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Antecedents of success in IS offshoring projects - Proposal for an empirical research study

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APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED FROM COUNSELLING:

ON NURTURING RELATIONS IN DESIGN PROJECTS

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Abstract

This paper elaborates on the personal relation between the facilitator and the participants in Social Practice Design. It is argued that such processes can not just be managed, but have to fostered in relatively free way, so that results can transcend expectations and more closely approach the actual possibilities. This is explained by aspects of Rogers' theory on therapy.

The paper aims to be an interesting and strong example of the critical need for a good relationship in facilitating design. By itself, such a conclusion would not be surprising, but some of its constituent aspects are detailed: the paper elaborates on the relevance of deploying focus and effort on personal relation, in interventions for organisational innovation.

Supporting the establishment of sense making and trust with Social Practice Design (SPD) approaches is found to be of primary importance in an e-Government development project. Here regional employees user-design a computer-based aid for public tender editing – a tender configurator - with the support of facilitators. We address the structural problem with infra-structural measures including open conversations to promote shared understanding, and user design laboratories to promote concept emergence and learning, while practicing relation and trust building all along. Our constructivist approach renounces from the start to solve the governance problem within a narrow managerial perspective.

The paper offers a demonstration of the mission critical relevance of the relational component in SPD, intertwined with the customary functional component, in resuming governance towards project success. This experience is far from a complete experiment. But a wealth of indications and partial results have been harvested on needs, opportunities, and practices, for promoting shared understanding and trust in the project, and letting emerge idiosyncratic solutions.

We judge the quality of the SPD approach by three requirements (Baskerville and Myers 2004): a contribution to practice (the action), a contribution to research (the theory), the criteria by which to judge the research, and we show explicitly how the research in the case meets these criteria.

Keywords: participatory design, organizational change, social practice design, trust, sense making

1   INTRODUCTION

Governance in design projects of social informatics services is still problematic. User participation is essential for Participatory Design (PD) of sustainable IT use (Bodker, Kensing, and Simonsen 2004). However, often participation alone is not enough. Trying to define better requirements within a given conceptual and pragmatic sense-making frame appears not to be feasible. In these cases, design cannot be confined *between* requirements and solutions: even the given frame must be abandoned, and new rules of the game and goals co-produced by all stakeholders. This happens in particular when there are no shared concepts, motivations, goals, and even language, among the various actors: the establishment of relation and trust in the project is hindered by ambiguity. To overcome the stall, one has to abandon the given frame, trying to recover sufficient sense making and shared understanding (Jacucci and Martin 2008). If facilitated by management through appropriate infrastructural measures, like in co-production Social Practice Design (SPD) approaches, as soon as trust relations are re-established, a new frame emerges, co-constructed by relevant actors, along with brand new outcomes, solving the structural problem (Jacucci 2007; Jacucci, Tellioglu, and Wagner 2007, 2008; Cattani and Jacucci 2007). Also changing the meaning of the whole process, however, and heavily reshaping its governance beyond what intended, and suggesting new practices and a new deontology in facilitating participative design.

2   THEORY

2.1   Managing ambiguity, taking a second step back

Watzlawick (et al. 1967), in studies of the pragmatics of human communication, identifies content and relation as equally relevant. Bion (1961) in studies of the psychology of groups distinguishes between the *task* to be executed, and the equally important establishing of *relation and trust* in the group. Is there a dichotomy in our interventions for innovation in technical systems and organisational processes, between attempts to establish functional rationality through analysis of content and task, on the one hand (reducing uncertainty), and attempts to establish culture change through communication, relation and trust, facilitation and learning, on the other (managing ambiguity)? Posing this question corresponds in the words of Bourdieu (1992) to be taking *a second step back*. We have discovered in the last decade the need to re-balance focus and effort in current approaches between function and communication. (Cattani and Jacucci 2007; Jacucci and Martin 2008).

2.2   Nurturing trust with Carl Rogers' *qualities*

Carl Rogers (1951), in his person centred approach studies of therapy, advocates the respect of three criteria, three *qualities* of the counsellor (non-judgemental unconditional acceptance, empathy, congruence), for establishing working communication and trust relation with the client. Trust is a pre-requisite for establishing a web of shared understanding. In alignment with criteria introduced by Carl Rogers in personal therapy, and extended already by himself to learning and company consulting (Rogers, 1969), non-judgemental respect, empathy, congruence, are needed here, to allow the establishment of trust. This calls for, on the other hand, introspection, self-awareness, clear and clean intentions, and control on the part of facilitators, as well as are their awareness and intentionality in conceiving, proposing, co-constructing with clients the appropriate path in that context towards the desired development; a path that is more important, if possible, that the very content and task objective.

2.3   Facilitating with *SPD*

Social Practice Design has recently emerged by urgency of praxis, as a 'sand-box' type approach, seeking to construct winning paths to ensure that the potential benefits of envisioned novel technologies can be realised. We consider SPD a methodological extension of PD to the

implementation phase of information systems, often intertwined with design, however. It is not to be regarded as rigorous method, or an apodictic truth, rather as the concocting by *bricolage* of useful responses to stringent needs. SPD entails aspects of research intervention and facilitation, in which facilitators elaborate with organisation personnel visions of solution, i.e., how to attain desirable change goals by leveraging on organisational assets and strong points, and/or how to cope with problem issues, possibly emerged through ethnographic observations and recognised and accepted in previous phases of the SPD work. In SPD, facilitators thus have a crucial counselling-type job, for the sake of which they must follow a holistic approach, performing an accompanying task from start to finish of the innovation path, and for the success of which the establishment of a good communication and of a good relation of trust is all important. Actions, communication, behaviour of the facilitator establish trust with, and support, the client – at all levels: individual, group, organisation – towards change, for promoting the conscious and proactive care taking and hospitality (Ciborra 2002) to the introduction of socio-technical solutions: a person centred approach, an intentional way to proceed, designed in all its passages.

2.4   Recursive intervention and introspection

This paper puts emphasis on the relevance in SPD of Rogers' counselling-derived perspective, oriented towards trust gaining, learning, and the reduction of ambiguity. A recursive structure then characterizes SPD: it is a continuous coming and going between client and facilitator in a dialogic process in which the facilitator is capable of observing, performing ethnography, elaborating on the observations, constructing visions, but paradoxically also of forgetting them when coming back to the client ("being without memory and desire", says the group theoretician (Bion 1961)), to reconstruct afresh visions with them, putting to practice in that instant her competences, especially in the communicative, relational domain (ability of managing a flexible and open communication: Schein (1987; 1999), Rogers (1980)), as well as competences on group dynamics. We underline the process of continuous interaction with the client, and the ability of the facilitator to work substantially on self, in order to acquire the necessary ability and 'purity' of approach that really renders her capable of helping the client find themselves the solutions to their own problems (Rogers 1951).

3   INTRODUCING THE CASE BY EXCERPTS

This paper elaborates on experiences of practicing SPD approaches in an e-Government development project, the 'Online call-for-bids', at the Regional Administration offices of '*Celtia*', one of the regions in Northern Italy. Here regional employees are brought to user-design a computer-based aid for public tender editing – a tender *Configurator* -, with the support of facilitators employing Interactive Use Case (IUC) as a PD tool (Calzà, D'Andrea, Jacucci, and Baskin 2004). IUC is a pictorial and interactive tool positioned in between Use Cases and Mock-up. We call the IUC tool "Interactive Use Case", underlining the importance of the interaction with users, where it can provide a common place for a dialogue between system developers and system users. The research intervention lasts about half-year. 'Clients' of the intervention are the manager, and the employees of the administration, as well as technology designers of the regional administration owned software company: *Celtia* Informatica, and employees of the RTI (Regional Training Institute).

3.1   Browsing case lab-notes

a) The manager, expert about the tender *Configurator* issue and capable himself, had built by technicians on his own instructions a non participatory-design prototype, to which personnel charged with tender design responded without enthusiasm, with very few comments. In a subsequent user workshop, proposed by us, it had become evident that the *Configurator* software employees a philosophy, a procedure for the design of the public tender, which is completely out of tune with respect to the real work practice: the fact always emerges, that software designers abstract, hence depart from reality.
b) A proper user design *laboratory* is then organised on our proposal, for best results and user appropriation. Although uncertain at the beginning about direct user participation to design, the

manager is struck that we now in-act a true, participatory design laboratory, not just consulting, not just training; a true design laboratory, requiring the construction of a real work team.

c) The manager, kept out of the user design laboratory – our request to avoid hierarchical self-censorship by personnel -, is furthermore struck by our live rendering of that experience, not a power point, not a word document, but live video reproduction of the work session, with access to people discourses and action, with results recorded, and directly usable, via the Interactive Use Case tool.

d) In the end, he is so touched by the content of the presentation, and the obvious success of the user design session, that his doubts vanish, and he now asks that users be invited to redesign the tool, entirely from scratch, without influence from his own prototype; technicians too, present at this rendering session, shared the manager's inclination to take risk and opportunity and ask the group to redesign the *Configurator* from scratch.

3.2   Anticipating inferences we shall deal with in the case

i) *SPD building trust with manager* – Manager: Here we see the high level of trust reached by the manager towards facilitators, his staff, and his own leadership. Trust relation with the manager has been constructed along the way with attentions like: timely and detailed reports, video recording, documents made available online, periodic update meetings, communicative attentions, and so on. So that he has perceived to be taken into good account, both professionally and personally.

ii) *SPD empowering users* – Participants: Participants enjoyed working in a group, found themselves at ease, as tasks demanded of them were simple, not stressful, albeit serious. They liked the method of hands on, of group work, also of written individual reflections. The video camera disappears, fundamental for documenting the work, no more invasive. People at last talk among themselves, share their work practices, never happened before. All this is more important that the goal: the path as all important.

iii) *SPD designing for user design* – All: the magic of when somebody with practical knowledge of her own work, builds herself the technology instruments to support her work, and as she goes on building, also performs continuous checks that all knowledge is preserved, embedded in the artefact. If the knowledge in question is tacit, it cannot be transferred to the designer. In turn, when designers build a software application for own use, things invariably go well.

iv) *SPD inheriting from counselling* - We can see the importance of the facilitator and of her direction of the performance: importance of the events she calls clients to participate in. Importance of how the facilitator IS and BEHAVES in situation (see Rogers: work of facilitator on self, re-elaborating how he/she lived through the group work, must observe how things went – video -, must build the passages each time).

v) *SPD facilitating sense making by care taking* - Importance that participants work and share viewpoints among colleagues, the facilitator here is fundamental, as must accompany this awareness process on their own work and on the work practices it consists of. It is important to make people work not on theory and abstract concepts, but on what they know, and to make them do, use their hands. It is also important working with them at the meta-level of reasoning, as this promotes awareness. And a new, co-constructed solution emerges.

4   ILLUSTRATING CASE INVESTIGATION AND OUTCOME

We present our investigation, and its outcome, enriched by photographs and brief transcripts of recorded discussions. Links to session videos are also provided.

4.1   Case investigation

We carry out our research-intervention with the specific Action Research methodology of observation, interpretation, step taking, outcome evaluation, and learning. The process is iterative as usual, with a succession of interaction events with manager and users. (see: Baskerville and Myers 2004). We describe the process of applying SPD step moves in the building of relations, sense making, and trust. The use of the SPD approach is exhibited by moving through the various stages of the iterative process, and seeing the congruence between the objectives set, and the characteristics and focuses of

facilitation (e.g., the establishment of trust relationship with the manager, and his understanding of the process). We also hint to what the facilitation team does between meetings: strategizing, analysing previous step, planning next step, material preparation; but also analysing observations in videos, and dialogues: emotions, behaviours, state of mind, the things that went well, the things that went badly, SPD attentions, counselling-like activities, etc. Each step is dealt with individually, recounted, discussed, linked to the next step, albeit we worn the reader that some lesson learned in some steps seems not to be confined to that step, but produced by along the WHOLE pathway. Counselling like qualities (acceptance, empathy, congruence) are constantly emphasised along this pathway. In the reflexive reconstruction we show how things worked *because* these criteria were followed. Evaluation criteria for AR results will be the degree of satisfaction of company manager, personnel, and facilitators/researchers, respectively, for change produced and final results, for theory and practice.

4.2 Report of selected research-intervention steps (steps are listed in bold)

More specifically, we define a number of interaction steps in our intervention, and give them names. For each step we discuss objectives, observations, lessons learned, and decisions taken for the next step, highlighting attentions paid to counselling-like qualities. For space limitations, we choose to report here the details of selected research-intervention steps only.

1. Needs collection

(Briefing with client for the collection of information regarding expectations and connected problems).

2. Presentation to the client of the project as a *laboratory*

a. - The objectives of the activity and expected results: Make the manager understand the potential of Participatory Design of computerised systems, and that their problem could be dealt with using this approach. Explain the potential of *laboratory*-type activity, which involves the group in real tasks.

b. - SPD attention points: Consolidate the bases of trust, collaboration and the personal relationship between the facilitator – Diego - and the manager.

c. - How things went and results achieved: During this meeting Diego presented the PD approach, which is very different from what the client expected. It was presented with great emphasis on the relationship among expectations, complexity and method to deal with the problem. During the presentation the client also stated the results expected more specifically: analysis of the current *Configurator*, connections with work practices, *vademecum* on using the instrument, training for all the contract announcement designers in the *Celtia* Region. These requests the Diego assessed to be coherent and achievable with the method proposed.

d. - Learning: It was important that the presentation of the method be brief, but focused on showing that change can be planned/achieved with a participatory format, and that the new work instruments, and the change that they induce in work practices, must be defined with users. It was important to "really" listen to the client and his statement that his aim was to promote change in his organisation. The client was already aware that realisation of the technological instrument would be the means of change but that the true end was change itself. This legitimated our approach.

more b. - SPD attention points: This phase moment was fundamental for the relationship between Diego and client. The relational/communicative style used conditioned the entire path. It is therefore necessary to conceive and plan how to implement it in a congruent, empathetic and conscious manner.

3. *Laboratory*: sub-groups tasked with defining and describing the work practices used to design contract announcements (18 March)

a. - The objectives of the activity and expected results: Sharing of work practices among the tender editors, creating a fertile humus for awareness. Get them to examine their own practices, measure the differences between what they do to design tenders and what they are asked to do with the technology.

b. - SPD attention points: Make persons communicate in a protected context (that of exercises/training), enabling them to exit from the usual work setting, with its rules, restrictions, roles (assigned, perceived), consolidated (also in their "pathologies") rituals and relational communicative

procedures. Unconditional positive acceptance; sense-making, artefacts to facilitate sharing (posters in sub-groups, conceptual maps on stimulus questions). Attention to individual empowerment.

c. - How things went and results achieved: Division into workgroups. First activity with use of post-it notes at a sub-group level on a stimulus question: *what does working on a contract announcement involve?* Initial brain storming within each group, simple but powerful instrument (post-it notes can be easily moved around on a poster for later categorisation and reorganisation). Afterwards, Diego held a plenary session for sharing results (summary of post-it notes) through co-building of a map. Diego used projector and the *Freemind* application to represent a summary of the work involving all present.
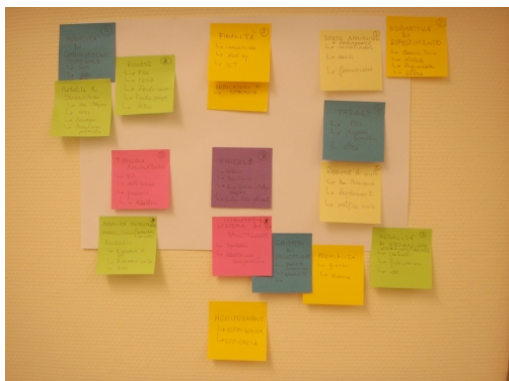

PHOTO 1: Post-it notes sub-group activity

PHOTO 2: Freemind *map, sum of design activities*

continues c. - How things went and results achieved: Explore the *Freemind* map, describing the work scenarios: who does what, how, when, why etc. Work again started from a stimulus question: what do you do when you design a call for tender? Each sub-group worked alone. Complicated things: sense making on the concept of scenario (what we expected from them regarding the concept of scenario). No wide-ranging scenarios emerged, contrary to expectations. The final product did not seem very satisfactory to facilitators but it was fundamental the process: birth of a functioning workgroup.

more b. - SPD attention points: Diego demonstrated positive unconditional acceptance towards all the participants and intervened only to help them perform the work requested, responding only to questions about the method to follow; he was also an example of open behaviour, empathetic, welcoming; he supported the sense-making process enacted by the groups on their work practices.

d. - Learning: Ask answerable questions and model them with artefacts. It was this work that gave rise to the idea of organising a *laboratory* presenting the *Configurator* in situated form, that is, producing a call for tender from beginning to end. The manager asked for advice on how to present the *Configurator* and we in fact said: present it with a contextual example.

4. *Workshop* **on the contract announcement** *Configurator* (19 March)

(The manager presented his way, his practice, of creating a call for tender supported by Configurator and those present listened and gave feedback (they were immediately able to see differences, the distance). We are aware of the importance of this encounter between the manager, inventor of the Configurator and the users. The manager immediately realised that the participants had numerous observations, many modifications, and with competence and commitment. The next step – he group analysis of Configurator and its functionalities – was obligatory and natural even for the manager).

5. *Laboratory***: (a) sub-group analysis of the** *Configurator***, and (b) sharing, managed by Diego who handed over to the various groups ,which performed a screen-by-screen analysis. (7 May)**

a. - The objectives of the activity and expected results: The stated objectives of the work session were: analyse work practices, measure the distance between the work practices of designing a call for tender in reality and the new practices imposed by the *Configurator*; construct an artefact.

b. - SPD attention points: Consolidate group's work practice and sharing process by involving the group in practical tasks through the production of artefacts. Reinforce the participants in their

commitment and participation, creating further opportunities for them to demonstrate their competence, professionalism and commitment/motivation. Continue along the workgroup's learning path of the *laboratory*; continue along the path of awareness towards ever greater intentionality.

c. - How things went and results achieved: The detailed analysis of the *Configurator* in sub-groups takes place in the following conditions: a suitable setting, the use of three artefacts: conceptual map of the first meeting (on 'what you do when you write a contract announcement?'), printouts of the most important *Configurator* screens, given to each group, and a poster visible to all participants which depicts the map of the entire *Configurator*. The task assigned: for each screen define what you consider important, what is wrong, what you would add, what you don't understand (interface accountability). For the "don't understands" the designers were deliberately kept away so that they did not respond in place of the users. The facilitator was always present for the sub-group and he provided support on method if he saw that a group was in difficulties. The participants were very active, free to express themselves in-group and in the plenary session. Without censorship. Everybody participated.

PHOTO 3: Group analyses Configurator *screens*   PHOTO 4: The group orienting with screens map

VIDEO 1: Screen analysis activity (video with faces: http://www.etour.tn.it/mcis2008/video1.html)

d. - Learning: The participants immersed themselves in the role of analysts of the user interface. Diego did not expect this and it came as a revelation to find that in this group there were also computer specialists, something that was not clear at first. It is therefore essential to verify, understand and make use of the competences present in the group and to enhance them through involvement in a task. This observation conditioned the next project.

more b. - SPD attention points: All of this is positive and unconditional acceptance. The route was marked out by participants, not by Diego. Empathy: continuous listening, no forcing, use of the participants' point of view. The participants felt enriched in their professionality (and this will have future consequences, also in their mode of participating, of being involved and present). Importance of selecting the group so that it is truly a "special" group.

Stretches of dialogue, phrases, situations: The group already reveals the differences between the work methods envisaged by the software and the need for data comprised in real work practices.
Second group: We don't understand why the document folder is called that, because we think it is the menu…. As for the label, we would call it "denomination" not "description". The item "personal data" is no good in our opinion, because it brings to mind something different from what it is in reality.
The software was produced by computer specialists, using the framework of the regional computer system, a framework which works on the concept of document (which is why there is an inappropriate/different use of the word "document").

6. Presentation of the *laboratory* results to the client

a. - The objectives of the activity and expected results: To present the results of the *laboratory* and agree with the client on how to continue (the client did not participate, on request by Diego, so that the participants could work more freely; it is therefore important to provide very rich feedback).

b. - SPD attention points: Ensure that the client was aware that the restitution was transparent and accurate, without interpretation or manipulation by the facilitator. Keeping him linked to each step of the work, consolidating the relationship with him and his faith in the project, giving proof that his hierarchal role and functions have always been considered, as well as his states of mind (anxiety, fear, resistance).

c. - How things went and results achieved: Present at the meeting were Diego, client and several members of the work group especially chosen (assertive, authoritative persons highly motivated to change, with important roles within the agency for change itself), because these persons would be guaranteed a true and not interpreted restitution. Various video clips taken during the *laboratory* were also used. Diego presented the results of the *laboratory* using a wide range of multimedia documentation with photographs and videos on comments by the sub-groups on each interface

VIDEO 2: A clip from the multimedia presentation used to present the results of the work
(http://www.etour.tn.it/mcis2008/video2.html)

continues c. - How things went and results achieved: The comments are made by the representatives of the workgroup, with important statements about the differences between actual work practices in designing a contract announcement and how this work could be supported by a computerised system.

Stretches of dialogue, phrases, situations: Statements of the type:
"*We saw that the Configurator interface contains elements that are not very clear; furthermore the interface does not help those using it to understand how it is used. In some cases the Configurator imposes a work logic that is very different from reality. Analysing the displays it was not easy to understand the operational context of each screen, the type of function performed by the screen*".

more c. - How things went and results achieved: The client, having seen the work carried out by the group and being convinced of the potential of the group, requested the facilitator to organise another *laboratory* to redesign a new Configurator. For the first time we were given the task of designers.

d. - Learning: The surprising thing that happened was that the participants showed great willingness to involve themselves, to be the protagonists of change (something generally not common among civil servants). Communicating to the manager/client what was happening in the *laboratories* proved to be crucial. From the moment when the client no longer came to the classroom, Diego always sent him the minutes of meetings within 48 hours and put the videos online so that the client could download them. The client was very impressed by this method of communicating, so rich in materials gathered in the field. This legitimated the method that we had selected. The client "trusted" the group, the method and the facilitator, so much so that he proposed something that was absolutely revolutionary and delicate/risky for the organisation. The client's words "redesign it" expressed his acceptance of a new challenge, which would lead him to agree with IT management to discard the work done thus far (months of work) and rebuild everything using a new logic.
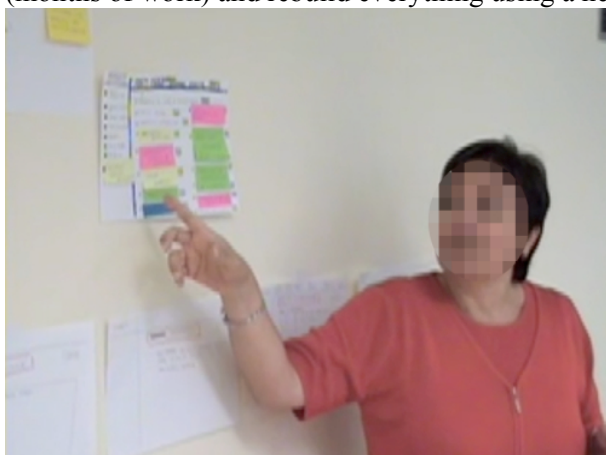

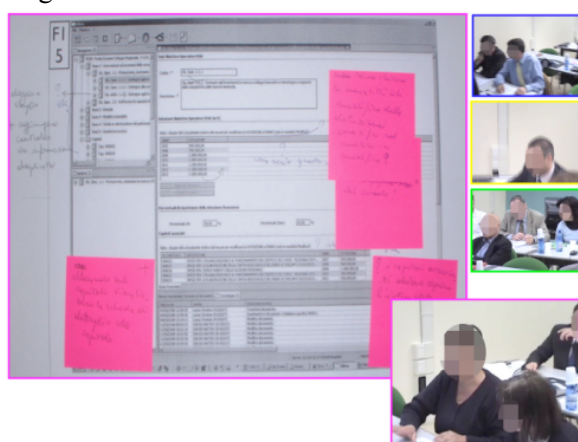*PHOTO 5: Paper user interface with buttons, labels, navigation menu*

PHOTO 6: Image shown during work presentation

7. *Laboratory***: construction of the** *Configurator* **interface in sub-groups**

a. - *The objectives of the activity and expected results:* Construct the *Configurator* user interface using an agile approach (paper models). The objective is to construct with the group a new work scenario with work practices respectful of the past but able to exploit the potential of the new instrument..

b. - *SPD attention points:* The map of work practices constructed March 18 was used, from the vision of the participants (positive and unconditional acceptance), to incorporate these practices in a new artefact (*Configurator* paper interface) which this group built by themselves. Consolidate within the group the conviction that they are truly taken into consideration, beyond simple demagogy.

c. - *How things went and results achieved:* Work in sub-groups on construction of the *Configurator* with paper models, passing through three stages. The first stage led to the construction of posters using post-it notes to imagine what the new system should give to and ask of its users, in terms of data.

VIDEO 3: Brief sequence of the design activity with post-its
            (http://www.etour.tn.it/mcis2008/video3.html)
continues c. - How things went and results achieved: Second stage concentrated on the sequence in which interaction with the system takes place (that is, what comes first and what comes later). In the third phase they worked to transform these into user interface elements (buttons, labels, menus etc.).

VIDEO 4: Brief sequence of sharing by the sub-group work in an assembly
            (http://www.etour.tn.it/mcis2008/video4.html)
more c. - How things went and results achieved: After the sharing they agreed to create a summary of the work by building a new artefact (a map with the stages of work and results achieved, each node of the map a video or an artefact with notes on what was learned). One of the richest summary phases, here the work practices of the first day were re-discussed and redefined within the new instrument.

more b. - SPD attention points: A great deal of sharing and mutual listening, respect for the interventions of others. They discussed work process and sense making of the technical.

more c. - How things went and results achieved: Each person made a great effort to accept the contributions of the others. At the end of the session the group produced a large poster identifying all the interface elements positioned in the order that they wanted. In a somewhat unstructured debate they mixed aspects of what and how needed to be done. The facilitator suggested shaping the discussion through the shared construction of a poster depicting the system with its inputs and outputs.
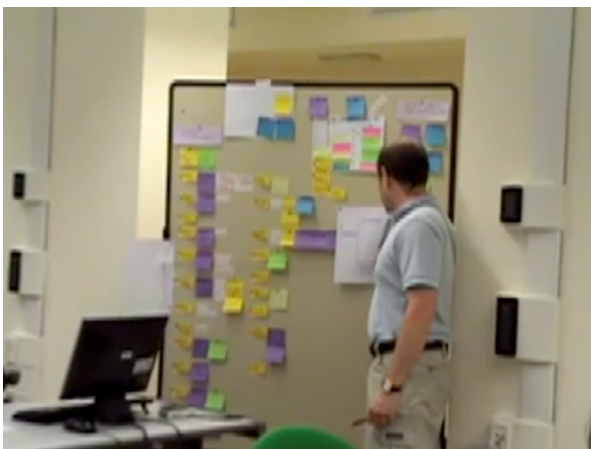

PHOTO 7: Poster with the final interface design

PHOTO 8: Nodes on map connects to videos

d. - Learning: Again the key role of artefact construction. The crucial role of a facilitator able to accompany the group understanding its needs (for autonomy, but also being directive when the work proceeded in a disorderly and time-wasting manner).

8. Presentation of the results (4 August) to the client and RTI (Regional Training Institute)

 (Presentation of all the work carried out in the *laboratory*, the methodology adopted and the results achieved. Obtain the go-ahead to continue the relationship with new projects even of a different kind. There is a risk that after having activated participation, involvement, change, it may disintegrate and be lost, backfiring both against the client who gave his trust and against the facilitator).

6. LESSONS LEARNED/REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE WHOLE PATH

Section 5 shows how our method made it possible for the client group to *go beyond* the initial project conceived by the manager, and even, later, by the facilitator. 'Go beyond' in the sense that not only were the users of the system able to enrich the instrument with new functionalities derived from a more detailed analysis of the work to do in its various dimensions, levels, functions, but they were also able to find the right language to voice their need for an instrument with a different philosophy which then emerged from their work, and which therefore *went beyond what the designers had thought, and brought to light new potential and logic for the instrument, which neither the designers nor manager had thought of*: an entirely new goal and outcome, *an experience of which they became fully aware, and that they also later engaged to divulgate and preach to others*.

What we learn above all is that, to ensure that *making the client fully aware of what PD can do*, is an objective to be pursued during the whole path; it is a goal that requires experimentation of the method. The client must be enabled to create prudent conditions so that the method can be practised, and these prudent conditions create space for the pursuit of smaller, more pragmatic objectives without forcing the client's hand, or pushing him to do things prematurely (respect *Kairos*, the appropriate time).

We should remember that the objectives stated at the outset were only to analyse the *Configurator* already designed by designers, obtain feedback from its future users, construct a *vademecum*, and plan a training course for a larger number of users. These objectives of course fall short of a fully 'blossomed' Participatory Design approach. In reality the possibility to undertake *genuine* participation – not an easy task (Bodker *et al.* 2002) - in the design of the *Configurator*, and with it to redefine the work practices, was understood and granted by the client and the workgroup during the ongoing work, on the basis of results achieved, and after continuous interaction/exchange of information and thoughts between the s, client, and group (a path of reciprocal learning, of awareness). *The group legitimated itself by doing; it was not evident at the start that this would occur.*

Let's list relevant practices towards this important result :

• To GIVE SPACE, HEED, AND ROLES to all involved, not only the manager, but also users, technicians, other managers, etc., with their different/opposing points of view, needs and interests.
• Of LISTENING, OBSERVATION, AWARENESS, REFLECTION, ELICITATION by the facilitator of the needs of the client and the different actors involved. Needs not decided upon once and for all but continually reviewed, re-discussed, in a process of learning/awareness making the client and group ever more involved, increasingly active.
• Of the client's FAITH in the facilitator, because this allows the client to trust the facilitator, to feel accepted and respected, as well as protected.
• Of the 's CONSISTENCY in his relationship with the client (be authentic, coherent between the verbal and the non verbal, be convincing, assertive).
• Of 's TRUST in the client, this generates positive unconditional acceptance, empathy.

Here is perhaps the key to understanding the entire process according to the logic highlighted in our AR: the stakeholders involved here, all have *different perspectives,* and interests. Some are interested in the PD approach because of their desire to use it in other cases (the manager of one of the computer systems divisions), some are interested in technology *tout court*, some in defining new work scenarios.

The employees in our group are not simply application software users: they are stakeholders expert in the design of call for tenders and their redesign started from work practices. On the other hand, the *Configurator* was previously designed by technicians used to design starting from abstractions, working on the possibility of processing the data according to a computational logic, a logic different from that of routine work. In the last case (technical design): →ABCDE (from abstraction to work practices). In the second case (redesign participants in *laboratories*) ←EDCBA (from work practices, with ramifications, to abstraction).

Our SPD approach was successful in managing ambiguity and establishing trust towards a new governance, where users could in fact redesign system and work practices according to their own user-strategies, with the consent of all involved, all recognising the improvement of this state of affairs.

We judge the quality of the SPD approach by three requirements (Baskerville and Myers 2004): a contribution to practice (the action), a contribution to research (the theory), the criteria by which to judge the research, and we show explicitly how the research in the case meets these criteria:
Contribution to practice. In the 'Online call for bids' project, users not only to enriched the instrument with new functionalities, they were also able to voice their need for, and designed, an instrument with a different philosophy which went beyond what the designers had thought.
Contribution to theory. Confirmation of the usefulness of:
- recursive dialogic process for sense making and the involvement of company personnel
- person centred counselling-like facilitation qualities for trust building and empowerment
Evaluation criteria for AR results. Hi degree of satisfaction of company manager, personnel, and facilitators/researchers, respectively, for change produced and final results.

5   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have experimented with user design *laboratories* based on the Interactive Use Case technique of PD, and on open conversations and learning, as ways of practicing SPD facilitation towards co-construction in a regional administration setting. These activities clearly enabled and supported participation in engaging, in sense making and awareness, and in the acquisition of perspectives of others. People generally felt comfortable and not at risk of being judged. Participants expressed how important the experience of working creatively on solving "real problems" had been for them. We can understand this also as a result of the in-depth observation and intervention character of our SPD engagement with people in the project, which provided us with good knowledge about their work practices, potentials and problems on the one hand, and allowed trust building on the other.

In closing, let is recall the basic attention points anticipated all along, to close the circle.

5.1   The group of facilitators prepares with care the activities in the field, in order to practice SPD indications – especially those from Rogers - in a real, ethic, coherent, manner.

Before each meeting there is always a consultancy workgroup session during which the team analyses the materials collected in the previous meeting, the observations made, the exchanges and the dialogues, content aspects, relational aspects, cross referencing all with first-off impressions, the notes taken by the s in a "log book" during and after the meeting. The primary aim of these sessions is to analyse the work performed "on stage", reprocessing it through analysis of the observation materials and discussion among the s (both those who went directly into the field and those who remained back stage), to assess what happened in the previous step, the situations experienced, the content and relational aspects, the initial impressions/emotions, the purpose being to design and define the next step in light of the path taken thus far, the results achieved and the lessons emerging from the analysis. Planning means: thinking flexibly about what will be done later, who will do it, with what aims, strategies, communicative/relational concerns etc. For each of these consultancy team meetings a log-book was kept, an internal workgroup document which was used to keep accurate track of these steps. It was from these notes taken in the field and during the consultancy team meetings that the points developed for each step were taken.

5.2 They closely attend SPD attention points during intervention steps, opening the way to success

Facilitators pay attention to *the relation* of the facilitator with all concerned (managers, employees).

- *Incipit* : at the beginning of the relation, dedicating time to gathering the needs of all concerned through SPD attentions, *i.e.*, facilitating the development in of awareness in individuals and groups
- *Ruit* : in all crucial passages of the project, activating and mixing individual and group meetings
- *Exit* : in approaching conclusion, activating occasions for visible, tangible results, as feasible with that group, with those people, in that context, giving sense to and justifying the entire path.

This means *communication attentions* (language, non verbal aspects, setting), observation, listening, both in managing meeting with participants, and facilitating internal relations in the organisation.

This means *consolidating the trust relation* with the manager through open communication and choice of appropriate language, unconditional positive acceptance, empathy.

This means, *in laboratory activities*, attention to: *whom to involve* in the work activities (caring for roles, people, competences, skills) → key persons; *whom should be, or not be, present* w.r.t. hierarchy (e.g., manager causing self-censorship on others); *subgroup composition*; *setting and climate* (a true laboratory, protected, non judgemental); *role of the facilitator* (observation and coordinator); *communication management* in the group; *choice of job assigned* (starting from own work practice, describing and comparing them among peers: this helps involve and motivate people, reassures them on their abilities, makes them learn new things in a protected environment: a job, in sum, of designing something useful for real, close to participants needs).

Lab activities strengthened the group, favoured contributions by individuals, and favoured training of all. In this environment, SPD behaviour of facilitators were winning bets: empathy, acceptance, congruence. The group felt guided, protected, non pushed, respected in its time and way (*kayros*). Its work and commitment was valued, yielded outcome. No demagogy or exploitation, real involvement, true trust in the group and in its potential. All this consolidated trust in facilitators, and in the project, increasing motivation.

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