

Preface

It is the first meeting in a new promising project. Everyone around the table is enthusiastic about the project and excited to get going. There is a good atmosphere and the discussion travels back and forth. Everyone tries to present their point of view, which results in a broad discussion on very different aspects of the project.

It is discussed how the project should be understood, approached, and developed. At the end of the meeting, some decisions are made in relation to the project. Many decisions are related to the different deliverables for the next meeting. At some point someone asks if they have reached an agreement and everyone nods their approval. Everyone leaves the meeting, confident that they know what to do.

A few weeks later, it is time for the second meeting. The team spirit is still high and there is a nice buzz in the meeting room, before the meeting starts. The introduction proceeds without problems, and it is time to recap what has been done in the project since the last meeting. The different participants start presenting their promised deliverables.

In the beginning everything seems fine; however, after a few presentations it is clear that there are very different understandings of the project as well as the assignments for the meeting. In fact it seems as if the participants have been working in different directions and with different aims.

More and more questions are asked and soon the presentations turn into a discussion about understanding the deliverables, the project, and its aim.

The positive and enthusiastic atmosphere is soon taken over by mild frustration and a slight disappointment.

What happened? A few weeks ago everyone nodded their approval, and seemed confident that they knew what to do. Now, it seems as if everyone is pursuing different goals and that nobody really understands each other.

The situation described above could perhaps be taken out of several different contexts and scenarios. Most people, who have been working in teams, probably recognize it, and especially people with experiences from interdisciplinary teams can confirm that this situation is part of many projects.

Lack of shared understanding or frames is just one of the difficulties facing interdisciplinary design teams working in pre-development projects. Besides managing their different values, perspectives, and interests that make them see

different things as important, they also have to figure out what their users and stakeholders find important.

In other words, the team has to frame their project around real user needs, problems or opportunities—and figure out what people really want, and at the same time come to an agreement about this framing within the team.

This is quite a challenge—both in terms of enabling the team members to express their personal framing of the project, but also in terms of making users and stakeholders communicate what kind of needs or problems they have, as well as the potential opportunities they see. And finally it is a challenge in terms of creating a shared frame within the team.

In this book, this challenge is approached from a ‘designerly’ perspective, based on the initial assumption that the creation of physical artifacts can help both team members, users, and stakeholders overcome the boundary of not being able to define, express, and communicate how they frame a given project or make meaning in relation to their everyday life. And that this clarity will help the creation of a shared frame.

Based on empirical evidence, it was found that not all physical artifacts were able to do so, but that a small group of physical artifacts in a special setting and with a specific set of characteristics was the physical artifacts were named Personal and Shared Experiential Concepts.

The objective of this book is to review how these physical artifacts enabled and stimulated the communication between team members, users, and stakeholders in interdisciplinary teams working on pre-development projects. And also how they enabled and supported the creation of shared frames within these teams.

Finally, this book will show how to facilitate the creation of personal and shared experiential concepts in your team.

A Thesis-Based Book

This book is a re-write of Lousie Møller’s PhD thesis from 2010, now adding emphasis on how to stage the creation of Personal and Shared Experiential Concepts in a workshop setting.

From 2008 to 2010 Louise Møller was a PhD fellow at the Department of Architecture and Design at Aalborg University. During this period Louise Møller had a 6 month stay at the Center for Design Research, Stanford University that helped develop central parts of the findings in the PhD Thesis.

The findings of Personal and Shared Experiential Concepts seemed to have a lot of merit for further understanding the construction of shared frames and shared understanding in pre-development projects. At the same time the facilitation of the workshop was left unexplained and uninvestigated in the thesis, but the extensive use of the facilitated workshops throughout the PhD project has generated very hands-on practical knowledge, useful for many project managers struggling with alignment and shared understanding. Thus it seemed very appropriate to restructure the thesis into this book including the facilitation aspects, used with great success in the cases of this project.



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