

Speaker: **Jennie Winhall – Social Innovator and Service Design Strategist**

Start time: **00:08**

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CONTENT

0:08

This is Tina, she's the same age as me. She's got three kids and when I first met her, she was writing a novel. We got on pretty well and because I was moving into an unfurnished house near Tina, she gave me some bedding that she was throwing out, some sheets with a kind of flowery pattern on them. And it wasn't until I got into bed later that night, with the bedding that I realised that what I was sleeping under was a set of curtains. Now, Tina and her family are one of the most notorious families in their community. They've been evicted seven times in seven years. They cost the state somewhere in the region of £250,000 a year. Tina was gang raped when she was fourteen, she's had a series of abusive partners and her kids grew up with violence.

1:09

When I met Tina and her family, her youngest daughter was in court for stabbing her teacher. Her son had been missing for several days and her oldest daughter had anorexia. Now no family wants to live like that. And Tina wants to change. But neither she nor anyone around her believes that is possible. And there are 23 different agencies around Tina, each of those agencies has their own agenda, none of those agendas is Tina's.

1:52

This is Yens and his horse. Yens has been unemployed for about 18 months now and he's struggling. He stopped going to the pub with his friends, because he's ashamed of not having much to talk about. And though we know that most work is found through word of mouth, Yens's experience of the job service is sitting in a room with other unemployed people sending out endless applications to employers he's never met for jobs that are not relevant to him.

2:34

This is Anne, she hasn't left the house for several months now. She has a carer who comes twice a day for fifteen minutes, that's just enough time to take care of Anne's meals and her medication and not enough time to stay for a chat. Anne has a befriender called, Lynn who comes on a Tuesday and talks about all the terrible things that are happening on the news these days. Anne doesn't really like Lynn. But she thinks she'd better not complain. What we are seeing here is a fundamental breakdown in the relationship between people and the systems that are there to serve them. All of that activity keeping Tina and Yens and Anne exactly where they are at. And although they come from different countries, these are the people who are facing the big challenges we have now as a society. Generational worklessness, chronic disease and aging population, they are new kinds of challenges and we can't solve them by improving our existing institutions.

4:03

Instead, what we have to do is to create new structures in which people themselves can participate in new ways. Now, I've spent most of my career as a designer most recently with colleagues at Participial and now independently, working with businesses and governments across the world to understand how could we do this differently and living alongside people like Tina and Yens and Anne to understand what that might look like through their eyes. And the conclusion that I have come to is this, almost all of the money that we are spending on innovation goes in to solutions that are propping up systems that are flawed. In effect, we are perpetuating these problems. And I actually think we've been looking at innovation in the wrong way, because the job is not to solve problems, but to create possibilities. Not to do the work of fixing, but of creating and the means we need to do that is not one of diagnosing, consulting and streamlining. It's of imagining, of making, of mobilising.

5:37

The architect, Christopher Alexander wrote a book called A Pattern Language, in which he collected together the patterns of what made good living environments. So those arrangements in which it seemed to be that people flourished and his idea was that with those patterns, people could create to their own flourishing communities. Now, most innovation happens from the perspective of the existing system and that's the first thing we have to change. We have to find ways of stepping outside of those current patterns in order to imagine new ones. Now these are big issues and there's no bullet point list to this. But I would like to offer four patterns that have been important in my work as a designer.

6:39

The first, is systems that get stronger with participation. So when we think about public systems we tend to think about limited resources and having to stretch and ration those and so if you are Anne in the care system that means you have to make yourself look much worse in order to get any help. But what if we were to flip that on its head and think about ways in which those types of services could actually benefit from having more people use them. So then we draw from things like, the collaborative consumption movement, where the pattern is that, instead of being burdened by demand, the more people who join, the stronger the system gets. If we did that, then people like Anne would become contributors, not just a burden on others.

7:42

The second pattern puts relationships at the core. So, we now know that loneliness is a bigger killer than smoking. That obesity spreads through social networks, and that young people's brains, if they do not experience love do not develop properly. And we know that families like Tina's need deep, consistent relationships to change. So this pattern says, we can't get where we want to go by making our existing systems more efficient, because the drivers behind these issues are emotional and cultural. So then we have attention. We need to create systems that operate at scale, but still have those deep relationships at their heart. What Charlie Leadbeater calls intimacy at scale? The Palliative Care Service in Kerala enables thousands of people to live out their last days at home and it does it all within a network of genuine, reciprocal relationships, between its members and users. The Buurtzorg Network in the Netherlands has 9,000 neighbourhood nurses, none of whom are on a time clock. They manage themselves and they draw in family members, friends and volunteers. They see themselves as community builders and the result has been to half the cost of care, because people's wellbeing responds to those deeper relationships. And what this pattern does is, it makes it possible to stay for a cup of tea with Anne. In effect, it's how most people want to operate that are prevented from doing so by the systems we have now.

9:37

Now, the third pattern tips the balance of power. It puts people themselves in charge. Ivan Illich, the Austrian philosopher characterises this era as the age of disabling professions. One in which people have problems and experts have solutions. So in this pattern we design services to tip the balance of power towards people rather than professionals. So in education services like the Khan Academy, which is free to join, gives learners themselves the tools to progress through learning at their own pace, meaning that the role of the teacher becomes less about the expert imparting knowledge and more about supporting a journey of learning, that's directed by the student themselves. So in this pattern, we are enabling people to pull that professional expertise to them on their terms. And this pattern isn't easy, because it requires us to change our own mind-sets.

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So how we think about the role of doctors and teachers and lawyers is part of the problem here. But if we do it then the benefit of this pattern is that it creates what Ilich called a more convivial life, one in which people become each other's solutions. The final pattern is expanding potential and it's perhaps the most profound shift, because the current pattern of many public services is actually one of containment. So all of that activity around Tina is about containing risk. It's not about developing potential. Even our health service is about containing illness, it's not about developing wellness. So these services group people together according to their weaknesses and there's the trap as people become over identified with their needs and like Yens, warehoused with other unemployed, begin to live to the low expectation set by that system. Patterns that expand potential instead are powerful. So in South Africa they have an approach to chronic disease called, Functional Medicine that does exactly this. It works with people not on containing their symptoms but on helping them to achieve the highest expression of health in their lives and of course if they do that, then their system fades into the background. And talk to Tina about those families like hers about their deepest held desires and aspirations, reflect back to them a belief in their potential and suddenly their defences fall away and that's when change starts to happen.

12:51

So, four patterns, stronger with participation, relationships at the core. Tipping the balance of power and expanding potential. They are simple and intuitive patterns, but they can have radical implications and we shouldn't be afraid of using them, because the problems that we are seeing will keep coming back. They are not technical problems that we need to fix they are fundamental mismatch between how they want to live and what these systems are doing. So, if we were to use these four patterns and think about how we might design something like the job service, for example, how might we do that? So we might think OK, for that system to get stronger with potential, with participation, what if it works for both employed people and unemployed people. So we might say, since most jobs are found through word of mouth, what if we found ways of building networks between people like Yens who are out of work and employees in the fields that they want to get into, and then what if those networks could become valuable to those employees too.

14:09

What if it helps them to become more employable, to progress, to change jobs, to change fields, then it became possible to have a network that does get stronger with participation that's built on positive relationships, that keeps people developing and everyone making a valid contribution, whether they are unemployed or not and that is actually a service that Participial is building in London called Bakke. Or what if we were to think about these four patterns with mental health. We might say, OK, how could we tip the balance of power so that people with mental health issues are leading their own journey and they are pulling clinical and social support to them in a balance that works and then we might end up with something that looks a little bit like Big White Wall. So Big White Wall is an online platform here and in the US and it's for people with low level mental health issues. Members of Big White Wall collaborate to support each other. They use self-guided tools to lead their own journey and they do pull in clinical expertise on their terms. And of course, the system gets smarter the more of them who join as they learn what works.

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So services that exemplify these patterns are out there now. And they need us to put our weight behind them, because whether or not these specific examples succeed, what's important is that they show what's possible. How our future systems could be. As exemplars they force a change in the market for solutions and they both reveal and build the new infrastructure that makes more things like them possible. And as other speakers have said in this era of system change, we need many exemplars, exemplars working together to do that. Now psychologists call them transitional objects. They create a bridge from the current to the new and by building something tangible and experience a prototype, an exemplar, we help people to understand what it could be like to live in that new story and then they can make an active choice to jump in.

16:44

But Winston Fuller said, you never change things by fighting existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the old model obsolete. That's why it's important to build exemplars in the proper sense of the word. Ideals to reach for, symbols of how things could be so that they become the magnets that attracts the momentum that we need to have people working on the things that matter. If we took even a small percentage of the energy, the money, the talent that we spend propping up our existing systems and focused it on building these new patterns.

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We take a big step forward to a future we want to live in.

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Thank you.

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