IMPROVING SERVICE JOURNEYS

– through intuitive wayfinding solutions

By Triagonal Information Design

The making of the experience economy; the changes we have witnessed, and which are currently taking place across sectors and economies, were framed by the American scholars Pine and Gilmore. They have described the journey undertaken by companies and providers of products and services from supplying commodities, via goods and services, to experiences, and ultimately to transformation, characterized by the benefit you get by engaging.[1] Engaging in a service journey entails both ownership and empowerment; two crucial ingredients in the concept of human centred design, as observed by Giacomin; *"Practiced in its most basic form, human centred design leads to products, systems and services which are physically, perceptually, cognitively and emotionally intuitive."* [2]

The relations built through, amongst others, good wayfinding thereby ensure confidence in the entirety of the user journey.

Wayfinding is often a key component in creating co-herent and empowering service journeys. We know it from environments, where the very existence of a company or institution depends on coherent and engaging service experience design, such as airports. When offered a choice, we prefer airports, where uncertainty and being dependent on verbal instruc-tions are at a minimum, making a world of difference to the overall service experience. What we see now is a growing adoption of the same principles and approaches to finding one's way in complex hospital

[1] Pine and Gilmore (1999): *The Experience Economy,* Harvard Business School Press, Boston

[2] Giacomin (2014): *What is Human Centred Design?* – Design Journal, 17(4): 606 – 623, (2014)

environments. Studies show that; *"applying good design and nonverbal cues uniformly makes wayfinding intuitive. This in turn reduces the fear and anxiety associated with hospital visits so patients feel more relaxed, comfortable, and ultimately, healthier, they assert."* [3]

Changing the perspective on wayfinding from being a strictly utilitarian concept to enhancing the overall service experience requires the individual components of the wayfinding strategy to be integrated as implicitly as possible into the service transaction. When integrating this existing contact point with the service setup it should be carefully mapped and deployed to provide optimal guidance and information. The objective is to benefit from user attention at any given service touchpoint and to avoid making wayfinding an afterthought. By being able to anticipate all user needs, smooth and seamless user journeys are created, while providing timely and relevant information, by striking the right balance between different types of information and by establishing clear information hierarchies. Integrated wayfinding strategies not only contribute to finding one's destination, but also to creating a coherent service journey, which exceeds one's expectations in the process of interacting with large, complex and in themselves often quite unintelligible environments.

Achieving a service environment, which is experienced as user-friendly, requires that we adhere to key wayfinding principles like transparency, logic, simplicity, consistency and legibility. Wayfinding does not only serve the purpose of pointing towards a given destination. Hospital-centred wayfinding research has shown that; *"The process of destination features prediction can also be viewed as a 'continuous—where I am—assessment.'"* In fact, as much as *'66% of the thought process during navigation between sets of origin-destination were devoted to continuous assessment of 'where am I.'"* [4] Therefore, an equally important factor is to continuously and unobtrusively confirm users that they are on the right way.

In particular when addressing the growing needs for good wayfinding in hospitals and other healthcare facilities, empowering users is crucial – not only from a service journey, but also from a purely medical point of view. Transparency, coherency and predictability, a thorough understanding of all factors influencing the user journey, and how different users respond, are essential in developing wayfinding strategies, and at the same time respecting the intentions and restrictions of the physical spaces. *"Keep in mind that the way to reduce the maze-like quality of healthcare facilities is not to rely on a single device such as signage, but instead to design or implement a mutually reinforcing group of aids to create a wayfinding system. Such a system may include the basic layout of the building and site, landscaping, architectural differentiation, interior and exterior landmarks, signs, maps, lighting, terminology, floor and room numbering, spoken directions, and technology"* [5]

Not surprisingly, such an integrated approach to wayfinding reduces the fear and anxiety associated with hospital visits making patients feel more relaxed, comfortable, safe and ultimately, healthier. [6]

Integrating digital wayfinding with due consideration of how the physical environment is reflected digitally is a requirement to achieve *"a mutually reinforcing group of aids to create a wayfinding system".* The national health authorities in Denmark are increasingly recognising the role and significance of exploiting the synergies between physical and digital facilities. *"The aim is that citizens should experience the health care system as one coherent network, which is inherently digital while being experienced as human".* [7] Making sure that the right platforms and interfaces are employed to achieve the best possible integrated service journey is crucial. This is most certainly not simplifying the development of sustainable and resilient wayfinding strategies, but it does undoubtedly underpin and facilitate the transformation referred to by Pine and Gilmore. It strengthens the sensation of empowerment, as each individual user is allowed to engage in and take control of the service transaction that finding one's way has become. This, however, requires an understanding of the complex and inextricable relation between the physical environment and the affordances already provided, the wayfinding strategy, and the individual capabilities of users. Bringing all this together entails the assertion, preparedness and trust needed to provide a sense of user empowerment.

[3] Rooke (2012): *Improving Wayfinding in old and complex hospital environments* – Dissertation, The University of Salford, UK

[4] Pati et al. (2015): *Identifying Elements of the Health Care Environment That Contribute to Wayfinding* - Health Environments Research & Design Journal, 44-67.

[5] Carpman and Grant (2016): *Interior Wayfinding and the Circulation System* - Design That Cares: Planning Health Facilities for Patients and Visitors, 96-151. Wiley, NY

[6] Rooke (2012): *Improving Wayfinding in old and complex hospital environments* – Dissertation, The University of Salford, UK

[7] Ministry of Health (2018): *One Safe and Coherent Health Network for All* - Strategy for Digital Health 2018-2022.