Chapter 16
Anticipation Dialogue Method in Participatory Design

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ABSTRACT

In the design of complex information systems and social practices for different domains a balance between theory-driven and practice-driven approaches is at best developed in a collaborative communication process between designers, researchers, and other actors. The authors have developed the Anticipation Design Dialogue method within the context of participatory design, which is based on dialogic communication between different stakeholders. A dialogic relationship between them takes place in future workshops in which experiences of different stakeholders are integrated in a way that makes it possible to illustrate the situation from different perspectives. The workshop participants develop in small groups a vision of the future state in which the situation is imagined from the future perspective by considering which kind of problems they have at the moment and by which way the problems could be managed in the future. Secondly, reflective thinking is promoted by letting each group at the time present their ideas while others are listening. The authors have found that the development of mutual understanding between different stakeholders in these kinds of workshops is a complex process that needs time, and therefore, an iterative series of workshops is recommended.

BACKGROUND

Two trends have been identified in design practice that challenge the role of technical products as the only target of design work. Firstly, it has been widely acknowledged that we should pay more attention to social aspects of technologies so that we not only passively adapt to technological systems but focus more on how human activities can be supported by them. The aim is that technologies should be integrated into human activities and habits, and they should help us to participate in activities that are socially rewarding (Nardi & O’Day, 1999). A critical question is how technologies should be designed so that they can support the activities for which they are intended to. A common
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Answer is that participatory design methods are needed to explore people’s motivations, desires, objectives and values (Buur & Matthews, 2008; Bødker et al., 2004 Muller et al., 2003). According to the principles of participatory design, we have to start the design process in the practice field of the users in order to identify the goals of their activity and the physical environment, the objects and the tools used in this activity (Bødker et al., 2004; Muller et al., 2003). Secondly, it has been widely realized that new technologies and products are not necessarily at all the answer to the many of the present day problems (e.g., Buur & Larsen, 2011). For example, according to the service design framework, it is even more important to shape behaviour of different stakeholders than to develop new technologies.

In this novel situation, the more acute task is thus to define the problems carefully than to create the perfect solution to a particular design task. It also has to be accepted that people’s environments are continuously changing, and the design work is never completed. Since there is not one perfect solution, diversity of design solutions is preferred. In addition, emphasis is placed in the future in the design work, not on the past, and the aim is to move beyond people’s current problems. A special task is to envision future work situations to allow the users to experience how emerging designs may affect their activities and to define how to get from the current situation to the desired situation, and consider consequences, alternatives and possible obstacles in the chosen path.

The big question is how to support this kind of co-creation process that involves different stakeholders in a collaborative framework. A quite common view in participatory design is that new ideas can only be emerged in negotiations between people with different intentions, and design work must be based on dialogues in which different stakeholders collaborate in order to obtain new understandings concerning a particular topic. Dialogue is a special kind of conversation in which each participant is willing to listen to the contributions of others and respond reflectively to each others’ statements. In a dialogue, the aim is to achieve new insights and a new kind of understanding of the topic at hand, and therefore listening is typically more important than speaking. The final aim is to help us to understand better how other people see the topic and why they see it in a particular way. Real dialogue in design work is thus based on a two-way communication, in which all people have the same status; ideas are investigated in a dialogue framework, and their acceptance or rejection is based on discussions. This kind of approach requires that people really listen to each other, recognize agreements and disagreements and elaborate their own point of view. This is only possible in a communicative and collaborative environment in which the facilitator’s role is important.

It is also suggested that in design work we have to foster people to envision the future and develop scenarios of the future. Future anticipation is thought to be some kind of mental testing in which we consider what will happen in the future and what the consequences of current actions would be. We perform anticipation all the time in our lives, and we normally are not consciously aware of doing it. Often we become aware of our anticipations when they are incorrect, and we have to make corrections to our visions.

There are different methods and approaches to explore the future in strategic planning and in design work. Some of these methods are quantitative, some of them are qualitative; some methods and approaches are expert-based, some others are participatory. Typical methods that are used in future anticipation are, among others, Delphi survey and scenario planning. These methods, however, have their limitations in terms of applying them in design studies and in participatory design. For example, they are typically not dialogic in nature, and they thus cannot be of any help in fostering dialogue between different stakeholders.

We have developed a workshop method that provides the grounds for interaction and co-oper-