

Co-Design

~ a recipe for success ~

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We have all been at that co-design session that did not quite go as smooth as planned, or the data gathered was not quite right to give you new insights. Which is why we, in this recipe, want to help you prevent this through providing you with a set of base ingredients and steps to cook up a fine session yourself. Through applying the theory of UX as a practice [6] we aim to improve the participation of your users and stakeholders in the process of creation [10]. We offer a set of what we believe to be key ingredients and steps to use as a base for your co-design session. And, once you have mastered this mix, you can flavour it to fit your taste!

Ingredients

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1. IDENTIFY THE RIGHT STAKEHOLDERS

A professional chef ensures a good preparation before they start with co-designing. This starts with the participants, you -as designer and facilitator- need to carefully pick your participants. Ensure you have different perspectives present in your team to help you see the whole picture [11]. There are multiple tools that can be used to identify stakeholders relevant to your project. E.g. stakeholder analysis mapping [12] can help with this, as well as organize them based on their interest and impact on your project [4]. Make sure you don't pick your participants alone but ask your college's or fellow students to review if you might have overlooked someone.

NOTE TO SELF

Co-design teams tend to develop more creative and unexpected solutions when the group shows various mindsets, mentalities and professional expertise [10].

2. PROPER FACILITATION AVOIDS FRUSTRATION

You will have to facilitate the session, guide your participants through your questions and encourage them to participate and share their vision. During all this, it is important that you stay objective. Let everyone voice their ideas, opinions and experiences, be empathic but beware tunnel vision [13]. Guide and structure the discussion with room for diverging opinions but also enable working together by converging topics. Depending on your topic, there are several strategies that you can take, an example of a book that provides you with a set of methods for you to choose from is the *Facilitator's guide to participatory decision-making* from Kaner et al. [7]. A great tip from this book is giving the participants specific roles, which can help create a feeling of shared responsibility.

NOTE TO SELF

A good facilitator needs to stay objective, neutral and supportive. The facilitator needs to encourage participation from all participants, promote mutual understanding between participants and cultivate a feeling of shared responsibility [7].

3. CREATE A SHARED VISION

When first starting out with co-design, we recommend co-creating a story to frame the challenge you are tackling with your participants. It is a great way to get the group started. Our brains are hardwired to enjoy and work with stories [9] and through co-creating it, a better sense of harmony can be created in the group, and thus prevent intergroup conflict [1, 15]. This co-creation of a story or setting helps with obtaining the following key ingredient: A shared vision. The group you are co-designing with should have a clear goal and vision when starting out, a common understanding of 'Why' they are participating [5, 10]. Only then, can you properly answer the 'What' and 'How' of the question you are asking the group you have invited [5, 10]. Having this common ground ensures no one feels disappointed after the session.

Preparation

4. BALANCING EMPATHY

As mentioned earlier, it is important that you stay objective. Doing this effectively asks for a balance in empathy: understanding the perspectives of all participants, as well as your own and being empathic of all [11, 15]. By expressing empathy, you can have a large influence on other participants [8] and aid them in being more open toward each other and you. To develop empathy, one needs practice and practical experience, but the willingness to understand already goes a long way. The discussion of experiences and your reaction to them serves as a trigger for others to make more connections, which will lead to an increased understanding of everyone in the group.

5. COLLECT, REFLECT AND ACT

A successful co-design session has to bring the designer closer to a solution. An important step not to overlook is thus acquiring data. One can for example use a canvas for all the participants and let them document their thoughts or simply record the whole session using video or audio. After the co-design session, the designer needs to reflect on and reassess the data as a whole. Did the co-design session go as planned? Were decisions made in agreement with all the participants? After careful analysis of data e.g. through thematic analysis [14] new insights can pop up. Then, with the expertise of a skilled designer, careful reconsiderations can be made that also take other elements into account e.g. financial viability, barriers in production, etc. While doing this, you must respect the decisions made and reflect on all the participants' motives, needs and wishes [5].

NOTE TO SELF

Collect, reflect, act, repeat. Keep your participants engaged and ensure a good experience, it will be more likely they want to continue working with you.

6. CO-DESIGNING IS CONTINUOUS

Finally, the end of your session doesn't mean the end of your collaborative work. Keep your participants informed and enthusiastic about the progress of the project. Feel free to organize another co-design session based on new insights with the same group. Making people responsible during the co-design session for the outcome, makes your participants also partly responsible for the products' further development [10]. Then, when you keep them up-to-date, the concept can only grow and develop further. Through this you can, if you wish, create a form meta-design and co-ownership, where end-users (after a product is fully developed) can also become 'designer' by keeping on improving it. [2, 3].

REMEMBER THAT...

... even with the best preparation, sometimes it just does not quite work out the way you wanted. This is okay! Be open and honest about it if it happens during a session, do not be too hard on yourself when you find out during data analysis. Work with what you have and try again. As with everything, practice is the key and when you find another ingredient that is key to your co-design session, note it and add it to your personal recipe for success.