Trello App:design evaluation

Victoria van der Mark

25 September 2015

This week's design review is about the mobile application Trello. Trello is a free business management application, in which (business) projects are represented by boards that contain several lists. These lists are categorized as "to do", "doing" and "done". Lists contain cards holding tasks; these cards can make their progress through the board by travelling from "to do" to "done" via "doing ". Each of these cards can be assigned to a user by using different colours.

1 Impression of the application

When opening the application for the first time, the user enters a visually simple layout, with only one item: "How to use Trello?". The tutorial turns out to be shaped as a Board, so the expalantions are immediately visible. The Board's lists are divided into three levels of mastery: Getting Started, Diving In and Mastering Trello.

Because of this hierarchy, the user can choose how deep he wants to dive into the material. Beginning users know where they may stop for not missing out on any basic functionalities and more experienced users explore Trello's *complexity* by discovering the possibilities step by step.

Even without reading the tutorial, the *most essential features are obvious.* The complex features are kept a bit beneath the surface. An example is the possibillity of creating default cards. This option can be found within the settings after scrolling down entirely. This is easy to find for experienced users, without causing beginners to panic.

One remark on the core features, is that it's not very clear that a card is clickable after creating it. There is no *affordance* that implies the possibility of pressing the card.

2 User Experience

2.1 Layout & Interface

The reason this app is quite intuitive, is because it fits well in its *context*. The layout is very much based on material design, yet kept personal by using their own colour scheme.

However, there are a few illogical elements:

When typing the name of a new card, the card is actually added by tapping on the "add"-button, right under the textfield. Only after adding several cards, one comes to notice that there is also the option of tapping the checkmark on the upper right of the screen. Apart from being very unnecessary, the checkmark is also strangely located (see figure 1).
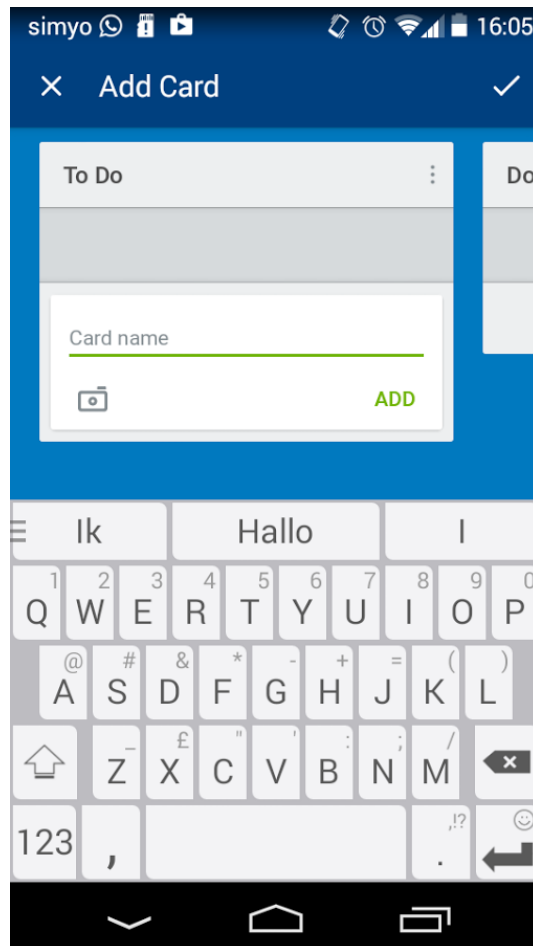

Figure 1: Two possibilities to add a card

When speaking of visual attention, the place where the user's attention is pointing at, is called the *locus of attention*. In this case, the attention is clearly drawn by the textfield one is typing in (and therefore the "add"-button right beneath it). All this makes the checkmark a strange design choice.

Then, there is also the theme of the settings menus. Trello uses three types of settings:

General Settings, Board Settings and List Settings. However, when clicking on a board, the possibility of entering the General Settings disappears, because of the replacement of the three vertical dots by three horizontal dots (which stand for board settings), as shown in figure 2.
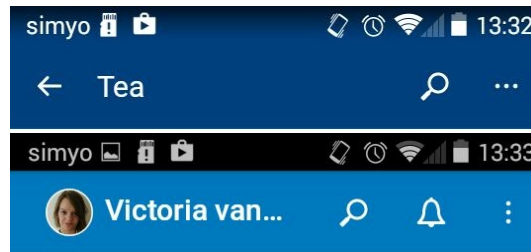

Figure 2: Horizontal vs vertical dots

General Settings such as "help!" should be available in every screen. A way of fixing this, could be by keeping the General Settings where they are, and keeping the Board Settings in a hamburger menu

These details, however, do not influence te visual rhythm of the app. A *visual rhythm* can be defined as creating a clear and obvious layout by placing elements on places where users expect them or can easily guess their location. This is accomplished by Trello by using evenly divided items within the main page, and equally divided horizontal whitespaces between lists within the boards. This provides peace for the eye and gives an uncluttered impression.

With this predictable layout, the app supports users' existing musle memory. A person's *muscle memory* contains the (un)conscious motorical patterns obtained in his life. Apart from supporting the existing memory, the app also allows users to create their own rhythms. By creating and modifying your own boards, a user can easily come to create motorical patterns for finding a specific card. One disadvantage is that the user cannot change the order that the boards appear in, within the start screen. This would've made it easier for users to create their own rhythms.

To improve the natural use of these rhythms, it could have been made easier to change between to different actions (rhythms), by reducing the amount of operations needed. An example of this is changing between boards. When, for example, choosing a colour for a card, it takes a lot of steps to get back to the main screen and pick a different board.

2.2 Customer care

There are a few design choices that can make an application pleasant to work with or simply annoying. A few elements of the app stand out concerning this subject:

- To start with, logging in is made very easy by offering the possibility of registering with your Google account. Most (android) users are already logged in on this account on their phone, so registering becomes a one-click operation.

  If a user doesn't have a google account, the register form is very short, asking only for your name, email and password. No emails that have to be read before being able to use your account, nor any restrictions on the layout of your password.

- Prompts asking for a response from the user and freezing the rest of the screen, have become unnecessary with the present-day options. Trello uses a combination of prompts and modern solutions.

  When adding a new board, a prompt appers in which the user has to type the new board's name. This is an example of an outdated solution. Within boards, Trello makes it look like they're not freezing the app by integrating the textfield in the screen. In fact, they are freezing functionalities that collide with entering a name (like swiping to another list), but they do allow the user to scroll within the list he's working in.

- Finally, the *posture* of the class is very important for the user experience. The posture can be thought of as the visual modes the app can turn on (full-screen, normal, etc). The app doesn't change shape in the entire user experience, so this is not very relevant for Trello.

  However, when adding a picture to a card, something illogical happens when clicking on it. Instead of enlarging the image withing the app, or even opening the Android Gallery, the app opens the image in a browser. Browsers are far from being the most ideal option to view an image, so this could be a point of improvement.

3 Cultural conformation

Symbols used in applications can have different meanings world wide. These include cultural meanings as well as religious meanings.

The application and its used symbols are almost fully based on the design choices of Google, by using their material design guidelines. Therefore, they only miss the mark where Google does, which is not common.

The more neutral a design is, the more people it possibly appeals to. Trello can be used by business people, as well as house moms. Using a neutral layout doesn't scare off any of those groups and make the app accessible for a larger group.