

## **THE SERVICE DESIGN COURSE MODULE: STEERING DESIGN STUDENTS TOWARDS NEW CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Abstract**

As far as developing countries such as India are concerned, services offer lucrative employment opportunities. Generally, services are low on investment and encourage customised and localised solutions. They have a great scope for encouraging societal interactions. Services can meet the user's needs directly by reducing/eliminating the need to introduce products or other tangible solutions. It is for the purpose of improving the quality of human life that one sees the convergence of service and design. Sustainable development can be attained through proper design interventions in the services. Self-employment that is largely precipitated through the paucity of jobs in India can become an important factor in introducing various services. Such services could be offered by individuals or even by groups. But, such services are predominantly disorganised in nature. Seen in this context, it is obvious that the Indian economy is a service-based economy. Keeping this aspect in mind, the National Institute of Design developed a course module on Service Design for the postgraduate students of the Strategic Design Management discipline. Through this module, the students were introduced to the concept of service and identify opportunities for design intervention in the service domain. The exposure to Service Design has made the students aware of newer career opportunities that could be explored. This paper documents the insights and experiential reflections on the design and development of such a course module.

**Keywords:** *service design, Indian perspective, sustainability,*

## India and Services

In India, one can find an amazing variety of services that are offered. Layers of services get developed around any business or manufacturing unit, any locality/society or around any need that is identified in the society. These services that are offered by individuals, sometimes even by groups, generally tend to remain unorganised. There are numerous services that are engaged in the home delivery of milk, newspaper, and grocery items. There is a totally different category of services involved in buying back used cartons, containers, used packages, and old newspapers from various residential areas. These used articles may then be sent for recycling, repairing, or for reusing in different forms. The auto rickshaws plying on the city roads double up as school rickshaws that take children from various localities to their respective schools. The housewives utilise their spare time in offering homemade food or repairing clothes.

Due to limited resources and skills and paucity of job opportunities, it becomes difficult for majority of the people to get a secure job that ensures them of a regular income. Therefore, people turn towards self-employment from a very early age. They find ingenious and innovative ways of earning their livelihood by utilising all the resources and skills at their disposal. It is in such a scenario that various kinds of services get developed.

Sandeep Gajakas, a young graduate from Mumbai started a shoe laundry service in 2003. The service that he had started from a small space of his residence in Mumbai, saw him involved in cleaning, repairs, pick-ups and deliveries all by himself. Today, he employs eight people. The tag line on his website [www.shoelaundry.com](http://www.shoelaundry.com) reads— *The shoe laundry: Inspiring hygiene for footwear, for life*. The service has now tie ups with most of the major sports footwear outlets in Mumbai. “I love my job because at the end of it, I have a smile that comes on the person’s face, when he/she looks at the shoe” – a quote on his website sums up the very strength that the services offers to individual.

There are also various organisations in the country that have successfully created services utilising the existing skills, available resources, and cooperation of the people. One of the successful cooperative organisations, Shri Mahila Gruh Udhayog Lijjat Papad

([www.lijjat.com](http://www.lijjat.com)) provides opportunities to thousands of women, many of who come from the economically backward strata of the society. They are mostly illiterate and have to earn a living with their limited skills. More than 42,000 of these women roll out 19 million *papads*, a staple component in Indian cuisine on a daily basis. These women get the dough from the organisation everyday in the morning. They are mainly homemakers and begin to make *papads* in the afternoon soon after they finish with their daily household work. The organisation also provides them the platform to come together and discuss various issues related to their life. Another such success story is that of the White Revolution that was initiated by Amul, ([www.amul.com](http://www.amul.com)) in the Anand district of Gujarat. Amul is jointly owned by some 2.8 million milk producers, most of who come from the rural background. The organisation collects raw milk from villagers and processes them in their state-of-the-art plant; thereafter, it markets the milk and milk products all over India, and now in many parts of the world as well. Both these organisations, through their innovative cooperative networks, could provide an effective interface through the use of the modern technology and quality service at the right place, catering to the traditional Indian society at the grassroots level and the quality conscious and demanding buyers/users at the other end. This has helped people at the grassroots level gain economic viability, independence while continuing to remain attached to their social and cultural moorings. Similarly, the *dabbawalas* of Mumbai ([www.mydabbawala.com](http://www.mydabbawala.com)) are a success story in themselves. Every day, an estimated 5000 *dabbawalas* collect around 200,000 lunch boxes from homes and deliver these boxes at the workplace of each individual with unparalleled punctuality. Although a low-tech service, there is only one mistake in every 6,000,000 deliveries.

### **Service: The Global Context**

Service may also increase consumption and consumerism if it is used solely as a marketing tool. Today, companies are struggling to compete in saturated global markets solely on price. Technological developments for products are largely horizontal rather than vertical. Good customer service is becoming a key differentiator for any company to survive competition. The customers are now looking beyond products and focusing on solutions and experiences. Services form the key link towards this transition and the

critical value addition. This also reveals itself in the economies around the world, many of which are rapidly moving into the service economy. Services comprise 72% of the UK's Gross Domestic Products, GDP, 80% of USA's GDP and around 71% of France GDP. The developed economies have begun to rely heavily on services. Services here are getting more and more commoditised.

### **Service: The Indian Context**

In the Indian context, the major emphasis will be on generating new opportunities, improving the standard of living and preserving the values of traditional society. A sense of service, sharing, and cooperation is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition and is imbibed from a very early age. The Indian economy is primarily a services and-process oriented economy rather than the material or product oriented one prevalent elsewhere.

*Mahatma Gandhi said, "Production by masses rather than mass production is more appropriate for the country like India".* Likewise, services offer great scope to create employment opportunities for the masses. While creating employment opportunities at the doorsteps of the people, services utilise the available resources and skills of the individual and thereby help convert their constraints and limitations into unique opportunities. Service encourages an individual to earn his/her living with minimum investment and elementary skill levels. Moreover, the individual has more flexibility with regard to time and the freedom to be on his/her own. Thus, it helps the individual gain economic independence, self confidence, and respect within the society. This would help distribute the income to a large segment of society and improve the rural economy of the country; thereby, arresting migration from the villages. Though it may be offered at the unorganised level, services also help reduce capital and infrastructural investments, otherwise required to be incurred by the service providers, and/or organisations/customers.

## **Service Design: An Emerging Domain**

Globally, the interests in understanding and designing services have increased substantially over the last few years, both at the academic as well as the corporate level. Service helps connect the user to his/her need. And in the Indian context, it helps provide employment opportunities, utilise individual skills and resources, and creates a sense of confidence in the individual. It helps encourage reusability and helps in reducing production, consumption, and overall dematerialisation. Services focus upon improving interaction with the service provider and the user; thus, encouraging further social interaction and community development. Therefore, encouraging new services and improving existing services would be one of the key focus areas for the sustainable development of Indian economy and the society as a whole.

## **The Service Design Course: It's Evolution at NID**

National Institute of Design, the first design institute in India is celebrating its golden jubilee. One of the premier design institutes of the country, NID offers educational programmes in 17 different disciplines both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Besides its educational programmes, NID's design service wing offers the opportunities to its faculty members and students to work on live projects from the industrial, crafts, and social sectors. This helps the institute constantly upgrade and update its curriculum and teaching methodology. This unique design education model of the institute has helped the author to engage himself across various disciplines of design at NID and also with the variety of industrial sectors. The Service Design course module emerged based on the experiences and insights gathered by the author. The course is being offered to the students of NID's postgraduate programme in Strategic Design Management (SDM) for the last five years. A workshop called *Design for Sustainable Services* was conducted at NID in 2002 in collaboration with the Doors of Perception, Netherland. The workshop was anchored by Prof. Ezio Manzini of Politecnico de Milano, Italy. The course module has been refined and revised over these years and is now offered as a three week course module. The module is offered during the third semester (second year) of the two year postgraduate programme in Strategic Design Management.

## **Service Design: The Course Module**

The course module aims to introduce students to the concept of service design. It exhorts students to explore the scope for design intervention in the field of service design. Through the three assignments, one each taken up every week of the three week course module, students are systematically initiated to explore, experience, and understand the field of service design.

As the first assignment, each student/group of students is asked to select an existing service and study the same in detail in order to understand its specific approach/es, business model/s, and strategy/ies. Based on this study, the student would develop his/her/ group's own understanding of some of the unique characteristics of service as a profession.

As part of the second assignment of the course module, the students would first map various opportunities/needs from within the institute itself. As the students are part of the campus life, it helps them to look at their own experiences as well as interact with their friends and fellow students. The students in a group would then select one such opportunity area and study the same in detail, focusing on the specific need/demand. Each group would then embark on the design of the service in the form of its strategy and business model. The outcome of this exercise will be presented in the form of a story line explaining the service methodology, a poster that advertises and highlights the unique characteristics of the service and a short write up of its strategy and business model. The students would then also prototype their new design and test it out. As the new service will be for the campus and for their fellow friends and students, it becomes easier for them to quickly test out their design.

As the last assignment of the course module, the students would select one of the existing services from around the city, and study the same in detail, analyse its specific need/demand, their rationales, scope for design intervention in terms of its redesigning, improvements from the perspective of strategy, business models, and level of interaction. Based on this detailed study, the group will then suggest appropriate design interventions for improvement of the selected service. The group would also present

and discuss its solutions with the service provider and get the feedback as well as try and help implement the solutions.

The methodology adopted for delivering the module takes the students through intense discussions, brainstorming, user research, process of analysis of the information and creative synthesis to develop solutions/concepts, scenario development methods, business model and strategy development, prototyping and testing methods. For each of the assignments, the students are first asked to experience and explore the context and the complexities before intense discussions and presentations thereby helping them develop their own understanding.

### **The First Assignment**

Based on their detailed study of one of the India's leading travel portals *Cleartrip*, offering services for booking of hotels, flights, and trains across destinations, a group of students from the 2009 batch of the SDM programme, as part of its first assignment of the course module, developed their understanding as— "Service is like an interface between product and consumer. It becomes a product's voice and helps it communicate its value and worth to its users. It also generates the feeling of ownership between consumer and the product. It makes life better for the consumer by giving him an experience which he will cherish and come back for it!" Another group of students from the 2009 batch of the SDM programme based on their study of *Veolia Environmental Services* providing tailored solutions to meet the needs of municipal and industrial customers in the area of waste management. They documented their understanding of service as—"In a business, service could be a core service or a facilitating service. In a core service, the main business is service; while, in facilitating service, the main business could be a product and the service could be a support available to the particular product. The characteristics of a service are intangibility, consistency in quality and consumption at the time of production. To avail a service, the consumer might not own the product but pay for the service according to the usage of product." Similarly, another group from the 2010 batch of the SDM programme developed its

understanding as “Service is an act of giving, offering something to someone for his benefit. However it can’t have ownership and it can’t be stored. Service may involve tangibles like product and/ or intangibles like experience. However, service itself is intangible.” Based on their brainstorming another group of students categorised these services in 13 different sectors that include logistics, security, emergency and safety, travel, health and fitness, social community, care, after sales, IT enabled services, wealth, hygiene and cleanliness, religious, large scale/government and food services sectors.

This study of the existing services by the students and their subsequent presentation helps initiate the discussion on various aspects including the Indian context, scope for design intervention, scope and opportunities for the strategic design management graduates, issues of sustainability, marketing , planning, and strategy and business models for the services. Varied perspectives from each of the groups based on their completely different services help students gain wider perspective and understanding of service sector and the scope for design intervention in the same.

### **The Second Assignment**

With this understanding and interest, the students would then embark on their second assignment. They have realised by now that one of the main advantages of any service is that it can start at much smaller level. Initially, it may start at an informal level and as the service provider gains confidence and experience, the service may grow into a formal service/business. This helps develop motivation, interest, and enthusiasm amongst the students to experiment with new ventures related to service design.

NID offers multidisciplinary design education at both the under graduate and post graduate levels. So, one would find students from varied backgrounds and disciplines ranging from engineering, fine arts, humanities, design, and architecture studying at the institute. These students will thus have various needs and requirements—ranging from learning new software or a skill, specific support to complete the assignments/carry out the user research, need to do virus scan of their laptops, anxiety of their career opportunities, contacts for getting the required materials, recreational activities, need to



have food/snacks late at night. The students would initially map these opportunities and select one such area that interests them as well as suits the group's strengths to offer unique solutions/services. The group would then carry out detailed and systematic user-research to derive insights and understand the needs and demands of the area and develop an appropriate service solution. The students will then develop a marketing and business strategy for their solution. The group will then aggressively market the service within the campus through posters and various other marketing tools that they may have developed in order to get the required participants to test the service.

Essence Consulting, one such service designed by the group of students from the 2009 batch of the SDM programme, as an outcome of this assignment, offers a total portfolio solution to design students. With the tagline— *Customized solutions for your identity needs*, the service helps the student understand his/her personality style, trait, and unique design strengths. The service would offer counseling for building up a tailor made identity that suits the design student and the needs of the industry. Based on these understandings, the service will help student develop the portfolio that highlights his/her strengths. Essence Consulting was divided into four sessions— self realisation, participative learning, interaction with experts and finally the industry interface. This service will maintain a large data base of industries and individuals which will be provided to the students in the form of CDs, documentations and virtual space for interaction with the industry. Similarly the service will help the industry benefit by getting the exact person they are looking for. Though the need for the service was felt, it did not have any tangible product offerings. Therefore, the group developed an aggressive marketing strategy based on teasers and indirect emotional posters that would make an individual think and create curiosity of coming into essence and understand the need for such a service. Installations like a gift wrap box, small teaser gift boxes for everyone, advertisements on rare places like dustbins and mannequin sequence installation became part of their advertisement strategy. The group developed a prototype of the service and tested it out within the campus.

Increased pressures of studies, tension of completing their assignments, constant competition, and the resultant confusion, frustration and boredom, all extend to the leisure time of the young students in the campus. Therefore, recreational activities should be creatively developed so that the students integrate fun with learning into their own areas and thereby increase their professional competence, their level of confidence, and personal satisfaction. Based on these insights derived through in depth user study within the campus, the students developed a range of services addressing these issues. A group of students designed a service called—'Chingari (Spark)... *ignite your imagination*' that helps participants explore crafts from the vicinity of the campus. Through a short tour of these places it provides opportunities to interact with the local artisans, get hands on experience of the crafts by actually creating them with the guidance of the artisans, and in the process the students get to experience the socio-cultural environment. With an objective of removing boredom and the lack of field study, the second group of students designed a service called—Creativeland Tour Packages. As mentioned in their report, it offers “...*tailored tour packages for design students to mix learning with fun. The tour package gives an opportunity to the student to learn about research techniques (people study and ethnographic research), and also get out of the campus and use them in real life.*” While yet another group designed a LAN based internet radio station, *Dhan Te Nan*, a service specific to the NID's postgraduate campus. To be operated by the dedicated group of students of the campus, the service will offer podcasts on design, famous lectures or talks, informal discussion sessions and information and updates on events, news, user generated programs, TED talks, design discussions, and explorations of music genres. With a view to generate a source of serious learning and platform of gaining design specific knowledge, the radio aims at generating a vibrant campus culture. These students worked out their business and marketing strategy and also prototyped their service ideas and tested them in order to check their responses.

Similarly one of the groups from the 2008 batch of the SDM programme designed the service, [healthster.com](http://healthster.com) that focuses on community based wellness programme for each student's personal growth and development. The service offers health care facility

to the student community. Another service, ClearVirus.com was created in 2008 and it caters to the NID student community whose laptop/personal computer are affected with virus and other hardware/software related problems. It functions as a 24 hours customer service handling a plethora of tasks such as clearing the viruses from the system, external hard drive and pen drive, formatting the system and restoring the data, creating awareness and educating the students on latest viruses and their effects and free downloadable softwares; answering students' queries related to software installation, information and guidance on proper service centres, maintenance tips, and finally providing guidance on selling and buying of second hand products. Sense-Sex, a service set up in 2009 offers awareness about matters related to sexual health to young design students, addresses their anxieties and inquiries through the dispensing of authentic information by arranging meeting with doctors and counsellors. *i Found it*, was a service set up in 2008. It is a portal based service that facilitates the NID community to share and exchange information and views based on their experiences and trials ranging from the preferences of restaurants, availability of specific materials, and skills. Besides exchange of information, the stored data will help the fresh batch of students that joins the institute every year in overcoming initial anxieties and settle down in the new place. NITEBITE, service that was set up in 2010 caters to the needs of the students for food/snacks/quick bites after midnight when they cannot go out of the hostel and the canteen stops its services for the day.

### **Service Design: Workshops**

Services offer great opportunity for the individual to create employment opportunities utilising whatever skills or resources he/she might have. Therefore, there are various unorganised services that exist in the country. During one such Service Design workshop organised in 2003, the participants undertook various such services for their value addition and redesign. Aquamind: Think Water, one of the services developed as part of the workshop, organises individual repair mechanics into a group of trained professionals who offer a holistic solution for all the water related issues of a household. Similarly the workshop called Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyle developed

various community based services that help increase interaction and cooperation amongst the community members.

### **The Third Assignment**

The insights gathered from these assignments would be carried further into the next assignment in which each group of students would select one of the existing services from around the city. The laundry man, newspaper delivery man, a tailor, motor driving training school, reception counter at the hotel, telephone information services, and food vendors were some of the services explored by these students for their redesign, improvement and/or value addition. The group would carry out extensive and systematic design research to study and understand the context, entire activity flow, tasks involved, various touch points, elements of service and resource mapping, expectation mapping, and observation. Also, activities such as follow-the-user, photo and video documentation of various tasks, extensive interviews with the stake holders, and quantitative and qualitative user survey will be some of the design tools used to understand, study and analyse the service. Based on such empathetic understanding and insights, the group will then map various design opportunities to improve the service. The context and the constraints involved with it will be one of the important parameters considered while developing/ redesigning the service. The focus therefore, will be on improving various touch points of the services through improved interactions, reduced anxiety, customised offerings to meet individual expectations, increased efficiency and reliability, and value addition. The design interventions proposed will be based on their implementation possibilities that are short term—the ones that can be immediately implemented, medium term and long term level. The group will continuously interact with the service provider to get feedback on various solutions/suggestions developed by it.

### **Service Design: A Career Opportunity**

The experiences and learning gained from the course module offers a new direction and creates new capabilities among the students of the Strategic Design Management discipline. They have to traverse a delicate line between design and management.

Service Design offers them a unique capability and strength as design management graduates and also offers them a new career opportunity. The course module creatively utilises the strength of the campus life as a testing ground for these young graduates and their experiences of prototyping and testing their new services help develop that much needed confidence and new direction to start their career as design entrepreneurs. While some of them, after their graduation, joined industries as design managers/product development managers with their specific focus and responsibilities to develop and improve internal communication and services, few of them are working with service based industries to improve customer relations and offerings. One of the students set up a service based venture after his graduation. Bhavna Bahri, an SDM student from the 2008 batch decided to take up her final year thesis project to understand and explore the scope and opportunities within the service design domain. As part of her thesis project Bahri studied in detail elements of services, tools for service design, the service sector in the country and various organisations offering this service in the country, current process of service design, and the challenges and opportunities for service design in India. She also undertook client based assignments as part of the thesis and tested out her findings. Based on these experiences Bahri, along with her classmate have set up their design studio called No Formulae. It focuses and specialises in service design. The duo set up this studio after graduating from NID.

## **Conclusion**

Indian economy is primarily a service-oriented economy. For developing countries such as India, services offer great opportunities for employment. It enables people to make optimum use of their existing skills, resources, and time. They will also help reduce mass migration from villages to the cities. Generally, services are low on investment and encourage customised and localised solutions. One would therefore find varieties of services offered by individuals, group of people, at the unorganised level and/or at the organized level providing employment opportunities at the mass scale.

Services connect at a human level. They focus on customised solutions. Services can meet the user's needs directly by reducing/eliminating the need to introduce products or other tangible solutions. It helps encourage reusability and helps in reducing production, consumption, and overall dematerialisation. They have a great scope for encouraging societal interactions. It is for the purpose of improving the quality of human life that one sees the convergence of service and design. Service Design thus helps improve the quality of people's lives. The Indian economy and society can attain sustainable development through proper design interventions in the services.

It is keeping such aspects in mind that the Service Design course module is developed and is being offered to the postgraduate students of the Strategic Design Management discipline at NID since the last five years.

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