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Value Pursuit

A tool for structuring conversation and encouraging collaboration in stakeholder networks

As companies move from providing specific products to providing a combination of products and services, their networks expand to include professionals from different fields than their own. In practice, this means collaborating with individuals with a completely different background and agenda. Value Pursuit is the outcome of a research project investigating how tangible tools can be designed to make complex networks more understandable to the stakeholders operating within them; ultimately building trust and encouraging collaboration between them.

Karianne Rygh (MDes)

Intervening in networks through strategic design

Within the global economy the service sector is growing at a rapid pace, calling upon designers to expand their traditional roles in order to help address complex problems and build bridges between previously separate disciplines. This is in part because their designs cannot be successful without, for instance, also addressing complex restructuring of the organisations that have to implement the designs. 'Design Thinking' is one way designers are providing added value to firms trying to innovate, and to societies wanting to create change (Kimbell, 2011). Within this context, how can practitioners from different disciplines find a common language and common ground?

As a Research Associate in the Readership in Strategic Creativity at Design Academy Eindhoven, I have contributed a year of research to the project PSS 101, under the Creative Industry Scientific programme (CRISP), investigating how designers can take on more strategic roles in supporting complex networks. CRISP is a Dutch national research programme spanning eight research projects, in which Design Academy Eindhoven collaborates with three Technical Universities, two Universities in Amsterdam and over 50 industry partners, design companies and service providers.

The PSS 101 is one such project, where researchers (from the Technical University of Delft and Design Academy Eindhoven) and partner companies (Océ, ZuidZorg, Exact, Connect and Innovate and STBY) aim to develop a framework and tools improving networked collaboration across industries. Looking beyond the idea of products as just products and services as only services, the focus goes beyond the traditional paradigms of product design and service design and

works towards a combination of the two: Product Service Systems (PSS). Together with the industry partners in CRISP we have defined three more strategic roles that designers can adopt in networks collaborating to create PSS: making ideas tangible and understandable (visualizer); facilitating the connections between people or parties (connector); and instigating change (instigator).

Over de auteur



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Studio Rygh. After completing a Bachelor of Industrial Design at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, Karianne went on to pursue a Master in Social Design at the Design Academy Eindhoven, where her graduation thesis was entitled, 'Choice within the Making', a thesis on converting carpentry skill-training in prisons into a tangible tool fostering reflective thinking. Karianne has a background in governmental institutions in Norway in addition to professional design experience in large organisations, and her interest is in how designers can take on new roles and change mindsets by designing on a systemic level.

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Dossier Design games

Using my background in industrial design I have investigated how the use of tangible tools can foster a better understanding of networks producing PSS for the stakeholders operating within them, while simultaneously building and maintaining trust and encouraging collaboration. The outcome has been the workshop tool 'Value Pursuit' (figure 1) which uses a game-board and playing pieces to align expectations and goals amongst stakeholders, aiming to disrupt the standard means of communication.

Designers as key stakeholders

Through the role of a visualizer, making ideas tangible and more understandable often includes some kind of visualization where the making of these visualizations is often also part of the conversation between the stakeholders. Berit Linquist (2014), service design researcher at Oslo School of Architecture and Design, describes the visualizer role in her article 'The tricky intersection between design and business', but emphasizes that this role certainly moves beyond only visualizing information or making appealing aesthetics; designers have the ability to design tools that enable others to visualize what they are saying, encouraging understanding across 'silos'.

Taking on the role of 'connector', designers can enable people to connect beyond their own disciplines and then broker collaborations between them. Once such connections are established, designers have the ability to instigate change by making new insights, opportunities and ideas tangible, and in doing so, creatively disrupting traditional forms of communication. Through knowing where to intervene and which elements to make concrete, it is possible to assist companies in adopting new approaches that don't immediately fit into their pre-defined models, as is often the case with new services.

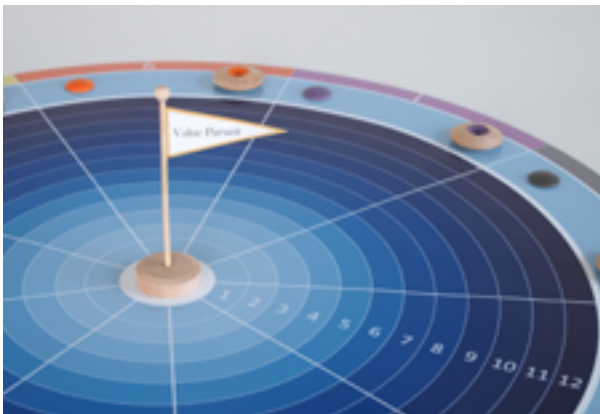


Figure 1. Value Pursuit – a tool for structuring dialogue on expectations, contributions and struggles within networks of stakeholders producing Product Service Systems

'In a large organisations (...) collaboration between departments is often based on tried and tested procedures (...) documented in manuals and templates. However, when trying to develop something that is new to the organisation that requires new ways of working – the existing ways of working efficiently may actually hinder evolution.' (Wierda, 2014)

In order to connect with the company and its stakeholders, build a relationship of trust, and to know where disruptive innovations might be beneficial, designers in the previously mentioned roles need to become key stakeholders taking part in the conversation from the start.

What makes networks successful?

In the PSS 101 project, as a designer I have had the opportunity to become such a key stakeholder, being involved in the conversations concerning PSS networks from the beginning. As a result, I have been able to learn about key success factors from the industry partners, as they were being identified. A partner from Océ pointed out during a PSS 101 workshop that in their experience, when creating PSS in networks, whether inside or between organisations, success crucially depends on three factors: (1) each stakeholder involved must have an understanding of the value to be gained from the networked collaboration, (2) they must be able to express their needs clearly, and (3) they must understand the other stakeholders' expectations.

In PSS networks, every stakeholder adds value in the form of experience and knowledge with regard to the development and roll-out of new service concepts. In theory, these networks can be a reservoir of expertise from different professional disciplines available to all network partners, but due to a lack of common language and an understanding of each other's goals and interests, this reservoir is rarely tapped into.



Figure 2. Moving from the outside and in towards the center, participants write their expectations, contributions and struggles on post-it notes and place them on the board



Figure 3. After filling in the board, participants are encouraged to place their contributions on other participants' struggles, making new connections between stakeholders

As relations of value within PSS networks are created by individual people as extensions of the companies they represent, trust affects how resources are shared within a network as it affects a person's ability to convey experience and communicate how this expertise can be used. One approach to building trust in networks is by expanding the stakeholders' overview of how their individual efforts contribute to the success of a PSS. Stakeholder maps (e.g. Stickdorn and Schneider, 2010) relate to these factors and give an overview of network relations. They do not, however, convey which relations are of actual value nor where new connections can be made.

Facilitating collaborations to evolve into valuable endeavors

To give stakeholders a better overview and understanding of the fact that value and common goals can have a different meaning for different stakeholders, Value Pursuit offers a practical, hands-on intervention based on a deep understanding of the dynamics at play in networks. The tool consists of two 'game boards'. The first is designed to collect information about how participants in a network can benefit from and support each other. The second game board visualizes these gains and contributions on a real-time 'radar', indicating the balance of contributions and gains in order to trigger further discussion.

Moving inwards from the outside on the first Value Pursuit board (figure 2), participants are asked to write down on post-it notes what their expectations, contributions (experience, expertise, solutions) and struggles (challenges or obstacles) are, in developing a specific PSS, or in reaching the defined common goal. After placing their answers on the board, participants are encouraged to take a sticker of their colour and place it on other participants' struggles, indicating where they can be of benefit to that specific stakeholder (figure 3).

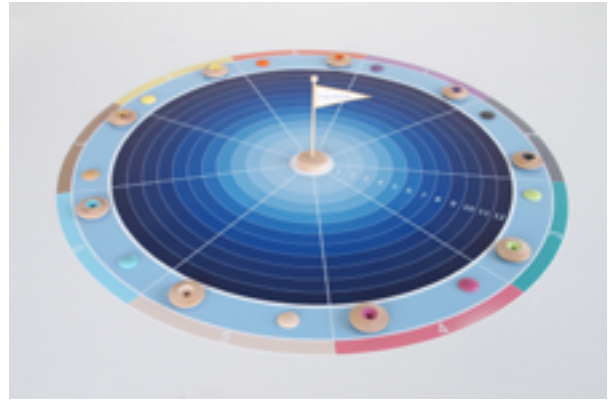


Figure 4. The new connections of value are counted and placed on a real-time 'radar' where a large playing piece represents the stakeholders' gains and a small playing piece represents stakeholders' contributions

By matching contributions to other stakeholders' struggles, new relations of value are established. In order to gain an overview of these potential exchanges in the network, these connections are counted and indicated on the 'radar' (figure 4). Each participant has a large playing piece, representing the number of potential contributions they can gain from other participants, and a small piece representing the contributions they have offered to others. For a network to thrive and for trust to be maintained between network partners, these playing pieces should be aligned as much as possible. However, this visualization is not an accurate measurement, but rather a trigger for conversation. How much a person gains from a network should be balanced against his/her contributions.

Handing over the facilitation

A prototype of an online Value Pursuit Platform has been developed together with the design research agency and project partner, STBY. This platform makes the information and connections gained through the VP workshop accessible in an interactive, visual way, to all participating stakeholders. In this way, the designer (facilitator) has designed him/herself out of the activity, so that the participants can continue their collaboration independently through the use of this online value map. The Value Pursuit tool has also been made accessible through open source and can easily be downloaded and produced at any local FabLab¹ (figures 5a and 5b).

Case studies

To test the contributions of Value Pursuit, four case study workshops were conducted targeting a range of different sized networks of stakeholders. The number of participants ranged from 6-9 and in the two case studies described in this article, one explored an internal network within a company, whilst the other

¹ For more information, please visit www.crispplatform.nl.



Figure 5a. The Value Pursuit tool can be easily downloaded and produced at any local FabLab

Figure 5b. The Value Pursuit real-time radar representing the balance of contributions and gains in a network

concerned a more complex network of stakeholders outside the organisation.

Case study #1 – Internal stakeholders within the company VanMorgen

For VanMorgen, a service innovation company of care organisations ZuidZorg and Proteion, experiences that, as with most companies, acquisition of new projects is an important task that employees must excel at in order to keep the company in business. Employees working with acquisitions at VanMorgen were experiencing several challenges and the company therefore wished to explore how they could improve on this as a team. Meetings and workshops had previously been held on this subject, but they had been unsuccessful in pinpointing the deeply rooted struggles lowering the number of acquisitions (figure 6).

As the Value Pursuit game-board structures conversations through allocating one 'slice' of the board to each participant, in the VP workshop the team experienced that everybody's voice was heard which in turn facilitated conversation as it made everyone's input equal. Individuals who rarely spoke up in regular meetings, opened up and added valuable insights, not only on the expectations and struggles relating to professional skills, but also skills on a more individual level. The team found that certain people were good at communication but struggled with the aftermath (reports etc.), while others were completely opposite. Pinpointing these individual skills can help build better teams and use qualifications more efficiently.

One of the more interesting findings was that VanMorgen was actually considering hiring external expertise for certain tasks. However, through use of the 'contributions' section of the Value Pursuit it was revealed that these skills did in fact exist within the team, just not with the individuals they anticipated.

'We haven't managed to talk about these things in previous meetings. I'm surprised that a simple piece of paper on the table can make this happen.' (workshop participant)

Through the Value Pursuit, each person gained a new understanding of who within the team they could approach for necessary assistance, lowering the threshold for approaching others for help or advice. As everyone had aired their opinions, the team got to know each other better as a whole. Certain people had indicated many contributions while others had only stated one. This was a good trigger for discussion on how contributions could be increased depending on other people's struggles. Following the workshop, the Value Pursuit tool has been frequently used by VanMorgen whenever there has been a project meeting requiring collaboration.

Case study #2 – External stakeholders² of the Province of North Brabant

The regional government of North Brabant is responsible for developing a new five-year policy within their network to assist in facilitating the

² Participants: Provincie Noord Brabant (regional government), Brabant Water (regional water supplier), Brabants Landschap (nature charity), Breda City Council, Waterschap de Dommel (regional water board), ZLTO (regional farmers association), facilitated by design research agency STBY.



Figure 6. Internal stakeholders in VanMorgen health care interacting through the Value Pursuit tool

expansion of responsibility for water management onto a larger number of stakeholders. The Province invited other stakeholders to a round-table discussion and exercise in aligning expectations and goals prior to the development of the new plan. This plan intended to sanction joint responsibility and enable a joint force to put policy into action. Whilst previously the responsibilities had been concentrated on a few key stakeholders, the making of water policy and its execution would now be spread over a wider number of stakeholders. The main goal of the workshop was to explore how stakeholders could collaborate in new ways in order to develop a new Provincial Water Plan for 2016-2020 (figure 7).

In this workshop the Value Pursuit tool provided a clear overview of the network, issues to be debated, and stakeholders' expectations and agendas. A key insight from the workshop was that the VP tool assumes that propagating openness and transparency is good, which is not necessarily true in policy making. In networks such as these, the stakeholders have to negotiate certain elements of the policy that are familiar to all. However, in negotiations, transparency and openness can be counterproductive. Stakeholders, who know each other very well, give and take in a controlled way during negotiations, taking care not to say something that can work against them later. STBY however,

identified other instances where Value Pursuit is well suited for the future development of networks – particularly where design thinking is needed in order to address an unfamiliar topic or theme; when dealing with larger complex problems that require aspects that urgently need change to be identified; when innovation is greatly needed; or when new stakeholders come into the network. The VP approach works very well in these situations because openness and transparency are valued and required. The tool got new stakeholders up to speed on the current situation of the network they had entered.

'As a new stakeholder, this workshop provided me with an overview and easy access to the key topics of interest of the other stakeholders. Normally, this information would not be as accessible to me since I'm not "one of the boys" yet in the network.' (workshop participant)

Furthermore, by structuring their conversation and stimulating reflection, the VP tool assisted stakeholders in gaining an overview since new themes needed to be identified. In this workshop, the use of the real-time radar was successful, as the alignment of the playing pieces triggered discussion on the level of contributions and gains within the network. Certain participants went back to the first game-board to see where they could offer more contributions, so that the playing



Figure 7. Civil servants connected to the Province of North Brabant align expectations and goals regarding management policy making using the Value Pursuit tool

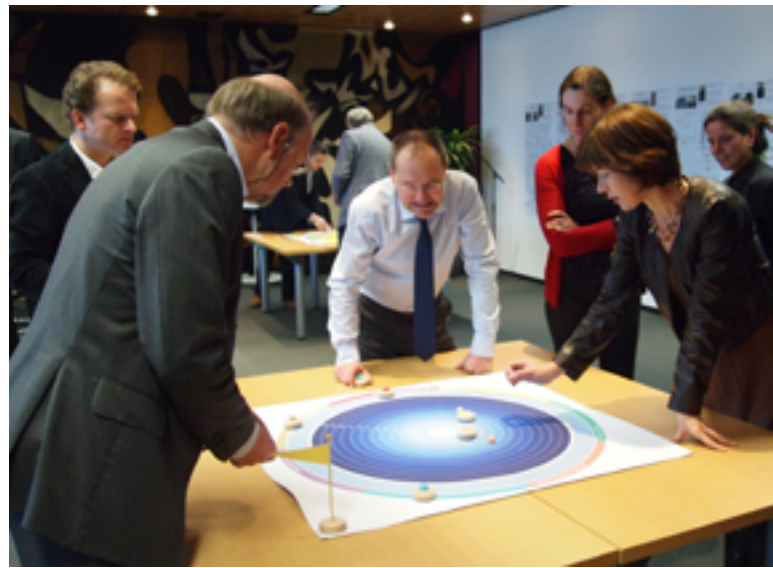


Figure 8. Workshop participants visualize the number of potential gains and contributions within their network of stakeholders

piece could be more in balance on the radar (figure 8).

'The new-comer stakeholder didn't receive any "dots" to start off with, but towards the end of the workshop this changed. After it became apparent through the visualization that they had not received any potential contributions, it prompted everyone else to see what they could contribute.' (workshop participant)

Conclusion

The case studies of Value Pursuit have shown that involving a designer, and tangible tools in this way was new to the companies and organizations involved. However, the result was that they were often surprised by how effectively the game-board could structure the conversation and how efficiently they could reach the core topics that directly influenced their collaboration. Value Pursuit has provided one approach that assists participants in finding a common language by visualizing how their value is potentially paying off and how it could be implemented in new areas. In visualizations such as this, analysis and synthesis are always an integral part of the designer's role and underpin it (Kimbell, 2011). Capturing the dynamics of these relations in the VP real-time radar, contributed a new way of understanding what role each individual plays, which is key to keeping a network 'alive' and productive, increasing the end value of a product service system.

No expertise, theory or single approach alone can solve the complex challenges networks face. Instead, the ability to re-invent new methods of creating knowledge through intuitive explorations serves a vital role in the development of the future of innovative services. By

operating on this more strategic level, the CRISP programme believes designers have the power to facilitate better collaborations and create value that will help to serve the creative industry in the future.

References

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