

Touchpoint

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Cultural Change by Service Design

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Facilitator-aided Innovation

"Helping multidisciplinary teams work more efficiently to achieve superior results"



Thierry Curiale is an innovation marketing director at Orange with a background in strategy, management and communications consulting. Combining his marketing and psycho-sociological skills, Thierry has become an expert in the process of co-designing digital services for which he is developing a specific approach to collective intelligence, based on group dynamics and transactional analysis.



Matthew Marino is a Franco-American designer and founding partner of User Studio, France's pioneer service design agency. Matthew brings his strategic vision to User Studio while helping corporations and public sector organisations adopt a design-led approach to innovation. Furthermore, Matthew is an active service design advocate, promoting the discipline through conferences, articles and training sessions.

Today's ever-changing social, cultural and technological environments have led a growing number of companies to promote flat-organisations to facilitate their multidisciplinary innovation initiatives. Designers, marketers and engineers, with their different visions and methods, must learn how to work together in the early stages of the process. The challenge lies in laying the groundwork to make this magic happen.

A good example is a digital service project for Orange, conducted by Thierry Curiale, an innovation marketing director for this French multinational telecommunications company, in collaboration with User Studio, a Paris-based service design agency. This article will illustrate how a facilitator helped a multidisciplinary team reach successful results efficiently and enjoyably.

In 2011, Orange launched an exploratory project to devise a new service that would allow customers to make virtual visits to France's top museums and their rich collections. Although the service itself still needed to be defined, it was clear that its development would require the expertise of a wide range of professionals, from curators to marketers, designers, programmers and publishers.

THE CHALLENGE OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMWORK

Bringing such diverse players to the same table can complicate a project. But it can also create a favourable environment for its smooth implementation by pooling resources straight from the start, making business, technical and human considerations all part of the equation. This was not done in a collaborative project at another French technology company involving a designer and programmer prototyping a novel digital device. Though it was seen as promising, the product never gained broad internal support. Had a marketer been brought in to provide insight on how this device could figure on the telco's strategic roadmap, the project's outcome might have been significantly different.



The team members collaborating on various stages of the museum project.

Traditionally, professionals have been more accustomed to a sequential project culture than an integrated, agile one. In the virtual museum project, the participants recognised the advantages of working as a multidisciplinary team but knew this would be no easy feat. This is where Thierry Curiale, a marketing director with experience in conducting highly collaborative initiatives, took on the role as the project's facilitator.

FACILITATOR-AIDED INNOVATION

Using facilitation to help teams co-create products or services is not new. Service designers, like User Studio, have increasingly expanded their role, acting as 'double agents' working not only as designers but also as project team facilitators. Though this has proved beneficial in winning over innovation team members to a design-led project culture, where visualisation and prototyping are valued tools, it requires a delicate balance for which few designers have been trained or possess the right skills.

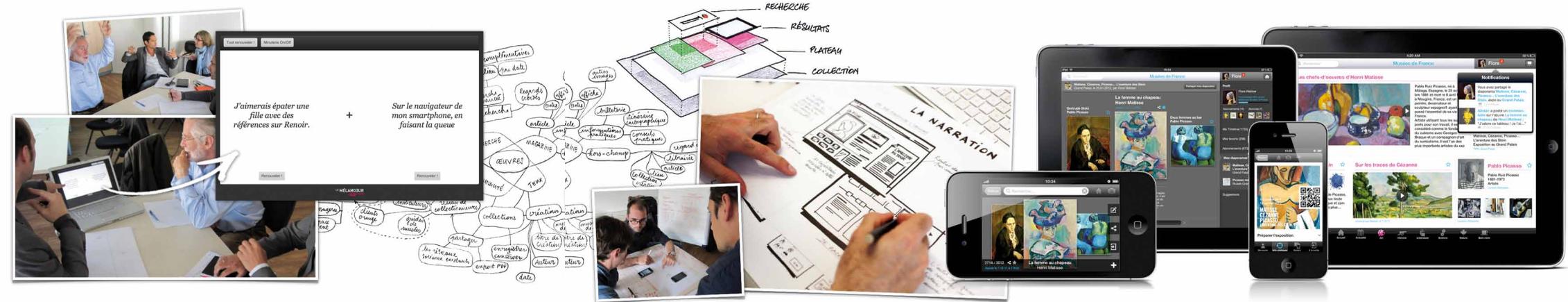
The Orange museum project offered a testing ground for an alternative innovation model, one in which the facilitator plays a role independent from that of the

designer. We call this model 'facilitator-aided innovation' and have identified a set of guidelines to help facilitators incorporate the format into their own organisations.

ACTING AS A CATALYST

During the different stages of a project, and notably the field research phase, participants observe the same reality but from distinct personal and professional perspectives. The facilitator acts as a catalyst to help the team achieve results larger than the sum of the parts. The Orange team members were all intent on translating a real-life museum visit into a digital one, but their own experience as museum visitors often reflected their professional orientation. The marketer appreciated an information desk's friendly welcome, a designer was captivated by the immersive experience of a silent exhibition room while a programmer focused on the detailed approach of a science tour guide. Thierry, as facilitator, made sure the group reacted to each other's impressions to construct a collective vision for the project by reformulating and propagating the ideas amongst the participants.

Various project phases aimed at designing the service's multi-channel user interface



THE RULES AND TOOLS OF THE GAME

To enhance such synergy, the following principles can help a facilitator customise the rules, tools and methods for a given project:

Put the right team together

Though favouring heterogeneous skills and disciplines, Thierry assembled a team of no more than 12 members with homogeneous values and cultural references. This was essential to build team cohesion and avoid conflicts.

Emphasize doing rather than bla bla...

Thierry made sure the entire museum team referred to the project as a ‘Do-Tank’ – rather than a ‘Think-Tank’ – and banned the traditional sort of meeting where ideas are mainly discussed, favouring instead action to put those ideas to work. Over a four-month period, weekly workshops alternated with production days dedicated to crafting the project’s user experience, business model and functional mock-ups. This helped team members recognise each other’s legitimacy based on their production rather than their position, and helped highlight the interplay of their varied professional expertise.

Create a formal framework dedicated to exploring new ideas

The facilitator of the Orange museum project involved everyone in writing a team contract. This offered a practical tool that not only established the rules of collaboration but also sent out a symbolic message: a cross-silo, heterarchical space dedicated to envisioning and testing new ideas. The contract included statements such as: ‘Freedom of expression’ or ‘Co-responsibility’. Team members, for example, felt sufficiently confident to oust from a workshop a guest speaker whose comments they felt were irrelevant, despite his invitation by the facilitator.

Delegate roles so that production flows smoothly

The facilitator is not the ultimate authority: they may delegate functions to other team members, focusing their responsibility on the overall flow of the innovation process. For example, Thierry delegated the workshop logistics to a ‘host’, the time management to a ‘rhythm master’, the production of time-bound results to a ‘decision mobilizer’ and the day’s feedback to a ‘friendly observer’, who would suggest how to improve the next session’s interactions. The division of responsibility among team members spurred responsibility and collective accountability.

Attribute leadership to each discipline when relevant

Although collaboration nourishes the collective thinking, the facilitator should specify when each discipline steers the project’s multifaceted execution, so the marketers at Orange influenced the strategic and business stages, the designers were entrusted with defining the user experience and the developers led the prototyping phases.

Remember to remain a project manager

Although communication, transparency and collaboration are promoted values, the facilitator should not forget the realities of traditional project management, such as focusing on meeting deadlines and staying within budgets.

RECRUITING YOUR OWN FACILITATOR

Innovation directors seeking to recruit a facilitator might look for the following skills and dispositions:

- *With a background in social sciences* and broad understanding of multiple disciplines, they know how to deal with complex situations by embracing multiple points of view.
- *Experienced in group dynamics* (and knowledgeable about its theory), their leadership, project management and interpersonal communications skills create team cohesion.
- *Promoting neutrality and generosity*, they put the project’s interest before all other considerations, act in non-defensive ways, and avoid judging their team’s contributions.

EXPANDING THE INNOVATION MANAGER’S TOOLBOX

Innovation practitioners recognise a number of ingredients for success, such as support from senior leadership and cross-silo collaboration. Leaders who wish to promote flat-organisations must learn to embrace a new layer of facilitation skills. As Thierry Curiale put it: “As we move away from hierarchical structures and open up the system, someone needs to act as the catalyst so things don’t overheat.” ●



The collectively authored team contract