
Pro.Seed : Designer toolkit for effective profiling and self-reflection

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Abstract

Pro.Seed is a toolkit, which allows designers to present and reflect on themselves and their goals at the beginning and at the end of a new teamwork learning process. The aim of my exploration is to design a tool to simplify the design process, to avoid being stuck and to get more out of the design team and the constraints of the time. The toolkit allows designers to delineate their profiles, to reflect on group dynamics and personal development in a visual way. It supports with visual and notational tools the way of proceeding in a learning development.

Keywords

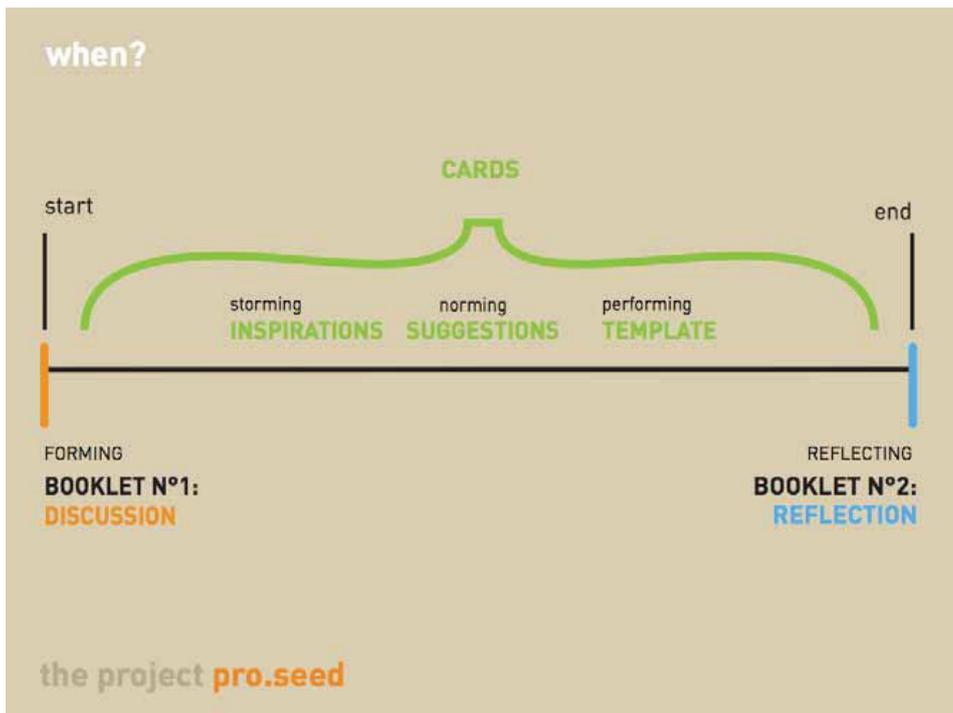
Interaction design, methods, ingredients, toolkit, stories, design process, groups dynamics, interdisciplinary, visual tools

Introduction

As a Pilot Year student in the Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, I have always worked in teams and tried many of the group dynamics involved in a design process building on a multidisciplinary dialogue. We were twenty-one students from eleven countries with many different backgrounds from Psychological Studies to Engineering. During the whole year we have been involved in a range of design projects with very different topics, ranging from tangible user interface to medical issues. We were asked to perform in groups in the best way possible in a very short time, from one to four weeks. So I decided to learn from our experience and design some tools starting from our point of view and experiences in order to facilitate future group dynamics and best performance. I decided to involve my colleagues in a co-creative process asking them about how they perceived themselves and their group dynamic during the whole year. In this way we co-created an initial series of rough visual tools wherein it was possible to identify high and low pitches to ease self-reflection. After the first sketches I refined all the material and I designed and developed the toolkit, which consists of two booklets and sixty cards to be tested again with next year's CIID students.

The design process and the challenges (frameworks)

In order to cope with the complexity of group dynamics my design challenge was how might I develop a tool for a better understanding of group



different backgrounds have to present/define themselves in order to understand how to perform together to achieve great and fast results

Each member of the team has a *Pro.Seed* toolkit. The toolkit contains: two booklets, one to engage and start discussions and another allows a personal and useful reflection at the end of the process; some stickers to build profiles in a free, easy, visual and handy way; 60 cards, which are tools for enhancing group

dynamics and improving communication between individuals in groups? I decide to analyse and take inspiration from one of the most well known models of group development by Bruce Truckman. Tuckman's model states that the ideal group decision-making process should occur in four stages: Forming (pretending to get on or get along with others); Storming (letting down the politeness barrier and trying to get down to the issues even if tempers flare up); Norming (getting used to each other and developing trust and productivity); Performing (working in a group to a common goal on a highly efficient and cooperative basis). I decided to build a toolkit that was able to follow this process together with the necessity to build trust and self-reflection between the individuals within a group for improving performance in a short time. My toolkit tries to convey an effective design process in groups that can also be useful for the individual's growing knowledge through self-reflection.

Pro.Seed concept

Pro.Seed is a toolkit to follow the developing process of designers in teamwork experiences. At the beginning, when a team is formed, designers with

dynamics during the process.

They start to use it from the beginning of the process. The *Discussion Booklet* lets them interact with one another and present themselves in an equal perspective. The cards are in the toolkit to help the users during the process, so they can pick them up and show/discuss each of them while they are developing a project. At the end of each fast process, all of the designers have learned a lot and the reflection tool allows them to apprehend the acquired knowledge.

What are the expected core values for the context?

- 11) A toolkit that follows the designers during the whole process, avoiding their feeling lost in the





Experience Prototype

Phase 1: CIID Pilot Year, prototype the self-reflection

The first phase co-created a series of rough visual tools with my colleagues in CIID Pilot Year to reflect visually about the whole year. I proposed to eight fellow students the first prototype of the *Reflection Booklet* and I tested it and discussed with them the parameters involved and the possible meaningful comparisons.

I learned through their sketches how essential it was to give them the possibility to take notes and compare different elements in order to impact the process in the memory. I asked them about their group dynamics and for suggestions about how to avoid being stuck. The most common answer was: "I looked back to my previous project." So I decided to translate their "looking back" into something that could be used by others, sixty cards that give answers to the most common problems in the design process: lack of inspiration, problems with the group dynamics, the necessity of jumping from one phase to the next one.

In order to answer to these problems I collected and translated our knowledge and experiences in 3 groups of 20 cards to deliver inspiration, suggestions and templates to the next CIID students.

Phase 2: starting form the beginning: team-building week

At the beginning of the CIID year, September 2009, the first week was dedicated to team building, so I had the opportunity of testing the *Pro.Seed* toolkit during the team-building week with Karen Ward. During the week the *Discussion Booklet* was launched and the new CIID students filled it. (video reference)

The research demonstrates the necessity of a common language like visual, especially when the members come from different background and the playful elements were an interesting ingredient. The notational tool about expectation was the most useful together with the profiling system, but the first was considered an opener, instead the second was open enough to enhance the discuss between each other.

One successful element was the size of the booklet. The A5 size given to the user is small enough for the booklet to be considered personal when it is necessary to start filling it in, but large enough to be shared as well.

Phase 3: mid- term prototype: end of skills upgrade

In December after 3 months of the program, the students were finishing the skills upgrade. So, in collaboration with the Head of the Program, Simona Maschi, I went back to test a mid-term *Reflection Booklet*. (video reference)

We noticed that in a program like CIID, extended along a whole year, it was interesting to have a midterm Reflection Workshop Section., so I developed a supplement of the *Reflection Booklet* in order to better demonstrate the developing process of 22 students keen on a very intensive and proactive year.

This midterm section was interesting to discuss about what is the goal of self-reflecting in a visual way. At the beginning, they were concerned about how they could have an immediate feedback from some sort of graph/template, then they realized it was not the graph but the way they were asked to fill it, the action they were doing, that allowed them to reflect and understand better the path they had followed until that point.

This time the size of the booklet was considered



too small to allow a useful self-reflection. They were suggesting something bigger, like an A3 sheet, to better draw their pitch and low points during the first period.

The template I designed to allow them to reflect about what they had done until that point was chronological. After this section I learned it was not the best solution. My research highlighted the importance of giving them the possibility to cross-reference their reflections about what they had achieved, how much they were feeling involved in the topics and also their mood, so the chronological system was too fixed to let them express their journeys. Another element I had not considered enough was the environment.

I ran this workshop in the classroom, but I hadn't considered that this was the same environment they were in every day so they were not able to freely rely on their memories. They were quite disoriented and tempted to consider the reflection tool just another form of evaluation or some kind of task. So I learned not to take the environment for granted, instead considering this part of the reflection experience.

Next step: phase 4: end of the year

In July 2010 I'll be back in Copenhagen to finish the *Pro.Seed* workshop with the CIID students 2009-10. In July we are going to test the last part of the reflective process and the possibility to explore a profiling system based on the comparison between the beginning of the year and the last part.

Conclusion

This project has the goals of simplifying the design process, avoiding being stuck and getting more out of a team and the time involved in the design project. After the experience prototype I have done with the CIID students 2009-10, even though is not finished, I can already see many different, interesting prospective possibilities, from an educational point of view, for a school to customize the program they offer based on a more focused understanding of the profiling of the student and his/her goals. On the other hand I can see

the possibility for the student to feel more in control of their future prospectives and goals, understanding and making relevance to what they are really good at without losing their focus, while they are looking for a job. Another interesting step I would like to take is to try to move the project from an educational long term prospective to others delineated like “company” and “advertising agency”, fields more related to the business side where teams have almost no time. I would like to build a service platform that can offer customized services based on the same method that can serve both, educational and business needs.

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References

Extensive references are available on <http://coconu.wordpress.com/> and www.coconu.it

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