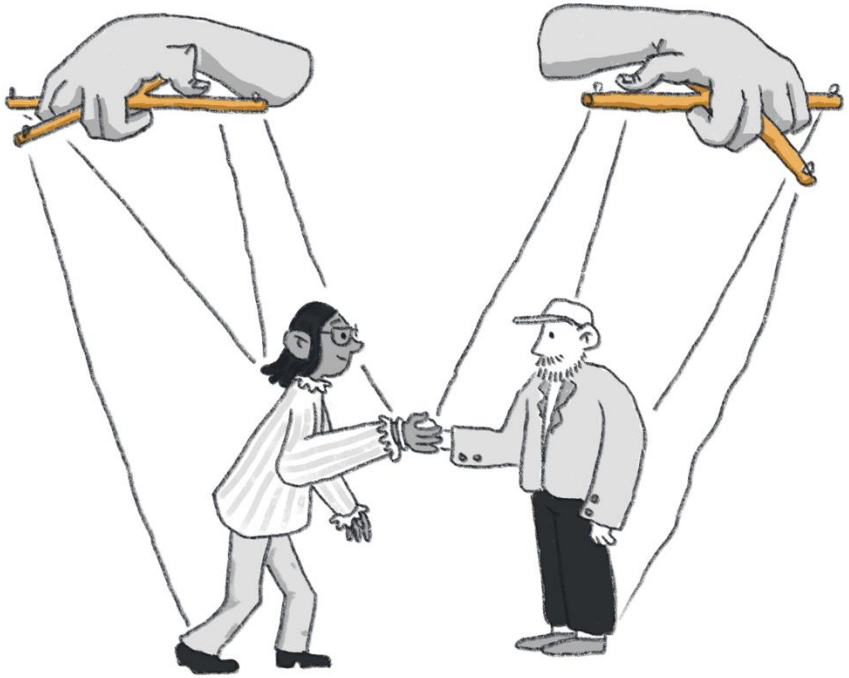


Illustration: Hobbe Mikae



Pre-Scripting Actor Interactions

Design of public services involves scripting how people relate.

Ex: Service journeys or actor maps

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

However…

… while creative and collaborative, design processes often produce concepts, roles, procedures that lock people into certain ways of interacting.

It builds on the assumption that actors are distinct individuals with roles that they perform.

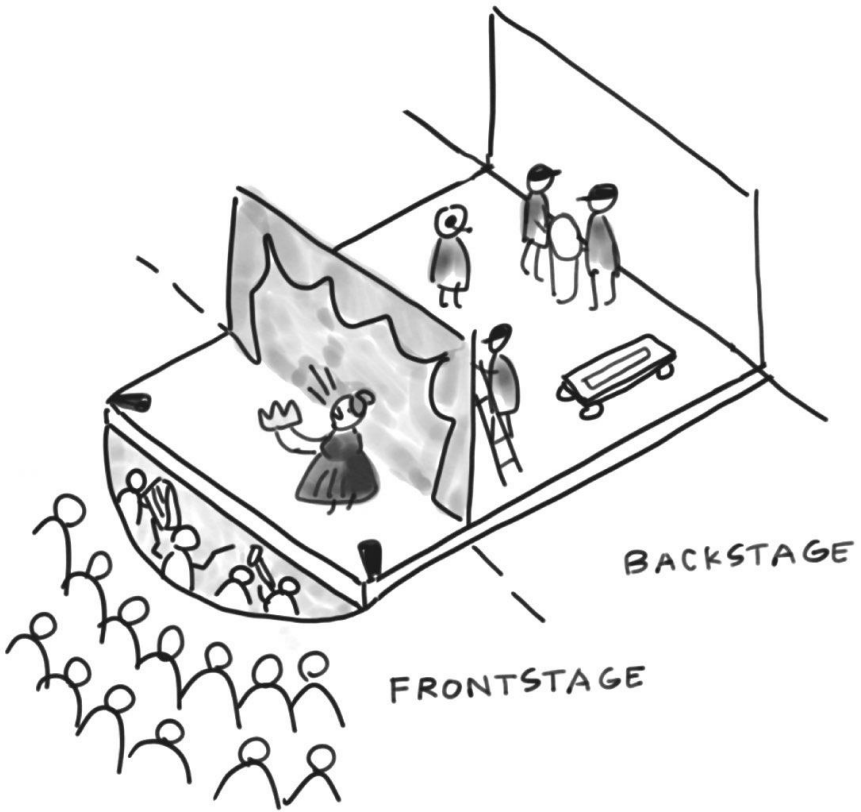


Illustration: NNGroup

Tendency 2

Zooming Out to Address Complexity

Development of ‘systemic’ approaches to work with holistic solutions amid complexity.

Ex: Gigamaps or layering micro-, meso-, and macro levels.

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

However…

… this tendency builds on the assumption that understanding complex systems requires zooming out.

Neglects how systems are enacted among people, and that these enactments are experienced in everyday life.

Photo: Hanne-Cecilie Bjørka

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Tendency 3

Innovation Happens in Centralized Initiatives

Innovation is often organized through distinct workshops or labs that function as «islands for experimentation» (Tonurist et al., 2017).

Ex: Policylabs or service design workshops

However…

… the idea with laboratories is to first develop and test something ‘centrally’, then implement and scale at the ‘periphery’.

Adaptation and learning tend to happen from the periphery of social systems, where people respond to emerging challenges (Schön, 1973).

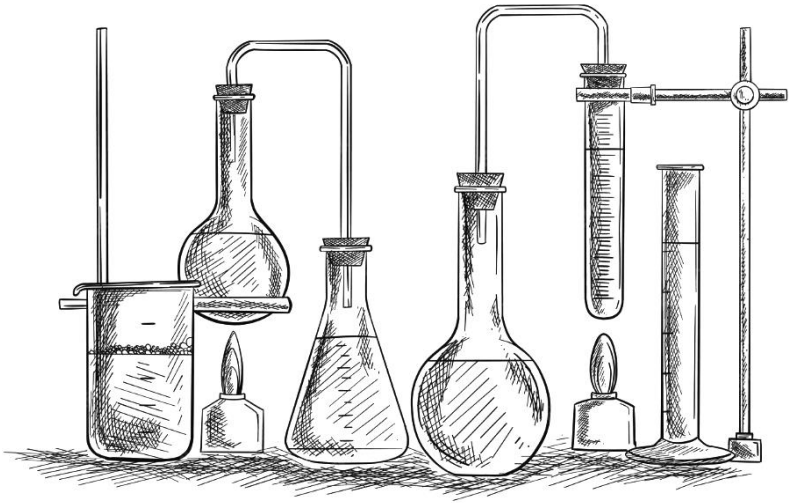


Illustration: Luckycreative

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Shifting Systems Through Episodic Efforts

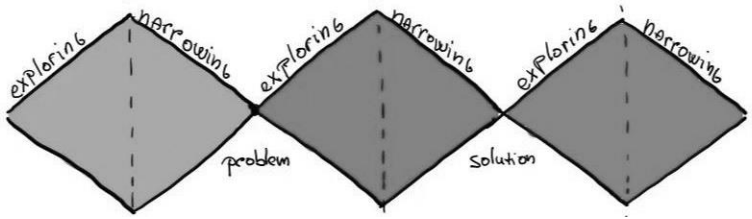
Public service design tends to be organized in projects. These are often time-bound and directed at specific goals

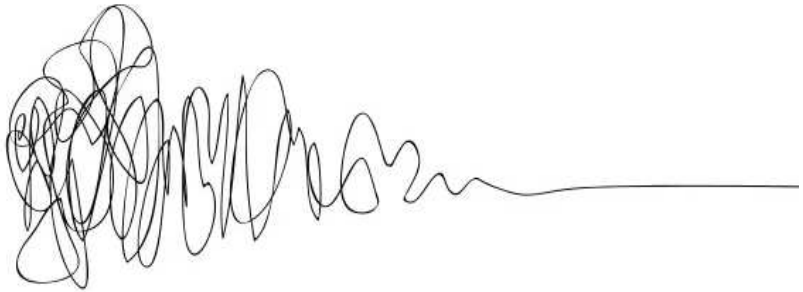
Ex: Design or co-creation projects

However…

… this rests on an assumption that design can support transformation by delivering innovative solutions

Risks creating rigidity by creating procedures and practices that soon become tomorrow's legacy systems





How can actors be enabled to collectively and continually design public service systems from within?

Dignity Exploration

Drama Exploration

Dialogue Exploration

130 participants employed within a child welfare agency
50 other participants from within the child welfare system
59 design master students, researchers, and practitioners

Findings

A framework for collective and continual designing in public services

Collective and continual design refers to ongoing processes in which embedded actors purposefully alter their interactions in response to lived constraints and opportunities

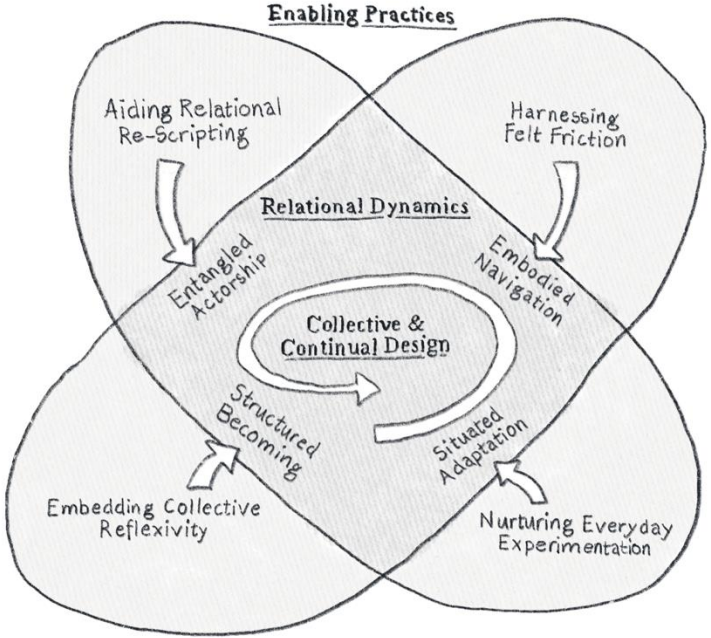
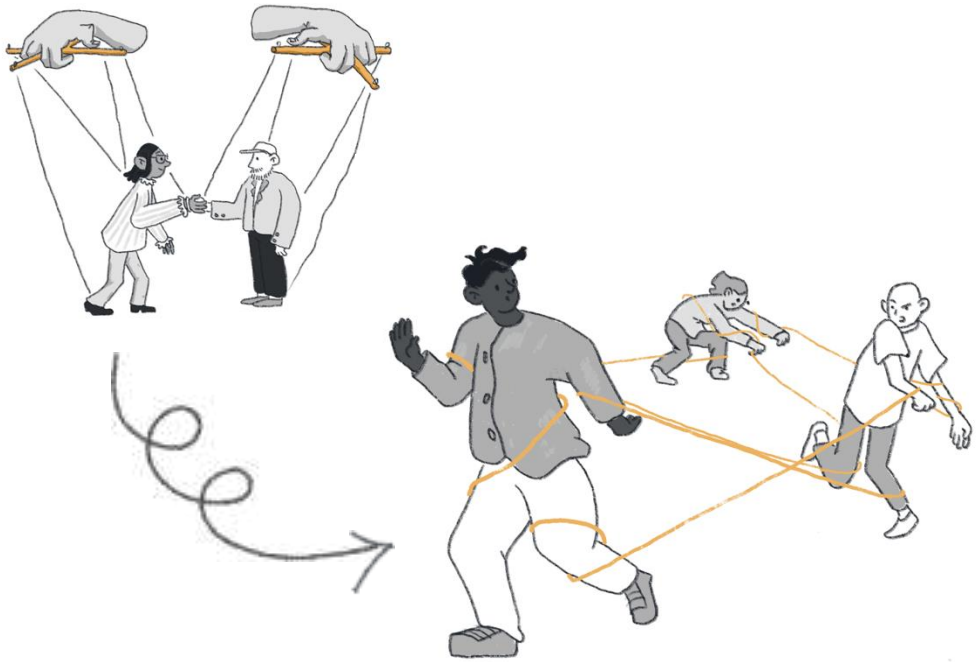


Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Alt. assumption 1

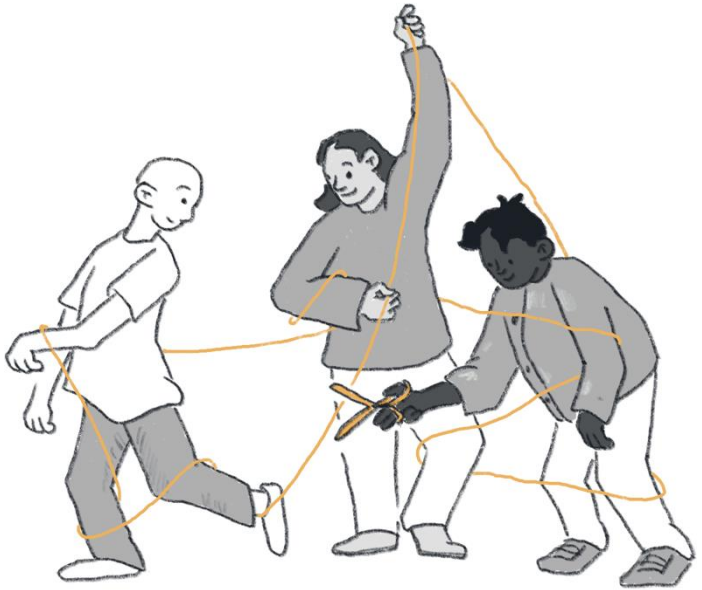


Entangled Actorship

People's roles, actions, and experiences are always entangled and mutually dependent. So is their agency to change things

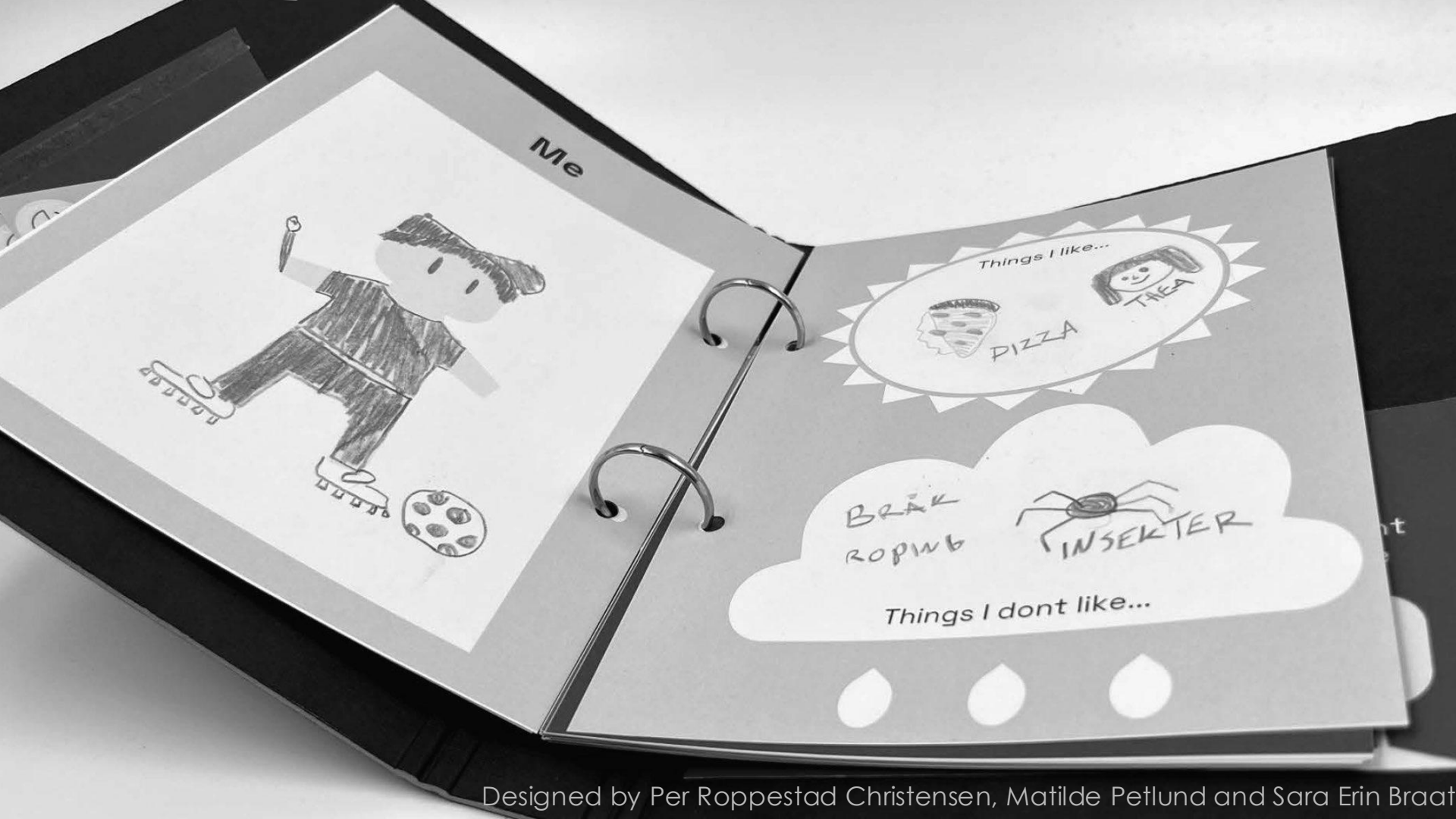
Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Aid people's joint revision of the scripts that underpin their interactions



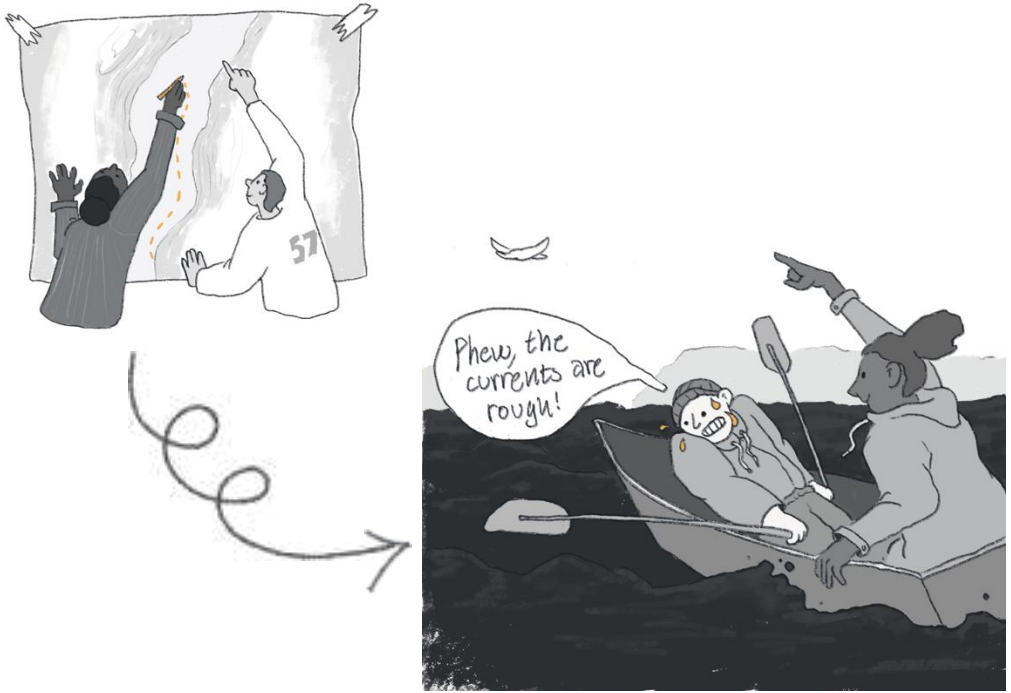
Aiding Relational Re-scripting

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae



Designed by Per Roppestad Christensen, Matilde Petlund and Sara Erin Braat

Alt. assumption 2



Embodied navigation

People navigate and act within complexity, not only through rational reasoning, but also by how they experience systemic tensions and conflicts on their bodies.

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

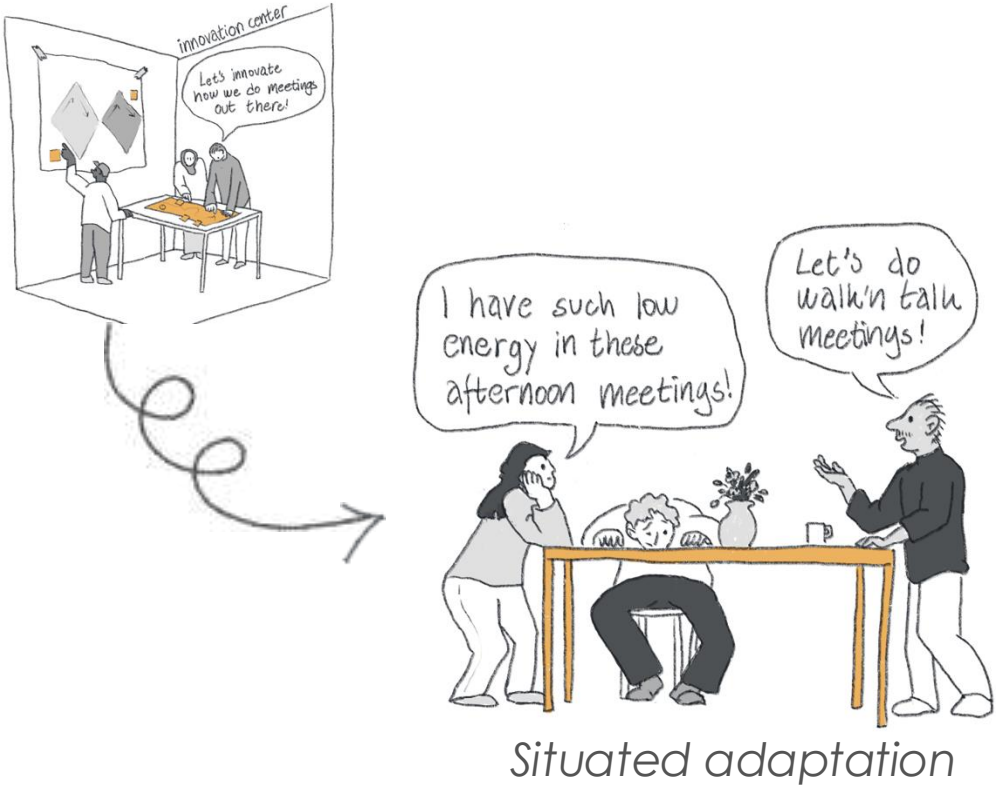
Make space for people to surface their experiences to foster creative action

Harnessing felt friction

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Photo: Orawan Hernmek

Alt. assumption 3



Situated adaptation

Innovation in public service systems happens through people tweaking what they do together in everyday situations

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Enabling Practice 3

Enable actors to propose, test, and refine ways of relating within their situated settings, while building support for collective learning from this experimentation

Nurturing everyday experimentation

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Alt. assumption 4

Structured becoming

Actors' interactions are shaped by, but also actively shape, the social structures that guide them

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

4 Enabling Practice

Embed ongoing, joint processes in which people become aware of the norms, assumptions, and beliefs guiding their interactions

Embedding collective reflexivity

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Illustration: Magnus Winther

Public Service Design as an Enabling Practice

Craft design devices that people can continuously use to adapt their interactions

Connect and reinforce experimentation and learning in everyday situations

Aid people to jointly address what they experience as problematic

Create spaces for dialogue where people question and renegotiate established truths together

Public Service Design as an Ongoing, Participatory Process

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

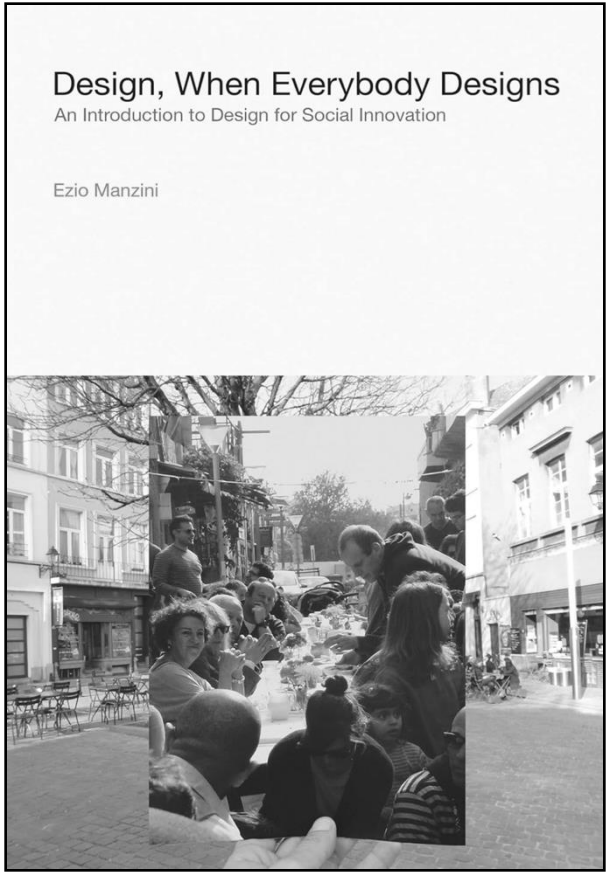
Public Service Design as Open

Social innovation is ongoing, self-organizing evolution. Innovative systems have strong mechanisms for mutation and selection.

Geoff Mulgan (2012)

Designers and innovators' role is to initiate, reinforce, and connect people's everyday design initiatives.

Ezio Manzini (2015)



Public Service Design as Participatory

Photo: Arbeiderbladet

Photo: Ehn (2018)

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Questions?
Comments…
Critique!

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