

Building a Foundation for Impactful Work – A Design Jam

Jolene Zywica, Working Examples - Carnegie Mellon University
Courtney Francis, Working Examples - Carnegie Mellon University
Anna Roberts, Working Examples - Carnegie Mellon University

Purpose and Goals

An important goal for this workshop was to make it personally meaningful and relevant to each attendee, so participants didn't poke at something we created or create a hypothetical solution to a random problem. Instead, it was an opportunity to think about and refine their own work.

We asked participants to come to the design jam with a promising idea or a project-in-progress and thoughts on how to make it a success. This workshop helped them to dig into their work strategically – using structured exercises that help grow ideas and games with impact. It was an opportunity to improve their ideas and create something engaging and valuable using tools that help them strategize, clarify, and integrate new perspectives.

Participants worked together to explore the environment around their projects and start to develop a better understanding of elements that will impact the success of their work. We facilitated activities that helped participants make small choices that addressed broader goals, reflect on what works and what doesn't work, and make connections between ideas, plans, and people (Davey, 2014). This helped people move their projects and ideas closer to having the intended impact and, in some cases, discover new ways of thinking about their work and its impact.

Our approach draws from design and business strategy, using proven methods that explore the audience they hope to engage and the problem that they're trying to solve. Our goals were to provide tools to help participants plan, strategize, think critically, and re-evaluate their own ideas, all for the sake of creating more valuable and effective games or gameful learning experiences. During the design jam, participants:

1. Thought purposefully about the problems being solved and why specific solutions matter
2. Developed more focused audience
3. Refined their goals
4. Gave and received feedback on ideas
5. Thought about their work from new perspectives, and
6. Developed a plan for taking ideas to the next stage

Through this experience, participants uncovered their project's unique path to success. The design jam used tools and best practices from human-centered design and business strategy to help participants think strategically about their work, gain empathy for their users and consider the broader ecosystem in which their projects live (Frog Design, 2013; IDEO, 2012).

The power of being strategic

Throughout the session we returned to an example from *Creative Confidence* (Kelley & Kelley, 2013) that showed the benefits of what we were demonstrating and how tools like the ones we provided can impact process. In the book, a design lead from G.E. Healthcare witnesses a child using an MRI machine that he spent years designing. The tiny patient and her parents were sad and stressed in the office – and in the time leading up to the visit - and the designer realized he hadn't properly designed the machine for the people using it. In an attempt to remedy the issue, he participated in a workshop at the Stanford d.school. The workshop used design strategy to clarify the problems he was solving in order to better serve his target audience. As a result of his work, the designer was able to create the "Adventure Series", of MRI machines. Young patients climbed aboard themed machines resembling amusement rides, which reduced the number of patients requiring sedation and drastically improved patient satisfaction. We used this example to demonstrate the power of being strategic.

During our GLS design jam, participants worked on their own projects; anything from a budding idea that hadn't yet been detailed out to a prototype. They participated in activities designed to develop and refine:

The Problem They're Addressing

Participants created problem statements and thought about what they know and don't know about the problem. They reflected on questions, including: What is the specific problem you're trying to solve? Why does this problem matter to the communities it affects? Why is your design/work a valuable solution to the problem? Some participants realized during the session that they didn't know what problem they were solving and hadn't given it much thought. While all of the projects did address a real problem, many of the participants began to view their work as a solution rather than just a cool idea. This change in perspective has important consequences for shaping what people create and who they create for. It was rewarding to see people begin to think of their work as innovative solutions for the first time.

Audience

Participants created stakeholder maps and learned how to develop profiles to define their specific audience, build empathy and better address questions, such as, Who are you trying to impact? What stakeholders are involved? What do these people need? Many participants debated who their target audience was and which primary stakeholders needed to be considered for the design. Some realized they weren't taking all the appropriate stakeholders into consideration.

Goals and Vision

Participants were given additional strategies and activities to complete later with colleagues and team members to define what they're trying to accomplish and how they'd know if they're successful.

The strategies and activities from the design jam are described in more detail at: <http://bit.ly/gls14jam>.

During the design jam, our team facilitated and asked questions to promote creativity and reflection. Examining the problem, audience and goals more closely helped participants to get more focused and ensured their work was addressing a real need or solving an important problem. Many participants left the session ready to hit the ground running, taking their idea to the next stage. Others left inspired after seeing how the strategies they learned were used by peers during the jam and by the G.E. designer to create a new MRI machine.

Who hosted the design jam?

Working Examples is a project based at the Entertainment Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University. Our team supports designers, researchers and educators in the ed tech field. We've built an online knowledge sharing community, www.workingexamples.org, and host events and workshops to help people collaboratively create innovations for education. In our online community and during our workshops, we provide tools that help people reflect on and improve their work and openly share their process, as well as learn about other's work, discover new perspectives, and connect with diverse experts in the field.

References

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