

Personas in Co-creation and Co-design

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ABSTRACT

Including users in large participatory innovation projects together with professional innovators such as designers, people from marketing, engineers etc. puts a strain on the user that might not like to be the focus of attention.

With point of departure in two cases, one from business and a student project, the paper illustrates and discusses the use of personas as a mean to get users involved in innovation, how it can address their needs, and at the same time be a platform that gives all participants equal involvement.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

Hm

General Terms

Design

Keywords

Co-design, co-creation, personas, scenarios

1. INTRODUCTION

In the following I will present co-creation from a design perspective and introduce the persona method, in the final part present I will present two co-creation cases. The phrase “Design” covers a wide variety of disciplines, but can be summed up as all processes involved in designing a product.

1.1 Introducing co-design

Co-creation has very different definitions depending on the context it operates in. Co-creation in business views the co-creation process that seeks after the users who are special in that they have high knowledge of a specific area and an interest in changing products within this area e.g. [1] and [2]. A vast amount of time and resources are used to find these lead-users. Co-creation in “design” considers ordinary people to be able to be creative if they are facilitated and encouraged to be so. “Co-designing threatens the existing power structures by requiring that control be relinquished and be given to potential customers, consumers or end-users.” [3].

There is a distinction between co-creation and co-design, but the

terms are often used intertwined. Sanders [4] defines co-creation as an act of collective creativity that is experienced and performed jointly by a group of people. Co-design is collective creativity that is applied across the whole span of a design process. This means that co-design is a specific instance of co-creation.

1.2 Co-creation

Co-creation exploits that the users possess knowledge about their own needs and daily life and their ability to be creative. Contrary to participatory design [5] the innovations of co-creation might not lead to artefacts that the participants will use themselves. The user is part of knowledge gathering, idea generation, and concept development. The designer/researcher provides tools for ideation and designs the innovation process. The designer/researcher and the user collaborate on the tools for ideation. Finally the designer/researcher gives form to the ideas.

1.3 Introducing personas

A persona is a fictitious user described with basis in data. The personas method is recognized in IT development within the private sector, but has spread to other areas such as marketing and product development.

The work with personas is about using the everyday experiences of the users and their needs as a starting point when developing new products. The persona method does not include real users but instead representations of the users. This leads to inclusion of the users' perspective in all aspects of the design process.

An example of how the method is used in marketing is the Japanese beer company Asahi Breweries that used personas to strategize the future of its Super Dry beer brand [6]. The most common use of personas is for a design team to use the user description to understand and engage in the user's world in order to create new interaction forms or products that correlate with the users' needs and contexts. In this use of personas actual users are present in the data, but not in the design process.

Often the method is perceived as a usability method. But as it will become apparent, personas are more of a design method covering all phases and all aspects of a development project. It has a wider focus than usability. The scientific foundation upon which the method is based is qualitative and based on the entire life-world of the user. The one reading the persona description must be able to understand and get involved in the persona even though it is just a description in text and images. This requires that the information presented can create a level of involvement. Thus, when gathering data we have to not only ask about what kind of work the users do, what their workflow is like, and what the purposes of using the product will be but also ask about their beliefs and attitudes. Always focusing on the area at which the design is targeted.

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Conference '10, Month 1–2, 2010, City, State, Country.

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2. THE TWO CASES

In the following I will present a novel way of using personas together with role-playing for innovation and ideation. This form of ideation process can function as an open-ended process that gives value to both designers and clients.

The workshops described in this paper are based on 10 Steps to Personas [7]:

1. Data is collected
2. You form a hypothesis
3. Approval of the assumption
4. Set out a number
5. You describe personas
6. You create situations
7. Obtain approval from the organization
8. Disseminate knowledge
9. Writing of scenarios
10. Persona descriptions are regularly adjusted

Key to the 10 steps are scenarios that are stories describing the persona's interaction with an interface or product. As a story, the scenario has a main character, a setting, a goal, it has actions that lead to the goal, and it has obstacles that hinder the way to the goal[8].

2.1 The Professional Case

Arla Foods a.m.b.a. wanted to innovate within the, until then unknown area of canteens. For the purpose of creating new products from user knowledge an innovation process was created that consisted of: Scientific data gathering. User data gathering – 4 dynamic focus groups, each video filmed. Data analysis. From the analysis a documentary film lasting 30 minutes and two personas were produced. The material was used in an innovation workshop lasting two days.

The workshop had the following course of events:

- Introduction to data.
- A design game using the documentary and focusing on pain points.
- Presentation of findings in the game.
- Participatory innovation from personas and scenarios.
- Presentation and ranking of best ideas.

The participants that innovated were canteen managers, concept developers, persons from marketing, and engineers. All groups had at least one person from each category. Even though the canteen managers came on the second day of the workshop, they entered the groups without hesitation and got engaged in the creative process. It was easy for them to relate to the persona descriptions and they felt on equal foot with the designers.

2.2 The Student Case



Figure 1: The user explains to the moderator how the persona will act in the given scenario.

The aim of the innovation session was to develop a tool that could support communication between soccer trainers, kids, and parents. Prior to the session, data was gathered from observations and focus groups. From this two personas that had different behavior and media use were created as well as a number of scenarios that varied in situation and context. The participant was asked to go through all the scenarios from the point of view of both personas, with the intention of creating novel solutions.

The participant, a mother to a child who played soccer, had no problem in switching between the two personas even though only one resembled her-self. She was able to draw on her knowledge of other parents and their preferences and behavior, but when she acted as the persona that resembled her-self, she often commented on the likeness, how she herself would react, and her own needs.

3. DISCUSSION

The two cases show how users 1) are able to act as personas and be as creative as professional designers 2) use their understanding of the area in focus to create scenarios both from the perspective of personas that are similar to them, but also from personas that are different from them, because they are familiar with different behaviors within the given design area.

It also shows how the users immediately are able to role-play thorough the scenarios and do this both alone and together with designers and other project participants.

The use of personas enables project participants to discuss from the same understanding of context and needs and at the same time allows the users to enter the discussion as an expert and relate to the innovation from their knowledge of context and work tasks.

The moderator plays a significant role especially in the case where the user did the innovations alone, both as someone who guides the sessions and someone who asks additional questions to the user.

The two cases shows that the users can be used for much more than validation as in classic HCI, as a UX specialist puts it in an interview about innovation, when presented with the idea:

“I actually was thinking how someone act as a persona would be a useful tool for participatory design. Like you're always having these design meetings between the consultancy and the client, and they will bring in the users for validation. But humans being are appropriating design all the time, they arrange their living, it's not a foreign concept to think about things. Certainly they can't be in charge as specialists. But having sessions that are open-ended

like: ‘how should we do this?’. I don’t think that people understand the value of it.” (UX specialist, Canada)

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to the students at ITU for allowing me access to their material.

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