

Synergy in Product Service Systems

on the role of (industrial) partners in creative research—review of CRISP's 3rd Design Review Session



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As the product service design field finds maturity in practice, a closer and more homogenous cooperation is established between industry, academia, and designers. Instead of three sectors working separately, handing over concept development step by step, all stakeholders now play a major role through fluid communication. This was the topic of CRISP's 3rd Design Review Session during the 2012 Dutch Design Week at Design Academy Eindhoven. The main focus was on the role of industrial and creative partners in academic design research. Jeroen Verbrugge, host of the day and chairman of the Creative Industry Council, introduced this Design Review Session, describing this kind of collaboration as "the golden triangle". For him governments have to play a smaller role by simply allowing new services to be put into place.



The morning was filled with 10 minute project profile presentations of the eight CRISP research projects, ranging from health care solutions to work related stress analyses, which was continued in the afternoon with smaller workshop style discussions led by one partner of each research project.



Throughout the morning a general sense of looking into methods and tools that define values remained an important theme. While there was a mix of industry initiated and designer created service framed proposals, a few stood out from the rest. Loren Roosendaal of K3D media (working in cooperation with CRISP project Selemca) presented a highly humanistic virtual mobile 'agent' that will help the health care industry on a more personalized level. One of the biggest problem caregivers face is to remind and even convince patients to take their medicine on time, the "Care-Droid" could alleviate the situation. Coming from a game development and design background, Roosendaal talked about another type of 'golden triangle' forged between industry, academia and science, where for him a wide gap still remains. For a multidisciplinary team to work, good connectivity presence needs to be better established on all levels, including industrial production. All stakeholders need to be "on site" periodically. "What steps can be taken to bridge the gap between science and healthcare, how can we narrow processes to get production quicker and clearer?"



Perhaps the best example of the brief proposed by Jeroen Verbrugge earlier that day, was the conversation that continued later in the afternoon when Roosendaal and his colleagues from Selemca presented the "Care-Droid" in a specific situation: A man who is fully disabled relies completely on healthcare for his livelihood. Though all aspects of his daily life are planned, he is still lonely. This device could provide him with not only a responsible friend but as suggested by other representatives of industry and designers joining in the discussion, an avatar. For this man, the "Care-Droid" could be a way to express his identity but also to communicate and interact with the world around him. After which the discussion focused and concluded on the idea of humanizing the Care-droid even further. Questions about a wider application of this device were also raised.



Another clear demonstration of how industry, designers and stakeholders (such as users) can work together, was presented by Guido van Galgedonk from Unito 40, who collaborates with Van Akker and De Wever in the "Smart Textile Services" project. The presentation was a simulation of their collaboration as they each represent a sector involved in the development of smart textile services for applications used in physical therapy. The designers elaborated about how to enrich story telling through augmented reality, but also how a previously failed attempt at measuring tennis players' performance levels evolved



into a wearable solution for physical rehabilitation. Leon Martens representing Van Akker (a textile production company) claimed, “We can only survive if we innovate”. Esther (a physiotherapist at De Wever) followed by saying “we are clinical thinkers, designers have creative ways of thinking”.

This interdisciplinary cooperation was honest and convincing but might not have fully met what Roosendaal mentioned before about being ‘on site’. In this case, industry was interested in collaborating but perhaps not as present as they could have been throughout the implementation of their product. In the afternoon discussion table sessions, Unit 40 presented a stitched map of all stakeholders involved but also of other possible stakeholders who could play a role in the future, sparking a debate on how to prove a product’s functionality and how the service functions around it. How do they combine? The challenge lays in evaluating this new business model on multiple levels while still reaching out to the various perspectives within each sector involved. How do you make a clear distinction between new technologies and new methodologies? Industry representatives at the table seemed to be evaluating Unit 40’s new business model from a design perspective, perhaps as a clear indication of their closer involvement. This is important in establishing closer dialogue but a balance needs to be maintained within expertise, especially in a domain of design that is still dominated by designers.

The afternoon provided for a fruitful and practical Design Review Session. The question of course remains: how to successfully involve the industrial partners in the process? Do they need to have a strong voice directly from the start of the process? Most of the attendees are of the opinion that true collaboration means that the teams directly from the start need to have frequent meetings and discussions. And although that is sometimes rather complicated, with busy agendas being the practical hiccup, but also the fact that it’s not easy to align the different agendas, it’s essential that the groups start to understand each other, as Valentijn Visch project leader of the G-motiv team explains. “That doesn’t necessarily means that they have to follow the same agenda, sometimes its even better if they take on a different approach, as long as they stay in touch with each other, these different insights will eventually come together.”

The conference concluded with a lecture by Nicola Morelli, Associate Professor at the School of Architecture and Design Aalborg University, who called for a new maturity in service design by finding common ground between (industrial) partners, researchers and users. What was once a design and craft centric field has now shifted to a more balanced model. “The front office of service design was the ‘interactions designers’ while the engineers and managers were in the back office.” How can the two meet when working with users, producing tailor made solutions while policy makers rather look for services that are reproducible? A new lexicon needs to be created, which merges these two ‘offices.’ In some of CRISP’s research projects presented, a new vocabulary has been established but in others, the surface has only been scratched. Industrial and creative partners provide for real world applications to research projects initiated by academic partners but the true test lays in finding a common ground and vocabulary that will allow all of these partners to remain integral from start to finish, in turn a quicker process. A balance is in play, were one partner is not louder then the rest, sometimes defending but also conceding ideas.