

LIGHT.TOUCH.MATTERS

MEANING AS PART OF INNOVATION



MY RESEARCH FOCUSES ON INNOVATION PROCESSES. THIS INCLUDES WHAT PEOPLE DO AND HOW THEY DRIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS FORWARD. MOST OF ALL, I STUDY RADICAL CHANGES IN PRODUCTS. WHEN NEW, PREVIOUSLY NOT EXISTING SOLUTIONS ARE DEVELOPED. PRODUCTS THAT GIVE A SENSE OF MEANING AND THAT MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY. MY WORK RESULTS IN NEW METHODS, HELPFUL WHEN IN NEED OF RADICAL NEW THINKING.

HOW DOES THE CONCEPT OF "MEANING" SPICE UP A DEVELOPMENT PROCESS?

Designers	Material Scientists	Facilitators
...see meaning through...		
... doing and experimenting	... studying the output	... reflecting critically before doing.

A major learning from the LTM project is that the concept of meaning is absorbed differently and according to professional background. An early hypothesis was that it is beneficial to reflect on current and potential new meaning early on in the project - and by all participants. However, the LTM-project shows that meaning making and reflection happens all through the project and in different formats.

- IT CREATES A REACTION, AN INCREASED AWARENESS.

MEANING - THE WHY OF THINGS

Traditionally, innovation processes have often focused on creatively solving problems with the help of new technology or business models. However, when describing products in terms of function or visual appearance, the reflection on a less visible dimension, the product meaning, is left out. The perspective of meaning is an alternative path to innovation that pays attention to the reason for using a product, its "why" rather than its "how".

It gives us a chance to reflect on why an individual uses a product, why she likes it and how she experiences it. It gives an answer to the reasons for using it and to its purpose. However, the meaning of a product or artifact can differ. What I perceive as the meaning of a product might not be what you perceive. Depending on who you are and what context you live in, you will give different meaning to products. In addition, what is meaningful today might be of less importance tomorrow.

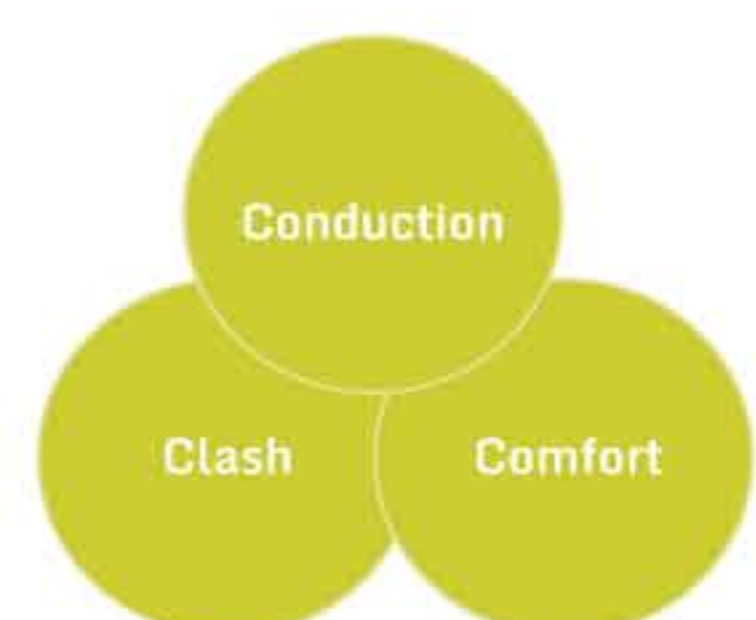
THE ROLE OF MEANING IN LTM

Introducing the perspective of meaning in the LTM-project initially created confusion. The three different groups of actors; designers, material scientists and facilitators (mostly academics) had different ways of relating to the subject. While some early on immersed in reflections on the underlying meaning of the materials (mostly academics), others took a more pragmatic approach to it (the majority being designers and material scientists).

In the late part of the project the "neediness" of discussing and reflecting on meaning was brought up by many participants. This triggered the reflection that the concept "meaning" not necessarily DRIVES innovation forward. It can also serve a role of creating reaction. By insisting on its value, academics, designers and material scientists together create a discussion - an increased awareness of what product meaning is, how it can be designed, understood and changed.

EASING THE PROCESS - THE 3C'S

When communities from competences as different as design and technology meet, some form of common ground is needed. In the LTM project, this common space did not emerge from a smooth merger between the different competences. Instead, an opposite approach could be identified: a clash of different minds rather than a merger helped the project to find ways to move on. This was followed by a fine-tuned and curious conduction by dedicated facilitators and finally, surrounded by a sense of comfort. These themes are here described as "the three C's".



The Three C's of creating a common space in the project: The power of clash, the room for conduction and the creation of comfort.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

In the Doctoral dissertation "Striving for meaning - a study of innovation processes" (2015) I explain the characteristics of an innovation process driven by meaning. Here you can also find explained its four main practices:

- Evolving - new potential meanings of products do not come in an instant but by slowly understanding first the existing meaning of it.

- Exposing - the perception of product meaning comes through personal perspectives that needs to be expressed by participants who dare to expose themselves openly.
- Criticizing - practicing taking different perspectives, debating and questioning drives the search for new meaning forward.

- Embodying - a meaning needs to be "felt"; it is not to be explained. Meaning-finding is a process of immersion.



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METHODS TO CRITICALLY REFLECT ON WHAT MAKES SENSE
IN INNOVATION PROCESSES

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the product is the interface



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