

# Designing Public Service Systems From Within

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Illustration: Hobbe Mikae





Photo: Christian Fredrik Borg / Avisa Oslo

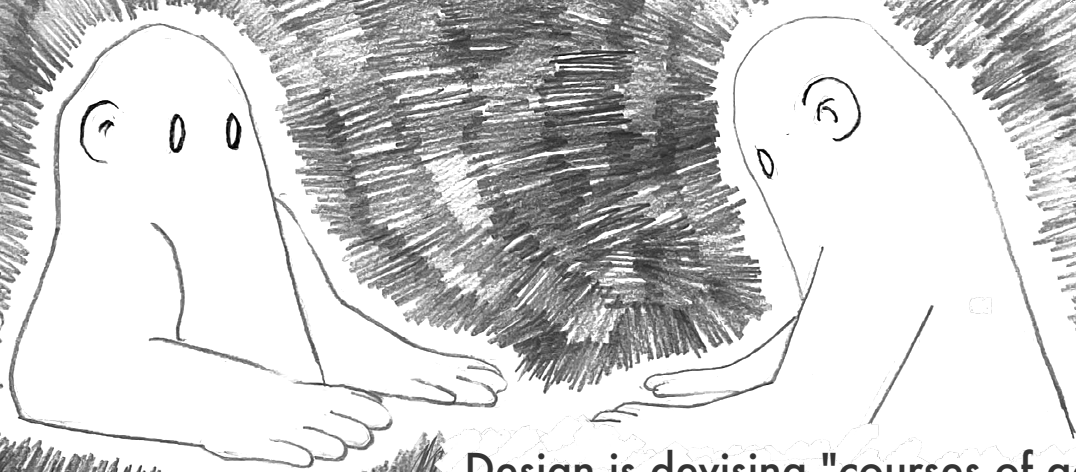


Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

soy

Now we can start  
working together

This is against my idea  
at therapy is.



Design is devising "courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones."

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Simon, 1969, p. 111

### 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

## THE CHALLENGE OF ADAPTIVE CAPABILITY IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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

Jacob Torfing

Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde Universitet, Roskilde, Denmark

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

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group

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### New development: Relational public services—reform and research agenda

Rob Wilson , Max French , Hannah Hesselgreaves , Toby Lowe  and Mark Smith

Northumbria University, UK

#### 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 conceptualising 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.

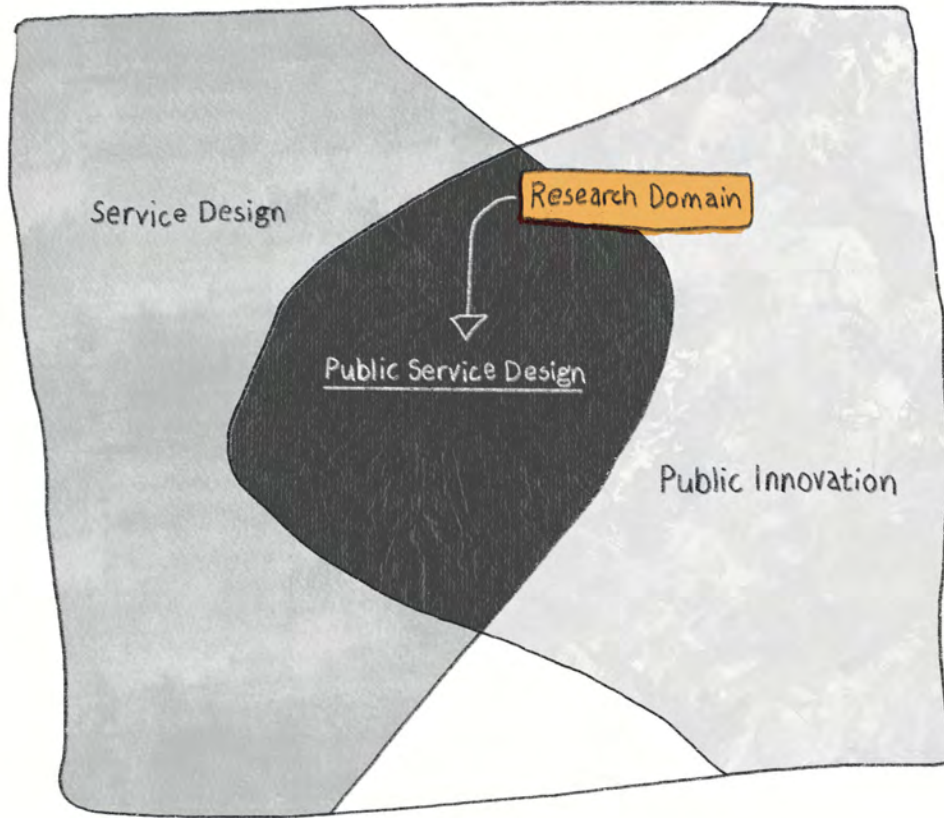
#### KEYWORDS

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

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

Agard, 2013  
Torfing, 2019  
Wilson et al., 2024



Public service design is typically referred to as a distinct, collaborative, human-centred and creative approach.

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Anderson et al., 2018  
Koskela-Huotari et al., 2021

How might the current story  
of public service design  
**constrain** people in adapting  
their interactions together?



*The promise of  
public service design*

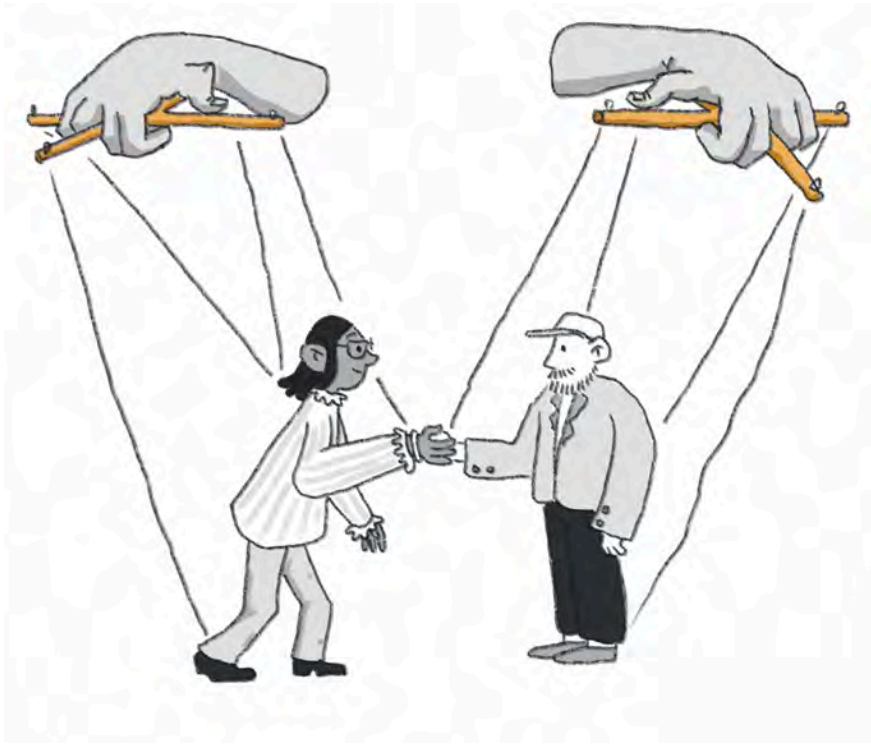
## Constraining Tendency

# 1



**Centralizing innovation efforts**  
... neglects adaptation and learning  
at the margins.

## Constraining Tendency 2



### Pre-Scripting Interactions

... constrains adaptation by treating actors as performers of pre-set roles



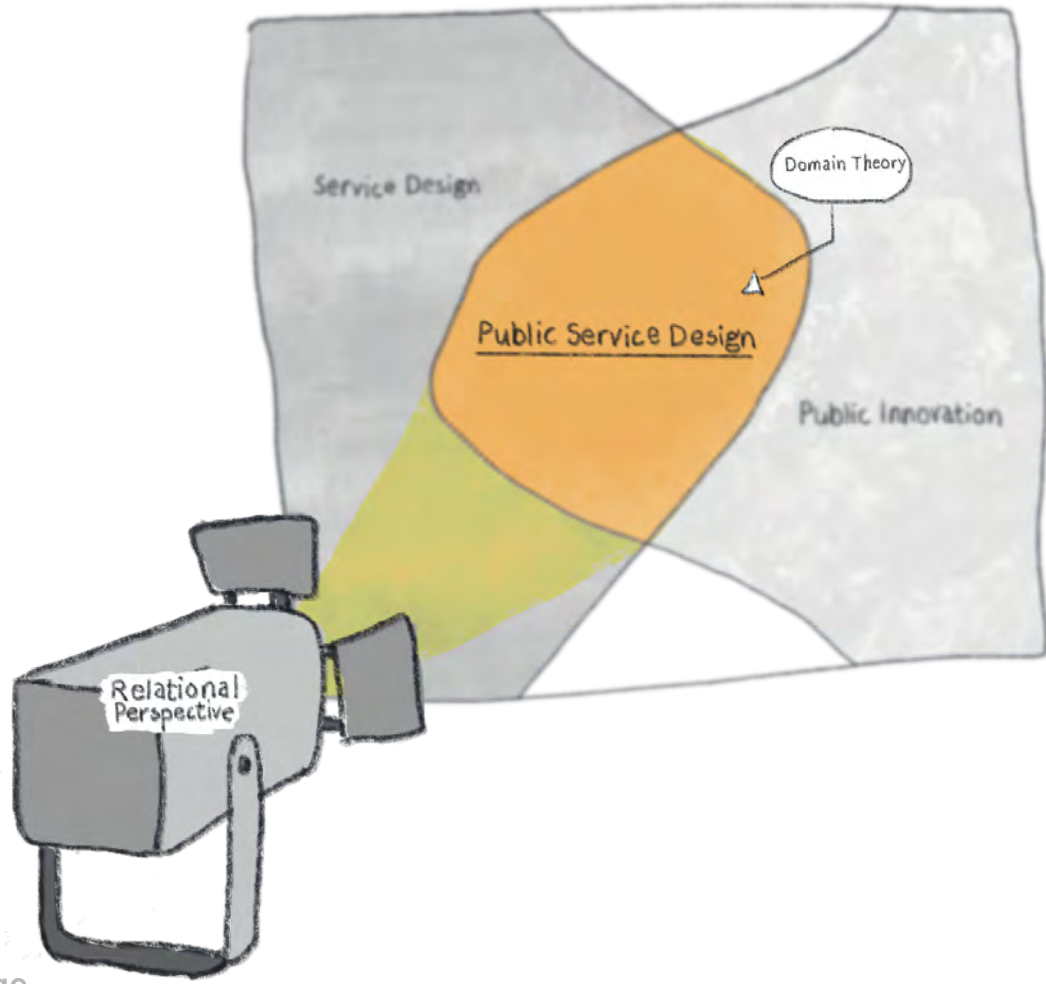
**Zooming out to address complexity**  
...makes structural issues something  
to be understood and addressed  
outside of the everyday

# Constraining Tendency 4



**Initiating episodic projects**  
...risks creating rigidity through  
solutions that soon become  
problems

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



# Researching collective and continual designing from within the Norwegian child welfare system



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

Shoter, 2006



The Dignity Exploration



The Drama Exploration

1) Hva har du hørt?  
2) Hva har du opplevd og følt?  
3) Hva har du lært?



The Dialogue Exploration

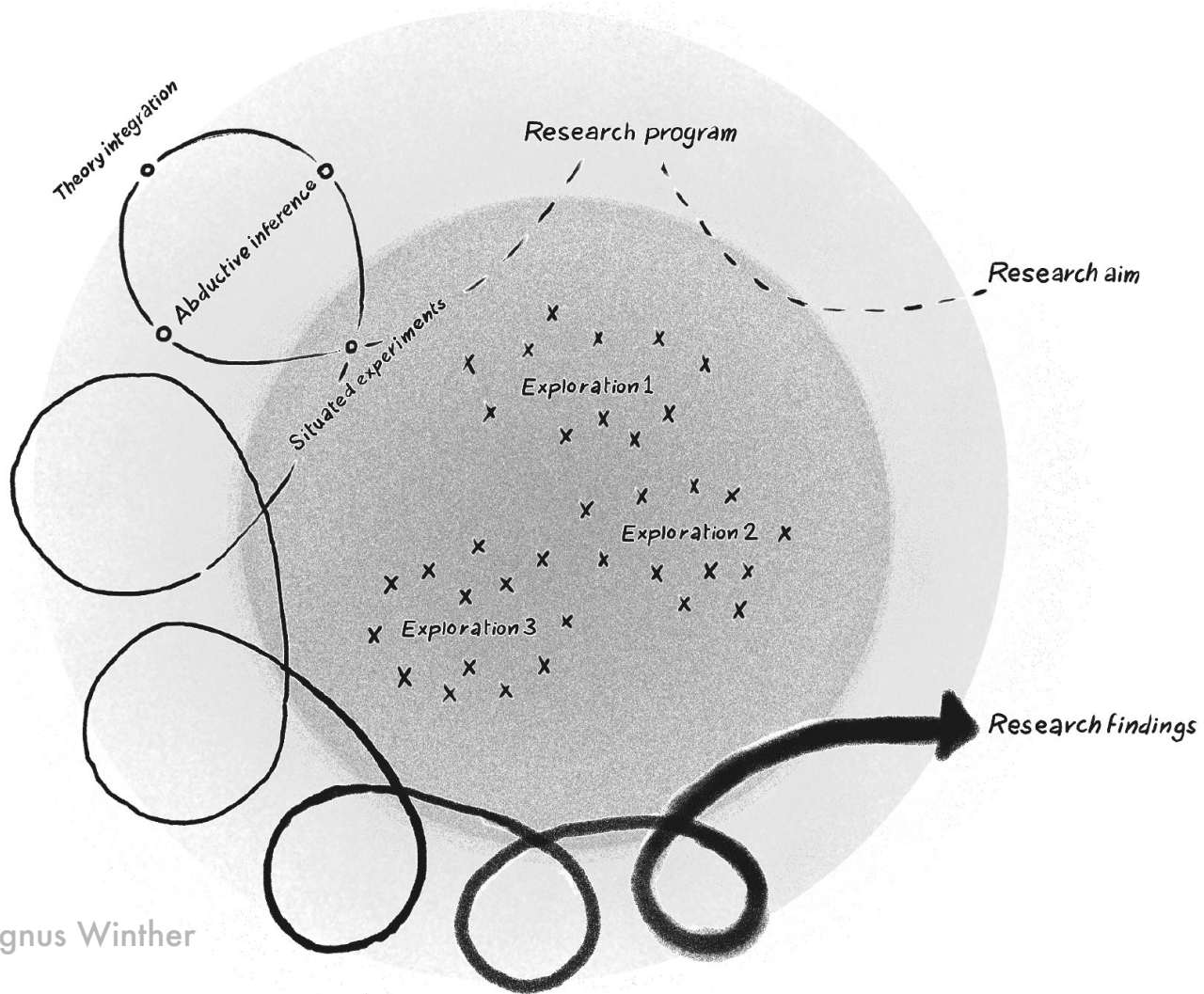
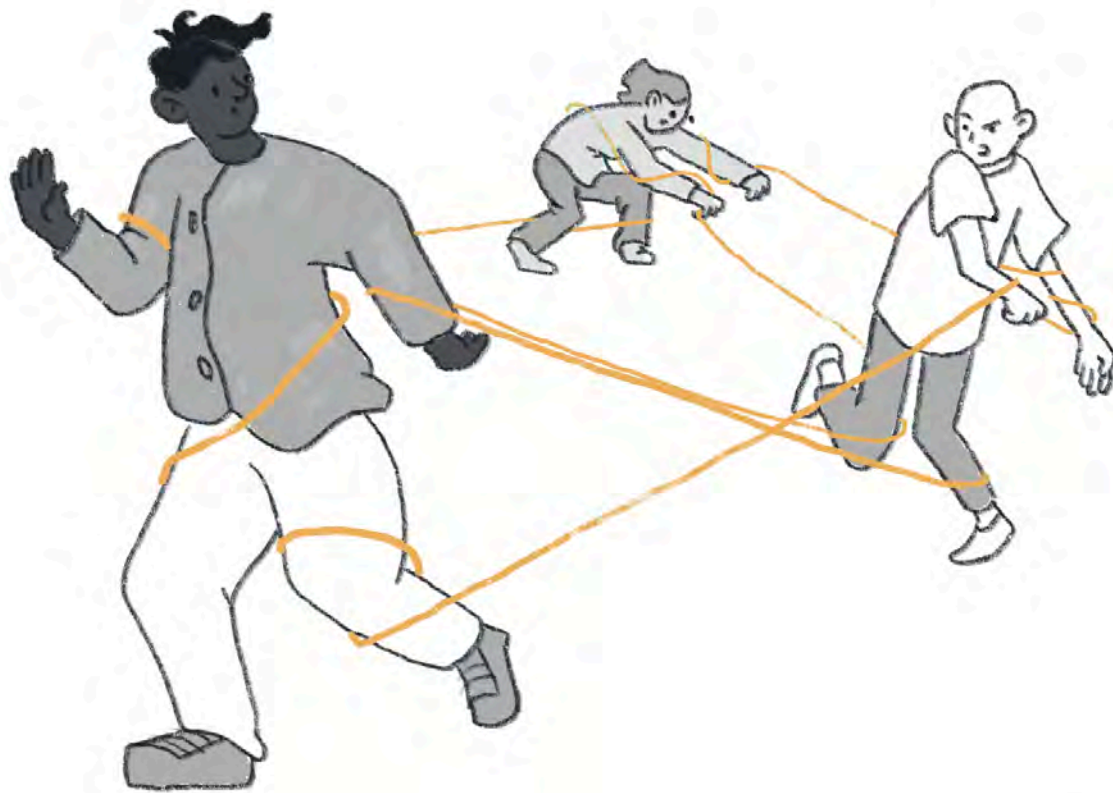


Illustration: Magnus Winther



Space for  
experimentation

Enabling collective  
and continual  
design

Space for collective  
reflexivity

# Enabling experimenting with relating otherwise

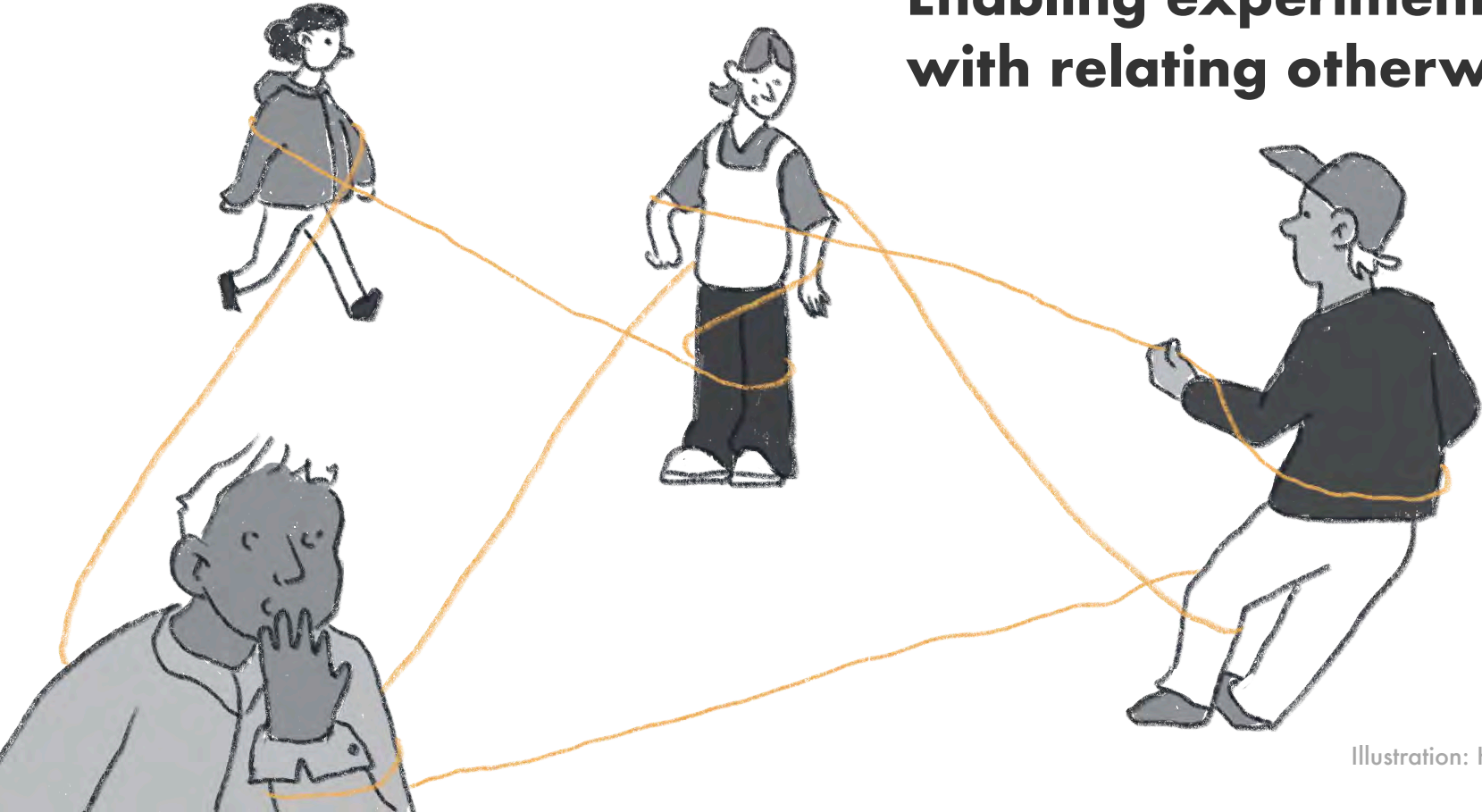


Illustration: Hobbe Mikae



# Enabling Practice 1



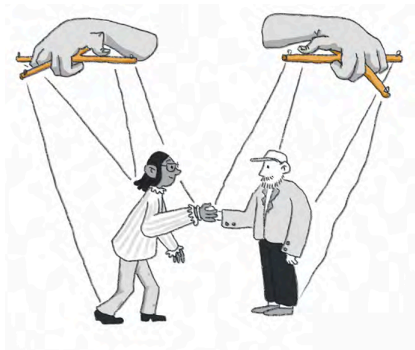
Enable people to propose, test, and refine ways of relating within their situated settings

*Nurturing everyday experimentation*



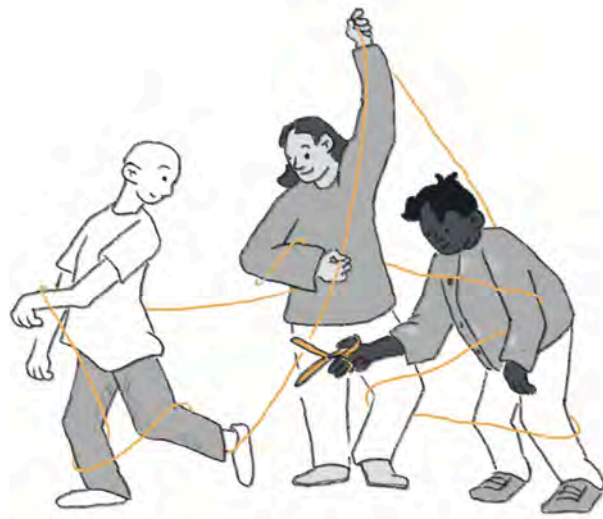
Legitimizing playful public administration through wearing a cape at work





## Enabling Practice **2**

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



*Aiding Relational Re-scripting*

Me



Things I like...



PIZZA



TATA

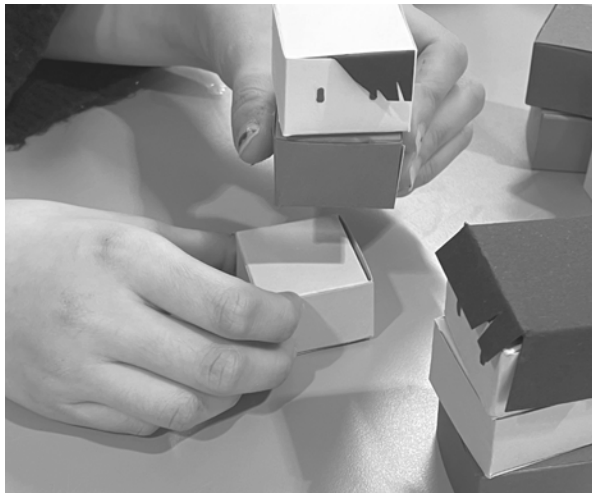
BRÅK  
ROPING



INSEKTER

Things I dont like...






## Space for collective reflexivity



## Design in the public sector: Nurturing reflexivity and learning

Anna Seravalli<sup>a</sup> , Savita Upadhyaya<sup>b</sup> and Heiti Ermits<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Arts and Communication, Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden; <sup>b</sup>VA Syd, Malmö, Sweden; <sup>c</sup>RISE, Research Institutes of Sweden, Borås, Sweden

### ABSTRACT

It has been highlighted how design engagement with the public sector risks being either irrelevant or instrumental to technocratic agendas due to a lack of understanding of the public sector's nature. Based on the idea of public sector innovation as a matter of learning and adaptation for continuous improvement, this article looks at how participatory design approaches can be used to drive co-learning processes within the public sector, namely, collaborative learning processes about institutional aspects. It reflects on the authors' engagement within a Swedish public organisation that relied on traditional design processes and co-learning processes. By analysing these processes, the article highlights how *design as problem framing*, by supporting collaborative reflexivity, can be a fruitful way to engage with institutional aspect.

### KEYWORDS

Design in the public sector, public sector innovation, participatory design, co-learning, design as problem framing, Institutionalism

## Building Reflexivity Using Service Design Methods

Josina Vink<sup>1</sup>  and Kaisa Koskela-Huotari<sup>2</sup> 

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2022, Vol. 25(3) 371–389  
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DOI: 10.1177/10946702211035064  
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### Abstract

The transformative potential of service design rests on its ability to enable people to intentionally shape institutionalized social structures. To avoid simply reproducing social structures unconsciously, people need reflexivity—an awareness of existing social structures. Scholars suggest that the use of service design methods can enhance people's reflexivity. However, the theoretical underpinning of this effect remains unclear, which in turn limits the realization of service design's transformative potential in practice. In response, using an abductive approach that combines theoretical and empirical inputs, we develop an integrative framework that explains the mechanisms by which service design methods can increase people's reflexivity. The current study contributes to the evolving service design discourse with an alternative categorization of service design methods, based on their affordances for different modes of reflexivity. The framework also reveals the underlying processes by which the use of service design methods can support people's work with institutionalized social structures as design materials to enable transformation. This research supports a more thoughtful use and strategic development of service design methods to support transformative aims.

### Keywords

service design, reflexivity, institutionalization, social structures, abductive research

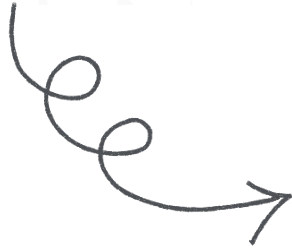
*"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."*

—James Baldwin

though how the use of service design methods can lead to reflexivity is not well understood. Without this knowledge, the increased adoption of service design methods globally risks the spread of superficial uses, with limited results (e.g., Akama and

People navigate complexity not only through reasoning, but also how systemic tensions are embodied





## Enabling Practice **3**

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



Photos: Jonathan Quintero/Kristiania





**AT: Kjøper du bil i Byggeskolen?**  
For folk flest  
For familien



...er viktig for  
...for

Photo: Joakim Quintero / Kristiania



Photo: Joakim Quintero / Kristiania



**Akkurat nå**

Stemmer: —————> Mar



**Valg23**

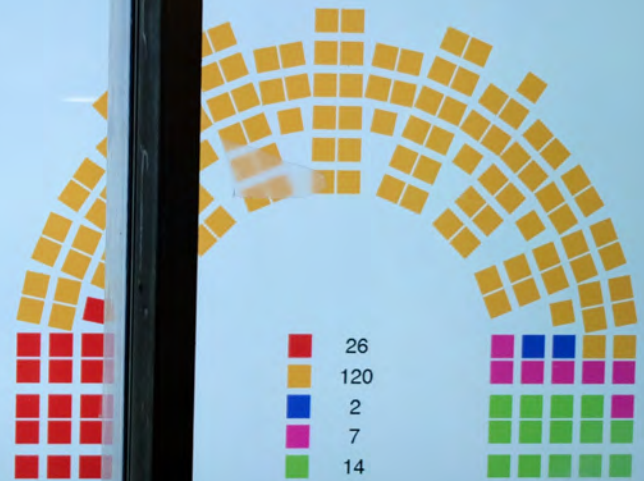


Photo: Yijun Wang

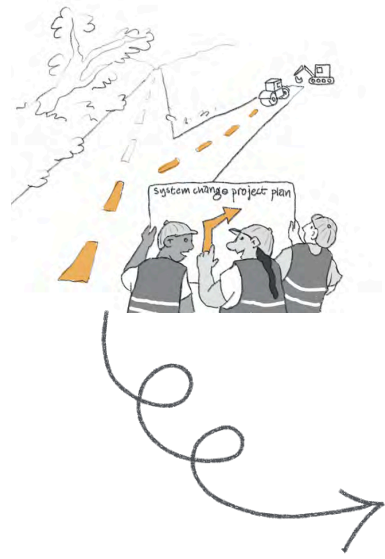
Actors' interactions are shaped by, but also actively shape, the social structures that guide them



Illustration: Hobbe Mikae

Emirbayer, 1997  
Shoter, 1983

## Enabling Practice **4**



*Embedding collective reflexivity*

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



Blue sign with white text, partially visible in the top left corner.

SIVIT

Handwritten notes and diagrams on a sheet of paper.

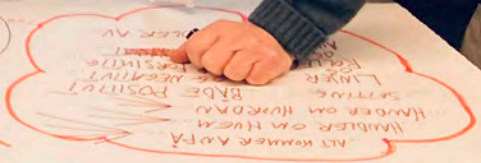
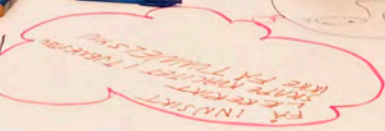




Photo: Jannecke Holten



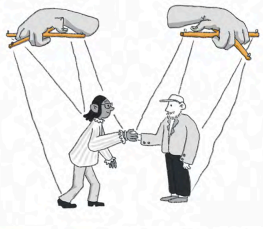
## From Constraining

Centralizing innovation efforts



## To Enabling

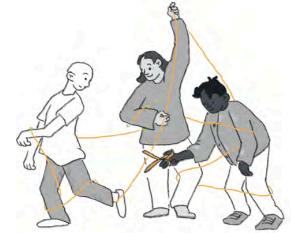
Nurturing everyday experimentation



Pre-scripting relations



Aiding relational re-scripting



Abstracting systemic conflict



Harnessing felt friction



Initiating episodic projects



Embedding collective reflexivity



# Reframing Public Service Design as a **Continual** and **Collective** Process

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae



# Reframing Public Service Design as a **Continual** and **Collective** Process

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae



# Reframing Public Service Design as a **Continual** and **Collective** Process

Illustration: Hobbe Mikae





Questions?  
Comments...  
Critique!

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