Triumphs and Tensions in Informal Design Interactions: Confessions of a Designer

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The contemporary landscape of design practice, education, and research is in a constant state of flux. Cox (2005) underlines how designerly creativity can propel innovative business strategies and help to revive the British economy, whilst Norman and Verganti (2012) distinguish between incremental and radical forms of technological innovation. Framing human-centred design as a philosophy, they set out its iterative qualities of observation, ideation, testing, and 'getting close to users' (2012: 2, 11). Designers engage with societal complexities on a local and global scale, embracing increasingly collaborative ways of working.

Many attempts have been made to demystify the human-centred designer's role and responsibilities within interdisciplinary relationships (Julier, 2007; Manzini, 2009; Inns, 2010). Kelley (2008), for example, presents ten diverse personas commonly adopted by designers, such as the anthropologist, the set designer, and the storyteller. These multiple roles evoke Steen's discussions of two tensions arising from human-centred design approaches: the decisions that designers must make when balancing user needs with their personal expertise, knowledge and intuition; and their aims to understand contexts as they currently exist, with the goal to inspire innovative change. Steen poses reflexive practice as a means of navigating these tensions and engaging in mindful and socially inclusive design practice (2011: 46–48).

The proposed workshop will create a space for a discussion of how practitioners and researchers intuitively mediate diverse cultural settings, artefacts, users, stakeholders, and collaborators. We aim to elicit and understand the triumphs and tensions inherent in everyday design practices

that often go unreported. Through a creative form of knowledge exchange, our objective is to capture workshop participants' cross-disciplinary and informal experiences of social engagement and insight gathering. Participants will form small groups to discuss their individual and collective experiences, producing descriptive and explanatory accounts of working across sociocultural contexts within the domain of design practice, management, and innovation. These will be captured through a series of visual storytelling activities and peer-to-peer feedback. By making tangible these peripheral anecdotes and intuitive actions, we will share tacit and reflexive narratives as a means of identifying practical strategies for managing complex challenges and seizing meaningful opportunities. Following the workshop we seek to disseminate participants' generated images, writings, and dialogues as a repository of inspiration and advice.

Prepare to disclose an exclusive from your research repertoire!

References

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