aligning concepts

Daniel Jackson · Autodesk Oslo Workshop · August 25-26, 2025

concepts in practice
deploying at scale

alignment between products
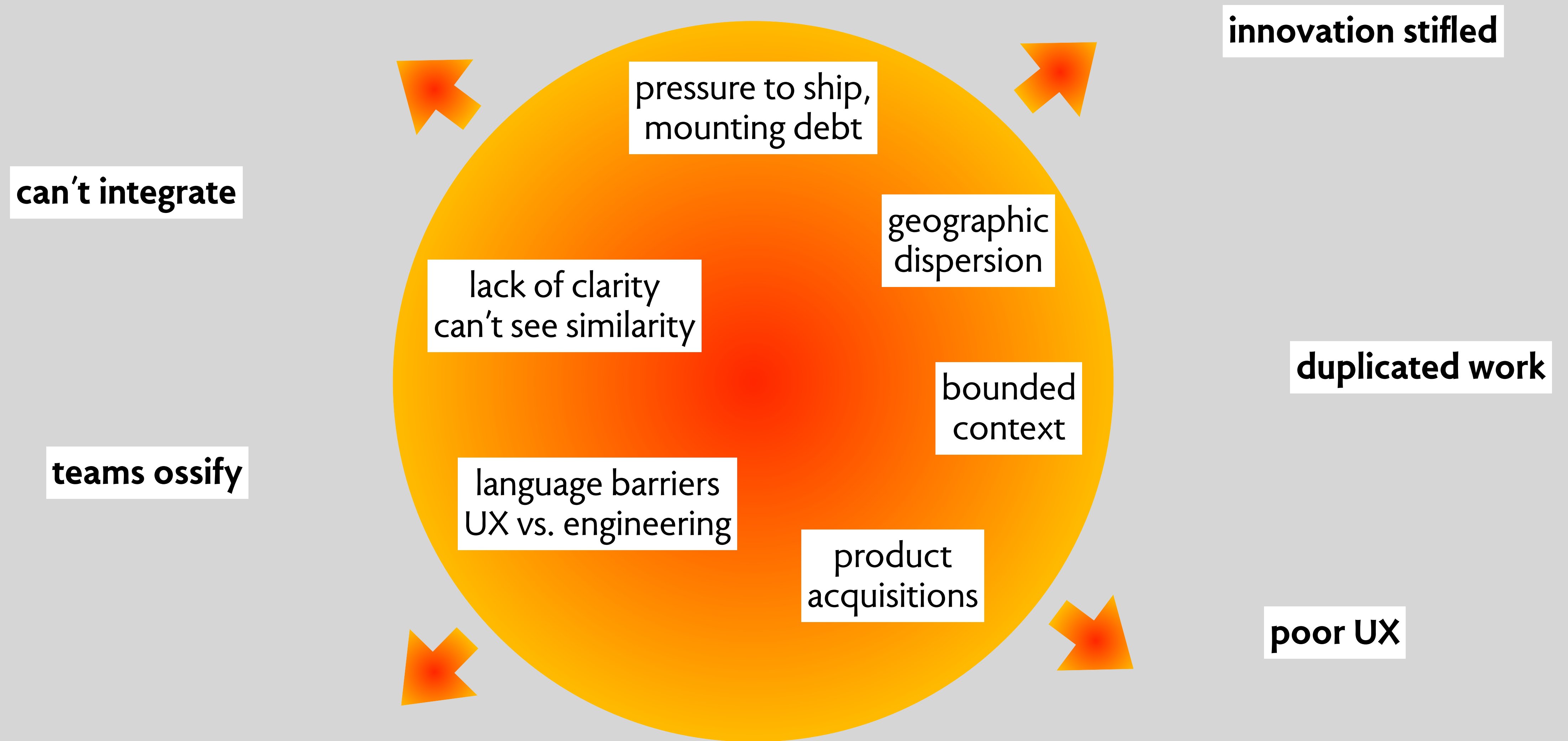

when the same function
appears in different products
it takes the **same** form

non alignment

product A

product B

product C

when the same function
appears in different products
it takes **different** forms

forces & effects of non-alignment

pressure to ship, mounting debt

geographic dispersion

lack of clarity can't see similarity

bounded context

language barriers UX vs. engineering

product acquisitions

innovation stifled

can't integrate

duplicated work

teams ossify

poor UX

an alignment strategy

concepts as assets
identify in current products
differentiators & leverage
embodiment of knowledge

concept catalog
create company-wide repo
a place for shared design
record shared concepts
track differences

concept owners
assign concepts to individuals
become experts & coordinators
help expand PM role

commit to reuse first
avoid reinventing wheel
look for familiar concept
during the design phase

separate concerns
ruthlessly, requirements on
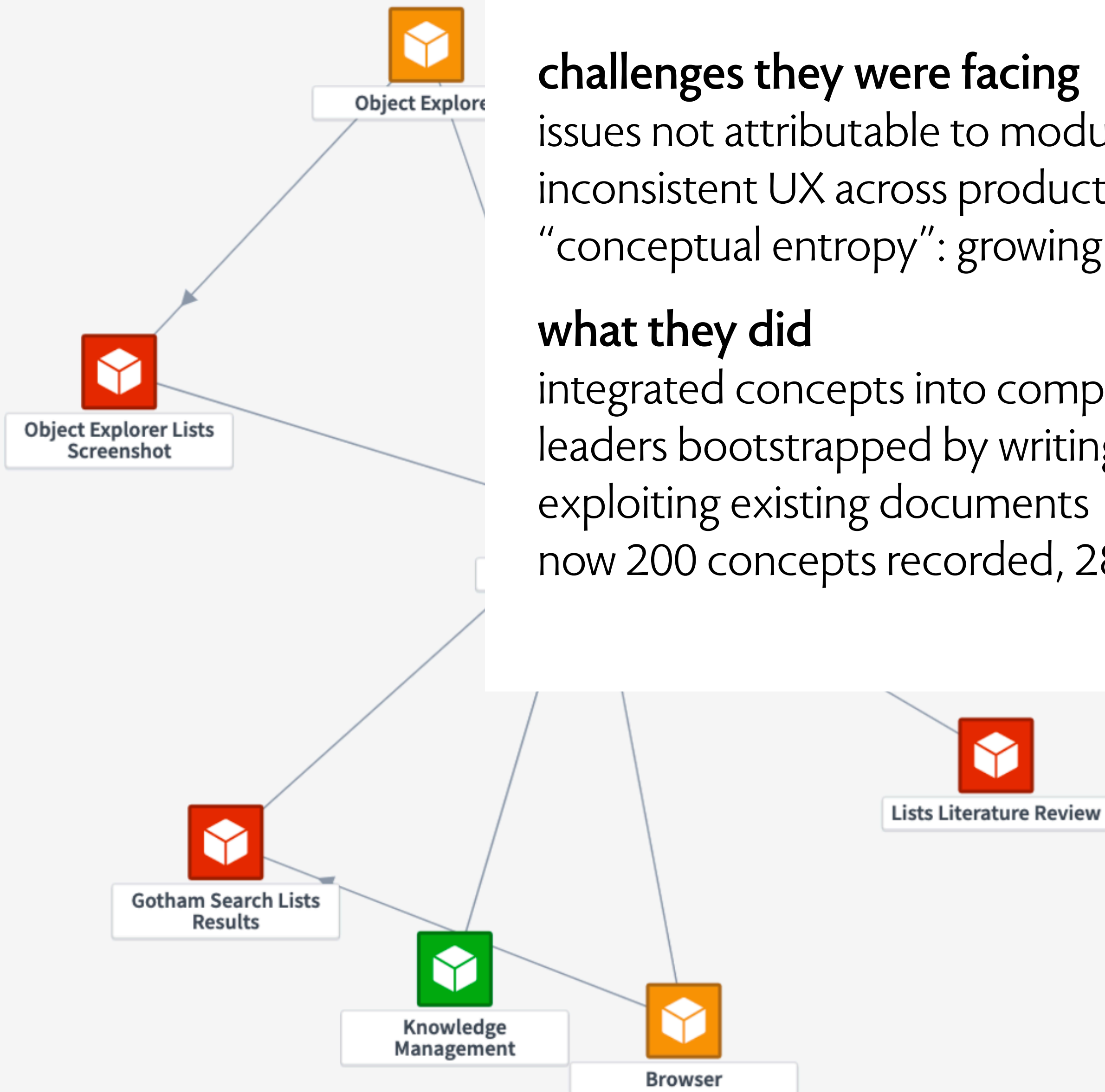the basis for modularity
starts with the familiar

Wilczynski et al, *Concept-centric Software Development*

challenges they were facing
issues not attributable to modules or even products
inconsistent UX across products for similar functions
"conceptual entropy": growing complexity

what they did
integrated concepts into company knowledge base
leaders bootstrapped by writing initial concepts
exploiting existing documents
now 200 concepts recorded, 280 regular users

Object Explore

Object Explorer Lists Screenshot

Lists Literature Review

Gotham Search Lists Results

Knowledge Management

Browser

A Concept Analysis of Open edX

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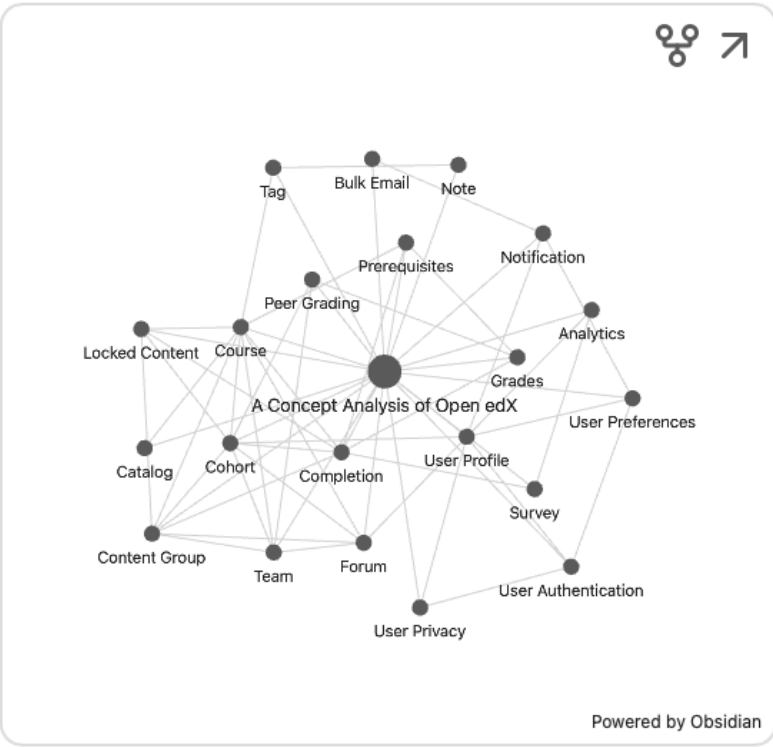November 20, 2024

Goals of project

The Axim Collaborative engaged me in a short project (of 8 days duration) to apply the principles of concept design to the Open edX platform. The goals of the project were to produce a high-level view of the existing functionality of the platform, and a critical analysis of the key elements of that functionality, noting areas of complexity and opportunities for improvement. The intent is for this to provide a fresh viewpoint that is complementary to the extensive work that has already been done (and is ongoing) by Axim's own product management, user experience and software architecture experts. As Axim conducts strategic planning exercises, these materials might not only contribute concrete observations but also will hopefully illustrate a new way to approach such a large and complex system, providing an initial structure that could be expanded to accommodate future analyses and investigations.

Overview of activities

My analysis of the platform's functionality was based on the following activities:

- **Reading documentation**. I read much of the help documentation, both the material aimed at learners and the material aimed at course authors. I also read much of the material on the Atlassian wiki, including: the product release notes and the discussions around them; the product management notes and discussions; the notes from various working groups; the notes describing the core principles of the platform.
- **Experimenting with the platform**. I perused the catalog of edX offerings on the 2U site,

INTERACTIVE GRAPH

ON THIS PAGE

http://publish.obsidian.md/axim