In October 2018, the US Embassy in Cairo, Egypt invited Parsons professors John Bruce and Mark Randall to give an intensive, five-day workshop on critical areas for those interested in taking a design-strategy approach for entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial ventures addressing complex social challenges. This type of cultural exchange, one potentially charged with political issues, was a milestone for the Embassy. From over 200 applications, 25 professionals from diverse backgrounds – NGOs, education, film, design, architecture and performance – were selected to attend. A pre-workshop exercise focused intentions; themes included empowerment, cities, health and culture. All were action-oriented and addressed particular challenges within Egyptian society. The curriculum included innovative design-led research theories and practicable methods. Immediate outcomes revealed positive shifts in perspectives on systems, stakeholder activation, and narrative development for advocacy and implementation. The energy and emotion was palpable over the course of the week, culminating in an event for the public, press and top government officials.

Keywords: social impact, design strategy, Egypt, entrepreneur

“The revolution was the real wake up call, a realization that I also have to work on social projects.”

– workshop participant Adham Bakry

Prior to the Arab Spring in January 2011, Adham Bakry was a freelance graphic designer in Alexandria, Egypt with a practice focused on branding for arts and culture. During the upheaval of the revolution he added activist and graffiti artist to his resume and took to the streets, using his creativity to comment on the Mubarak regime (Figure 1).

Architect and urban planner, Taher Abdel-Ghani said that what inspired him to follow a path of social change was his “previous experience with the revolution” he goes on to say that this period was a “turning point in the way I viewed society and the environment I’m living in.” Many of the participants in Design + Social Impact, a Workshop on Strategies for Creative Intervention hosted by the US Embassy in Cairo, Egypt expressed similar sentiments. At the Embassy’s invitation, John Bruce and Mark Randall from Parsons School of Design in New York developed a five-

Figure 1: A protester during the Arab Spring with graffiti art by Adham Bakry. (source Adam Bakry)
day intensive workshop for creative professionals on how to leverage design-led research and strategy to develop interventions to address challenging social issues.

**Workshop context**

Embassy programs for cultural exchange typically involve more traditional forms of art, film and performance. Dina Hafez Abdelhafez, a Cultural Affairs Specialist from the US Embassy in Cairo was looking for ways in which the Embassy could support the creative economy in Egypt. She was also interested in how design could be leveraged as a tool for social innovation. The open call for applications to the free workshop cast a wide net, with expectations for potential attendees being civic-minded, engaged creative professionals.

The Embassy partnered with urban-tech innovation space KMT House in Cairo to host the workshop. KMT House handled all marketing and outreach, (Figure 2) which attracted over 200 hundred applications prior to the deadline with an additional 100 individuals expressing interest after. The response exceeded expectations, and dramatically indicated a deep desire for this type of engagement.

Participants were early-mid-career professionals covering a wide array of disciplines; from communication and interior design, architecture and urban planning to filmmaking and fine art (Figure 3). In addition, individuals working within established non-profits brought the themes and projects they were exploring into the workshop. Participants were given a detailed assignment in advance to articulate their area of inquiry, which allowed them to engage immediately on the first day. The exercise also gave and Bruce and Randall valuable insight into each individual and an understanding of the emerging themes to better tailor the workshop to meet the needs of the participants.

**Theoretical frameworks and approach**

The Cairo Design + Social Impact case advances an argument for the value of image-oriented practices that embrace cinematic devices and support narrative perspectives during analysis and synthesis of the design-led research and design strategy process. The context addresses learning environments where theories and methods are presented via an intensive workshop format. Our curriculum and pedagogy involved confrontations with narrative artifacts and forms through embodied and multi-directional learning, and relied on a variety of tools and participatory engagements within a design process for rendering images in relation to movements through systems at various scales.
The term storytelling is thrown about very liberally in design strategy and management contexts. Too many assumptions are made around the potential usefulness of acts of telling stories within a design process. Yet, undeniably, narrative forms and artifacts possess great possibility for catalyzing aspects of design-led research and creative intervention. Stories emanating from events during the Arab spring operated with reflexive potency to disrupt entrenched power and shift system dynamics. The affordances of decentralized information via digital social media – still relatively new in 2011 were put to use during the 18 days of uprising in Egypt in ways beyond reportage, archive, or discourse. Media was used to mobilize people in real time. In the immediate aftermath, trans media projects such as 18daysinegypt.com by Jigar Mehta and Yasmin Elayat attempted to augment media activities with platforms to support generative environments for subsequent collective actions (Mehta and Elayat 2011).

In the years that have followed the major events of the Arab spring uprising of 2011, the socio-political atmosphere of contemporary Egypt continues to pose interesting questions in regard to the potential affect of stories in relation to efforts of design for social innovation. How might the flash points from 2011 continue to influence designers and strategists in their approach to using imagery for investigation and intervention? Memory plays an important role in struggle, and can catalyze energetic gestures for conscious efforts toward change; thus control of people’s memory can impact their agency to participate in designing a future (Foucault 1975). In the wake of the 2011 events, alternative press outlets have been suppressed and opportunities for social exchange in public spaces has been atomized through restrictive urban regulations regarding gatherings in Cairo.

Stories in a variety of forms and formats can support vital communication among community members, and thus might serve as the bottom-up currency of exchange for social progress. The infrastructures for such dynamic mixing are often at risk of gentrification, spiritually as well as practically, and gentrifying forces might be motivated not only by market economics but also by desires to control people’s ability to share experiences that might spur creative freedom (Schulman 2013). The projects of the Cairo Design + Social Impact workshop did not specifically address the politics directly involved with the Arab spring, while many focused on the symptoms of policy that resulted in the wake of the uprising, especially in regard to conditions impacting the potential of social fabric and public space (Figure 4).

In light of the context of Cairo, and in regard to the energetic potential of storytelling, the approach for curricular content and pedagogy of the Design + Social Impact workshop was developed in order to privilege stories as active design strategy tools. Our program utilized a dialectic approach to facilitation and visual phenomenon. It relied upon the use of a multiplicity of image-oriented narrative devices (Frølunde, Simonsen 2014). The approach acknowledges an array of players and meanings as operating in dynamic flux within
context, and allows for productive tensions to continuously occur in the construction of meaning (Frølunde, Simonsen 2014) (Bakhtin 2000). Lisbeth Frølunde refers to this methodology as neo-Bakhtinian, referencing Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of hybrid dialogic forms for efforts toward the generation of meaning (Bakhtin 2000).

### SELECT CAIRO WORKSHOP PROJECTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPowerMENT</th>
<th>ARTS and CULTURE</th>
<th>HEALTH and WELLNESS</th>
<th>PUBLIC SPACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharine Atif</td>
<td>Nora Aly Said</td>
<td>Hershom Mansour</td>
<td>Taher Abdel-Ghani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A film production company that creates video content to empower Egyptian women.</td>
<td>Promoting the value of the Nubian language in Aswan, Egypt which is predicted to become extinct in 50-70 years.</td>
<td>Leveraging performance via transmedia platforms – with an occasional dose of humor – to raise awareness around the serious subject of child abuse.</td>
<td>Utilizing art spatially to encourage interactions between diverse social backgrounds within public spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmine El Hagry</td>
<td>Noha El Taher</td>
<td>Habiba Elgendy</td>
<td>Adham Bakry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional support for teenagers called “care leavers” who were raised in an institutional home and are required to move out at the age of 18.</td>
<td>Sparking interest in young people to learn traditional klim weaving skills in Fowa, Egypt, to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next.</td>
<td>Educating Egyptian families about how to deal with anxiety and depression affecting a family member who is often stigmatized in society.</td>
<td>To circumvent the government ban on graffiti, two-inch “Bike Tape” can be applied to public spaces (and easily removed) in a number of ways to promote cycling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed Hamed</td>
<td>Hadeer Ghareeb</td>
<td>Haia Abotaieb</td>
<td>Alia Sabry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An online platform to empower citizens in Cairo to protect the urban forest by adopting and planting trees.</td>
<td>Empowering children to gain new perspectives, confidence and a sense of liberation by learning how to upcycle discarded materials into toys.</td>
<td>A holistic, co-creative approach to interior design to promote human connection, wellbeing and a deeper sense of space and memory.</td>
<td>A platform to connect inhabitants of the city through unexpected shared experiences in revitalized urban spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Brief abstracts of select workshop projects. Topics were roughly distributed across four themed areas. (source workshop participants)
Taking cues from design fiction, our attempts were to support iterative activities where narrative elements could be referenced, critiqued, invented, modified, and juxtaposed in order to charge and confuse perspectives within complexity. As such, the framing of the activities leveraged cinematic tropes—bringing to life, through multiple perspectives, the re-creations and speculative creations of situated moments at various scale and temporal junctures of the project ecosystem. In this way, the design process might enable the recognition of new co-creative spaces, counter-intuitive modes for addressing leverage points, and tactical gestures within strategic directions.

**Methods: Images of crisis, images of change**

The program relied upon a process of creating both reflective and reflexive exercises for workshop participants in order to catalyze narrative fodder and provide organizing infrastructures for sense-making activities leveraging an array of story elements (Schon 1984). Developed by Freedom Lab, the Wheel of Reasoning, (Figure 5) is a tool that maps the relationships of a problem space in order to engage in root cause analysis as well as propose trajectories for positive futures (Freedom Lab 2018). We have modified the original instructions in order to elevate cinematic visualization within the nodes of “crisis” or extreme opportunity, and “change.” Instructions indicated that these nodes be articulated as though one were describing a 5-minute scene from a film. What is the moment of crisis in regard to people involved in a situation, in real time, in a particular setting? What are the action, atmosphere, and dynamic energy of this moment? What is immanent? Working in small teams, we tasked participants to craft their “image of crisis” and perform a recitation of these scenes.

![Wheel of Reasoning](image)

*Figure 5: The Wheel of Reasoning maps the relationships of a problem space in order to engage in root cause analysis as well as propose trajectories for positive futures. (source left, Freedom Lab; right Mark Randall)*

One participant working with the idea of teaching children how to make toys from trash related her “image of crisis” with the cinematic sophistication of shot/counter-shot vision. Shot: Children watch tourists board a bus, leaving trash behind as they disappear into a strange and unknown place from which they mysteriously had appeared. Counter-shot: View from a tourist bus as it leaves a rest stop in the desert on the way to Luxor, a group of idle children standing on a dusty trash-strewn road watching the bus move away. The “problem” that perhaps brought about this “image of crisis” was cited as: children of this remote and poverty-stricken location have no toys, and their environment is plagued by trash. While this problem is clear, the complexity and resonant possibility of the situation is revealed more profoundly in the “image of crisis.” Later in the workshop week, having iterated with the Wheel of Reasoning and other tools, the same participant related that perhaps an even more serious “image of crisis” for her project might be the same children as initially described in the shot/counter-shot scene, but years later as adults who had never benefited from any intervention around this...
problem. The visualized insight exposed the participant to notions of generational trauma, thus further informing the nuanced context of the project ecosystem for potential intervention.

**Systems and movement: Perspective and reverberation**

Workshop activities productively complicated the positionality of the participants, inviting them to alternate between design strategist and narrator. These iterations might involve shifts in scale as perspectives changed, and might demand attention to dynamic movements along relational paths within ecosystems. Movements through systems might be considered as reverberation. Reverb, in acoustics, is the sonic energy that moves through environmental objects, and continues even after the original source of the energy has stopped. Similarly, we might consider moments of intervention and their subsequent energetic movements through system states (Bruce 2017).

Raising narrative elements from the Wheel of Reasoning exercise, we asked participants to transfer these insights into exercises for the mapping of value creation and delivery. Journey mapping and stakeholder activity mapping examine the reverberation of intervention toward impact (Figure 6). These tools were framed to consider the acted out relationships of design value, stakeholder actions, and transformative journey movements in order to support the development of potential design principles.

Utilizing narrative forms and image-oriented gestures for working through the constellation of stakeholder activities provoked fresh perspectives on leverage points and impact potential. For example: the *Trash into Toys* project had been up until these mapping exercises focused on value creation in the form of education workshops for children (Figure 7). As the participant sketched stick figures into a journey-mapping template in the form of a graphic novel storyboard, an ancillary narrative emerged revealing upstream opportunities for intervention. Making toys from trash might be augmented if the trash was optimized in advance for the purpose of making toys. This odd notion, as derived through a storyboard image, led to an extended narrative involving the partnership of larger corporate entities producing goods that typically yield certain kinds of waste germane to the project ecosystem – food and beverage packaging, etc. These corporate partners might engage in co-creative sessions with children in order to redesign packaging with an extended life for functioning as toy parts. The formation of such an unlikely partnership might act as the Trojan horse for confrontations around other systemic shifts in production waste, as well as for garnering new attention to communities impacted by socio-economic disadvantages. The evolution of ideas around the *Trash into Toys* project emerged through visceral, narrative extensions.
Outcomes

Through the program’s cinematic framing for the use with tools of design analysis and synthesis, participants acquired new perspectives on their respective design practices, and projects evolved with actionable next steps around stakeholder engagement.

Participant Adham Bakry was eager to take back state controlled public space and to use it to promote cycling in Egypt. Bakry sees cycling as a way to positively impact the severe traffic congestion and pollution facing cities like Cairo. To combat the government ban on graffiti which carries with it a prison sentence, Bakry had to innovate new ways in which to publicly spread grassroots efforts around alternative transportation and support collective action toward policy change. His solution, Bike Tape is a two-inch roll of tape that can be easily applied – and removed – from surfaces such as roadways to create impromptu bike lanes, wrapped around poles to tag a safe place to lock a bike, or on messenger bags to unite the community of bikers – many of them women new to cycling (Figure 8).

Recently, Bakry along with colleague Roba Mustafa an Egyptian educator and event planner have translated the tools from the workshop into universal Arabic so they can be engaged with across the Arab world. After the government demolished the Cultural Center in Bakry’s hometown of Portsaid, Egypt, Bakry and Mustafa worked on a funding and relocation plan. They have identified a new space and are building a Heritage Museum and Culture Center. Bakry recounts, “the Wheel of Reasoning and Journey Mapping tools...
were used in a grand brainstorming session involving 15 people to great success” (Figure 9). This demonstrates that once learned, these tools promote continued use along with an elevated attention to narrative. They are easily adopted and translated for other contexts - an unexpected yet rewarding outcome.

Participant Taher Abdel-Ghani, an architect and urban planner, explored ways to utilize art spatially to encourage interactions among diverse social backgrounds within public space. His vision found traction through discovery of the steps necessary to move the project forward through hyper-local pilot programs in co-creation with existing networks of communities of art practice and social hubs operating in public/private pop-ups.

Hadeer Ghareeb shifted her systemic view for approaching the Trash into Toys project, re-framing her work to have impacts at the source by taking children into corporations to inform the design process around how packaging was designed. Currently she is developing her project in Zipaquira, Columbia. Over the course of one-year she plans to teach her students about sorting trash, decreasing consumption and making toys that will be distributed to underprivileged kids. Her next step will be at the corporate gates.

The workshop culminated in an evening event for the participants to present their work and reflect upon their experience (Figure 11). In attendance were US Embassy officials, the press and the general public. Dorothy Camille Shea, Deputy Chief of Mission from the US Embassy remarked to the organizers how moved she was with the outcome, and how impressed she was with the passion and commitment of the participants (Figure 10). It allowed her to see the power of design to address social issues on a deeply human level.

All were able to look beyond themselves, and as Nada Salem a filmmaker reflected several months later on her experience “The most transformational aspect of the workshop was realizing that we are not the heroes” She goes on to say, “our social intervention only works if it is truly dictated and driven by the people that we’re targeting.”

Following the Cairo program, this approach has been applied to an executive education setting where the client company was seeking to discover new innovation practices in order to evolve from their entrenched 20th century mindsets around consumer product offerings. Similarly, the advantages of seeing systems within situated narratives allowed for the revelation of potential new leverage points and approaches for value creation. Process approaches akin to
design fiction, and employing cinematic tropes, revealed relationships from multiple stakeholder perspectives within the value chain, thus elevating the potential for exploration and ideation.

Figure 11: A closing event was hosted by the US Embassy at KMT House in Cairo for Embassy officials, the general public and the press. (source US Embassy, Cairo)

References


Thinking-through-making: physical model-making as a business model education strategy

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Outline

Design thinking currently enjoys public recognition and is increasingly utilized in business consulting and strategic decision-making. It has given rise to university programs while opening up varied careers for design strategists. As design enters mainstream management consulting practice, a critical question being asked of educators, designers and businesses is what kind of design is privileged within design thinking-as-business strategy. Moreover, has this version of design thinking delivered additional creativity to business environments centred on process efficiency? Nussbaum (2011) argues that business has embraced a brand of design thinking that is recognizably process-oriented, and this has limited its capacity to deliver on its mission of enhancing business creativity.

This study examines a project delivered in the first semester of Parsons’ Master of Science in Strategic Design and Management program, it is called Understanding-through-making: building new dimensions in the new economy. This practical studio-based project requires students to physically build a model that exemplifies their understanding of the dynamics defining and driving business in the 21st Century. This project attempts to counter a scientific, process-oriented design thinking with a more beaux arts, craft-oriented, thinking-through-making approach. Currently student outcomes are varied; some exist as pedagogic devices while others are recognizable as tools (e.g., navigators and compasses).

The study analyses these current outcomes, highlights the shortcomings of both the current project and its outcomes and proposes possibilities for future iterations that promise to explore other paradigms in the application of design thinking to business.

Background and context

In recent decades, Parsons School of Design has gained renown for its fashion design program, however, the past few years have seen its BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) in Strategic Design and Management grow to become its second largest program by volume. In 2004 what was then Design and Management was reimagined (from a program with identifiable origins in fashion merchandizing) into a design thinking/business hybrid. In response to the BBA’s growth and profile, and also due to current student demand, the School of Design Strategies (the “school,” or sub-faculty in which the BBA is housed), was charged by the Provost of The New School, and the Dean of Parsons, with creating a post graduate-level program with the same strategic business design focus as the BBA. From its inception in 2012, the Master of Science, Strategic Design and Management (MS-SDM), a two-year, 36 credit program, has experienced a rate of growth from a 70 student intake, at the program’s inception in 2013, to a peak 110 student intake in 2016 and 17.

The Chase School was founded in 1896 by William Merritt Chase a renowned Impressionist painter, however it was Frank Alvah Parsons, a teacher and subsequent head of school (in 1911), who led the school’s transition toward instruction based around art in the service of industry. In 1909, it was renamed The New York School of
Fine and Applied Art to reflect new course offerings such as fashion design, interior design, advertising, and graphic design; the first of their kind in the U.S. It was eventually renamed Parsons in 1940. Even following Parsons’ absorption by The New School for Social Research, in 1970, its design DNA retained its origins in a European fine art (or beaux arts) tradition extending from the late 19th Century to the present.

Today, fashion, interior, product, graphic design and architecture are all well-understood and defined as sub-fields within the broader scope of design. In contrast, strategic design and management is less broadly-understood externally, and is an emerging field situated between the domains of design and business. It is currently undergoing further definitional challenges as it is simultaneously developed in more or less different ways by varying institutions all of which have different origin stories. In North America, Stanford University launched their ‘D-School’ in 2005, while in 2006, the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) launched a nine-month executive master’s program in Design Methods, both were roughly concurrent with Parsons BBA. In 2008 California College of Art (CAA) launched its MBA in Design Strategy and New York’s School of the Visual Arts (SVA) launched its MFA in Design for Social Innovation program, graduating their first class in 2014 concurrently Parsons’ MS-SDM. My current understanding is that CCA, SVA and Parsons all share beaux arts origins, while strategic design at IIT and Stanford have stronger scientific affinities related to definitions of user research derived from computer science, engineering and product design. This distinction is useful in relation to the status of what we, at Parsons, describe as “studio-based learning.”

At Parsons, the MS-SDM program is currently grappling with what “studio-based learning” means in relation to strategic design, specifically what knowledge (or ways of coming-to-know) are integral to studio practices of the “plastic arts:” fine art and design. In their chapter “Design Matters for Management,” from Managing as Designing (2004), Boland and Collopy characterized [then recent] management failures (e.g. Enron, Global Crossing, First Capital) as attributable to a ‘famine of good ideas,’ which were largely the result of managers trained to make choices from among alternatives presented to them, rather than from a training in the design of new alternatives resulting from the generation of new business ideas. Boland and Collopy quote Herbert Simon in making a case for what they arguing was “the manager’s professional responsibility [which] is not to discover the laws of the universe but to act responsibly in the world to transform existing situations into more preferred ones,” in their quote from Simon, he states, “Engineering, medicine, business, architecture, and painting are concerned not with the necessary but with the contingent — not how things are but how they might be — in short, with design. (Simon, 1996, p. xii). It is instructive that the Boland and Collopy wrote these words very slightly before the first programs of the kind I described here emerged in North America. Their words are more prescient today as we see “design thinking tools” packaged and utilized in ways that industry voices such as business journalist Bruce Nussbaum summarize in the following way:

Design Thinking originally offered the world of big business—which is defined by a culture of process efficiency—a whole new process that promised to deliver creativity. By packaging creativity within a process format, designers were able to expand their engagement, impact, and sales inside the corporate world. Companies were comfortable and welcoming to Design Thinking because it was packaged as a process. There were many successes, but far too many more failures in this endeavor. Why? Companies absorbed the process of Design Thinking all too well, turning it into a linear, gated, by-the-book methodology that delivered, at best, incremental change and innovation.
(Nussbaum, 2011)

The project I co-created seeks to address the problem of a studio-based experience within a design-business degree in the following section through describing an attempt to both redress a perceived process-bias in design thinking while grappling with the question of what value a beaux arts tradition in design might offer business strategy in the early 21st Century.

Project 2, Understanding-through-making: building new dimensions in the new economy

Because strategic design is an emerging field and is inherently dynamic (evolving with changes in business conditions), the MS curriculum is re-evaluated and modified on an annual basis. In the late summer of 2017, I was tasked with leading a substantive re-write of three projects, designed to anchor three modules in a course called Strategic Design and Management (SDM) in New Economies. My instructions from former director Rhea Alexander, my co-author on this task, for was to retain and bolster the physical “making” components of the
three projects, keeping in mind that one of the unique (or at least distinctive) value propositions in MS-SDM was the engagement with a Parsons’ perspective on studio-based [design] learning.

SDM New Economies is important in establishing the contextual and methodological basis for the subsequent three semester applied strategy and innovation work which is often, (though not exclusively), manifested, by students, within their “studios.” Fig 1. shows this course in the context of the four-semester, two-year program, occurring as it does, in the first semester of the first year:

![MS-SDM Curriculum](https://www.newschool.edu/parsons/masters-design-management/?show=program-curriculum)

My response to this brief was to build upon an existing three-project arc, the emphasis of these three projects are summarized in the following table:

**Table 1: The three-project structure in SDM New Economies, redesigned for fall semester, 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project 1</th>
<th>Mapping New Economies</th>
<th>Mapping in two-dimensions, using information visualization to communicate complex systems with interdependencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project 2</td>
<td>Understanding-through-making: building new dimensions in the new economy</td>
<td>Building models (for business and strategy) in physical three-dimensional form. Figuring out and testing these models using iterative making-thinking-interacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project 3</td>
<td>Design Frames and Heuristics</td>
<td>Written reflection on readings and how design tools might be used to address some of the issues raised in the readings. Generate your own game-based tool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although this three-project structure corresponds to a specific learning progression in SDM New Economies, the single case I discuss here is Project 2: **Understanding-through-making: building new dimensions in the new economy** because this project was my clearest effort to engage with studio-based learning as a function of business modelling and design-inflected strategic business planning. The project brief addresses thinking-through-making by asking students “What bearing does an understanding of the dimensions of the physical world have on our ability to think, and act, in creative ways that may open up new insights[?]” The brief invokes Heidegger in his reflection on craft:
A cabinetmaker’s apprentice, someone who is learning to build cabinets and the like, will serve as an example. His learning is not mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely gather knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood—to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns. (Heidegger, 1976)

In the project brief I note that Heidegger contrasts this intelligent engagement with “empty busywork” that will be determined by “business concerns,” and I speculate here (not in the brief) that lack of what Heidegger describes as “relatedness” may be have a connection to the “famine of good ideas” referred to by Boland and Collopy.

The case: Janet Hoy’s Strategy Clock and Barometer

In fall 2018, Janet Hoy was an online student in my MS-SDM New Economies class, this course is offered in the first semester of the first year of a two-year program making Hoy, then a newly-admitted student. Hoy had spent two decades working since her undergraduate degree making her a more professionally experienced than the majority of her online cohorts. Her company, Janet and Co., currently provides project and design lead consulting on hotel projects internationally. Hoy is based in Sydney, Australia but also works extensively in Europe. For Project 2, it was Hoy’s intention both to utilize her professional knowledge as a season project manager and to develop a model or tool that would help her to integrate—in a practical manner—the two hemispheres of her work as a consultant/project manager across the domains of what she describes as the “known” and the “unknown.”

In Hoy’s words she was “trying to create a tool that gives a framework to think through the challenges presented through having her feet in both more traditional cost/time/quality decision-making while simultaneously managing design teams and therefore engaging with the unknown [the design question] or the not-yet-created.” (J. Hoy, personal communication, March 3, 2019). She used Project 2 to create a model, or tool to reconcile these two very different mental processes: traditional project management and designed/speculative (or abductive) practices. For Hoy, a key reading, and inspiration for this project was Nigel Cross’ book Design Thinking: Understanding How Designers Think and Work of 2011, which, she says, gave her an “ah-ha moment” of recognition that she had always been involved with abductive reasoning but had experienced difficulties in communicating this aspect of her work to clients in a way that made sense in terms of their grasp of the project as a-whole. Abductive reasoning is the logical process where one chooses a hypothesis that would best fit the given facts. Cross identified it as a process of inference in which “design develops innate abilities in solving real-world, ill-defined problems” (1982), Hoy identifies these in the right hemisphere of the barometer in Figure 2. below:
Hoy stated that abductive and designerly ways of working have frequently put her at odds with traditional project management thinking. In the course of her twenty plus-year career she points to The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), a set of terminology and guidelines first published in 1996 by the Project Management Institute, as instigating a mindset she describes as increasingly process-oriented and ever-decreasingly holistic. Hoy’s process for making her barometer began with rough prototypes. Hoy stated that she “started by looking at the barometer an instrument for measuring the outside environmental conditions; an idea that can be applied to a project’s environmental contexts and conditions.” Her barometer has a sliding scale which can be articulated along multiple axes. In her articulation of the known/unknown hemispheres, Hoy’s barometer could be compared to a colour wheel in which complementary pairs (of colour) sit on opposite sides of the wheel. These pairings of oppositions (or complements) can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Known” hemisphere</th>
<th>“Unknown” hemisphere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgets</td>
<td>Value proposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (Gantt charts)</td>
<td>Design increments (sprints etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management structure</td>
<td>Self-organizing teams (scrums etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products and services</td>
<td>Solutions and benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific management</td>
<td>Business problem space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business plan</td>
<td>Design strategy research and learning plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hoy designed her barometer to be used with Plexiglas sticks, each of these corresponded with one of the six oppositional pairings and these were intended to allow the user to play with and reflect upon and then represent the intensity of each aspect of given project in terms of both domain and intensity along the known-to-unknown axis. Blue is more known while the red end of the spectrum is more unknown (e.g., established business vs. new venture), see Fig 3. below:
Fig. 3. demonstrates varied intensity along three axes within a single aspect of a project

As she began real-world testing of the barometer, Hoy realized that her own project management experience made the barometer less useful in her client interactions. She felt it was too complicated and somewhat self-evident (to her). Application of the barometer however, enabled her to develop the Strategy Clock; a simpler schema which allowed her to try to hone in on the broader implications of where the value she is creating is derived from. Key attributes of the clock are the same two hemispheres: known and unknown, Hoy states that a stick is chosen on the scale depending on the characteristic it represents which then is placed on clock relative to the management tool or approach that would best manage that project characteristic. See Fig. 4:

Fig. 4. Shows Hoy’s more simplified Strategy Clock, in this configuration, Hoy states that the clock “Keeps it simple. The hands on the clock face indicate current team focus e.g., this clock shows our current focus is on design research and learning which will be done with our design team through quick sprints over the next month. Concurrently our operations team are establishing our delivery capability by looking at our overall organizational structure.”
Hoy elaborates, the face of the clock orients you in relation to the two hemispheres broadly. Then more specifically, it allows you to prioritize your immediate project actions. The clock is your first stop, whereas the barometer is a subtler and more complex tool. As an experienced project manager, Hoy believes that the barometer may be more useful in assisting a junior-level employee, believing it to be overly complex and perhaps of peripheral value (to her) compared with the clock, which, in contrast, “allows the user to locate themselves and then dig deeper in a more focused manner.” Hoy generally uses her model indirectly, that is, she generally interfaces with CEOs and founders, therefore the clock “has not been used to build team consensus but rather to formulate her thoughts and understand and create her consulting value via the framework before communicating it to clients.” For example, if there is an issue with formulating a global team for a specific project, Hoy may use the model to elicit a recommendation. She does however think it may have value in teambuilding and understanding and focusing collective intent and action.

Summary and next steps

I chose Hoy’s Project 2 for this case from a variety of interesting models developed in both this and a concurrent on-campus version of the same course I taught this past fall. I sought out Hoy’s work for this case because she almost immediately began beta-testing her model-as-tool in a consulting context, and, in fact, had used the heuristic of client relevance to develop the clock from the initial barometer design. As a new student in the course, Hoy’s recognition that her model could be immediately deployed was somewhat of a revelation to her but I believe her success in initial implementation and testing was partly due to her prior professional experience and this rapid real-world deployment, is, at the time of writing, the exception rather than the rule with these class cohorts and their projects.

Project 2 helped Hoy in shifting her own mindset about the role of design in her business as much as it provided specific practical guidance; she stated to me that “the design process of learning-by-doing has been huge in her process and has helped to transform her business currently and her future strategy for the direction of the business.” The case I present here provides one practical example for how one business use of design thinking may evolve and it indicates what a beaux arts pedagogy—fused with a business education—may uniquely offer. Specifically, the case points the way toward achieving two pedagogical objectives that have been partially achieved through Project 2 thus far:

- Encouraging students to be the makers (as well as the users) of strategy tools;
- encouraging students to develop and test models, tools, maps, methodologies etc. using a thinking-through-making heuristic rather than a pre-determined abstract framework that lends itself to a process-understanding of a given business problem.

My next steps as an educator are to better articulate and more deeply embed characteristics of thinking-through-making (from my education and practice in fine art) into projects supporting the creation of new tools, methods and frameworks in business education broadly and specifically in design strategy. I aim to investigate whether, and how, these tools may scale and work in practice, within a variety of applied business and consulting contexts.

References


