

Building Adaptable Teams for Co-configuration

Knotworking, co-configuration, collaboration, innovation, design thinking

Summary

In innovative organisations we are seeing an increase in cross-functional teams being built around projects. The diverse perspectives of collaborators draw from personal world-views and organisational roles, which contributes to radical collaboration across traditional boundaries of work.

This hands-on workshop aims at testing a rapid team alignment activity in which teams propose core values and align these to the innovation learning cycle, synthesising them into foundational work practices for each phase. These are then reframed as the teams' innovation narrative.

Workshop Purpose and Primary Aims

The purpose of this workshop is to test an activity aimed at contributing to the meaningful formation of new teams. Increasingly we are seeing teams form and reform throughout the product/service development lifecycle. These responsive teams are often cross-functional in nature, bringing together multiple perspectives into each phase of product/service design.

These purpose-driven teams often have to find alignment quite rapidly, so time is a constraint. Misalignment can lead to dysfunctional teams, resulting in longer product development, and innovation lifecycles. This in turn diminishes knowledge development of teams. Purpose-driven teams need to be rooted in a set of common values. The espoused values of the team should in turn be grounded & aligned to foundational work practices.

The primary aims of this workshop are to:

- Test an activity aimed at bringing new teams together rapidly
- Bring potential users of this activity into the design process
- Provide an interactive platform for participation and collaboration
- Generate insights around rapid-team alignment

Theoretical Relationship

Co-configuration, an emerging customer-centric mode of work, "involves building and sustaining a fully integrated system that can sense, respond, and adapt to the individual experience of the customer" (Victor & Boynton, 1998, p195). In practices of co-configuration there is a need to go beyond conventional teamwork or networking to the practice of 'knotworking' (Engeström, Y., Engeström, R., & Vääaho, 1999). Knotworking, the emerging interactional core of co-configuration, is where separate actors can quickly come together and "tie a knot" and work together and solve a problem or design a task in the most efficient way possible (Engeström, 2012).

Knotworking, Engeström (2008, 196) claims, "poses qualitatively new learning challenges to work communities." Critical to knotworking and the functioning of constantly changing participant configurations is rapid negotiation and improvisation (ibid).



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The changing configurations of teams happen over time, specifically "the entire life trajectory of the product or service" (Engeström, Puonti, & Seppänen, 2003). The life trajectory of products/services is framed as expansive design thinking and aligned here with the iterative, innovation-learning process (Figure 1) (Beckman & Barry, 2007).

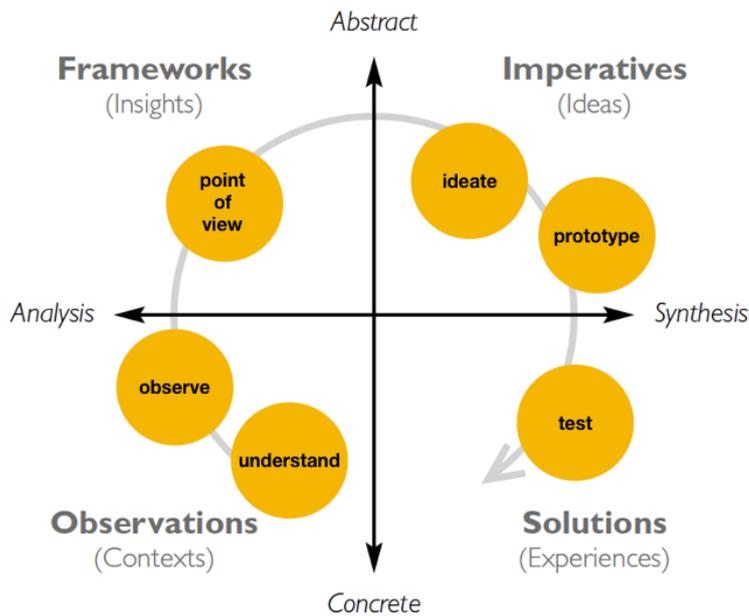


Figure 1: Innovation Learning Process. source: adapted from Beckman & Barry, 2007, p30

This diversity in collaborators and temporality of team configurations, based on objective/motive of the project at a specific time, can present challenges around cohesion, alignment and synchronicity.

Foundational work practices, that is, the enacted values of a team change with each iteration. These foundational work practices are rooted in the personal values of each individual and espoused as team values. With rapidly changing teams, the misalignment between espoused and enacted values can create tensions, which can hinder or derail a team's efforts.

Workshop Approach

This interactive, hands-on workshop will see participants form teams and develop foundational work practices for each phase of the innovation learning journey, that is, how they will embody and enact their team values dependent on where they are in the innovation cycle. This will be done through a guided, scaffolded approach moving from personal sharing personal values to collaboratively defining team practices.

This workshop embraces the activity-driven mind-set of design thinking and participants will each produce a personalised guide for future work, in the form of a lo-fi booklet.

After a brief introduction to the teams outlining how the workshop is structured, participants will co-create in teams of five, moving through the 6 stages presented in Figure 2. There will be intermittent instructions at each phase of the process.

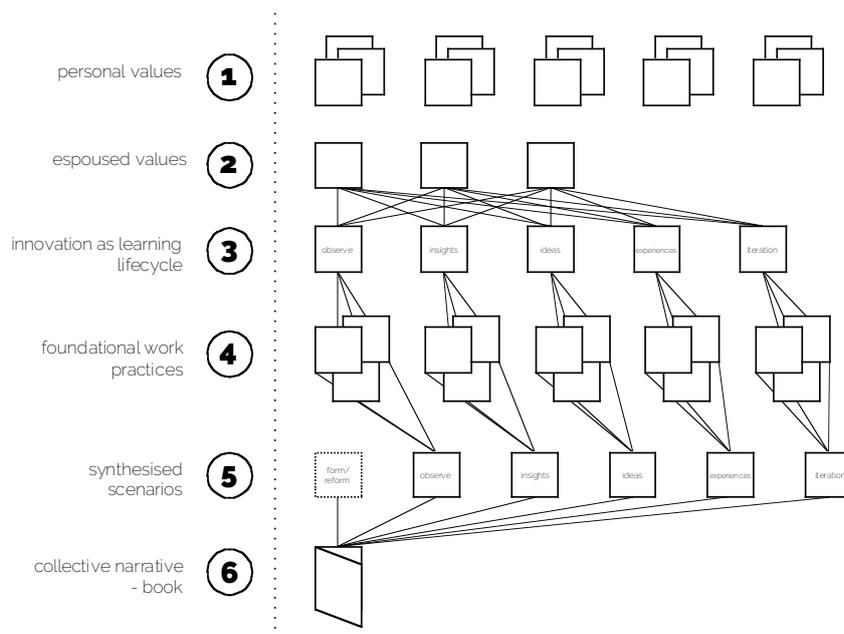


Figure 2: Workshop Phases. source: Authors Own

Takeaways for the Participant

Participants will each leave with a prototype of their team’s co-created work guide in the form of a small booklet (stage 6 in Figure 2), which they will each produce.

After workshop findings have been synthesised, they will also be provided with the refined workshop outline and templates (via email) to carry out this activity within their organisations.

Results and final reflections for consideration

The results of the workshop will go toward refining the activity further.

Specific feedback I aim to capture is:

- What worked,
- What didn’t work so well,
- New ideas/suggestions that emerge, &
- Questions that still need answering

References

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