

PROUD Co-Design Café: A Platform for Multi-Disciplinary Exchange on Co-Design

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Building upon PROUD Co-design Masterclasses, a group of enthusiastic participants created a way to continue the valuable exchange. The PROUD Co-Design Café is a monthly gathering of diverse people who wish to have a valuable, inspirational and in depth exchange about various topics of co-design. The format of the Café will be offered to participants of the Knowledge Exchange Conference as a means of showcasing the approach, and having an interactive workshop to evolve the Café as a tool for exchange.

Keywords (3 max): Co-design, knowledge exchange, interactive workshop

Introduction

PROUD is an INTERREG IVB project; the acronym stands for People, Researchers, Organisations, Using Design for innovation and co-creation. It aims to bring together designers with public organisations, businesses and user communities to experience the added value of design thinking and design, while working together on innovative solutions for today's real world problems. For this the project partnership develops, tests and gathers transnationally methods for co-designing services, products and processes. Furthermore PROUD helps designers, often micro-enterprises, to have the right facilities, knowledge and expertise to play this key role in innovating, improving and consolidating people's lives, businesses and public services across Europe.

In Eindhoven at Capital D, the Design Cooperation of Brainport in the Netherlands, is founding a Design Innovation Space (DIS) with help of the INTERREG IVB funding of PROUD. Its aim is to be a home base for designers, industries, knowledge institutes, public workers and the general public. The goal of DIS is to favour knowledge exchange, the collaboration on ideas and the contribution to the implementation of results.

In this respect Capital D brought the last year two PROUD Masterclasses elaborated and executed by the Imagination Lab of Lancaster University. In the Masterclass the method of co-design is interactively introduced to a limited group of participants. By questioning and working on the 9 principles of co-design, the participants internalize the basics of co-design, and bring new insights to the PROUD partnership in order to sharpen the existing and evolving co-design principles.

As an outcome of the second series of the Masterclasses the more experienced participants let know that they wanted to have the opportunity to discuss co-design more, to continue the discussion, not as an umbrella topic, but go in depth on various topics of co-design in practice. The enthusiasm from a diverse group of people encouraged us to tackle the challenge, how can we engage diverse participants to further contribute to an exchange about co-design experiences and learning? This core group of participants gathered to take the step to prototyping one approach, the PROUD Co-Design Café was quickly announced, and implemented.

Creating An Opportunity For Exchange

"The key here is that it's about developing a creative design process that facilitates the design of new approaches by people who are new to creating these sorts of [knowledge exchange] processes."
(Cruickshank et.al, 2009)

The PROUD Co-Design Café is building upon the work of Cruickshank, Whitman and Morris who speak here of the importance to focus on “second order tools and mechanisms” which are seen as “approaches that are designed to help people design their own tools and approaches for KE [knowledge exchange]”. The PROUD Co-Design Café team has placed a focus on sharing tools and mechanisms within co-design practice in order for participants to find relevant inspiration and insights for their own work. As well as offer a dynamic platform on which to exchange experiences, meet others in the work field, discover each others expertise, and find overlap or differences. The core Café team have currently proposed a three part format for a monthly gathering

- Begin with an introduction by the host of the month's work, and of the theme for discussion split up into sub-topics.
- Followed by round-robin discussions about the proposed sub-topics of the theme,
- and as a conclusion each table facilitator (on-the-spot volunteers) crystalizes and briefly presents the outcome of each discussion, which is filmed for sharing.

Tools and mechanisms have been designed in order to facilitate the discussion, minimize the threshold to host the event, and to capture outcomes of the exchange. These include:

- Name tags that trigger participants to get to know each other
- Introduction slides with information about the event
- Chalkboard signs for sub-topics at each table
- Colour-coding method to track conversation rounds
- Table facilitator's role described on information cards
- An evaluation 'letter' to the team for input after each event

The dynamic and open character of the Co-Design Café allows for new tools mechanisms to be developed and implemented during the course of events. New tools have been designed such as a mapping of the places where participants work, and their preferred suppliers etc. We have also seen a Gallery where participants can show their own work to illustrate the theme in the form of physical objects and images.

Furthermore, the PROUD Co-Design Café seeks to put an emphasis on a multi-disciplinary exchange by reaching out to participants from many different sectors who have either worked with, or are interested in co-design practice. This has led to exchanges between academia, industry, creative industry and public sector participants, exchanging different approaches and inspiring each other.

Co-Design Café For Transnational Exchange

The PROUD Co-Design Café is becoming a strong platform for diverse people to share, discuss, debate and exchange knowledge and experience of co-design. To continue this effort forward, our team proposes to host a Cafe format workshop where participants will be given the platform to exchange in depth about the Café as a tool for knowledge exchange itself.

As an entity the Café's are fresh, and therefore still face some challenges. These will be the subtopics for exchange;

- Which topics to discuss, and what criteria can we rely upon to select them?
- In which ways can we build upon and improve the Café tools and mechanisms?
- How to promote such an event, and to which audience we promote in order to ensure an interesting group of Café participants?
- How to capture and disseminate the exchange and subsequent knowledge created during Café?

During the Knowledge Exchange Conference we will apply the Café's mechanisms to discuss how to evaluate and evolve the approach in order to shape insights on how to have an effective exchange about co-design between diverse participants. This will allow for others to experience a PROUD Co-Design Café, as well as to apply and discuss how to better this exchange.

Conclusion

It is important that we start to design ways for people to design tools for knowledge exchange. When a platform is offered for sharing and discussion about co-design in practice, participants can engage in an exchange from which to build upon. We have observed that participants are confronted with

different ways of working, other approaches to similar problems, and are learning from each others challenges. The PROUD Co-Design Café promotes an open atmosphere between peers, which we believe is fundamental to exchange, and we look forward to sharing this at the upcoming Knowledge Exchange Conference.

References

Cruickshank, L. and Whitham, R., et al. (2012) "Innovation through the Design of Knowledge Exchange and The Design of Knowledge Exchange Design", paper presented at International Design Management Research Conference, Boston, MA, August 8-9 2012.