Panel Discussion

Dr Alyson Walker, Consultant Paediatric Cardiac Anaesthetist, Royal Hospital for Children
Andrew Quinn, Lead Service Designer, National Services Scotland
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The panel discussion explored the challenges, successes, and strategies involved in embedding design approaches in complex environments like healthcare, policing, and wider public services. The conversation provided valuable insights on creating sustainable change, influencing mindsets, and driving better outcomes through design. Here are a few discussion points that emerged:

1. Embedding Design through the Power of Passion and Persistence

- **Passion Drives Progress:** Embedding design didn't demand additional clinician time — it thrived on passion. While passion projects alone aren't always sustainable, they can create momentum that builds over time. Ally's project was a testament to this.

- **The 'Snowball Effect':** Change often starts small, with designers proving their value bit by bit.

- **Key Traits for Success:** Successful design leaders need passion, humility, strong communication skills (particularly through visualisation), politically adept, and a proactive mindset. Combining these 'superpowers' with persistence, gentle persuasion, and positive manipulation helps drive meaningful change.

2. Embedding Design through Shifting Mindsets

- **Overcoming the 'Fix It' Mentality:** In institutions like police, officers are trained to respond quickly with solutions. Shifting this mindset to embrace service design thinking — which encourages exploring problems deeply before jumping to solutions — has been challenging. The panel discussed a few strategies they have used to over this.

- **Building Awareness and Engagement:** A monthly **Service Design Hub** helps spread awareness by inviting teams to listen, engage, and slowly build interest in design thinking at Police Scotland. Progress is slow but steady, with small wins eventually leading to larger cultural change.

- **Overcoming Barriers:** Governance, legislation, and institutional frameworks often act as barriers in the public sector institutions. At times, pushing boundaries and challenging these constraints becomes necessary to create positive change.

3. Embracing Empathy in Public Sector Roles

- **Practicing empathy in public sector roles:** While some public sector roles such as police officers are naturally compassionate and dedicated to helping others, their experiences and strict procedures can sometimes harden their responses. Encouraging officers to reconnect with empathy — for example, by thinking about users' needs in workshops — has helped

shift attitudes. The panel emphasised how design spaces have become instrumental in giving the 'permission' to be empathic and think from users' point of views.

- **Taking a collective approach:** The panel also highlighted the need to reconsider the role of police in non-criminal incidents, such as responding to deaths in the community, and to collaborate with healthcare providers to reduce unnecessary demand on a particular service but share the responses and demand for better outcomes.

4. Making intangible Pathways and Models of Care tangible

- **From Intangible to Tangible:** Designing healthcare pathways can feel overwhelming, especially with limited time for major redesigns. Mapping services and visualising processes helps make the intangible more concrete and manageable.

- **Visualising Change:** Creating visual prompts like systems maps helps teams identify small opportunities for improvement. Tools such as **How Might We** (HMW) questions encourage creative thinking and system-wide change while highlighting leverage points to make those system shifts.

- **Long-Term Change:** Achieving system shifts requires time, resources, and a deep understanding of constraints. While this process may feel slow, building clear visual insights can reveal opportunities for meaningful change.

5. Inclusion and Equity in Design

- **Competing priorities:** Sometimes it is hard to follow all the existing frameworks out there and findings alignment with them. But there are instances where staff may practice and follow such ethos without really labelling it. The panel emphasised that it shouldn't be a box ticking exercise. The panel stressed the importance of asking, **"What's the cost of not doing this?"** to highlight the long-term impact of neglecting inclusivity.

- **Creating Safe Spaces for Conversations:** Bringing together diverse voices to discuss priorities and goals helps build connections and drive positive change.

6. Creating Opportunities for Design Roles

- **Designing the Business Case:** Panellists emphasised the importance of building the case for design roles by demonstrating value through small wins. Developing stories, building partnerships, and showing measurable impact can gradually lead to the creation of dedicated design roles.

- **Expanding Design Skills:** The panel highlighted the growing demand for multidisciplinary skills in roles that blend **user research**, **service design**, and **quality improvement**. Some of these roles may not be branded as 'design', but design skills are transferable in these roles. There is a need for the new Scottish Approach to Change to play a role in showcasing how design skills can be applicable in broad range of roles and contexts. Designers must act as translators, connecting systems, people, and processes and designers need to demonstrate these values in their work.

7. Embedding Design in the NHS

- **Overcoming Resource Challenges and proving the value of design:** The NHS often operates in 'firefighting mode,' making it hard to prioritise design thinking. Panellists stressed the importance of demonstrating value by speaking the right language, showing real examples, and sharing success stories. By building trust and partnerships, design approaches can become embedded within NHS systems over time.

The panellists discussed drawing from existing examples and practices how change can be achieved:

1. **The Power of Collective Impact**:

   o Addressing complex problems, often called wicked problems, requires coordinated efforts across sectors.
   [Collective Impact](#)
   [Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact](#)

   o For example, Glasgow's approach to tackling violent night crime brought together education, healthcare, and law enforcement under a common agenda, supported by a backbone organisation that provided resources, funding, and coordination.

2. **Alyson Walker's example of creating a child friendly theatre:**

   o Alyson's work showcased the value of cross-pollination, being politically adept, and dedication to common goals. By aligning diverse efforts, her team achieved sustainable change. These examples need to be shared and highlighted to evidence that change is possible.

3. **Driving Change Collectively, but Differently:**

   o The Centre for Sustainability applied a collective approach across Scotland's 14 regional health boards, each with its own ecosystem.

   o By posing common How Might We (HMW) questions, teams explored similar issues in ways suited to their local context — demonstrating that collaboration can still allow for flexibility and tailored solutions and drive change.

4. **Key Elements for Sustainable Change:**

   o Including Social Care: For true system-wide change, social care must be integrated alongside healthcare.

   o Change Champions: Successful delivery relies on dedicated individuals or teams acting as trusted voices, connecting stakeholders, and keeping momentum going.

   o System Diplomats: These individuals play a vital role in navigating political, cultural, and organisational complexities to build partnerships and align efforts.