# Evaluating designs in action

Recap – course design.

Introducing Dr Bo

Recap – designerly change agents.

Recap – IDEO human-centred design.

*Why does being skilled at evaluating designs in action matter so much for generating design innovations?*

**3 spaces model.**

We fill the Inspiration Space with design knowledge: the activities that people do, how they do them, why they do them, how they use designed things and create their own designs, what works, what doesn’t, what they like, what they don’t – all of the aspects that matter to people concerning how they achieve their goals through action. This knowledge used to be stored in the heads of designers. Now, we create and present it in a space that is as open to all potential participants as possible – encouraging what in “communities of practice” theory is called “legitimate peripheral practice”.

From this knowledge, we can identify authentic, genuinely significant design challenges, and get inspiration as to how those challenges can and should be addressed with design ideas, to be developed in the Ideation Space (tested, refined etc.) into prototypes, that may be made real in the Implementation Space. We can learn from things that work well, things people like, the good designs, and cross-pollinate that knowledge into new design challenges that we can develop out of understanding the imperfect or unexplored aspect of the lives of real people.

But getting valuable design knowledge is the hardest work. It requires a combination of observation and participation (by all of the design participants), an inquiring attitude, diligence in recording, attention to detail, patience, care, ethics, and then an ability to organise, synthesise and gain insights from what has been discovered.

**Empathy slides**

Empathy is the key – not as some abstract, fluffy, new agey kind of thing, but as a method, allowing us to “Spark Innovation Through Empathic Design” – as Jon Kolko argues in “Well Designed” we can “use empathy to design products that people will love.”

Key to this is being able to identify, describe and evaluate designs in action – whether that is in the form of “design studies” or as less formal conversations about designs. And that means understanding designs within the context of the activities of real people. This can be complicated because the real world is a complex combination of designs-as-intended (by designers, who create the “affordances, constraints, enabling constrains, signifiers, processes, workflows etc.), designs-as-implemented (as they are modified in use), and designs-as-experienced (as they are interpreted and interacted with).

**4 aspects slide**

To navigate this complexity, we first focus upon people’s activities – a “human centric approach”. Activities are more or less intentional, directed, goal seeking behaviours, using designed things, creating fresh designs, and reflecting on their own actions. Often, by focussing on activities that people find satisfying, we can discover ways to improve activities that they have problems with. The classic example of this is IDEOs work to redesign children’s hospitals. We call this “cross-pollination”.

**Children’s hospital slide**

When we look at people’s activities (or reflect on our own), and the designed things that matter within them, we need some basic principles to apply in evaluating the value of designs. The “fit, stick, spread and grow” framework is a useful tool for doing this in a consistent way that everyone can understand.

**FSSG diagram**

There is a tendency to take a techno-centric approach to evaluating designs. This often appears as an application of Rogers’ *Diffusion of Innovations* model, with aberrant behaviours associated with “laggards”, when in fact we are really seeing a much broader, more diverse, range of activities, goals, cultures and values. We must understand and guard against these attitudes.

**Everett Rogers model 1 and 2**

**Tim Brown slide**

In *Change by Design*, Tim Brown argues that this techno-centric, or managerialist approach, is only capable of optimising existing designs. It cannot easily deal with changes in paradigm. It cannot discover significantly new and better practices. IDEO employ a wide range of people in order to ensure that they break away from the obvious, from cultural and psychological biases and technocentric thinking – including anthropologists, psychologists, artists, film makers,

**Lucy Suchman slide**

Lucy Suchman, a leading anthropologist (now at Lancaster University), worked for many years within the Xerox Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC) in California. The designers and engineers at PARC invented much of the modern world. She is, however, deeply critical of the techno-centric culture, that sees innovation as being produced in labs and corporate meeting rooms by white, male, heterosexual Americans, and pushed out to conquer the rest of the world. Suchman argues for a more critical, disruptive and distributive role for anthropology and design.

**Dori Tunstall slide**

In recent years, the “design anthropology” movement has brought designing together with “decolonized anthropology” to create an approach that Dori Tunstall calls “respectful design”. The aim is to respect the capabilities of people, especially indigenous cultures, to create designs that work for them in their own contexts. We should apply these principles to all kinds of designing – as cultural and political colonialism is everywhere.

We need to be especially aware of the value of details such as rituals, symbols, gestures, humour and the positioning the body, in constructing identities, making events manageable and meaningful, dealing with ambiguity and difficulty, and enabling risk and experimentation. Small things matter hugely.

Example – **ubiquitous computing slide**, **calm technology slide** (JSB and Andy Clark).

Mind map