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intro

In recent years concepts like 'co-creation', 'ethnography' and 'user participation' received a lot of attention in the realm of design. Companies recognize the importance of better understanding their customers; designers are looking for ways to enrich their understanding of the user's everyday life, to come up with better fitting designs.

title

Background of contextmapping

body

To achieve such understanding designers need more than the classic design brief or the usual, mostly quantitative and/or textual, marketing reports. Empathizing with the user and the context of use is equally important as to understand the functionalities of a product. This is often referred to as 'stepping into the user's shoes'. One approach to achieve this is to include users in the design team: co-creation. Another way is for the designer to immerse him/herself into the life of the user. A third possibility is to create a rich image of values and needs together with the user.

In practice time and money to really associate with users is often limited, therefore it is important to work effectively and efficiently. Simultaneously a lot of information needs to be gathered. Questions like who, what, where, when, why, how, with whom, how long, etc. instigate the process. However, there is no fully developed theory to be followed. It does not have to be complete, but a usable guide to help designers gain excess to the user's world; a map of the context, a contextmap.

Actions happen in a context: where is she, who is she calling?

"You must step into the user's shoes"

*A map as metaphor
to inform designers*

The contextmapping method builds such a map in three steps: Starting with a collection of data by using cultural probes and generative techniques. Next interpreting and structuring (analyzing) the data to develop insights, using qualitative research methods. Finally communicating the insights, focusing on both objective and subjective data.

Over the past five years the contextmapping group of ID-StudioLab has conducted research on these methods together with national and international industries and design agencies. The findings are applied in education almost immediately, like this Rich Insights! elective, but also in workshops, courses and through the website.
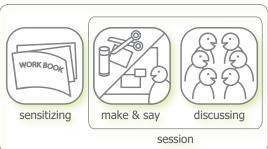
References

Sleeswijk Visser, F., Stappers, P.J., van der Lugt, R., Sanders, E.B.-N. (2005) Contextmapping: Experiences from practice. *CoDesign*, 1(2), 119-149
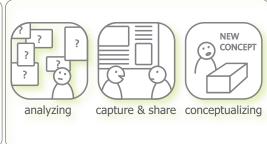
"I,m not inspired by your diagrams"
[R&D about marketing data]

The contextmapping process

preparing

sensitizing   make & say   discussing

session

analyzing   capture & share   conceptualizing

NEW CONCEPT

collecting user insights

share with and communicate to the design team