

Service Architecture Review Method

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Case background

This workshop will give participants a practical introduction to Service Architecture Review Method, a method for evaluating competing service designs drawn from methods widely used in the world of software systems architecture.

It involves collective development of an evaluation context, creating a set of service scenarios related to a Service Quality Model, and documenting the interest in these of the various service stakeholders. The participants also assess the impact in the event that the chosen service design fails to satisfactorily deliver each scenario. This context sets the scene for solution design, but does not in any way dictate the service design methods used. The review method is not a design method, but rather a method for design evaluation that can complement any service design method. It provides particular insights when there are several competing service designs, the strengths and weaknesses of which need to be explored.

Once a number of design options have been developed to sufficient detail that they can be well understood, an evaluation workshop is conducted that will explore the competing design options using the context created at the outset. The evaluation workshop participants conduct a trade-off analysis, enabling them to better understand the solution options from the perspectives of the service quality characteristics in the Quality Model, and the service stakeholders (who, in a real review, should be represented among the participants).

Three distinct steps are involved, and can be condensed to fit into the conference to give participants an understanding of how the method works:

1. Creation of the evaluation context, with scenarios and stakeholder analysis
2. Development of a set of competing service design options
3. The trade-off analysis workshop

Step 2 is not part of the review method but is, of course, the creative act necessary to give the trade-off analysis workshop a set of solution options to analyse.

The preference is for Steps 1 and 2 to be conducted as interactive activities during the Unconference. I will propose Step 1 as an early Unconference activity, and encourage those with an interesting approach to Service Design to offer up Unconference activities to develop solution options for the scenario / context developed in Step 1. Subject matter can be discussed online ahead of the conference. The trade-off analysis workshop can then take place as the formal Workshop activity as part of the main Conference on Day 2 or Day 3.

The trade-off analysis workshop opens with a description of each of the proposed solution options. It is vital that all participants have a good understanding of these designs so that participants can contribute their views during the trade-off analysis.

The trade-off analysis commences by reviewing all of the scenarios that were created to form the evaluation context. Each scenario is considered by the participants for each solution option, and following open discussion, the participants agree on a level of likelihood that the solution option will satisfactorily deliver the desired scenario. The discussion moves on to the next solution option, and when levels of likelihood have been agreed for all the proposed solution options for that scenario, the team move on to consider the next scenario.

The information captured in this way is combined with the impact assessments agreed earlier to form a risk matrix. Each solution option can be seen as representing a particular set of trade-offs. These can be examined by the participants at the level of the scenarios, or at the higher level of the service quality characteristics in the Quality Model.

The stakeholder analysis conducted initially is also used to provide participants with another trade-off perspective, illustrating how the stakeholders will be differently affected by the competing solution options.

By the end of the workshop, participants gain greater understanding of the competing solution options, are well placed to choose a preferred option, and to initiate some further actions to mitigate some of the risks that will remain for that option.

Take home

Participants will gain a practical introduction to the application of a design review method, currently being piloted in two UK government departments, that has been developed to facilitate the evaluation of competing service designs.

Participants will learn how a Service Quality Model can aid the evaluation of service designs, and see the insights gained from conducting a trade-off analysis. This is a new approach, still being piloted, so participants will be encouraged to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the approach and its underlying Quality Model.

If conducted in the ideal circumstances, evaluating competing designs developed during the Unconference, the review may also reveal some valuable insights into the designs that are considered by the trade-off analysis.