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AGILE COLLISION CONCEPTS IN THE INNOVATION SPHERE IN THE HELSINKI REGION

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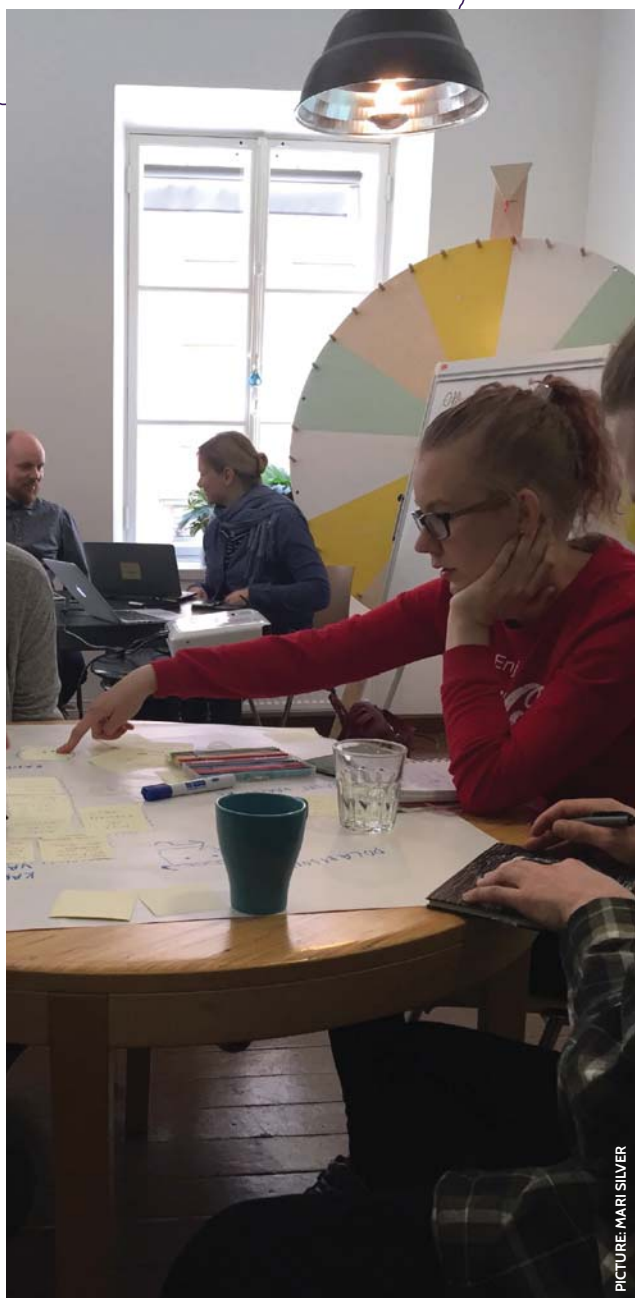

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TO UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT INNOVATION networks, innovation projects and how actors operate in these networks in the Helsinki region, Metropolia's MEDAIA research team conducted a background research in the spring-summer of 2016. Based on the results of the research, MEDAIA selected four agile collision concepts; Jams, Hackathon, Reverse Pitch, and Quick and Dirty, which were utilized in MEDAIA's grassroot innovation experiments in the Helsinki region. The purpose of this article is to introduce the background research and the four agile concepts that aimed at the collision of various actors such as students, startups, larger and well-established organizations, and companies in the wider Helsinki region.

THE TWO-YEAR MEDAIA PROJECT HAS SHOWN that the innovation scene and the many networks of various actors are well diverse by nature and still-growing in the Helsinki region. What MEDAIA came to understand was that innovations are not just one dimensional. There are varying understandings of innovations at the grassroots level as well as in literature. As Baregheh, Rowley and Sambrook (2009) state, each project and disciple tends to have their own distinctive one that they utilize. Therefore, for Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (Metropolia), it was important to define what is meant by innovations in order to reach the collision goals.

There were many agile collision concepts that can be used to collide numerous actors such as students, startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with larger well-established organizations and businesses that have more central position(s) in the innovation networks. During MEDAIA, Metropolia has established good relationships with various gatekeeper actors, such as media houses and corporations that operate inside the innovation networks, as well as with those less-central actors, such as students and startups that operate on the outskirts and outside of traditional innovation networks. Having good relationships with various actors from multiple backgrounds, sizes and positions in the networks has turned out to be beneficial in the collision efforts and will benefit the innovation networks in the long run in terms of idea and prototype development operations.

ACTORS AND NETWORKS IN THE INNOVATION SCENE

Actors who operate with and around innovations form various networks that intertwine, meaning that there is not just one innovation network to which every actor belongs to. All networks include various power-relations and innovation development projects, and not every actor has equal power and influence in all of the networks and projects. Network theory has been used to explain innovation and development arenas. Often cited author Castells (2009: 19) defines networks as sets of interconnected nodes that may have varying relevances to the networks, whereas Lewin (1947), one of the original network theory researches, pointed out that channels, aka networks, have no simple beginning and ending, but are circular in nature; they intertwine, and one channel can be part of another.

Networks consist of various actors with multiple interests, values and relationships (Meriläinen, 2014). Hudson (2001: 331) similarly argues that relationships are the building-blocks of networks, whereas Lin (1999:31) says that actors engage in interactions and networking in order to produce benefits. These benefits can be financial or otherwise power-related, which means that there are central and less-central actors in each network. Therefore the less-central actors, such as students and smaller business, e.g startups, sometimes need to be aided in order for them to collide with the central actors that have the resources in the innovation development projects such as financial power to help in prototyping projects.

It is important to keep in mind that innovations are not just based on IT or engineering but created by people, which is why agile collision concepts must take a more human-centric approach. Thus, it's crucial to understand that employees and students who develop innovation ideas and prototypes can feel exhausted and disempowered if organizations and the top level management especially are not willing to provide breaks for employees in between intensive innovation creation processes or decline to give positive feedback and positive reinforcement to employees (Chung, Choi and Du, 2017). Thus, to understand innovation networks, it's equally vital to understand the processes which lead to innovations instead of the just the final projects from the point of view of engineering, product design or IT.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

In order for Metropolia to be part of the innovation networks in the Helsinki region and to be able to use agile collision concepts in an effective manner, it was vital to gain theoretical as well as practical understanding of networks and innovations at the start of the MEDAIA project. Metropolia wanted to create opportunities for various actors, such as students and small startups, to take part in the innovation networks and to participate in the innovation projects, given that Metropolia recognizes the great value that students and startups have in the idea-development sphere and preto/prototyping projects. Metropolia wanted to assist in the collision of various actors but it was first crucial to understand exactly where and how MEDAIA's assistance was needed.

To meet meet these goals, Metropolia's MEDAIA research team, consisting of students from digital communication and design and supervised by teachers from Metropolia working for the MEDAIA project, conducted a background research in the spring-summer of 2016.

The purpose for the research was:

1. to understand organizations' innovation projects and activities
2. to understand organizations' innovation development plans
3. to understand the networks they operate in and/or wish to operate in regarding innovation activities.

RESULTS

For the background research, 24 organizations were interviewed. The interviewed organizations were startups, expert organizations and communities, businesses from various fields, cooperation accelerators and Finnish universities.

The results from the interviews tell us that:

1. There is a need among organizations for assistance with quick and agile development of innovation ideas and procedures. Currently, it takes too long from development of ideas into actual innovations - real world products and/or services, and as a result, the innovation development projects tend to be slow. Sometimes the slowness even kills innovations.

2. There is a need for an experimental culture. Currently, organizations are afraid to fail, financially or otherwise, which has negative impacts on the development culture and represses the experimental culture.

3. There is a need to break away from the one-person-driven development culture. Organizations wish to move towards a more cooperative and multi-field innovation culture that includes integrated participatory factors from all levels of the organization.

4. There is a need for more cooperation with multiple actors. For this to succeed, there is an additional need for assistance in external communication. Currently, the innovation project development tends to slow down after the first initial meeting because there is no support or no-one to keep the communication going.

5. There is a need for support with long term and guided cooperation. Without any support, cooperation projects may fade into the oblivion. In other words: nothing gets done in the end.

What these findings told Metropolia was that there is a strong desire to develop innovation projects that are supported by an integrated communication and development approach internally and externally. Organizations want to develop innovations in a multi-fied manner with various actors but lack the capacity, manpower and time to take innovation ideas and pretotypes to the testing and prototyping phases. Additionally, organizations wish to promote experimental culture more, while they admit that financial and other resource-based pressures are prohibiting this. As a result, the preto- ja prototyping culture in the organizations does not flourish as it should, which in practice means that innovations cannot be generated. Organizations are aware of their shortcomings in the innovation networks. Most of the interviewees want to emphasize innovation culture and therefore wished for more support in:

- the development of ideas
- promoting experimental and prototyping culture
- having possibilities to meet with possible project partners, such as SMEs and students
- communication activities.

Based on the results of the background research, Metropolia started to look for agile collision concepts which could be utilized in MEDAIA's grassroot innovation experiments in the Helsinki region. As a result of the interview study, Metropolia used four collision concepts that targeted the needs of various organizations operating in the innovation networks in the wider Helsinki region.

AGILE INNOVATION CONCEPTS

Jams

The purpose of Jams is to spread information between various groups, such as students, companies and third sector organizations, that do not belong to the same networks or normally meet or associate with each other. In this way the Jams concept functions as a distributor of information and as a link between

the different actors in the process in which students, organisations and businesses receive information, and hopefully as a result, helps develop innovation ideas into concepts in a multi-field fashion. This concept is useful for facilitating multi-field and multidisciplinary cooperations and distributing information between actors coming from various fields. For students especially, Jams offer a great opportunity for receiving information and for colliding and networking with actors with the resources to create and sustain cooperations and prototyping projects. This way students are, for example, able to learn about new open data packages, etc. Jams last between 2-4 hours and are facilitated by experts from the field(s) in question. In Metropolia's Jams, the participants were a company that focused on 3D modelling, visualization and consulting, Helsinki Region Transport (HSL) service, and students from various disciplines.

Hackhaton

The purpose of a Hackathon is to provoke and to increase the understanding of various issues and of problem-solving via facilitated collision. In Hackathon, actors from various fields and backgrounds are encouraged to collaborate as they first learn about a real-world problem, get to know each other's areas of expertise and then map out solutions to the problem(s) utilizing their individual expertise. Participants are divided into smaller groups in order to really facilitate problem-solving and to create actual problem-solving cooperation between various actors coming from different backgrounds. The aim is to generate multidisciplinary and multi-field problem-solving that is innovative in the manner that it addresses the problems in question. Hackathon relies on an experienced facilitator who can inspire and get people involved especially when they might at first be hesitant to cooperate with actors coming from completely different backgrounds. The participants at Metropolia's Hackathon were students and local actors from Arabianranta, Helsinki.

Reverse Pitch

The purpose of Reverse Pitch is to enable actors, such as students or startups, to pitch their concepts or solutions to different problems directly to companies and organizations. The Reverse Pitch concept allows for organizations and corporations to look for capable employees with new ideas to be utilized by the employer in a development project. In a Reverse Pitch, organizations and corporations pitch the need for a new service/product or for a solution to a specific problem to the participants, who then work on it for a day or two. After the given time, the solutions and/or new products/services are presented to the organization/company who in turn give feedback to the participants and get to decide which participant they might perhaps hire to continue working on the development project. In Metropolia's Reverse Pitch, the participants were students from various fields and Yle, the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

Quick and dirty

The 'Quick and Dirty' method is made famous by Google's Alberto Savoia. The purpose of Quick and Dirty is to develop pretotypes of product(s) and/or service(s) as fast as possible. Quick and Dirty relies on good design and enables participants to concentrate on creating and developing pretotypes as quickly as possible without having to worry about distractions such as funding or interruptions at the workplace. The key of Quick and Dirty

is to allow ideas that lead to actual pretotypes to flow freely, which also means that the pretotypes can be unpolished and even 'ugly' in the conventional sense. In Metropolia's Quick and Dirty, the participants were students from Metropolia, OP Bank and two startup companies from the Helsinki region.

CONCLUSIONS

Metropolia tested four collision concepts that promote cooperation between different actors. There are various innovation networks in the Helsinki region which house multiple actors from students and SMEs to bigger and well-established corporations and organization. These actors desire to work together but lack the capacity to create cooperations or to even meet with each other. MEDAIA recognized its role as a creator and aider of collision between various actors. Additionally, MEDAIA strove to spread information between various actors and to encourage dialogue and interaction between actors from different corners of the innovation networks in order to create a shared interest in cooperation.

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