

Froukje Sleeswijk Visser

Delft University of Technology

is the world's first contextmapping PhD. The day prior to this symposium she defended her thesis, entitled 'Bringing the everyday life of people into design'. Currently she is a part-time assistant professor at TU Delft and runs her own consultancy, ContextQueen.



a good five years of context mapping at TU Delft

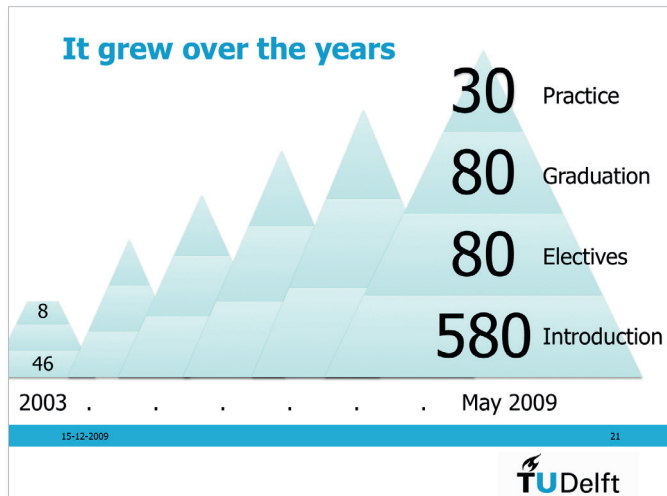
a brief history and a little peek into Froukje's thesis

Five years ago, we started the contextmapping research programme and have been diffusing our knowledge in education ever since. The students have applied this knowledge to their projects and kept us informed of their experiences. The basic foundation of contextmapping is largely based on the ideas that Liz has introduced: letting users make, say and do things, while supporting them to become aware of, reflect on, and express their everyday experiences with products and services. Users contribute to the design process in their role of experts of their own experiences. In this way, the experiences of users are collected and used to inform and inspire design projects.

Let me say a few words about how we implemented our method of contextmapping here at TU Delft. We have three Master programmes, and in two of them, the Master Design for Interaction and the Master Strategic Product Design, 200 students per year are taught the basic theory. These students get a basic introduction. They learn the theory, they get a first taste of practice, but they don't really hone their skills in that course. They can apply the techniques in successive projects. Then we have a few electives, with about 25 students a year who really dive into the method and learn to set up the research, facilitate sessions, and analyse findings to use for design purposes. Moreover, we have about 20 students a year who use contextmapping extensively in their graduation projects in collaboration with industry.

Besides teaching students, we have also been teaching practitioners in Master classes and in workshops.

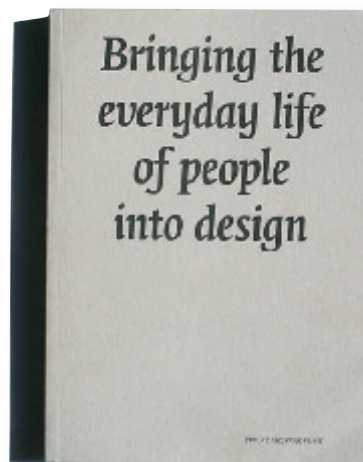
After five years of contextmapping education, you could say that we have almost 600 students who have acquired a basic notion of contextmapping. About 80 of them have deepened their knowledge and skills via electives and graduation projects. As far as we know, at least 30 of them are currently applying contextmapping in their professional life. Ten of them are introducing their work today. They are a varied cross-section of people with one to three years of experience.



Some of them have started their own companies, and others are working in marketing, design or consultancy.

In my own research, the connection between design practice and education has played a large role. Students participated in case studies, research projects, and design projects, exploring new solution directions, stumbling upon new questions, and furthering the growing insights in continuous discussions.

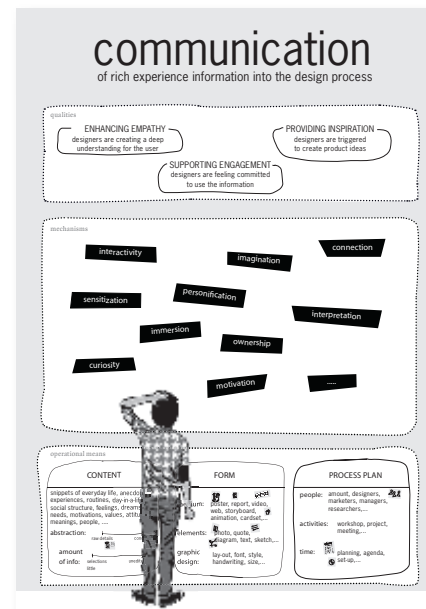
My thesis is about bringing the everyday life of people into design. The research was mainly conducted through case studies that include contextmapping projects within design practice. After dealing with the methods and tools for gathering user experience data in my MSc project, my PhD research focused on successfully integrating the rich experience information



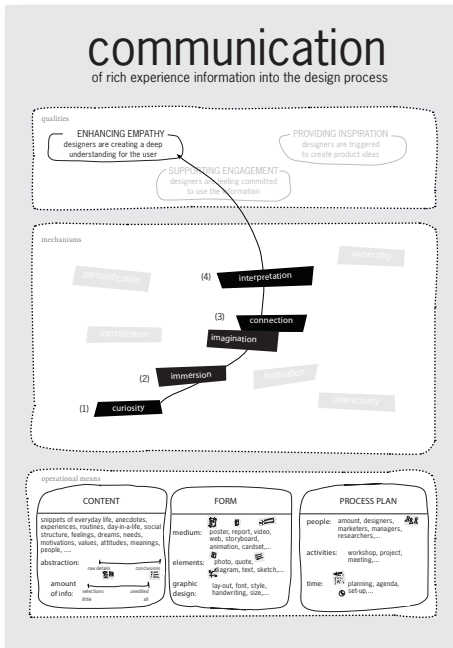
into the design processes of product development companies. This kind of explorative user research is most useful at the fuzzy front end of design: the phase where strategic decisions are made. Here design teams need to be able to get inspired, besides getting informed, and need to be able to empathise with the users in order to understand the users' experiences. Moreover, not only designers need to engage with the data: other stakeholders such as managers, marketers and strategists also have to see the benefit of user experience information in their work.

I developed a framework in which these aims are positioned at the top level. The three main goals for successfully communicating user experience information are

- Empathy: supporting designers to empathise with the users
- Inspiration: supporting designers to get inspired for innovative ideas
- Engagement: supporting designers to interact with the information



At the bottom level, all kinds of elements are listed that can be used to communicate information. The middle level is gradually filled in during the case studies, and presents the mechanisms that are addressed when aiming at one or more of the goals.



This figure shows one of the routes which can be taken to reach the goal of empathy

I also developed a set of guidelines based on this theoretical framework and on the hands-on experience gained during the case studies. I compiled these in a guidelines chapter full of practical tips and tricks, illustrated by examples from my own case studies, but also from other projects and literature. The guidelines are outlined here, together with 5 sample tips.

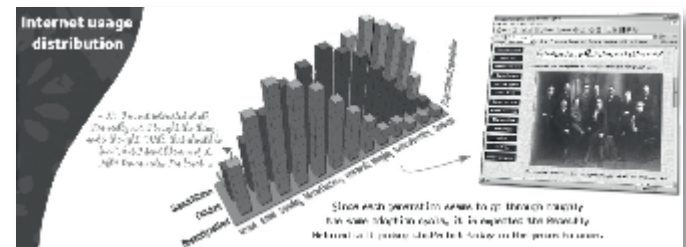
1. set up a good communication plan

This might be common advice, but planning a communication strategy at the start of a project will support the impact of the findings. For planning a communication strategy, the company context culture and receivers' needs are aspects to take into account. For communicating rich experience information, a structured plan for who to involve, when and how, helps to make your findings land where they need to. Specifically, it could support the engagement of various stakeholders with the information.

Tip: Couple the results to other knowledge that the company already has.

Especially when you communicate with marketers, managers and external clients, convincing them of the value of this information can be a challenge. Satisfy their need for validation by showing that there are other research results, which can be

complementary. Acceptance might be higher when they can place or categorise this information within their knowledge of other research results, like demographic, trend, market and product information.



Quotes and pictures from a contextmapping study are coupled to a trends diagram in a presentation to the strategists.

2. present real individual people

Instead of presenting users as a group of people, such as a target group or consumer segment, presenting them as real individual people is highly recommended. People have the ability to make empathic inferences when seeing data about other people. The personas method is based on this principle. But this guideline is different from the persona technique. Personas are fictive representations of users, whereas this guideline explicitly recommends representing real and individual people: real, because users are everyday people like you and me; individual, because experiences belong to individual people. Showing the real people who participated in the research emphasises the fact that the information is about people. Moreover it supports credibility, because the source is clear.

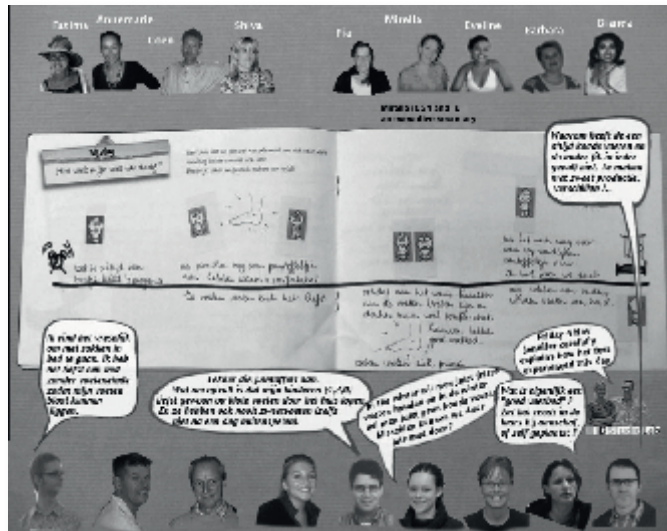
Tip: Give insight into the life behind the users.

Use elements in the presentation that invite the receiver to get



This persona sheet shows a week from the subject's agenda to give a bit of background information about her everyday life

an insight into the user's life; eg a day-in-the-life or a page of his/her agenda. This works well, because such elements tell a story about a person. Insights into a few aspects of the day or a week of someone's life can help to construct a coherent overview of that person over time.



This website revealed snippets of the user data in the three weeks prior to an idea generation workshop based on the results of the contextmapping study. The various stakeholders of the design team could leave reactions on this site.

3. sensitise designers

Sensitising means 'making sensitive for...'. This is a fundamental principle for communicating rich experience information, because this supports empathy and inspiration. Just as users are given little triggers to help them reflect on their daily lives before entering a generative session, designers can be triggered to create awareness about the topic of study and/or the users.

Tip: Send little triggers which are easy and fun.

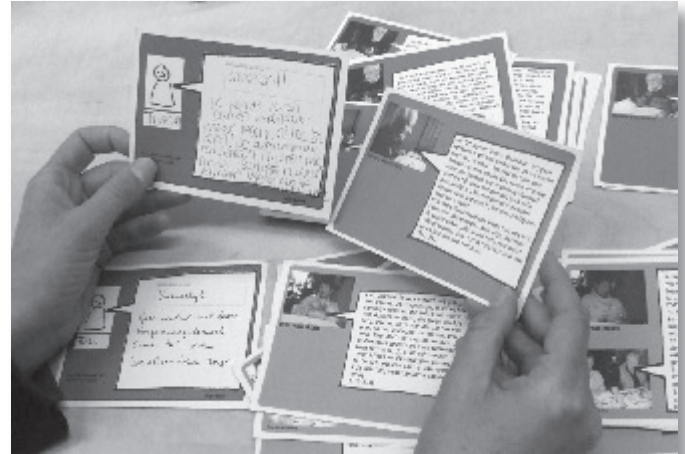
Make use of postcards, email updates and interactive websites. A website might be a bit of work, but a postcard with the message 'the field studies have begun, in two weeks we will report findings' can get more attention than an email. Make sure access is easy and invite designers to participate. It will trigger their curiosity. These triggers could be focused on the topic of the study, involved users, or even first insights

4. stimulate designers to address their own experiences

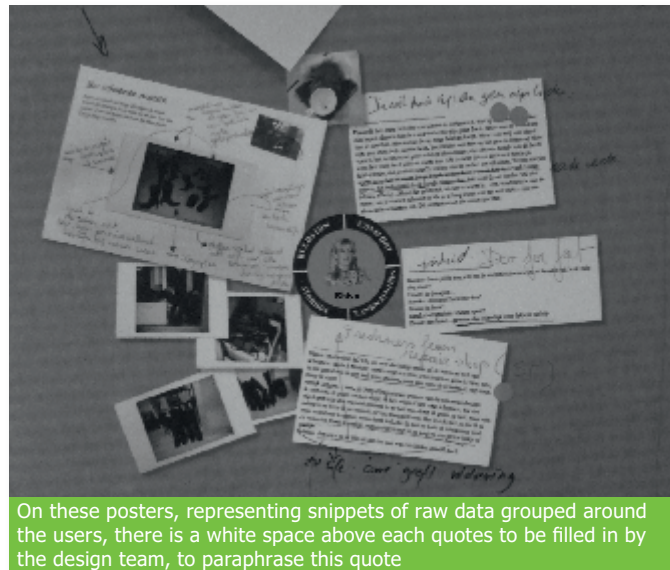
When designers are stimulated to become more aware of their own experiences, they are better able to connect and relate to the users' experiences. Empathy is a process of four steps: discovery, immersion, connection and detachment.

The connection step means connecting with their own experiences. This leads to a deeper understanding of the users' experiences, and also to a more open and personal atmosphere in the workshop.

Tip: Support designers to share and discuss their own experiences relating to the topic before they dive into the experiences of the users.



Designers fill in a few cards about their own experiences and are asked to compare these with the cards filled with user information during an ideation workshop



On these posters, representing snippets of raw data grouped around the users, there is a white space above each quote to be filled in by the design team, to paraphrase this quote

5. make the communication participatory

Rich experience information cannot be communicated as a set of facts. Designers are active recipients of the information and by a process of understanding and sense making they are able to act upon this information in the design process. By giving designers the means to organise, structure and finalise the information, they are able to make sense of it.

Tip: *Unfinished and open aesthetics.*

By providing tools which are not 'finished' in an ideation workshop, designers can collaboratively 'finish' the tool. By making this action visually explicit, the teams are supported in creating insights into collaboration. Such tools invite designers to explore directions, without forcing them in one direction.

For more tips and tricks, see the guidelines chapter of my thesis which you can find online on www.contextmapping.com (Sleeswijk Visser, 2009).