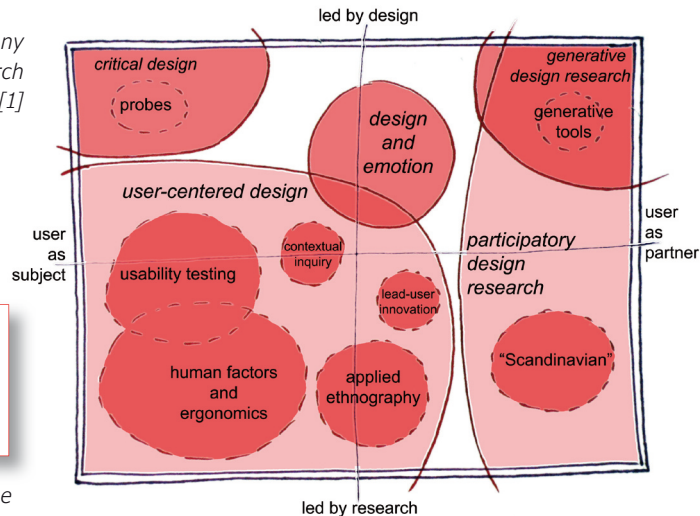


Basics



Understanding the context around the product & user comes first. From that perspective, designers develop a vision on the user-product interaction, the product, and how to integrate these with enabling technologies.

Over the past decades, many new forms of user research have emerged [1]



[1] Sanders, E.B.-N. & Stappers, P.J. (2008) Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. *Codesign*, 4(1), 5-18.

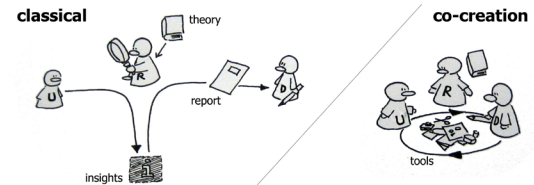
In the past decades, the role of research within design has grown considerably. Where designers could previously focus on the product as a thing and the technology inside, these days design often begins with a thorough understanding of the user and, increasingly, of the context of use: the what, where, how, when, with whom, ... that surrounds the interaction between user and product.

Overview of methods

To support this development, there has been a widening of the techniques for user-centered design research. The diagram shows that the field contains a variety of approaches, and indicates two directions in which new types of

research emerged: the role of the user (from passive object of study to active expert), and the role of the designer (from receiver of research data to active contributor to the research).

Contextmapping is in the top half of the diagram, involving the user as 'expert of his or her experience', and involving designerly tools and approaches in empowering users to express that expertise.



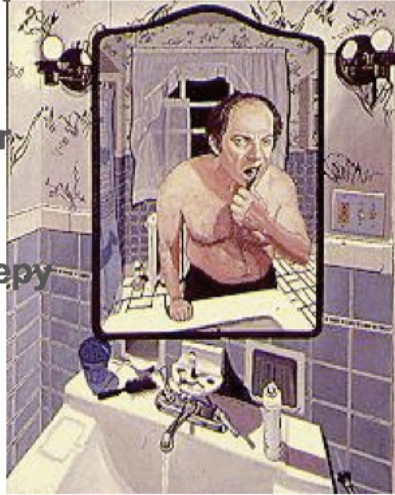
The roles of stakeholders are changing

white light beautiful nighttime

getting older

sleepy

sound



hate

love

hurry

cold

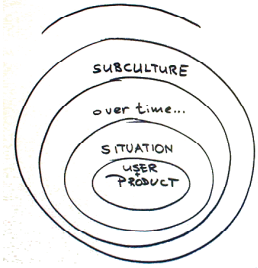
water running

Routine---washing face afterwards

fresh taste

tiny objects

yesterday



The context of product use, e.g., brushing your teeth, contains many different facets.

Basics

By the term *context* we mean the context of the product use, which is 'all the factors that influence the experience of product use', including social, cultural and physical aspects, goals, needs, emotions, and practical matters.

Context and contextmapping

Which factors are important depends on the goals and scope of the design project as a whole. One way to find out which factors could be included is to ask Aristotle's questions: who? what? how? why? when? where? with whom? how long?...

A contextmapping study should help designers to take the user's perspective: to step into the

user's shoes, so they can empathize with the needs, goals, and abilities of the user; and to step back into the designers' role to create desirable solutions.

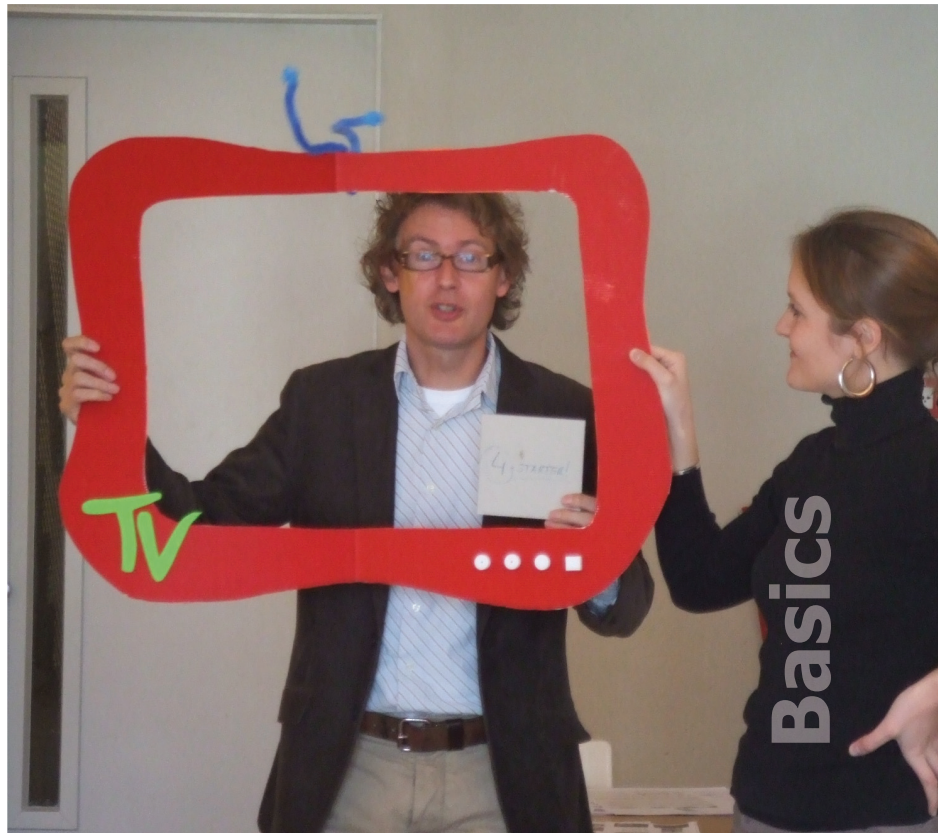
We use the word *contextmap* to indicate that the information should work as a map for the design team: it does not replace the terrain of the user experience, but helps the designers find their way, structure their insights as they come, recognize dangers and opportunities.

The contextmap is meant in the first place for inspiration, not validation.





Some tools for bringing out experience.
 Left: sheets with ambiguous words and pictures trigger users to recall memories and associations.
 Right: a 'TV game' creates a situation in which people feel free to express their opinions.



The user is the 'expert of his experience'.

More than anyone else, the users have experienced their context; they are the prime source of information about its many facets.

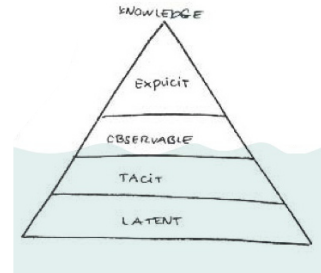
User as expert of experience

The expert is respected. As expert, the user is treated with respect, listened to, and given the opportunity to influence the direction of the research and design.

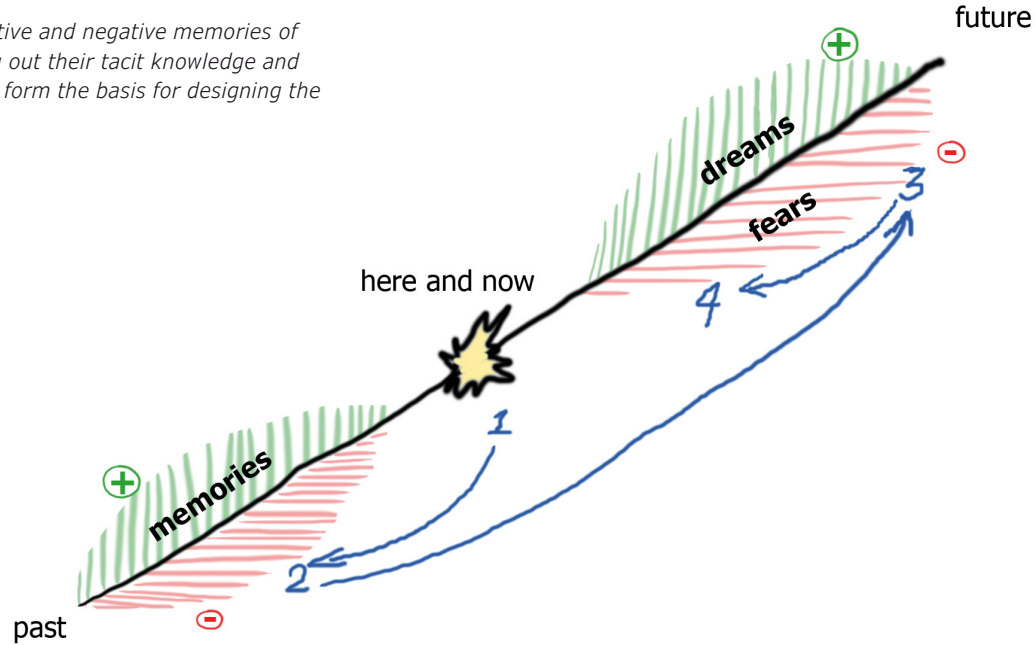
The expert has special tools. In order to perform as an expert, the users must be equipped with appropriate tools. The creation of such tools for expression is a key design element of contextmapping research.

The expert brings special knowledge.

But this knowledge is often hidden below the surface. The tools, techniques, and procedures described later on serve to bring out such tacit and latent knowledge.



Understanding positive and negative memories of users helps to bring out their tacit knowledge and latent needs, which form the basis for designing the future product.



To design desired (product) solutions, the designers build a vision of the future use, with special attention to the deeper layers of

To the future, through the past

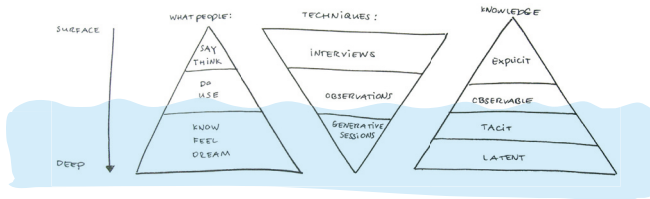
Different tools access different layers of knowledge.

meaning. Observation in the users' current lives can give rich insights in their experience, but we can only observe what happens under the conditions of here and now. The deeper layers of

meaning, things that can be expected to be still valid in the future, can be understood by calling up memories from the past.

Liz Sanders refers to this as the 'path of expression': think of the future experience around a certain topic, we should

- observe and reflect on the topic in the present;
- call up related memories from the past. Many of these memories will have a positive or negative emotional value;
- find the deeper layers that these memories express;
- move these layers into our understanding of the desired future situation;
- think of product solutions that work toward that situation.

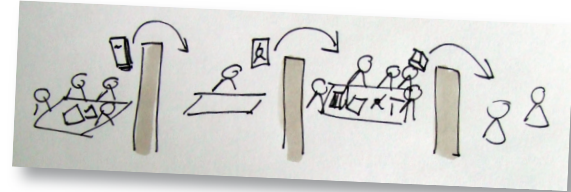


Issues

Contextmapping places many questions about how to involve different stakeholders, and how we should design and produce products. Theory and techniques are still in development, and many issues are being debated, explored, and tried out. A few of those are:

Scoping and scaling. Contextmapping techniques involve small numbers of users intensively over a longer time. This can be done by large companies with large research budgets, but is difficult for small and medium enterprises (SME's).

Is a company's organisation up to participatory design? Traditional divisions in organisations, such as separations between strategy, marketing, and design are difficult



When information is 'thrown over the wall' as often happens, much of the richness is lost.

barriers in which much understanding of user experience gets lost. Different departments have different languages, cultures, and values, and standard forms of reporting do not efficiently cross between them.

Authorship and rights. If users participate as active experts rather than passive subjects, then they are authors to the

resulting product ideas, and may justly claim recompensation, acknowledgement, or even a piece of the pie.

Research purposes and values.

Contextmapping is among qualitative explorative research techniques. Its aim is to inspire as much as to inform, to generate questions rather than to provide quantitative answers to questions that are already well understood. But many people expect research to be based on large numbers of respondents and unambiguous findings.

Cultural diversity. Many of the techniques so far were developed within specific Western cultures, and may not be appropriate everywhere. In some cultures it is impolite to

disagree or to express an opinion. The visual languages and cognitive styles of different (sub)cultures can be very different. We need to appropriately 'tune the techniques'.

Technologies. Computers, the internet, and mobile phones promise new ways of gathering and organising data.

In this booklet we emphasize media, such as paper and models, because of their flexibility of use, connection to existing skills, and support for rich, bodily-involved group activities.

We can expect that the range of tools and techniques will grow in the next few years. But profound research and sensitive design is needed to teach the richness of the traditional media.