

KTN Silent Designers Tom Inns Episode 4

Steve Welch 00:08

Hello, and welcome to Silent Designers, a podcast about the under the radar design activity which goes on in many organisations, even though it's not necessarily seen as design, or even necessarily done by designers. Each month we're talking to an expert guest to share their knowledge, the impact that the designer has had on what they do in their domain. I'm Steve Welch from Innovate UK KTN and I'd like to introduce my co host Katherine Wildman, founder of b2b copywriting agency Haydn Grey.

Katherine Wildman 00:42

Hi Steve. Thank you for the introduction. In today's episode of Silent Designers, we are going to be exploring the theme of healthy living and technologies and we're going to be talking to Tom Inns. He is Director of consultancy Cofink. Tom, thank you so much for joining us today.

Tom Inns 01:01

Thank you very much. It's great to be with you.

Steve Welch 01:03

Excellent. Tom, thanks for joining us. How about we start by you telling us a bit about yourself and the area of innovation that you work in?

Tom Inns 01:10

Okay great, thanks Steve. So I am Tom Inns. I work with Cofink, where I help facilitate collaborative thinking in a wide range of sectors. I'm also a Visiting Professor at the University of Strathclyde, and I'm working with Innovate UK as one of the coaches on the Design for Growth programme. So my interest, my obsession, if you like is the role that design plays in helping teams understand complex challenges, helping them in that phase of discovery, and helping them innovate and deliver change. And those teams come in many different forms, but many of them have those silent designers that are the theme of the podcast, I think.

Katherine Wildman 01:49

That leads me beautifully into my first question, Tom, which is can you tell us how you use design in the area? And why is it important to innovation?

Tom Inns 01:59

Well, let's kind of stick to the theme of health. So a lot of my work is in the area of healthcare. So I work in two ways. I work with healthcare teams, those people, the clinicians, the healthcare professionals who work inside our healthcare service. They are actually very good at innovating in a way. They have a kind of paradigm of quality improvement that drives a lot of healthcare improvement. But actually, when you kind of dig into that, there is a kind of old portfolio of methods and approaches that are missing. And those are the ones that come with design thinking. So in healthcare, we like to be patient

focused, but a lot of that quality improvement portfolio doesn't really tell us much about patients and service user journeys, and doesn't tell us an awful lot about having empathy with patients and understanding their their journeys from a sort of ethnographic point of view. So immediately, you can see there, that there's an awful lot that can be brought on board with the application of some design thinking approaches. But interestingly, the people who design healthcare services are silent designers. If you're a GP, you are the person who designs the GP services. If you're a clinician working in a hospital, you are the person who designs those services, you're the person with the expertise. You need to be upskilled in design approaches, and those design approaches need to come alongside the approaches you've got for quality improvement. So it's kind of really interesting, it's a really interesting place for design thinking.

Steve Welch 03:30

You think these people are aware that they need skilling. And that enough people are aware that maybe they wouldn't see design as we would. But that they're, they're in an area where there is a body of work that they could learn from?

Tom Inns 03:44

I think, I think levels of awareness obviously vary. I think, if I think very broadly about healthcare, I think there is a kind of growing understanding that existing paradigms of quality improvement in healthcare can only take you so far. Quality improvement tends to drill down into more and more detail. And as I say, it doesn't necessarily have the voice of patients within it. Within contemporary healthcare, there's much more of a need to see the system as a whole. So that's where your kind of design thinking comes in and actually systems thinking comes in to. And so there is a whole set of approaches, which I think there's an awful lot of appetite for in that sector. So I think it's a very interesting one from that point of view.

Katherine Wildman 04:29

I know, Tom, that you, you talk about systemic challenges. What sort of challenges are you looking at when you're thinking in terms of design thinking? Where do you even begin with something like, like a healthcare system?

Tom Inns 04:43

Well, in healthcare systems, we've been through my research projects at the University of Strathclyde, and through the practice of coping, we've been developing new methods. So one of them is to map out a visual ecosystem of healthcare pathways. It sounds very, very complicated, but basically, healthcare professionals, it's a bit like looking at a tube map. A tube map has the Victoria line, the Central line, the Piccadilly line. They all interact with each other, they all sit inside a much more complex system called Transport for London. And, you know, as a person travelling around London, you travel around that transport system, taking your journey with you, depending on what it is you want to do in London on that particular day. Well healthcare is exactly the same. It's made up of pathways, the cardiology pathway, the respiratory pathway, they all intersect and interact with each other. But if you're inside healthcare, you don't see the system very often you just see the pathway that you're in. Just great, you can improve your pathway, but you can't improve your equivalent of Transport for London. So you have to visualise it, the tube map is an abstract version of what the actual underground system looks like. It

doesn't look like that geographically. And it's kind of quite a high level visualisation. If you can create that visualisation for healthcare professionals, then that acts as a fantastic focus point for everyone to collaborate. And that's where the kind of collaborative thinking comes in. I see designs' role as being really as much about bringing teams together as it is about being kind of human centred in what you do. So that's the kind of example of how we take a kind of systemic approach. And I've done that. You know, next week, I'm in Northern Ireland. I've been working with the agent and scheduled team at the Ulster hospital over the Southeast of the Social Care Trust. So we're looking at their maps that we've be constructing over the last two to three months. And they are in desperate need of finding some solutions for this autumn, for this winter, in order to sort out urgent, unscheduled care and the flows of patients. So if you have the map, you can begin to understand those flows. You can understand, you know, if you think about it as a tube map, how you can begin to think about those passenger journeys. And the same is true for patient journeys.

Katherine Wildman 06:52

That's fascinating, thank you. So everybody basically needs the Elizabeth line.

Tom Inns 06:56

You need the Elizabeth line, it cuts through everything. Yeah, no, absolutely. It probably takes you straight through to the emergency department, which is not what they want in urgent and unscheduled care.

Katherine Wildman 07:06

Brilliant, thank you.

Steve Welch 07:09

That's a great visualisation. But I was thinking also, some of the people we've talked to in this series, say they're applying design in ultimately what is a passion project of their own, which is quite different from your role, where you're helping many people, clients and others with this. How do you think that changes your approach? And does it make things easier or harder?

Tom Inns 07:36

Well, it's, that's a really interesting question. I work in so many different sectors, as I say, lots in healthcare, but I've worked in the third sector. I've helped a conservation charity recently in Kenya, Save the Elephants all the way through to local authorities and universities. But my passion is always the same thing. It's this whole process of how do you get a team to collaborate? And what's the role of design tools and design process in that. And every time I run a project, I probably learn as much as the team does, about how that works. And that's what absolutely fascinates me, it's about kind of pushing the boundaries, coming up with those new methods. So my passion is, as I say, evolving methodologies to support that collaboration, you know, and the healthcare ecosystem mapping tool is kind of the perfect example of that. That's where I get my kicks. It's from, yeah, it's from kind of nudging the methodology, if you like.

Steve Welch 08:30

Yeah, no, I get that. And there's, there's certainly a kind of pleasure. I suppose it's a bit like if you were watching somebody else, painting a fence, you can see the bits they've missed quicker than they can.

Tom Inns 08:44

Yeah, I mean, yeah, absolutely. It's always very easy to be a philosopher in someone else's land. And I think that kind of that fresh perspective is really, really important. And, you know, I take great pleasure from that. Usually, it's about connecting people together who haven't been working together and kind of forging that connection, that collaboration, that's where, and then as you say, a lot of the projects I run I'm with people for six to twelve months, so you do get the opportunity to see the impact of that as they kind of develop their own solutions. So yeah, it's very rewarding actually, from that point of view.

Katherine Wildman 09:19

I know that you one of the coaches for Magnetic which is the Design for Growth, delivered by Innovate UK EDGE. Could you tell us a little bit more about about that work that you're doing?

Tom Inns 09:29

Okay, well, the Design for Growth programme has been running for just over 24 months now. So it's an Innovate UK programme providing specialist design support, largely to startups but some of them are scale ups. And it's delivered by a team of coaches who work with Magnetic. So, Magnetic have evolved the service over the last 24 months and we're now into Cohort 10. I look after a lot of the health care companies. So these are companies that are looking to bring either digital products or physical products into healthcare. They're outside the healthcare system, if you like. A lot of them actually led by clinicians who are teaming up with technologists to develop these new interventions, which will improve healthcare. So I help them very much along the lines of really getting them to understand the service user journeys associated with their products. So that seems to be one of the big themes for the coaching work that I do with them. So in healthcare, there's many different service user journeys. There's the journey of the patient, but you also have to think about the people in the care system, and how they use the products and service. And you also have to think about how they're procured in the first place. So how are these products and services commissioned? How do you get your new product or service to integrate with the systems that are already there, the legacy systems if you like. And a lot of the legacy systems in healthcare are not 21st century and cutting edge. So that's a kind of interesting challenges in it's own right. So I've met many different health care companies along the way, and had some extremely interesting coaching interactions with them. Some of them, some of them are kind of physical products. So one of the, one of the great ones is a trumpet that's been designed by the team at Tutti Toot. It's designed by a team that have musical expertise. They're a team of musicians, and designers. They've created this amazing product, a physical product, which helps children suffering from asthma and other breathing disorders. The product is being worked on and developed with a clinical team. And it's there to help those children and young people practice their breathing exercises, which you have to do if you are suffering from some of these conditions. So it's connected up to an app, which gives you your cycle of breathing exercises, but everything is connected to musical patterns. So you, you learn to play the instrument, you create music, you create music, as part of a community with your peers. And it's all part of a kind of new form of clinical practice, which has been developed with the team. So that's the kind of physical end. Many of the other products and services that have been developed and supported through Design for Growth are things like apps and sort of digital

interventions, largely around connecting people to data and information to help them in their healthcare journey. So extremely interesting spectrum of innovation out there in the UK, when it comes to healthcare innovation, and technologies. Everything from the physical product through to digital interactions and support and interventions for healthcare.

Katherine Wildman 12:35

And so very practical as well. When you take, when you're thinking about that the vision that you gave us at the tube map, which is extraordinary helpful, and you can picture what you're talking about, but then you can imagine a child actually getting stuck in and involved and enjoying their recovery, or managing their condition, because of some creative thinking that's come in, it's extraordinary.

Tom Inns 12:58

I mean, the Tutti Toot, I think is amazing from that point of view, because it is the genuine fusion of the stem in the arts, if you like there's there's certainly technology behind it, digital technology. There's the kind of clinical setting, it's clinically proven. But it's also has that amazing input of the, you know, the creative genius of the team that are kind of driving that innovation. So it's really interesting to see that fusion. And it's great to see the smiles it brings to the faces of those people who, you know, had the drudgery before of breathing into kind of clinical devices, which they had to breathe into, 50 times at exactly the same rate in order to kind of perform their kind of medication each night. So the Tutti Toot trumpet has transcribed, it's kind of transform that, is about to transform that.

Katherine Wildman 13:44

The choice of gamification. Excellent. That's brilliant. We're coming to the end of our time today Tom. Thank you very much for being here. I know Steve has one more question to ask you.

Steve Welch 13:59

Well, I don't know if this is going to be the easiest or the hardest question. But what a fantastic spread of people you've worked and lots of innovation opportunities you've seen. Your working in innovation. What one piece of advice would you give to somebody who wanted to incorporate design thinking into what they do?

14:21

Great question Steve. Well, I've got one piece of advice that kind of breaks down into three workouts if you like. So I think if you want to bring design thinking, systems thinking into your work, what you've got to do is develop some of the mental gymnastics associated with design thinking. So it is to do with new ways of thinking about things. So I'll give you three simple mental workouts that you can go away and practice. Okay, so workout one is don't jump to solutions. Always start by asking yourself, what is the problem or unmet need? And then blast it with something like, how might we solve this? So then ask yourself the question. But always go back to the needs or problems. All the time I meet people who are jumping to solutions. In healthcare, everyone's a type A person, and has a kind of list of solutions. But you've got to go back to the problem or the unmet need. Workout two is when you're looking for solutions, always look to the left, and think, What have others done in my sector? And always look to

the right and say, What have others done in other sectors? So what else is like this? Don't reinvent the wheel. So there's so much that's been done already. And again, half the time, we're just not aware of what's the left and the right. And the final workout is learn to zoom in and out. So just think about Google Maps. Google Maps shows us a city, it shows us a suburb, it shows us a street. You can go down into someone's back garden. You can go inside their shed practically. And what you need to do, is you need to think about that, in the context of your own business. Learn to visualise your own business in your own organisation in the same way. What's the system it sets in? What's the kind of ecosystem of services and products that you have? What are the individual products? And think about Google Maps. In Google Maps in the bottom right hand corner, you've got that little yellow figure that you can pull into the map. And that takes you into Street View. So do the same thing with your systems. Take that little yellow figure and put them into your system map. And that shows you what the customer experience is like. Because the customer doesn't see the system. The customer just faces you with all of those touch points all the time. And that's what Street View is. Street View is the touch points as you navigate around a Google Map. So three workouts for you. Don't jump to solutions, ask what else is like this, and just kind of begin to think in Google Maps' terms about your own situation. And I think if you take on board those three little pieces of mental gymnastics, you'll be, you'll be motoring when it comes to designing systems thinking

Steve Welch 16:52

That's lovely, yes, it's great advice. And very clearly expressed. Thank you. So, thank you so much for that we've learnt again, as always, we've learned a lot today and some superb examples and some things to think about. Especially about the systems and almost systems of systems and an understanding how they lock together. So thank you for that.

Katherine Wildman 17:16

And thank you so much for your time. And thank you for sharing all your insights with us.

Tom Inns 17:21

Brilliant, thanks so much enjoyed the chat. So thank you very much for inviting me along.

Steve Welch 17:24

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