GROWING FROM CRITIQUE: EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION AS A TOOL FOR ACADEMIC ADVANCEMENT

CRECIENDO DESDE LA CRÍTICA: LA COLABORACIÓN EFECTIVA COMO HERRAMIENTA PARA EL PROGRESO ACADÉMICO

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ABSTRACT

We elaborate on the importance of teaching collaboration and communication skills in the academic setting with regards to learning a framework for effective design review and critique. It was necessary for us to review the literature with regards to the evaluation process of design, and the implementation of a structured review process. Discussing the importance of teaching skills that are conducive to collaboration and coordination, both in academic and the professional settings. Looking for ways to enhance communication and incorporate a structured critique format in which clear objectives and goals are identified. An overview of psychological, cultural, and technological challenges that hinder communication and that have an impact on the development of an effective critique process either as the person giving the feedback or receiving it, with the goal of minimizing a negative impact on the artistic expression and/or outcome of the project.

KEYWORDS: critique;   effective   collaboration;   academic advancement.

RESUMEN

Insistimos sobre la importancia de enseñar habilidades de colaboración y comunicación en el ámbito académico en lo que respecta al aprendizaje de un marco para la revisión y crítica efectiva del diseño. Fue necesario que revisáramos la literatura con respecto al proceso de evaluación del diseño y la implementación de un proceso estructurado de revisión. Discutir la importancia de las habilidades de enseñanza que son

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conducentes a la colaboración y la coordinación, tanto en el ámbito académico como en el profesional. Buscando formas de mejorar la comunicación e incorporar un formato estructurado de crítica en el que se identifiquen objetivos y metas claros. Una visión general de los desafíos psicológicos, culturales y tecnológicos que dificultan la comunicación y que tienen un impacto en el desarrollo de un proceso de crítica eficaz, ya sea como la persona que hace la retroalimentación o la recibe, con el objetivo de minimizar un impacto negativo en la expresión artística y / o resultado del proyecto.

PALABRAS CLAVE: crítica; colaboración efectiva; avance académico.

INTRODUCTION

First, we chose to focus on the psychological, cultural and environmental challenges and the importance of intend and how these factors impact communication in the critique process.

We emphasize the concept of correct" intent "with is defined by the authors as "is putting the best effort to understand whether elements of the design will work toward the established objectives for the final product" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 21) Also giving critique with the intent to "help the designer understand the effect that the elements of the design will have on the product's ability to achieve its objectives" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 22). The global intent should be to use the information to modify and strength the design. Assuming the constraints placed on the designer such as budget, time allotted, freedom to create, choice of medium etc. should be avoided and critics should be encouraged to ask for the information. Taking both the perspective of the designer and the user/target audience also helps with formulating correct intent.

Issues that are inherent to relating in groups and deciding on a common outcome, include personality traits and socialization skills. Both of these are directly impacted by past experiences receiving and giving opinions. This affects the way a person feels about both giving and receiving criticism. Some may hold back in giving opinions for fear of upsetting the recipient. Being honest can be difficult, especially if you equate critique with judgement. This can go both ways, the designer may take the input as a personal attack flaw. Also it is important to minimize team politics and social taboos, which may intimidate the persons giving critique, and hinder participation.

DEVELOPMENT

At times in academic settings there are not enough opportunities to practice the skill of critiquing and/ or the experience with professors being too demanding, too rough in giving input etc. The greater the opportunities offered in a supportive academic setting to practice sharing of ideas, opportunities to work in collaborate projects, and practicing communications skills, the better prepare the student will be to assimilate critique practices at the workplace.

As with any life skill, practice is key. A group's actions reinforce shared values and behaviors which are needed to establish a shared foundation in which to feel free to express ideas in a safe setting.

It is also important to teach four aspects that are needed to establish objectives. The first one is termed "personas" which is defined as, "user archetypes that describe an individual's behaviors, goals, expectations, knowledge" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 58) this will give information on the target audience. When using personas, it is recommended to avoid demographics or stereotypes such as thinking that a person over 60 for example is technologically challenged, also limit the amount of information you give about target audience to important facts that relate to the object being designed. Another factor to keep in mind is the use of "scenarios" which are "short narratives that describe the contexts in which the product will be used and the experience people have when using it" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 59). Scenarios should include the individual's thought process and emotions the user may have when using or seeing a product.

Moving from psychological factors to describing review methods, and familiarizing with design review terminology, I will note others skills that are key in collaboration. Two terms, which need clarification, are Feedback and Critique. Most evaluations or critiques of projects take place in an informal setting and consist of receiving what is referred to as "feedback".

Feedback is a distinct term with a broad definition and may hinder critique if not carry out as part of a structure framework with identifiable goals. It is which is defined by Connor and Irrizary as "merely a reaction or response," inferring that this feedback is based on personal preference. They offer a definition of a "feedback loop" which states that, "after an individual takes an action, the object or environment on or in which that action has taken place changes (or reacts). The individual then interprets that change or reaction in consideration or what they'll do next" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 3). There are three types of feedback that are identified as follows: Reaction-based feedback is driven by the individual's understanding of what they are expected to say or what they think the presenter wants to hear. It is basically a response to simply being asked for feedback. The second type: Direction-based is usually a mere form of instruction or suggestion aligns with the giver's expectations and viewpoint (Connor and Irizarry, 2015). Both of these forms of feedback there is no explanation to indicate the effectiveness of the suggestion towards meeting the objective of the design.

Here comes the role of "Critique," which is the third form of feedback. Critique is defined by Connor and Irizarry as an, " act of reflection, a form of communication, between two or more people and most importantly a life skill". They noted that in modern organizations collaboration and coordination is a must to achieve successful projects. Acquiring the skills to self-

critique and learn to work in teams to access design process and its adherence to achieving its goal in a timely manner.

Two key elements of critique are intent and critical thinking. Intent has been previously clarified, and critical thinking can be a complicated concept. Critical thinking is defined as "the process of taking a statement and determining if it is true or false" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 8). This type of thinking leads into formulating a form of analysis, which results in this form of feedback, called Critique. Critical thinking in this context is the examination of what is being design against the objectives for its creation. And the "delivery" is how you present your critical thinking to others whom you are working.

Critical thinking also plays a key role in self-evaluation. Analyzing one's own work requires toggling between the two mental processes. Creative thinking, which deals with generating ideas and putting together: and analytical thinking, which entails deciphering whether what they are creating is meeting the goal of the design. Most experienced designers are able to master this, but it needs to be taught and provide opportunities to apply and practice these concepts in a group setting as well.

Exploring the term feedback further, it is important to note that there are common ways in which feedback is collected and that offer opportunities for incorporating critique. These include the following: Standalone critiques, which are meetings with the sole purpose of critiquing and Collaborative activities, which are events where multiple people work together simultaneously to solve specific challenges, discuss ideas valuable to the design's objectives. Design reviews, which are meetings usually held toward the end of the design phase, where approval of changes and narrowing down of suggestions takes place (Connor and Irizarry, 2015).

One common activity that comes up when working in collaborative activities is brainstorming. This involves a group of people offering potential solutions. Brainstorms can pose a challenge, because they lack structure and coordinating the mental processes of a group usually results in everyone to agree to something without much regard to whether or not it is the right solution.

In understanding critique, two processes should be examined. An incremental process a problem is taken apart into pieces and phases. During each phase a new piece is introduced. An iterative process is defined as "something that takes a creation and evolves it from idea to final product and further – there need to be points in our process that drive that evolution and indicate where changes should be made moving forward (to the next iteration)" (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 14).

Iteration is key to critique; it allows one to analyze, rethink decisions, and change what is ineffective. The group needs to be comfortable and value continuous improvement of the design. The goal is to repeatedly modify the solution to increase its effectiveness. The solutions are modified based on knowledge, and

with each iteration, elements are removed and replaced with better fitting ones. A combined approach of both incremental and iterative changes allows for pieces of a solution to be prioritized and created at different times. They give an example of writing the book used as a reference for this paper, they started writing in linear fashion incrementally, then proceeded with successive iterations, revisions, until the desired information and order was achieved.

Now, I feel it is time to enumerate the importance of critique itself and its facilitation. First I look at critique as a life skill, we are unconsciously revising what we create or are created by others all the time, whether we communicate it or not. Applying this to review in design, there is a simple framework comprised of four questions proposed by Connor and Irizarry (2015), which are as follows: What is the objective of the design?, What elements of the design are related to the objective?, Are those elements effective in achieving the objective? and Why or why not?

Critical thinking is a critical element and needs to be incorporated by examining of what you are designing against the objectives of the creation. And "Delivery" is a term use to describe how you present your critical thinking to the others with whom you are collaborating (Connor and Irizarry, 2015).

Parting from these questions, then a practical approach can be develop in which all participants are focus on the objectives of the design. I mentioned the use of " personas" and "principles" as starting points. Now looking to highlight objectives, "Goals and "Principles" become best tools. When put together these four tools should help create a solid foundation (Connor and Irizarry, 2015, p. 57).

Before discussing "goals," I think it's good idea to look at the concept of "scope." The scope of a critique is the identification the components of the design that the team will be analyzing and the objectives, which they will analyze. For example assigning what aspect of the design will be discussed during each session such as visual styles, etc. Once discussion parameters are set in place, then is easier to gear conversations into the direction of reaching the desired goal.

"Goals" are the desired and measurable outcomes, describe where you want to go with the design. Descriptions of goals can include what you see that is or is not working with the design with respect to the scope. Also goals can be use as a tool to gather insight on any specific questions the designer may have and to identify any concerns. Throughout the process active listening should be implemented, shared vocabulary and common understanding by repeating feedback we hear, back to the person who originally gave the input to make sure it was the intended meaning. Presentations, reviewing of the rules of the critique and maintaining participants focused on specific aspects of the design (Connor and Irizarry, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

Facilitating critique is the conscious balanced management of conversations toward a conclusion. Several recommendations are offered starting with eliminating organizational hierarchy, and make sure everyone feels that their observations and perspectives are listened to equally. Keep groups small, to facilitate focused and productive discourse. Encourage and praise participation. Set a critique schedule in accordance with the amount of advancement between sessions and the deadline of the project.

A difficult task that should be avoided during critique is problem solving which requires toggling between analytical and creative thinking. This was mentioned earlier as part of self-critique, it becomes an issue when it is happening independently within every participant in a group. Some people will offer ideas originating from the analytical while others are operating in creative view and some have past beyond this analysis to comprehending the new idea. It becomes a challenge in getting everyone to focus on the same objective. Unconsciously problem solving will occur, since we instinctually generate ideas, are then important to understand that it is occurring and try to get the person to describe the issue and its relation to the objectives.

Another important recommendation is to allow questions to be asked and present the obvious and also include the aspects of the design that participants cannot see, such as presenting the design from the perspective of a user. Review constraints such as budgets, deadlines, and limitations with regards to business or/and technical decisions. When conducting meetings with teams in different locations use screen sharing via Internet to make it possible to focus the group's attention on a single artifact or visual at the same time. Finally review findings and determine how to act on them.

Basically as with any skill, critique needs to be taught in the academic setting and ample opportunities to practice need to be available. Facilitating a cohesive environment for critique is key for a successful outcome of any collaborative project. Keeping conversations focused on the objectives of the design is the most important factor and the most challenging one.

Critique is not only important in design. It is a skill that helps with efficiency and collaboration in any setting. It can be incorporated in every decision with regards to delivering a final product. Critical thinking and delivery of how you present the information you want to share with others is useful not only in commercial but personal relations as well.

REFERENCE

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