



History and creativity:

Art, design and media history increase the potential of creative methods in design and management

Christof Breidenich / Macromedia University for Applied Sciences / Cologne / Germany

Blucher Design
Proceedings
November 2016,
Number 1, Volume 1
<http://www.proceeding.s.blucher.com.br/article-list/icdhs2016/list>

Abstract

Creative methods have become integral parts in product development, advertising, the design of communication and services, as well as in internal and external communications within organizations. The desired innovation as the objective of such planning and processes lies always in the future. But since we cannot make any safe statements regarding future situations, all that remains for us to do is to regard past situations as former futures in order to be able to assess historical occurrences with a view to upcoming demands. This approach, namely to associate historicity and creativity in a methodological context, means to incorporate historical patterns in methods of creative practice (workshops, facilitation, design thinking, etc.). Strategies of visual communication from fashion, culture and media history can provide insights and inspire methods in equivalent contemporary issues.

Keywords

Design thinking, creative methods, art history, iconology, design strategy

Introduction

Deduction and problem

A possible guiding paradigm for the classification of knowledge can be found in the differentiation of thinking and acting in the field of design, in contrast to the realities of nature and the sciences based on researching it. One speaks generally of the natural and artificial. Whereas the natural sciences relate to the reality of the world, the actual state of affairs and relationships with people, then design and the related science of the artificial can always be distinguished by its focus on situations in the future. The core of design, whether object or action-based, is principally directed towards future situations. It is meant to optimize existing situations (Simon, 1996). Since the future is, in principle, and empirically indescribable, design problems need to be articulated with deductions, models, and processes that differ from what would be required by the deterministic approach of logic and rational thought and knowledge in the natural sciences.

The problem of the conception of creative methods will be described and analyzed in the following with the action-based research-setting method. The central question is the extent to which historical images, cultural principles, and media history communication formats can contribute as role models for questions and tasks in innovation processes.

Wicked problems and visual science in the context of the problem

To what do we align our learning when we start from context-based and ambiguous problems and solutions constructs? Logical rationality is contrasted with practical experience that implements knowledge in the form of methods of experimentation and testing. On the basis of tasks for teams in design and innovation processes, historical models, such as image descriptions and the associated narratives become valuable sources of knowledge. Problems where the approach determines the nature of the solution are not a logical problem. Scientific questions often have a unique solution to a unique problem. In contrast, design and practical design problems are user-centered, in other words, focused on people. The center of these problems never constitute an object, but always a person acting within

How to quote:

BREIDENICH, Christof; "History and creativity: Art, design and media history increase the potential of creative methods in design and management", p. 233-237. In: Wong, Wendy Siuyi; Kikuchi, Yuko & Lin, Tingyi (Eds.). **Making Trans/National Contemporary Design History** [=ICDHS 2016 – 10th Conference of the International Committee for Design History & Design Studies]. São Paulo: Blucher, 2016. ISSN 2318-6968, DOI 10.5151/despro-icdhs2016-03_010

their environment. In this context, Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber formulated in 1973 (Protzen, 2010, pp147-165) the term wicked problems to illustrate that unlike unique specific problems, design issues can never be answered with true or false. They have neither a universal context, nor a clear list of operational solution steps. Each solution is a partial solution; every approach depends on the definition of the beholder. Findings are not usually formulated based on understandable linguistic or textual presumptions, but require the visual interpretation of statements, such as characters, images or image sequences. Orientation on the basis of images defies deterministic operation of knowledge. Images are selective, ambiguous, refer to different reference systems and depend on context for interpretation.

Nevertheless, the question arises: What does art and cultural history tell us beyond their professional internal discourse? Design in contemporary life contexts, whether in combination with self, foreign, corporate or media management, can roll out a potential in combination with historic images and stories, that expands the perspective of communicative action. The work, educational, and entertainment worlds are not only more user-based and responsive, they are also further removed from standardization and specifications as regards localities, processes, and rules. Anticipation of future events is already presupposed as a prerequisite for strategic planning, innovation, and creation of new products, brands, and services.

Practical relevance: Method design thinking

In today's methodology of designing and planning, strategies of practical learning have long been self-evident. If you integrate design in management practices, then one often speaks of design thinking methods (Cross, 2011; Kelley, 2013). Different types of implicit knowledge are inspired and recorded with different approaches. The methods are varied, but they have their simple and rather few basic rules. Common to all is that one never knows the solution in advance.

The reception of words and images lead to different memory capacity. Pictures have a much higher potential than spoken or read words. For decades, creative techniques have also been used in management education and practice, which make use of the higher memory potential of images, experiences and insights of practical designing, and team-based work. Especially in terms of strategic direction and planning of innovation, design thinking is now regarded as an indispensable tool. There are countless methods of team-based operations, which defy a clear and standardized definition. The following basic rules apply to all for example: Don't theorize, do! Let mistakes occur! Expand on the ideas of others! Think visually and human-centered!

Cultural and art history lend itself well in creating a vocabulary which can be based on actual fundamentals for these creative techniques that are usually visually, narratively, emotionally, and practically expressed.

Theory reference: Historical patterns as templates for creative work

In contact with design practice, theory does not have an end in itself. Rather, it provides the backbone to support practice. If you do not support the practice, then the success of design projects would be pure coincidence. Due to the inability to look into the future, a glimpse into the past makes for the creative space, which enables us to modify and improve existing events under current conditions.

The strategy of looking back, although you are on the road to innovation, opens a grandiose visual spectrum to establish images as models for intentions. On the way back-to-front, historical perspectives always open up the view of the footprints of others who wanted to manifest references and truths with images.

If we look at the past as a former future, we can use the experience of past differentiations and significances for our present actions. If you don't use the method of applying history as a tool to assess your environment and its dynamics, then you can only act on the basis of personal preferences or fashion trends. Bazon Brock (Brock, 1990, p.211) formulated this method as the Pompeian view, in other words, freezing a historic event as an instantaneous recording, like the community of Pompeii which was preserved by its volcanic eruption.

Beat Wyss (Wyss, 2013) clearly demonstrated how the renewal of cultural practices is repeatedly nurtured and inspired by the adaptation of historical events using the Renaissance as an example (which he called cultural technique). From these so-called renaissances it became evident that the repetition of cultural intentions and understandings are an effective means of formulation of competence and power calculations in times of uncertainty and reorientation.

Hypothesis and question

The question above leads to the following hypothesis: Wherever we work today in the realm of strategic innovation, knowledge of the historical concepts of social and cultural constitutions may assist in utilizing exemplary solutions for orientation and information in design tasks. The advantage of historical strategies against arbitrary storytelling lies in the provable fact of historical artifacts or events. This statement serves as a source for the design of creative workshops for strategic innovation projects of all kinds.

From it the question arises, to what extent effective methods for workshop concepts that deal with strategic innovation, can be derived from historical patterns?

Method and procedure

Action based research

For the evaluation of actions in design processes, action based research is particularly suitable. This method is essentially a collaboration between researchers and practitioners (Dresch, 2014). The creative work of the workshop participants will be used to contribute to the improvement of knowledge about the assumed hypothesis. In addition to observing the work of the team, a survey after the workshop will serve that purpose. It refers to the following image example, which links a historical figure with a creative way of working.

Workshop

Using case studies from history, workshop participants who were given the task to deal with innovative strategies in the development or management of corporate goals, will be confronted with images and events from the artistic culture and media history. Historical images and their contexts were used as illustrative examples. Such pictures were always presented along with their production and reception contexts in addition to their immediate visual effect. It may be art-historical, emblematic or symbolic, everyday images such as photographs, images from advertising or mass media that were interpreted in a historical context (up to about 30 years ago) from an art, culture or media scientific perspective. Interpretations, descriptions, and anecdotes of the reception of images, eras, styles, media techniques, characters or narratives serve as the basis for the methodology.

Diverse facets of strategic planning for businesses, brands, services, start-ups or organizations serve as a starting point for applying this method. Tasks and objectives to provoke a renewal for the purposes of consolidation, change or innovation were conceived here methodically in workshops. The selection of methods was based on qualitative analyzes of historical images and their descriptions which are being used as a starting point for the workshop. The handling of image analyzes in the workshop was again analyzed using action-based research by documenting and analyzing the findings of the results and the manner in which the team reached these.

Iconology and qualitative image analysis

Based on the image description and interpretation approach of Panowsky (Panowsky, 2006) and modeled on the index categories of Müller (Müller, 2011), the image material was categorized into subjects and genres and qualitatively iconographically analyzed and interpreted.

The question concerning the subject of an image called formulated interpretation on the pre-iconographic level (here F1) and the iconographic level (here F2) called reflective interpretation (Bohnsack, 2011, pp 56-57). The reflective interpretation (here R3) were combined with the historical contexts (H4).

Formulating and reflective interpretation

F1: What can be seen (content, form, dimension)?

F2: What story is the image based on and which story came from it? (Purpose, meaning)

R3: Formal composition of the image (perspective, scenic choreography, planimetry)

Historic environment

H4: At what point in time was the image created, and what contexts (economic, social, political, media) prevailed at the time?

While the workshop was being laid out, appropriate images and visuals were defined in advance. During the workshop, these images were presented and implemented into the tasks.

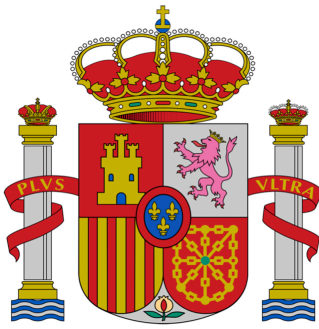


Fig. 1: Coat extracted from the flag contributed to Sodipodi's Clipart Gallery by Pedro A. Gracia Fajardo. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Escudo_de_España.svg

Selection and implementation

SI 5: Using the descriptions, an image status was defined in terms of how the historical representation caused or favored a later situation. This change was described, deducted and formulated as a workshop task.

SI 6: Appropriate elements were defined from a pool of creative methods which played through the situations and the state to be reached within the meaning of the task in teams.

Image example: Storytelling on the basis of a historical image for the implementation in creative workshops for service improvement

The force of the narrative provides a strong bond to the memory of the recipient. Images and events that are involved in a story can be accessed more quickly. You can remember it better. If you were to place the same images and events without narrative elements simply side by side, they would be harder to

remember or even impossible. Talking pictures avoid complicated words and texts.

The challenge to leave familiar places and actions and to embark on a journey with unknown outcome is difficult or even impossible to implement with conventional workshop methods and techniques. Here, the process of a story is supported as evidence of the functionality of the intentions. For management workshops with the objective: *How can we improve our service in the future?* the participants were confronted with the following historical emblem and its history.

Plus Ultra is the emblem (Figure 1) that is to this day, an element of the national flag of Spain. According to the Greek poet Pindar, Heracles marked the strait of Gibraltar with two columns and the inscription *non plus ultra*. This was to warn about the end of the world that begins with the Gibraltar Ocean. The Renaissance in Spain turned the prohibition into *plus ultra* and this statement was to emphasize the success of the Spanish naval power. This new inscription was presented as a banner between the Pillars of Hercules, and still reminds us today of the fact that innovation is only possible when you cross borders. To accomplish this border crossing, the border must first be known and accepted as a cultural necessity.

F1: A pair of pillars standing side by side with the banner *Plus Ultra*. The representation of the water indicates a location near a coast. Furthermore, a coat of arms and a crown is depicted.

F2: Pindar describes in his third Olympic song that Heracles misses the ancient world, by marking the limits in Gibraltar with two columns. This marking denotes going past these limits as dangerous and unreasonable: *Non plus ultra*.

R3: Graphic representation of an emblem with embedded coat of arms. This image may exist in many versions. It shows no perspective, scenic or planimetric forms.

H4: The image was created in the Renaissance under Charles V. The imperial power calculation was based in part on the idea of overcoming the limits of the known world and to conquer new territories. The image is still depicted on the Spanish national flag today.

SI 5. The symbolic surpassing of limitations by the inquisitive humanism in the 16th century was achieved by the conversion of a ban into an invitation. This shows the potential of the new and unknown, which is fundamental to any innovation.

SI 6: A storytelling method is combined with a role-playing game.

Survey

A total of 20 participants of various workshops were surveyed in November and December 2015 respectively. The 12 male and 8 female participants between 20 and 60 years old all came from the professional fields of Marketing, IT development, project management, and corporate communications. The workshops were conducted for different purposes in the fields of management and strategic innovation. The case study task *plus ultra* and the creative method derived from it was part of all workshops. The historical image analysis was carried out in advance of the workshop. The workshop supervisors derived from it the appropriate method (see Table 1).

The quite experienced workshop participants (almost all have done workshops before) find creative workshops useful to implement corporate objectives. 12 of 20 participants estimated that the efficiency of creative work in teams was higher after the workshop with the case study. How can we improve our service in the future? 13 of 20 people found the derivation of the methodological approach from historical motifs very helpful, 6

answered the question with, “That’s what it sometimes comes down to.”

HISTORICAL IMAGE ANALYSIS	WORKSHOP METHOD
Plus Ultra – historic emblem	Combination of storytelling and role-play
Innovation in history: Communication of the self-evident fact and the power of a seafaring nation, derived from ancient texts.	Innovation in management: Increasing the practical design spectrum of service products and behavior.

Table 1 – Analogy of historical storytelling through pictures and the design of a strategic management problem

Conclusion and outlook

The approach of integrating historical motives for workshop methods in the strategic design of entrepreneurial objectives has been interpreted by practitioners in the present test to be profitable. The method was evaluated as more or less suitable in different problem contexts. The analyzed case study *plus ultra* has been designed to fit the problem and was quite suitable. To achieve this potential, a sufficient potential of historical images and stories must be available. The fact that historical photos and events actually occurred in the sense of truthfulness and in relationship to the real word, helps to convey the credibility and effectiveness of the method. Some workshop participants criticized, in part, the relevance of the historical input in terms of current practice. How accurately the selection of pictures and stories fit the workshop methods turned out to be crucial for the efficiency of the method. In the future, historical images and events would have to be tested and evaluated in an elaborate process in regard to their efficiency for creative workshops.

References

- Bohnsack, R. (2011) *Qualitative Bild- und Videointerpretation. Die dokumentarische Methode*, Opladen & Farmington Hills: Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Brock, B. (1990), ‘Musealisierung – eine Form der experimentellen Geschichtsschreibung’, in Brock, Brock . *Die Re-Dekade – Kunst und Kultur der 80er Jahre*, München: Klinkhardt und Biermann.
- Cross, Nigel (2011) *Design Thinking*, Oxford / NewYork: Berg.
- Dresch, A., Lacerda, D.P. and Miguel, P.A.C. (2014) ‘A distinctive analysis of case study, action research and design science research’, *Review of Business Management*, Vol 17, No. 56, pp. 1116-1133, Apr./Jun.
- Flaggen und Wappen der Welt*, Bertelsmann Lexikon Verlag (1992) Gütersloh, pp. 146-147
- Kelley, David and Tom (2013) *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, New York: Crown Business/Random House.
- Müller, M. G. (2011) ‘Ikonografie und Ikonologie, visuelle Kontextanalyse, visuelles Framing’, in Petersen, T. and Schwender, C. (eds) *Die Entschlüsselung der Bilder. Methoden zur Erforschung visueller Kommunikation*, Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag.
- Panowsky, E. (2006) *Ikonografie und Ikonologie. Bildinterpretation nach dem Dreistufenmodell*, Köln: Dumont.
- Protzen, J.-P. and Harris, D.J. (2010) *The Universe of Design. Horst Rittel’s Theories of Design and Planning*, New York, London: Routledge.
- Simon, Herbert A. (1996) *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 3rd edition, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Wyss, B. (2013) *Renaissance als Kulturtechnik*, Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts.

Biographical note

Dr. Christof Breidenich is Professor for Mediadesign and Design Management at the Macromedia University for Applied Sciences, Campus Cologne. He studied visual communication, media design and aesthetics. Since 1992, he has worked as a self-employed media and communication designer, researcher, book author, coach and founder of «Pixel Painting Company Communication» (pixel-painting.de).