# Social design as a tool to ensure that service learning will not become a mere formality

**Abstract:**

**Introduction**

Fu Jen University has promoted international service learning for over 12 years. As a Catholic university, the education of people and liberal education are important features. However, after a period of time, the hierarchical organization is always easy to become formality and produce various problems caused by the organization's life cycle itself. After reflection and practice, this study proposes social design as an organizing tool to maintain the meaning of service learning.

**Theoretical framework/literature review**

Service learning is often seen as a pedagogy and is used to explore the application of teaching in a particular field.(Gallagher, 2011) Service learning is sometimes seen as a specific plan for talent development, in which case charity or social change is also discussed as an issue (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006; Morton, 1995). But whether it is a charity claim or a social change claim, most studies agree that giving or receiving is actually a two-way learning process. Even if you advocate charity, you should try to understand the social situation of the recipients to ensure that the recipients are really helped. More importantly, if it is to advocate social change, the cause of social imbalance should be the core issue of service learning. This study is more inclined to believe that service learning should be a response to the environmental needs of higher education (Demulder & Eby, 1999; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Based on this assumption, the implementation field of service learning should naturally incorporate community or social systems as important variables (Daniel, 2014; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Therefore, when we conduct international service learning, the comparison between the cross-social systems makes it easier for both service learners and serviced learners to form meaningful research or reflection objects.

According to *Supercapitalism* (Reich, 2007), in almost all fields of contemporary capitalist society, it is controlled by the market system, which is the basic game rule of business management. Even in the highly competitive industry, business process research was started as early as the 19th century, but by the end of the 20th century, a series of business process reengineering activities and academic research were still needed to reverse the phenomenon that business processes deviate far from their corporate goals. In recent years, in the research field of blockchain, it is believed that the financial industry, which should have been promoting social circulation, has now become the culprit in crushing the weak and hindering social development. It can be seen that in the world of organization, people are often dominated by organizations built by themselves (Mintzberg, 2007).

**Methods/analysis**

In the past ten years, the authors have gained a lot of inspiration from participating in international service learning, and the research and thinking horizon has also been broadened. Therefore, if the authors participate in service learning or any social participation activities, we will try to use the knowledge of our professional field or the knowledge of non-professional fields as the basis for self-examination. To put it simply, it is to try to maintain a learning attitude that is ready to cross the field.

As an international service learning program, in general, multiple organizations, cross-disciplinary professors, and interdisciplinary students are required to participate and support. These organizations, professors, and students all participate with the organizational effects behind them. Therefore, we chose to use "Design Thinking", which transforms the problem analysis and resolution process into a very easy-to-use utility, as a review tool for the international service learning team over the past 12 years. However, in the use we deliberately incorporate the community or social system, so this is called social design in this study.

**Results and Discussion**

During the initial review process, it has been found that most support organizations tend to adopt a philanthropic perspective, and they also use management control methods to request support teams. These service learning teams will be required to specify the service learning plan beforehand, and the service learning plan must be based on the needs of the service. These seemingly plausible organizational control requirements are actually prone to a series of organizational effects. The participating professors also enthusiastically guide the team students based on their personally perceived service learning contents. For example, some professors would think that the serviced should be taught to fish instead of giving them fish. This simplified understanding has led many different teams to teach handmade soap or other simple products that are generally considered progressive at different service locations. But in fact, this is not a complete business thinking, the meaning and value of these products in different social systems are completely different. It is conceivable that the consequences are of course not as good as expected, and may even result in a certain degree of adverse outcome to the local. Obviously, year after year, students are less and less concerned about the social situation of the client, and the relative concern is the surface requirements of supporting organizations. For the design of service content, participating students are increasingly inclined to require a clear design scope or rules. If they are not satisfied, they may even copy the program, add some familiar content, and put most of their efforts into beautifying the expression. But through close observation, the vast majority of these students are actually full of love or enthusiasm. In most cases, students are simply confused by the requirements of the support organization or the guidance and correction of the professor. In some cases, some of the more deeply involved students will clearly express that this is the social rule they recognize. In the process of continuous reflection and practice, we get the most reasonable explanation, because the layered stack of organizational effects makes modern young people lose the spirit of exploration. Leading to their understanding of learning becomes pure acceptance and practice. Therefore, in the face of international service learning across social systems, it will highlight the inappropriate embarrassment of waiting for acceptance or direct practice.

**Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice**

The use of social design as a review tool for long-term international service learning is still ongoing. Observational analysis of participating professors, supporting organizations, and clients is still ongoing. But the initial results are enough to reduce our expectations of service learning to reduce the surface standards. We deserve to directly adopt the social design process, encourage participating students to explore the problem of the client, and slow down the rush to complete the service and learn. This change should bring more immediate benefits to the client and an opportunity to reduce the negative impact of the service learning process. At the same time, it should be easier for supporting organizations and participating professors to discover new ideas for application adjustments.

**Keywords**: international service learning, social design

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