Managing User Experience - Managing Change

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Abstract

As managers of user experience and design teams we often find ourselves in environments where it is difficult to position the work of our team members. Their roles are often misunderstood and our adjacent disciplines such as product management and development see their work as unnecessary or in some cases are threatened by them.

We find that the culture of the company we are trying to deploy UX resources into isn't ready to accept them and we find that our role becomes more that of a change manager than a user experience manager. We have a vision for what the future processes of the company can look like but we find it hard to communicate that vision and engage our adjacent disciplines.

What are effective strategies user experience leaders can use to impact change? How can we leverage current business and engineering trends to move corporate cultures in a direction that support our work? What are the potential traps and pitfalls? What does a culture of design thinking really mean in this context? What is a realistic expectation for an end state?

Keywords
User Experience, Management, Change Management, Strategy, Interdisciplinary Collaboration

ACM Classification Keywords
H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

General Terms
Management, Human Factors

Introduction
As managers of UX organizations, we are still often faced with challenges positioning the work or our teams.   We are convinced of the value of design and research but are challenged by the environments we work in.

Process, Culture and Roles
We find that the culture of the company we are trying to deploy UX resources into isn't ready to accept them and we find that our role becomes more that of a change manager than a user experience manager. We have a vision for what the future processes of the company can look like but we find it hard to communicate that vision and engage our adjacent disciplines.

Trends
There are a number of visible trends:

- □ Companies striving to reinvent themselves to be leaner and more customer-focused.

- □ The press mentions companies hiring more social scientists [1]

- □ Business schools infusing their curriculums with "design thinking" [2]

Clearly there is a sea change underway. Our adjacent roles are adopting of our way of thinking. Hartmut Esslinger points out how important the business-design alliance is to product strategy [3].

What does that mean for the User Experience disciplines? Are these changes "our changes" or are others on the verge of realizing the same thing? For example the book, *Tuned In* from Pragmatic Marketing is arguably is user-centered design from the product management perspective [4].

What about agile? Development teams are moving to more iterative models and involving customers (thought often not end users) in reviews of the sprint results relying on many of the same underlying principles as user-centered design and design thinking processes.

Collaboration
Companies are recognizing that collaboration is the key to the success of teams and corporations. According to Nilofer Merchant, success in the future is about the teams understand "the why" so they determine "the what" on their own [5]. This puts them in a position to fill in the gaps between the hard and fast role assignments. Success and failure of products is often in the things between the roles, not the tasks that are specifically assigned.

Many of us have experienced what I'll call "it" on a small scale. It's that amazing feeling you get when a small cross-functional team all thinking about a

problem, spending time with users really understanding the problem and then bringing their best thinking to bear to come up with an amazing solution.

One role that UX often takes on is as cross-functional facilitator. Is facilitating collaboration a core competency that we should consciously play to?

Innovation and Design Strategy

What about product strategy and innovation? Traditionally companies have had elite groups that are responsible for innovation. The ideas generated by these groups are then handed off to the product development groups who are then supposed to realize the vision.

What comes out at the other end is often disappointing and misses the key ideas of the original design ideas. Why is this? Original design ideas were not grounded in technical or other constraint realities that the product development teams face. The innovation or design vision and its context are lost by handing off the projects to other groups, essentially playing a corporate equivalent of a game of telephone. Significant data is lost as ideas are past from one person to another.   Is there another way?

Issues under Discussion

How can UX leaders leverage the current trends in process, culture and role changes?

How do we talk about and frame our work? What language do we use? How do we avoid alienating our potential and much needed allies?

What are effective strategies user experience leaders can use to impact change? What can we learn from the change management literature to enable us to be more effective in our efforts to influence processes and culture? What are the potential traps and pitfalls?

What is the role of UX in innovation? How do user-centered design and design thinking processes fit into this topic?

What is a realistic expectation for an end state? What does a culture of design thinking mean from the perspective of UX management? What does success look like for the UX management community?

Panel Participants

Carola Fellenz Thompson leads the User Experience Research and Methods team at SAP which is responsible for user research worldwide and for working to shift SAP's culture to make it possible for cross functional product teams to take a user-centered approach to product definition and development. She joined SAP after running Interaction Engineering, a design and design management consultancy, and holding management and design positions at firms including Openwave, Onebox.com and Sun Microsystems.

Richard Anderson (moderator) is a user experience practice, management, and organizational strategy consultant with international management, cross-organizational development, and more than 20 years of experience. He is also Co-Editor-in-Chief of interactions magazine, He started and directed the Experience Center at Viant, as well as the User Research & Experience Strategy discipline at Studio Archetype and

Sapient, and has held and supported other management roles in an assortment of companies.

Irene Au is Director of User Experience at Google, where her team is responsible for design and user research for Google's products worldwide. She joined Google following eight years at Yahoo! where she founded Yahoo!'s user research and interaction design practice and eventually assumed worldwide responsibility for all product and platform design efforts as Vice President of User Experience and Design.

Cordell Ratzlaff leads the User-Centered Design team in Cisco's Voice Technology Group, which is responsible for designing compelling user experiences across Cisco's Unified Communications product portfolio. Prior to joining Cisco, Cordell was Creative Director at Frog Design and held a variety of design and management positions during a nine-year career at Apple Computer.

Nida Zada is Director of User Experience at Plaxo and Comcast's Social Technology Group, where her team is responsible for product design. She joined Plaxo after holding positions leading user experience teams at Yahoo!, PayPal and Amazon.com.

Intended Audience
This panel is directed toward leaders and managers in both the CHI community in user experience as well as leaders of adjacent specialties including product management, product development and product strategy.

It would also be of interest to individual contributors with an interest in understanding how their role fits into the context of corporate culture and product development lifecycles.

Goals and Outcome
Effective user experience management is critical to a robust and thriving CHI community. While this topic is discussed in other forums, it is a critical topic for CHI.

We will publish a write up of the debate on the panel's webpage, and aim at using the outcome of the discussion as a basis for further work in this topic.

An outcome we would like to see for this panel is the foundation and interest level built for a 2 day workshop at the next CHI.

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