

Work Shop a design Methodology

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The Work Shop project has three core principals that set it apart from the standard mode 1 (ref.1) research method. In mode 2 (ref.2) the researcher is embedded in the context of the investigation, and as such their findings are not based on just observation but shared experience. This position in the knowledge transfer process adds extra levels of depth in quality of experience, and verification of data.

The second principal is that of making things. The use of designed objects for communication and dissemination is key to the level of quality interaction in engagements.

The third principal is the studio based element of the work. In this context studio is used as the primary form of communication between designers and participants. The space is utilised to externalise knowledge for synthesis and exchange.

The project was created by Irene McAra-McWilliam as a exploratory investigation into the future of Indigenous Business (ref.3). It takes the core concepts in Innovation from Tradition (ref.4) and Innovation from the Edge (ref.5) to look how design can be used to stimulate growth in the Scottish work sector for small to medium enterprise.

Phase one of this project was too become embedded in small business culture by placing an open door studio on the high street of the local town. This was to build a network of SME's that could verify and further our knowledge of Scotland's indigenous business sector. It operates under the premiss that anyone is welcome and if the door is open, the designers make them the focus of the engagement.

To integrate into the local culture the project had to operate as a small enterprise, not dealing in product and money but service and

time, this allowed us to experience the culture first hand and learn the language of small indigenous business. To achieve buy-in from the community the emergent element was made accessible and visible. Showing every influence from the community as a growth exercise for the project. This empowerment has created its own culture of small business that engages not just for the benefits of working with GSA but for the further development of the Scottish indigenous business sector.

Thanks to this approach the project did its direct marketing though word of mouth. The engagements have come in waves based on the circulating knowledge about the project. The first wave was the "curious", the local newspaper had highlighted the amount that was being invested in the Creative Futures Partnership. At this time many local people came to the studio to find out how it was going to be allocated and how much they would get? After sending this group away with correct information about GSA's investment in the region and the specifics of the Work Shop project they became the driver behind the grassroots exposure. The practical upshot up this, is that they selected the "interested" people, these interested were the small businesses that need help. After six months of engaging with this group there was a change in demographic and for the next few months many successful small businesses, who wanted to just share their knowledge, came to the studio to talk. After this period, the third wave brought social enterprises and charities to share their knowledge and access help from the project in a variety of forms.

Operating as a small indigenous business the project entered into an exchange economy with participants. We traded our traditional Design skills in exchange for knowledge and time. This worked with a high degree of success

leading to six strong case studies where the businesses in question committed to an embedded research program. We supported this approach through the co-exploration of the Indigenous Business Model. This was organic in nature and responded to particular needs, in each case the designers offered an understanding of their practice and when the appropriate situation arose in the exploration, participants felt comfortable requesting help.

For example Gleed 3D asked for help with prototyping a bespoke marketing artefact, and a short film about a research project with Western Australia University for their website. For Mindful forces we visualized their value mapping session to help co-develop a logo for their enterprise.

These trust building exercise lead to very comfortable conversations around the private sides of business. Personal Issues, pricing and finance are exposed in a willing manner and questions invited. Because we have the open development of a wider system, the Indigenous Business Model, that participants are contributing towards their understand of the worth of their knowledge for the greater good. In turn making the knowledge very accessible for us.

Design plays several roles in this engagement, we offer Design skills in exchange for participation. We use design to communicate and gather knowledge in the form of the Studio and the dissemination of the current understanding about indigenous business in the form of artefacts, objects, illustrations and stories.

Studio has been the biggest tool for communication and dissemination in these first stages. Placing a design studio on the high street of a small Scottish town has been an education process for the public. We endeavoured to create a personal, informal, focused environment that generates creativity and energy. Being situated on the high street, the public's projection of a "shop" space has bound the project to regular opening hours and constant accessibility. The advantage in this is a steady stream of people, averaging about three a day. Although accessible the

average demographic of high street shoppers are in their 70s and not the prime target group. Most of the people that make the pilgrimage to the Work Shop build it in to a journey with other destinations in town. For example being situated between the chemist and the bookies the majority of winter shop "drop-ins" are ill and on their way to pick up their prescriptions. The down side to this arrangement is the designer has to relinquish all control over their time. When the door opens the visitor has priority over all other activities.

The fundamental premise of this approach to design, is communication. As a designer/ researcher embedded in a project you may have very little knowledge of the subject being explored but the role of design is to help the participants understand the knowledge they have. Then articulate that knowledge in an accessible way for critical engagement. The use of designed artefacts and objects have played a key role in the engagements. In the exploratory phase, as each new section was uncovered, a tool and intervention strategy developed around those specific engagements. In each case this took the form of a designed object/ tool that was developed between designer and participants to meet a specific need in the engagement with a view to build a set that supports the development of a program for Indigenous Business development.

The last year of Work Shop has investigated rural Scotland's Indigenous Business model, developed a support structure for business growth based around the knowledge and supported by the tools. As a design method for engagement the Work Shop project fulfilled its brief for phase one. It provided a safe environment that opened up multiple conversations with local businesses to investigate and verify Scotland's work sector.

Phase two would be to consolidate the learning further and design a program that utilise the tools and strategy to stimulate growth in Scotland's work sector. This could be done through direct engagement with business, dissemination of knowledge grassroots and academic papers for policy makers based on impact.