

# MIT GOV/LAB

## PODCAST SERIES: POWER TO THE WHO

**Episode 6: Nicolas Rebolledo, Head of Services Future Lab [Chile], and Kahil Ali, Project Lead at the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation [Sierra Leone], with Mariama N'Diaye, Morningside Academy of Design Fellow [MIT]**

### **Carlos 00:01**

What is the future of governance? How do governments innovate with citizens not just for citizens? Power to the Who builds on our recent work at the innovation initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Governance Lab. At the lab, we work with reformers, public service leaders, technologists and designers at the heart of governance innovation, where new solutions tackle complex problems to improve the relationship between citizens, government and civil society. I'm Carlos Centeno, your host and Associate Director of Innovation at the MIT GOV/LAB and this has Power to the Who. What do an MIT graduate student, an academic in the Royal College of Arts and the manager of Sierra Leone's Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation have in common? In this case, design. Today's podcast is hosted by Mariama N'Diaye MIT GOV/LAB's Morningside Design Academy Fellow, a key figure in our work integrating design into governance innovation. She talks with Nicolas, who is based in UK and runs the design agency unit, and is a former member of the first Chilean government laboratory team. Kahil Ali joins us from Sierra Leone, where in addition to his work with startups and the government's lead innovation arm, he worked with MIT GOV/LAB on our very first governance innovation project.

### **Kahil 01:31**

Just to give you a little bit of background about myself. So my name is Kahil Ali. I work at the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation, and my role here is Head of Project Design and Delivery. What brought me to the organization was, I guess, a passionate desire to make change within a challenging context. I had some work before in a private industry in business, did some other work in England and when the opportunity came to actually partner and work with the Sierra Leone government, I jumped at it. So I have no history, no background, no familial link to Sierra Leone, but I'm here because the work brought me here, and I'm happy to be here.

### **Mariama 02:10**

Fantastic. Thank you, Kahil. Nicolas, can you introduce yourself?

### **Nicolas 02:15**

Great. Yes, thank you. Thank you for having us. I'm Nicolas Rebolledo. I am an architect by background, and I'm also a tutor and lecturer at the Royal College of Art where I lead the Service Futures Lab. But I think I'm here because of my own practice. I'm co-founder and strategy director of Unit, unit.la, which is basically a global service innovation, strategic service innovation, consultancy.

And we work in the UK, and in mainly Latin America. We're based in Chile, mainly, and we work from Chile to Latin American context. Why I'm going to speak from with that, I would say and why I'm, I'm in Unit, basically, because with my other co-founders, we have the opportunity of creating around 2014 the first government laboratory for the Chilean government, which at the same time became my PhD thesis. That's why my academic practice is really intertwined with my, with my private practices and service design, I would say so, after the president of the Chilean government ended, basically, we decided to create Unit, and we're doing since 2019, basically working with governments in the region, and bigger organizations who are in the need of creating public value. And in doing so we use design as a, as a vehicle or as a tool or as a mindset or as a framework, we can discuss all of those angles, on how basically to guide or lead an approach of innovation that is based on people, collaboration, basically, and new forms of governance.

**Mariama 04:04**

Fantastic. Thank you so much, Nicolas. And you delve into what I would love to hear from you both on what does design even mean? And so to different audiences, those have different definitions. And so I'm curious to hear from you, Kahil, what does design mean to you? And do you actually use the word design when speaking to other people? And if you were, if you do change it in any way, what do you change it to? So what is design mean to you? And how do you kind of share that knowledge with others, literally, with the word or creating any adaptation to it?

**Kahil 04:36**

I think to me, personally, I started off as an engineer, I also studied graphic design, and so I guess my understanding of design comes from some of those principles, thinking about things classically kind of growing up around ergonomics, what is the interface look like between humans and the environment? How can we actually make sure things are fit for purpose? And I think that's kind of probably where my classical understanding of it comes from. In terms of what it means within Sierra Leone, it is a slightly different conversation. It actually isn't part of the vocabulary or language here a lot of the time. So people might come up with the idea of how we're going to design a solution. But sometimes dependent on who the funder is or dependent on other pressures, especially within the context within which we work, design becomes a word that's bandied about, as opposed to always be used deliberately within I suppose that's more classic definitions. At DSTI, design for us means thinking about serving the needs of the communities and people that we want to reach. Design for us, it starts to think around things such as access, it starts to think about marginalized groups, it starts to think about the socio-economic problems or challenges. So we say, starts to think about infrastructure. And so design is a really broad term, but I guess, for us at DSTI, what it means is looking at where we want to go and the people we want to serve, what are the deliberate things we need to plan for and think about before we even start I guess moving from ideation, which the next phase for us, I suppose, which is the design phase. Okay, once we've thought about it, how do we actually go about doing it? And how do we overcome the barriers to ensure that we meet the needs of the people that we want to serve? So quite a broad answer, and I guess the language of the ecosystem isn't fully developed. But I suppose from my side, or DSTI's side, that's probably what it means to us.

**Mariama** 04:47

Fantastic. Thank you, Kahil. And Nicolas, I would love to hear from you. Because you also are an academic as well and have seen this use of the word so many different ways, and there's service design within a larger space of design. I'm curious to hear from you what design means, but also, how have you kind of described it to the many governments you've worked with over the past many years?

**Nicolas** 07:02

Yeah, it's a very good question. I think there's two questions there. So I will answer the first one. I think I understand design, very similar to what Kahil just said, how we make things fit for purpose. And I really liked that that Kahil, how you put it. I would expand that definition in to say that design for me is to plan, to create things that don't exist. And those things that don't exist has to basically achieve or follow a purpose, a purpose that we want to achieve. So we have a purpose, and we make plans for things that we want to create, that can help us address that purpose, or solve a problem or address a problem or create a new proposition or, or whatever. And I think that's a very inclusive definition of design. But I think what is interesting is that it positions design in the world of planning. You know, it's about creating plans for things. So I think with that in mind, I think what is distinctive about other forms of planning, you know, what's special about design is that we plan things with people in mind. We plan things in a perhaps a visual manner, we plan things considering the culture of context, we plan things understanding the materiality on how things are going to be built, and I think we plan things in a creative way. That could mean that we combine, you know, abstract thinking, ourselves in a piece of paper with engagement with reality, and we try to plan things by prototyping that, the fit between our ideas and reality. So I think it's a very special way of planning things that don't exist. And as such, I think it can be applied in many fields. So, in that very open or inclusive definition, can be applied to many things and that's why I think in a more disciplinary way, has expanded into services or into policies. So, we can design policies by planning them, considering all the attributes that I just said. So, the way we design policies while considering people, considering the complexity, introducing creativity, introducing prototyping, perhaps some sort of like experimental approach to policy to see how they actually can work, how they can be built. With that in mind, at Unit, I think we will never speak about design as such, I think it has become a barrier. For some clients and governments at the beginning, we will we say that we are service design company. But at the end, what we are trying to do is to use this, I'm going to use that academic word this epistemology of planning, this way of understanding things and doing things. We want to use that to create better public services and better policies. So what we are trying to, the way we we explain our work is more around policy innovation or service innovation or strategic service innovation, that are words that are more in the field of our counterparts in a way. So, so we don't exactly talk about it, we, but we do it. And perhaps the last thing I would say is that in our work, what we've learned is that design is useful. Basically, because sometimes it tackles the exact complexity of what these policies and services have in their contexts to explain it as Kahil was saying. When you do policies and services with people in mind, when you do it, introducing moments of experimentation, when you consider the culture in which they are embedded, probably they will become more sustainable, and I think more long lasting. So I think the value of design within these fields demonstrate itself in the process on how you do it, that might be more legitimate, more sustainable. But also in the, in the, in the outcomes.

**Mariama 11:12**

You brought up a really important element of when do we communicate design versus when do we just do design as part of our process. And so in my experience, in the past, it has really looked like, depending on the audience skill, as mentioned, utilizing the word design thinking because they knew what that meant. But when they didn't, it was a matter of, oh, let's choose to use this framework as a way to think about the thing that we're trying to figure out, or let's choose to use this methodology to do it without necessarily using the word design. And so you mentioned innovation being the the go-to word now. And you know, Kahil, in our experiences in Sierra Leone, both in this project but with others, people knew what innovation meant. They can attach to it and they can understand what that means. Design is not necessarily as familiar. So I would love to hear from both of you, starting with the Kahil on if you could tell me about an experience when usually utilizing design thinking has actually served you well. And then also another example where it actually wasn't very useful and it became a barrier to some extent, I think Nicolas also mentioned.

**Kahil 12:20**

You mentioned innovation. And before I answer the question, I'd also suggest that some of the definitions, or the word innovation isn't the same for everybody. And so one of the challenges we face here is that, let's say we talked about digitizing a process before, give me an example, they might think innovation is putting in a scout, where it's actually to digitize a process properly, I guess, end-to-end is a completely different experience. And so, actually, in terms of innovation, some of our work is around getting all the different stakeholders and partners on the same page in terms of what innovation looks like. And I think one example of where we, I think we've had a bit of success around that is with an initiative from the Ministry of Health, and also, I guess, something from a request from the president as well, to start thinking about how we digitize maternal health records, how we capture that data, and then can we then use that data from a local level, right away up to a national level, from district to national level, sorry, where decision makers can use this to actually start to look at trends, patterns, and hopefully helps reduce maternal mortality rates. And I think one of the reasons why this project has been a success is we spent a lot of time at the start ensuring that there was ownership at all levels, not just at the executive level, where the President was asked to do something, and then Chief Innovation Officer as well, Dr. Senge, but kind of from that level, and moving now to I guess some of the more kind of administrative bureaucratic levels right away down to what's happening in the field as well. And I think the way, how we designed it was kind of really thinking about some of the lessons learned, reflecting on some of the things that we hadn't done possibly as well as we could have done before, and then thinking how do we adapt our own process. So I think kind of getting everybody bought in, also having policy discussions evolve from the start. As Nicolas mentioned before, within this context, if you don't have the policy support, and if conversations around this aren't started early, even if there's a statement for somebody in executive leadership, if you don't have the framework I guess to support that ecosystem, then often the applications won't become embedded. Again Nicolas mentioned sustainability earlier, which is such an important point. And so in addition to the classic design phases of it, I suppose, which is, you know, coming up with a tool and figuring out how this works. I think it was also about thinking about, I guess, the human elements of it, and how can we get everybody bought in. And so that's why I'm really pleased with our progress today on, this whole product stretch by the way. And I will share some more information about that another time. But we really believe this can make a difference to something which makes, which is super important, which is maternal health, I think we've

got provisionally some of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. And so this is why it's a super important project. And so kind of seeing that going well, using our lessons learned before, is something that's particularly exciting for us.

**Mariama 15:41**

Fantastic. Nicolas, I'd love to hear from you an example of where you've seen design really work well, when intersecting with governance and with government. And maybe if there are even particular frameworks that utilize that, somehow has really been able to shift mindsets and shift behaviors and get to implementation that is much more user-centered than normally governments have been able to do at your work at Unit.

**Nicolas 16:09**

In the work we do, basically, we could say that we use design for three things. One for enablement, or facilitation of processes. So we use design as Kahil was saying too, to bringing everyone together, and there's a lot about what we call creative kind of interactive spaces for collaboration. So, so and I think that's something that, of course, most people interested in this field might not, you know, so when you turn in a meeting into a workshop, or when you kind of like, establish the tools and methods in order for everyone to participate and to align their interest and to collaborate, you know, it's kind of a glue, interesting glue for creating trust. And I think a lot of our work is based on creating participatory processes using tools and methods of of design. And I think they work well in the sense that in terms of the outcome, we are able to mobilize for a project, potentially, that instead of being decided or informed by little people in the room, we are able to mobilize more people and try to bring their voices into into the table. That of course has big limitations I think, it would be the experience. So the limitations are around biases, potentially of the people we can engage at the limitations of public participation, I would say. So it's very difficult to get people that are like not the usual suspects sometimes, the people who are more on the borders, and I think design has a lot to do, not just design, I think participatory process has a lot to do in order to overcome those barriers and not be bias in those participatory processes. We are aware of that, and we try to have that in mind, trying to create other tools, for example, for participation. We start creating, now we're doing even some participatory process using WhatsApp or like other kinds of technologies in order to, to expand the reach of the voices that we could bring in. And I think that's, that's one thing. Basically, it's for participation. The second thing is designed for innovation or for new service development. There, there is more, it's the more classical I would say service design, discipline and approach. So when we are trying to create strategies, or there's an organization that has a problem, using service design methods, we understand the problem, establish the users, establish the purpose, and then we start creating a new value proposition, a new design proposition, sorry, service proposition, that can at the same time be aligned with the organizational needs, and user needs, and considering stakeholder, basically, involvements. And we do most work there on creating these new value propositions for companies and governments. And then the challenge is that at some time, some point, all the research that you do, and all the the idea, the ideation of what something might be new clashes most of the time with the internal capabilities of delivery. So I think that led us, you know, to the third thing that we do, which is what we're currently doing now most, that is designed for transformation. So originally, that Unit, when we started we would try to be the classical service design company and trying to create new you know, create new services, new service visions, new product and try to implement that from scratch. And then we realized that was

very difficult to do that within bigger organizations that have great legacy, that have very conflicted interest and they have lacking sometimes capabilities. So we shift our value proposition and now, when I say transformation, what we tend to do is that we combine service innovation processes with training and mobilization of stakeholders. So, and most of our work now is there. So for example, in Sao Paulo, which is the one of the big cities of Brazil, we work with the prefecture of Sao Paulo in a project to digitalize services within the prefecture within the municipality. And we did that creating a program where civil servants and public managers, they joined the program with an idea and a challenge that they had. And we basically were facilitators, giving them the tools, giving them the space, and also working with their managers to give them the opportunity to actually innovate and do these things by themselves. And that proved to be more impactful. Perhaps it's less authored by this design. But they're using this, as I said, the beginning of this conversation, that special capability for planning, you use that for helping them basically create change within what they're doing. So in summary, we're trying to do three things, basically, you know, facilitating great things, new things, new strategies, but mainly working with public managers and civil servants to create change within their organizations through supporting their basics.

**Mariama 21:30**

There's been a large dialogue on how do we decentralize design that takes the designer itself off of a pedestal of a teacher or of a consultant that comes in and provides tools and then work to leave. And so the democratizing of design has also had its own challenges, where individuals say, designers are also experts necessarily in their tool sets, etc. And so I'm interested to hear from both of you on, you know, for Nicolas, your team made this shift from being, "we're going to create new things, and we're going to help you do that, and then we as designers will step back and have you all do this" to a model where you're actually helping to build design within an organization that it can then be applied throughout. And so I'm interested for Kahil, how has that perception of democratizing design played itself in the DSTI space? And what does that even look like to do government different and how other ministries have reacted to that, or they've been actually quite receptive and are even interested in applying some of the tools that you all have used with them within themselves as well?

**Kahil 22:49**

In a word, varied. And I know that might be a cop out. But I suppose the thing that has really stuck with us is that it's not one size fits all. It really is about a differentiated and bespoke approach from DSTI. I think as a team, our real challenge is getting making sure, sorry, the government partners have the support that they need, but also not teaching them to suck eggs for want of a better term, terrible English term. And I'll give you an example where we actually ran something similar to something that you mentioned, Nicolas, where there was a bootcamp of sorts, some ministries, departments, agencies pitch, they won. And with the two winning agencies, there was such a difference in terms of what our support looked like. One of the agencies had quite a high level, I guess, of technical skill, particularly around digital skills, and previous kind of understanding of what design looks like. They'd already kind of started on that journey. Whereas the other organization, even though they were willing, really didn't have the language, experience or expertise. And so it's, it's really interesting, because I almost see that as the microcosm as to what plays out in terms of society, around discussions around even what democracy looks like in Africa, for example. And so, you know, it really depends on certain things. I mean, it's not to make a comment on that, of course, but I think, sort of the organization that required

more support, we really, I guess, adopted more of a, I guess, a mentoring approach as opposed to a coach, if we look at some those classic definitions. So a coach I guess is someone that comes alongside you, and might ask you certain questions, but kind of gives you that extra little bit of space, where you can then adapt for yourself and move forward, whereas a mentor probably provides slightly more structure. And I think that was more the process we adopted for these two different ministries. So definitely bespoke and situation-specific based on the needs of the ministries, departments or agencies that we partner with.

**Mariama 25:17**

That differentiated approach is quite interesting in terms of what we choose to utilize for which audience in which way. And being as designers, we're constantly questioning, which I think is what we should be doing, is saying, who is our audience and how do we need to adapt to reflect what they're actually needing in that situation. And so Nicolas, how do you adapt your experiences and your approach depending on the audience. Do you think in mind of how long they've been in government, with the political will of the organization, is there political power? Are there any factors that help you kind of shift and change what your approach is around design thinking with those organizations?

**Nicolas 26:01**

Yeah, it's a very interesting question, because I would, I was thinking about the idea of democratizing something. I think what we're trying to do is to, to mainstream design, you know, in a way within governments, I would, I would say something like that. And to answer your question, I think we're doing many things at Unit, at least three, I would say, in order to communicate what design is and what is the value that it has, considering that we are a private company. So we need to basically better explain what we do. The first thing is that we decided, although we are a consultancy firm, to maintain our identity of a design agency. So we take visual design, graphic design, very seriously, in the sense that, that we have a brand and we have our material, our experiences are always well designed. And we have our own magazine that we call it Disenio Publico or Public Design, where we basically interview people, we write about it. We just wrote a piece on, on this design thinking, our enemy or ally, we criticize ourselves. We try to discuss and get into the conversation, you know, through actually, we interviewed Carlos from MIT awhile ago in our website, and I think that has helped us I would say, where we started just less than a year, to create some sort of specific design culture around what we do in our, in our community of practice, I would say. So our clients, our collaborators or partners, we're trying to bring them together around what we do, trying to discuss and create this kind of community of practices around design without saying that is design. But you can see, it, you can, you can see that it's different, it has a kind of a different appeal or, or a different status. That's one thing that we're doing in general, the second thing that we're doing is to, in a way, educate our clients. And I think that is something that has proven very important, both in our deliverables, but also we introduce in all of our projects, different instances when we say our clients, I mean, the decision makers or counterparts, in order to get them to have the experience of what it means to run a project when you are service designing, designing it in our way, very kind of short instances like, but we include them, we incorporate them into the process, you know, we use visual means to create things, we introduced the prototyping element of something very important. So in the experience of working with them, I think they get a grasp of what we do. And then the third, I would say is similar what we already discussed, we're trying, what most of our value proposition is about training, training in the context of projects. You know, so

we're trying to make collaborators, basically work using design within the same, the same, same rail of the project. I think those are the three things we're doing now in order to expand the impact. However, I would say just to finish that, it has a lot of limitations. I think we, and it's a big discussion. You know, it's like, it's important for me, when you think about design as a general capability of planning to non-designers or to everyone, I think it's really interesting to acknowledge the limitations that that might have. I think, design thinking is not the same as design doing or design can be also a practice, it could be it's also a discipline. So I think it's, for us, we are cautious of saying, you know, if you took a workshop on design or design thinking what is interesting is that you're going to be able to understand how things could be different and perhaps procure things in a different way, but not necessarily, you're going to be able to, you know, do service design from scratch.

**Mariama 30:06**

That's such an important part. And thank you for, for bringing it up. And I wanted to create space for that conversation. There is two parts of it. The first are what have been the limitations of design in your space, you both have mentioned, some things that might seem very time intensive, in, in the spaces where time is very, very, very difficult to actually get and reach. You mentioned things that require an immense amount of political wealth. And that might necessarily be the case, depending on the situation. So I'm curious at this moment to take the time to explain what are some of the limitations around design that you've seen in your space? And then also, how have you filled that gap? So what are the other elements that may not necessarily be in the design world that you utilize to bring that in? It can be around negotiation, it can be around psychology and change mindset, around political strategists who aren't necessarily designers.

**Kahil 31:08**

Okay, let's start with political will. We're uniquely positioned. So we are situated within the Office of the President. And so we're in state house, it's fantastic. Thanks to the President's vision, he's put kind of DSTI front and center in terms of his agenda. And that's amazing, because in some ways, there's a lot of political favor and will for us, because if the President says it, then, you know, these are the things that move things forward. And so at that level, yes, there is a lot of political will. I think alongside that, there's, I don't want to say a conflicting narrative, but there's also I guess, the bureaucracy of it. And so Sierra Leone, even though the President is very forward thinking with his vision, not every institution is set up to, to, I guess, let's say employ agile project management, let's use that, like that is a principle, for example. And so even though there is the political will, because of the bureaucracy and administrators norms, when you try to employ things around agile project management, it isn't always so, so conducive for them. With respect to that, I think one of the things that we really had to do as a team was understand that even though we have these principles that we want to employ, we don't work in a vacuum. There is an ecosystem that already exists, and how can we leverage some of the strengths within that to then help us to get to our end goals. For example, one of the things that we found very useful was, let's say, we've got the minister, or my direct line manager, Mr. Kane, who knows basically, like they know everybody within an ecosystem. And so if they send a letter from from our institution to another head of institution, and then basically, I guess, follow the administrative law, so protocol, then actually, we can leverage that as long as the heads of institution are kept in the loop. We can then begin to employ some principles of agile project management. Now, of course, it's not as idealized as we'd like it to be. But we found that without leveraging the existing system, without kind of



getting people to buy into the bureaucratic mold, regardless of political will, things won't move. And so, kind of having taken those lessons learned even when we work with other partners, one of the things we encourage them to do is follow protocol and then we'll follow up as needed. And then once you kind of got that level of kind of bureaucratic or administrative buy-in, then the political will helps accelerate things as well. So that's kind of one example. Obviously, others as well. But I think that's the one especially within the Sierra Leonean context, where even though we have buy-in from the President, we still have to follow certain norms because of the administration requirements.

**Mariama 34:10**

You bring up such an important element of what does design thinking and design look like within bureaucracy? And some might say those are almost antithetical to each other. You have bureaucracy in one design and design on the other, and there are folks out there that are trying to say, no, they actually aren't that different. They can work and they can complement each other, they can work in the same space. And so in your case, Nicolas, I'd love to hear an example, if you have any that can pop up in your mind, around what happened with limitations around design in your projects, and what tools or methodologies you've used to close that gap that some might not necessarily call as part of the design field.

**Nicolas 34:51**

So first, I think those limitations of what is called design attitude, you know. So design attitude is this, this approach to problems that is different from decision attitudes. So decision attitude wants basically, to make the decision to set a course of action immediately and the design attitude, sees in a problem and opportunity of creating something new, an opportunity to turn it into thinking in a different way, frame in a different way, have a creative approach on it, focus on people and so on so forth, the things that we discussed in that first bit. I think the limitations of design attitude are huge. You know, sometimes I similar what Kahil was saying, many times in government, there are things that you don't want to change. Not every problem is an opportunity to do it differently. Some problems, you know, our constraints. And sometimes it's useful to follow protocol, to respect bureaucracy, you know, not to maintain certain things, but to protect certain stability, I would say, in the things that we do, and not necessarily create everything from scratch. And we've experienced that, I would say, when we first started as a, back in the, in the government laboratory in the first stages of Unit, of trying to basically see everything as a, as an interesting opportunity, you know, to make a point to create something and I think, yeah, I think I made my point. It's not all the time, you know, the best answer to create a new service proposition or to create a new value proposition. Many times, it's about making little changes or adapting, and putting those efforts somewhere else, basically. So that's the first limitation, and I think it's part of the maturity of practicing design within these fields that are that are more constrained. The second one that I think is a huge one that is general that I've seen, also, my students, I'm a professor, basically, so I have a lot of students that practice this in their fields, is to overestimate the impact that design in itself will have. And I think that over estimation, is based on the wrong idea that today, public management or public sector innovation or public transformation, basically, it's a matter of one discipline. So it's definitely an interdisciplinary problem, and I think one of the key elements is to actually try to set up interdisciplinary teams to tackle complex challenges. So the overestimation of design is, for example, just to give you an example of perhaps connected with things that I see in my every day. So you can replace proper research, you know, social science research with user research

when you're creating a policy. So what tends to happen is that if you get kind of a new graduate of service design or, or converted design thinker, you know, you think that you're gonna go out to the street, empathize with people and suddenly find kind of like the, the super insight that will help you basically solve the problems. That's not going to happen, you know. That's going to be complementary with facts, rigorous facts, you know, with clear analysis of what is the policy problem, what is the policy outcome, what is the complexity of the stakeholders, you know, and how you can, in that context, introduce a different perspective that might come from exercising design. And I think, when you understand that, I think design can be more impactful. When you don't, and that's why we put in this case, design thinking becomes your enemy, because because at the end, in your stakeholders, you lose trust of previous design failures basically, you know, so, so if someone goes and tries to solve a policy, just doing your real research on the street, that's not going to work. And then that basically decreases the, the capacity of the organization to embrace new things. Another example, it's about the distinction between design thinking, design doing and building, for example, data services. You know, today, what I see a lot is that data services has become a craft on its own, you know, and you have design systems, you know, you have technologies and new material. So you can replace that with an idea in Figma, basically, so Figma, you're gonna create something in Figma, and that you think there's going to be implementable, and then you find out that it's very difficult and you haven't considered the actual constraint. So it's a similar thing. You're overestimating, you know, the value that you'd have in thinking in a different way, with the expertise or actually designing a service. Yeah, I think those two examples happens to me, I have it very fresh because I've done projects in those fields, and that happens me a lot.

**Mariama 39:54**

There's something there around how design can be a tool and not be the answer or the solution to challenges and problems. And a lot of conversations we've heard around the challenges around design thinking is that it's like a one solve issue, where you come in, you apply these tools, you create the Figma, you create a wireframe, and then you hope that, and then you go, why did this not work? And it's like, how could you expect it to work? There's so many other elements that have to be included. And I think it requires such a level of humility amongst designers to say we are an element, we are a tool, we are a team player to be utilized with other individuals, and not base it on us. Kahil, I'd love to turn it over to you. I think you had a thought on this one, too.

**Kahil 40:42**

Yeah, just to follow-up on what you both have said, I love what Nicolas said , you've articulated it so well. Because a lot of the time, there's also I think you end up alienating some of the people you want to partner with and serve as well. And it's a really interesting thing, you can come up with the most elegant policy, the most elegant solution. But if the people who are going to I guess own it don't buy into it from the start. And then you touch on the point as well, even the build afterwards right, and then the other challenges associated with it, if these things aren't done deliberately from the start, you see that the actual organization that wants to employ these, these really novel principles loses credibility. And I think that's a really interesting thing. And where the MIT team came across was that we looked at something called the Roger's adoption curve. And I'm sure some people have come across this before. But it was really interesting for us, looking at who are going to be our kind of our early adopters, who are the people that are going to be able to carry the flag and move forward, because these are the

people that kind of are embedded within the organization, and then are able to take the message and bring it forward. And if you don't find those types of people, no matter how elegant your solution is, it's not going to be adopted. And so I just want to say, I really agree with what you said, Nicolas, really resonates with us.

**Mariama 42:09**

And the part around those community champions and those who can kind of hope to be the stewards of this work, even after we leave ourselves, is so critical. I'd love to hear from both of you, are there any characteristics of who those individuals are? In Nicolas's case, who do you choose to train and to support certain projects? Are there certain characteristics of folks that you notice early on, say, this person understands design, this person can really apply it, they can articulate it to different audiences? Are there individuals, and sometimes they're a bit hard to find do because they might not be in the room where you've been assigned to work with. And so are there any characteristics of those community champions that you've hoped to train and educate around design, to be able to utilize it, even after your organization and their and their involvement in whatever the project is?

**Nicolas 43:03**

I was thinking that, very fresh as a project that I'm doing that I... so in Unit, we divide our audience in three levels, I would say. So we have decision makers or, or public leaders, you know, mayors, you know, head of services, you know, people that are going to make the decision. Then we have public managers, or the people who are making things happen. And then we have public workers or civil servants that they vary and are very diverse in their hierarchy. So I think the approach to the three of them is slightly different, or very different. But some of them, they can kind of navigate in the roles. With that said, I think the people who are most close to us and help us a lot are like public leaders, let's say or decision makers, that they have acknowledged the need to change the way they do things. I think we stop trying to preach the non-convenes, because it's so difficult to get, if you don't get buy-in at the beginning, it's going to be very difficult to navigate. So I think we partner, and that those people are very important to us with public leaders, as I said, that already acknowledge that there's a need to change the way they do stuff. And they see what we do, Unit, they see service design or strategic service design as something that might help them and I think that because, the community of practice in the world, community of practice has evolved a lot. You have many examples, you know, governments use a design, you know, they have the government labs, public sector innovation, so it's something that is known, and I think that's useful. Then the second, the second part, I would say that that first audience, give the permission to do something, you know, so give the permission and is willing to take the risk, you know, of basically using different approach, because they've seen the value somewhere else. Then we have the public managers where I think, for these projects to work, public money, or sometimes they're not convinced about design, but they're really trying to push change within the organization. And I think, in my view, most governments that succeed is that when they have public managers that are really committed, they're really into the problem, they're willing, they're really willing to learn, because they've learned other stuff, you know. And we've seen this, we all work in government, you've seen public managers and public innovators, basically, these people, now we're calling them public entrepreneurs even, you know, so these people who've been in different departments of government, they always want to do something different, they're really committed to the public value. And I think for them, when they get design, they see the value very quickly, and they

become big champions of that, and I think they become partners. And then you have civil servants of different categories, you know. You have the skeptics, basically, you know, of course, then you have the most enthusiastic, you know, you have the champions, and that's diverse and I think. And then, all the time we try not to push so hard on them in the sense that, you know, designing is, is another tool, is another way of working, the most important thing is to try, to convince them to trust us basically, giving the previous, the previous other two, two engagements. That's what I would say is the most, the most important thing is. And I think the last thing I would say on that note is that this field is becoming more and more specialized, I would say, you know, and I think there's an there's a need as well of an offering. And that's why we're working on that offering. For those public managers, for example, or public innovators who really want to expand this to become basically actual public entrepreneurs in their field, to learn more, and I think sometimes just design thinking falls short. And I think there's another things to be be connected to. I'm thinking things such as new forms of project management, or thinking sometimes, how to introduce technology, how to buy technology, or, or the rights, you know, the problems around adopting technology, new forms of governance, you know, platform economy, so different themes and topics that I've seen, that are kind of tangential to design, that might be very important to start kind of compiling and building together. In order to change the way we do government, basically.

**Mariama 47:36**

Thank you so much, Nicolas. Kahil, curiously to hear from you, who are the champions and who, who has been able to push this forward and who has, you know, who have you who have you leaned on to, to get the transformation to happen, that you've realized that are key and critical players?

**Kahil 47:55**

For us, I think it does start with the gatekeepers, for want of a better term. We need to identify the gatekeepers or decision makers, and we have to lean on the bureaucratic and administrative norms to help us with that process. But I guess, even if you identify them, and then you identify the person in the field, who's going to be implementing it. So I guess there's almost two levels. Yes, there's a decision maker, and then there's the person who's the decision maker in the field who are going to be implementing said new idea or even contributing to the design, you need to get them involved from the start. Because even if the decision maker says yes, if there is something which makes their work more onerous, or they don't see the benefits of it, they won't buy-in. And I think that leads me to my second point for all of these different actors at the different levels, which is trying to figure out how we can incentivize these partners, and more importantly, what can we offer them? I know, it's a really kind of base level of thinking, but actually, especially with the context within Sierra Leone, it's a very challenging socio-economic landscape. And so how can we actually offer something which will benefit our partners, is actually a super important part of it. So for example, if we want to get a frontline worker involved in the design process, we need to put a budget aside and ensure that the transportation costs are covered so that people can come in and contribute. Again, it's moving back to one of our earlier points and removing barriers. So it's about identifying those barriers for people to actually access it, and then it's about incentivizing them. So of course, if we can provide funds which is going to, not only allow you to eat well for the day, but your family, we know that in Sierra Leone, someone that is earning a decent wage supports a huge amount of other family members and people across the country. Considering that in our design is also an important part. And then for to political elites for the executive

office, how does it benefit them? If there is something where we can measure impact, and they can tell a story on it, then they're much more likely to buy-in, because it isn't just design for the sake of design, it's design which is measurable, it's quantifiable, and therefore we can tell a story about it. And so I guess, yes, it's about again, the barrier side, but also, how can we really tap into the internal motivators of people, on different levels within the ecosystem so they can contribute.

**Carlos** 50:33

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