

Column

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With co-creation our ideas don't end up in a desk drawer

WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT METHODS FOR CREATING INNOVATION. Large corporations and government agencies are establishing innovation departments and “play labs” to produce results that will increase competitiveness in saturated markets. Traditional industries like the automotive and telecom industries are seeking new ideas to make them stand out. Public-sector agencies want to digitalise their services in order to better meet citizens' needs.

But we're also seeing many good innovations getting stuck on the drawing board. Initiatives for citizen dialogues can be perceived as gimmicks and private companies' hackathons can be seen as a way to get free ideas from customers. In our own careers as professional designers we've seen projects that were never realised but we've also been involved in ones that really succeeded. So what is the recipe for turning concepts into reality?

We believe that co-creation throughout the entire design process – from the brief to the finished product or service – gives the resulting innovations great potential for becoming a reality. By co-creation, we mean inviting various forms of expertise from the agency or business involved plus the users to work together during all stages of the innovative process. This method has its challenges: it takes time and energy and requires careful planning. Here are some of our key success factors:

Build an “expanded team” with the client

Creating innovation requires trust and close cooperation between different areas of expertise. The right conditions for this exist when we are close to our client and are working together with them. The expanded team can consist of such functions as customer service agents, developers, product owners and communicators.

Formulate the set of problems together

The expanded team must agree on the scope of what it

is to work with. The team should work together to develop a problem definition and set the boundaries.

Plan the whole process from start to finish

Achieving concrete results requires a structured innovation process with clear stages, activities and intermediate targets. Schedule time for all the activities so that the expanded team can set aside the time to participate. Make the plan visible: put it up on a wall.

Visualise ideas and thoughts

Start early on to sketch and visualise together with the team. This takes your concept work to the next level and triggers new thoughts.

Discuss how to realise the concept from the start

To gain support and get people engaged it is important to involve the individuals who will be implementing the concept right from the start. They perceive the limitations and can indicate which ideas should be prioritised. It might feel counterintuitive to discuss at an early stage the implementation and to have to reject ideas but the result will be that more people feel a sense of ownership.

Achieving such cooperation is not always easy; people are short of time and feel they must prioritise something else. The co-creation process can itself lead to change: people become more engaged and more of them want to become involved and influence the result. In our experience this is a good checklist to use to get people engaged. More people feel a responsibility for making the ideas a reality and meeting customers' needs.

And co-creating is also really fun! ■