



Illustration: Kirsten Bonde Sørensen

Using Creativity to Enhance Consumer Awareness

An Industrial Ph.D. project involving the Danish savings bank Middelfart Sparekasse and Kolding School of Design aims to design tools that draw on the creativity in our thinking and reflections. Specifically, Ph.D. scholar Kirsten Bonde Sørensen seeks to develop a new service for current and prospective customers to help them uncover their unrecognised knowledge and emotions and make them more aware of their own needs and values. The project also aims to illustrate a new type of consumer communication that is not about persuasion but rather about making consumers aware of their own values and dreams.

By Hans Emborg Bünemann

In her Industrial Ph.d. project at the savings bank Middelfart Sparekasse, Kirsten Bonde Sørensen intends to develop a new and different service that reflects the bank's world view and values. The service will also constitute a new form of consumer communication.

“The point is not to persuade the customers to purchase certain products but rather to develop a tool, based on creativity, for making customers more aware of their own values and needs,” says Kirsten Bonde Sørensen.

Customers' Values and Dreams

In her project, Kirsten Bonde Sørensen studies how workshops

can be used to pave the way for non-designers to use creativity as a reflective instrument in their everyday work. She says,

“Through my creative workshops with the bank's current and prospective customers I have discovered that many people seem to have values and perceptions of economic issues that have been handed down to them from their parents or grandparents. They might be profoundly influenced by sayings such as ‘easy come, easy go’ or ‘a penny saved is a penny earned’, and many live by – or in opposition to – these values. I have met high-income career women who hide their shoes in the closet because they feel guilty about spending money, even though they can easily afford it. And men who complain about the wife spending money on a new summer dress but see nothing wrong with buying a new hunting rifle for themselves.”

Kirsten Bonde Sørensen says that these underlying perceptions of money and economic issues can be limiting and even burdensome for people and may prevent them from living out their dreams. Therefore, it is important to understand and be aware of one's dreams and values, also with regard to money and economic issues.

Tools for Reflection

In the creative workshops Kirsten Bonde Sørensen uses so-called generative tools, methods known from user studies where they are used as conceptual tools. The purpose of the generative tools is to help people reflect on their own experiences, dreams and values through creative and visual means. One such tool might be a box with creative assignments and questions concerning eco-



Workshop with generative tools

In addition to questions about the given topic, the tools available to the participants in the generative workshops may include a selection of materials for creative expression.

Illustration: Kirsten Bonde Sørensen

conomic issues, which the participants have to address using scissors, paper, glue, crayons, pictures, letters, headlines, illustrations etc. Kirsten Bonde Sørensen explains that the point of the method is that the generative tools appeal to the emotional side of our personal experiences, knowledge and values. They also appeal to our creativity and deeper layers of consciousness.

“I stage experiments for reflective as well as unreflective users,” says Kirsten Bonde Sørensen. “The participants create a variety of visual expressions, for example collages. When I interview them before and after these creative sessions, in my experience the participants have often developed a higher degree of awareness of their own values and perceptions of money and economic issues.”

Fixed Perceptions

Kirsten Bonde Sørensen uses the term fixation from cognitive psychology to explain where the challenge lies. Traditional user involvement rarely produces novel ideas because we are fixated or set in our views and perceptions.

“Our ability to think outside the box and imagine novel pos-

sibilities is limited by our prior knowledge. In interviews with the bank’s current and prospective customers, when I ask them how they imagine a future bank, they’ll say things like ‘open till 10 p.m.’ or ‘improved online access from home’ – that is, more of what they already know rather than actual innovations,” says Kirsten Bonde Sørensen. “The generative tools speak to a consciousness that exists on a deeper level than the language centre and thus offer a means of reaching beneath our explicit knowledge and automated responses.”

A Dialogue With Oneself

The study expands the generative tools as a means of using human creativity and visual expressions to enhance our capacity for reflection. Kirsten Bonde Sørensen is currently exploring how

“If I’m able to design tools that actually help people – even people who claim that they’re not creative – to engage in a dialogue with themselves about important issues in their life, such as their personal values, then I have reached my goal,” she says

she might refine these tools to develop new and different bank services. The intention is not – as in traditional user studies – to use input from the creative sessions as part of an innovation process. Rather, the method in itself might become a new service for the users.

The Industrial Ph.D. Programme

An Industrial Ph.D. project is a company-focused project that is carried out in cooperation between a private company, a Ph.D. scholar and a university. The initiative for such a project may come from the Danish Centre for Design Research and the four schools associated with the DCDR, from a company or from a prospective Ph.D. scholar with a good idea for a project.

The company

- hires the Ph.D. scholar full-time for three years and receives a wage subsidy of DKK 14,500 per month throughout the three-year project period
- designates one or more qualified members of staff as company supervisor(s) for the Ph.D. scholar

The Danish Centre for Design Research / the university

- provides academic supervisor(s) and a workplace for the Ph.D. scholar
- receives a subsidy of DKK 252,000 a year for supervision hours, Ph.D. courses, administration costs and costs associated with arranging the Ph.D. defence

The Industrial Ph.D. scholar

- carries out a research project of direct relevance to the company
- divides his or her time roughly 50/50 between the company and the university

You can read more about the Industrial Ph.D. programme here:
<http://en.fi.dk/research/industrial-phd-programme>

For additional information, please contact Research Coordinator Hans Emborg Büneemann (heb@dcd.dk) at the Danish Centre of Design Research.

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Human Values

Middelfart Sparekasse embraced the idea of working with human values as early as 1991. Since then, the bank has undergone a process revolving around value-based management, ethical accounting and self-management. The bank has hosted two previous Industrial Ph.D. projects, which made important contributions to a process that in 2007 made the international consultancy and analysis firm Great Place to Work select the bank as Europe’s best financial workplace. HR Director Herbert Sørensen is responsible for working with staff values and acts as the company supervisor for Kirsten Bonde Sørensen. He says,

“The Industrial Ph.D. scholars are brilliant minds with tremendous dedication and a lot to offer. They offer us invaluable access to the university environments, and in a very concrete sense they are key to the bank’s organisational development.”

Self-Management for the Customers

Herbert Sørensen explains that Kirsten Bonde Sørensen’s project will be used to take the organisational development with its principle of self-management all the way to the bank’s customers. The generative tools that she is currently developing and testing should enable the customers to take charge and become aware of their needs, he says.

“People are only free to act freely once they have a good understanding of their own situation and dreams. Kirsten’s project lets us act as a coach for the customer and use dialogue to help them use reflection to uncover their own values and possibilities.”



Kirsten Bonde Sørensen.
Photo: Lars Bech.

Cover illustration: The strategic design process.

Kirsten Bonde Sørensen’s Industrial Ph.D. project lies within the research field strategic design, which explores how design, particularly design thinking, can be applied in business development processes. Strategic design involves a holistic approach that incorporates business aspects as well as softer, value-oriented aspects in and around the company. Only at a relatively late stage in the process is the problem identified, and the concept and possible solutions are defined.

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DANISH CENTRE FOR DESIGN RESEARCH

The Danish Centre for Design Research DCDR comprises the design researchers at the Aarhus School of Architecture, The Danish Design School, Designskolen Kolding and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. The DCDR aims to contribute to establishing a strong design research environment in Denmark and to strengthen the exchange of knowledge about design research and facilitate the identification of potential areas of collaboration for researchers, schools and enterprises, on a national as well as an international level.

MIND DESIGN

Mind Design, DCDR Webzine is published once a month and features articles and interviews about current Danish and international design research. Mind Design aims to present design research and research findings from researcher to researcher as well as from researchers to design practitioners in general. The webzine is free of charge. Please see www.dcdr.dk/uk/minddesign

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