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WORKSPACE EXPERIMENTS: A JOURNEY ON PLANNING PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

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KEYWORDS

Workspace design, user involvement, participatory process

SUMMATIVE STATEMENT

This paper presents a resource material in planning and performing participatory workspace design processes. This material brings up design dialogues into focus and gives insights on how to stage them, bridging the gap of merging user involvement with the well-defined design work-practice.

Expériences en milieu de travail : le chemin emprunté pour planifier la conception participative

MOTS-CLÉS

Conception d'espaces de travail, participation des utilisateurs, processus participatif

SOMMAIRE

Cette communication présente le processus participatif utilisé pour élaborer un document de planification et de conception d'espaces de travail. Le document explique comment établir et utiliser des dialogues liés à la conception et la façon de combler les lacunes en fusionnant la participation des utilisateurs à des pratiques de conception bien définies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The concept of participatory design and user involvement is well known and discussed among researchers (Simonsen and Robertson, 2013), and there is a widespread interest in implementing it in major building and construction projects. Nevertheless, it is also often difficult to translate the contributions from users to workspace design that seriously take on board the employees' specific work practices as a platform for a desired change. There is a need for a tool that manages to travel into a well-defined design work-practice and merge with it.

Design dialogues set the stage and employees, management and design practitioners are brought together to explore opportunities on the basis of the professional experience they each represent. Different materials (or objects) can help planning and performing participatory design processes. Several researchers have studied which kind of objects can be found in design processes (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2009) and others have attempted to characterize different objects in relation to how well they function (Broberg et al., 2011).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE/QUESTION

We developed a resource material to merge user involvement within current designers' practices when designing new workspaces. The aim was to test and experiment how a participatory prototyping process can help developing such a material aimed at architects and other participants on workspace design projects.

METHODOLOGY

We developed the resource material through a participatory “prototyping process”, that is through a mutual learning process taking place in a cooperative design setting. The material was gradually built during a research project, including three workshops emphasizing joint exploration by architects, consulting engineers and health & safety consultants (Figure 1).

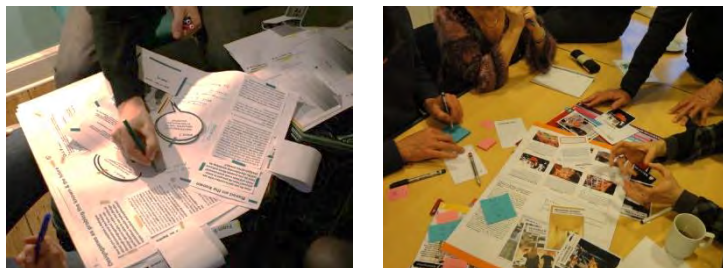


Figure 1 – Prototyping process over the workshops

This method was used because we could discuss, explore, and try out various aspects of the new resource material with its prototypes and thus mediate communication among the different participants of the process, content and format being gradually developed through participation.

RESULTS

The result was a flexible resource material for designers as a tool to help building a participatory process specifically for each project (Figure 2). The material consists of a toolbox containing: 1) three booklets, 2) “playing” cards, 3) a game board, and 4) a leaflet explaining the main process the tool aims at bringing participants through. The booklets are the core of the toolbox and they aim at giving ideas and inspiration on methods and activities that can be part of the participatory process. The cards and the game board aim at making the use of the resource material a participatory and interactive activity in itself. The leaflet provides some guidance the participatory planning.

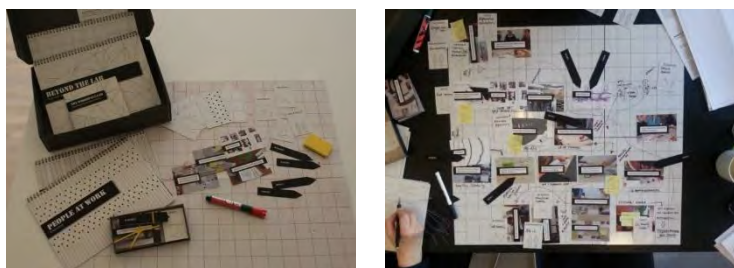


Figure 2 – Final prototype for the resource material

DISCUSSION

As we see it, the resource material was well accepted during a training section and some participants were happy they in fact used the time during the session to solve some planning issues for their projects. The material became an asset that streamlined the planning of a participatory process while putting the key themes within user involvement and workspace design on the agenda. It still has room for improvements, but it is a good starting to introduce participatory methods into the design practices and to facilitate the planning for such activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The task of involving users in design processes is not easy and it can be a challenge to merge these activities. The resource material helps staging the interventions and activities and preparing the materials to be used. On a long term, we see the resource material as an open source, where new methods and inspiring ideas can always be added.

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