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Entrepreneurship

During the course 'Design Leadership and Entrepreneurship' we reflected on the differences and overlap between entrepreneurs and designers. We concluded that there is a big overlapping part, yet 'design entrepreneurs' set themselves apart by being creative, pragmatic and visionary.

When I relate this insight to the quote that was introduced in the first lecture of our course 'Design Innovation Strategies', I see a similar conclusion:

*"Successful entrepreneurs **look ahead** and identify **a creative way** to **address a marketplace problem or need**. They formulate a focused entry **strategy** and an even more focused **set of experiments** to test it."*

To me, this sentence would have also been true if it would have said "Successful designers…". I design for societal impact, which includes this entrepreneurial mindset in order to situate my ideas into society. The execution of this includes the elements I just mentioned (e.g. creative, pragmatic, visionary).

An example is my Final Master Project, in which I am looking into how designers can help governmental organisations in dealing with wicked problems:

- I **look ahead** by envisioning future scenarios of the ecosystem
- I take radical angles in approaching the challenges in a **creative way**
- I address a societal **problem / need**
- I will create a **strategy** on how to do this
- I use a **set of experiments** to create this strategy

What I however experience as a difference in mindset, is the focus on **output** (entrepreneurship) versus **outcome** or **impact** (social design).

To my understanding (based on the Impact Monitoring tools we use at Zet (www.wijzijnzet.nl), output is rather focused on concrete results that are either tangible of quantifiable. I experience that entrepreneurship is really focussed on this output, as it helps to impress others. Numbers is something we all can relate to, and are therefore relatively 'easy to sell'.

Outcome is more focused on the intangible results, the emotions, the qualitative data. Impact is the bigger and more sustainable version of that. For example: 'Harry feels welcome' is an outcome, whether 'the city of Eindhoven has gained an inviting character' is impact.

Personally, I prefer to dedicate my work to creating impact over output. This belief was only strengthened during this course. While completely understanding that creating impact was not the aim of the course, I sometimes felt a bit useless working on MVP's that were purely targeted to find output.

This feeling made me reflect on my future. I had always thought that I would become an entrepreneur, yet I now have questions whether this is still the path I would like to pursue. Right now, I rather see myself as a social innovator with an entrepreneurial mindset. I like to work on the transformation of society, and I am currently looking into what kind of roles or positions would enable me to do so.

The Innovator's DNA

Questioning

I see it as our job as designers to always seek to the question behind the question. When the client asks for something, it doesn't mean he wants it. I think this was the case with our client (NoFoodWasted) as well. In my opinion, he was already set in a certain direction and only could think of solutions in that framework. Moreover, he indicated that anything outside that frame would not be useful for him.

We first focussed on checking whether his framework was a fruitful one, and once we concluded that it wasn't, we started to reframe. I took a leading role in seeking the question behind the question, e.g. sustainable lifestyle over food waste reduction. Although our client first felt very uncomfortable with this, we slowly took steps back into his direction, which made him in the end more comfortable – probably without even noticing we got him a small step outside his own frame!

Observing

Several of our interventions took place in 'real life', e.g. we could observe our customers' behaviour. However, I found the observations we did quite shallow, as we didn't really touch upon complex underlying values. What I however learned is that observing the reactions of provocative behaviour can lead to surprising insights. For example, when we went to the market in a banana suit, we received useful responses that we otherwise probably would have missed.

Experimenting

During this course we set up a new experiment, or sometimes two parallel experiments, on a weekly basis. This experience was super intense, though very inspiring. Usually I construct my interventions very carefully, which was impossible to do now. The time limit forced us to really think of how to test the essence and reflect on that, which I liked as an approach. I am now trying to apply this in a big complex project I do at Zet, in which we discuss the area development of a neighbourhood in Breda. Because this assignment is super complex, it is hard to really start the process. By bringing in this approach, I hope to stimulate the group in developing a reflective and proactive attitude.

Networking

Networking is a big part of my DNA, I frequently operate in a multi-stakeholder network and love to collect perspectives. However, usually I know up front who I want to approach for what reason. Now, many of our interventions were done 'randomly', e.g. interviewing people walking on the street. I felt a bit uncomfortable in doing so, as I felt like I was 'bothering' these people. Part of this is because I didn't take the time to really get to know them before I started to come to the core, part was that I didn't really support the core I was spreading. This relates back to what I just reflected on, being driven to create impact instead of creating results. Most of our MVP's were targeted on results, which I as a person don't value that much, and therefore felt embarrassed to ask time of others to test their care. This experience showed me that being e.g. a UX designer is not really my cup of tea.

Associating

Associating is in my opinion closely related to questioning. I think it is mostly about shifting between concrete and abstract, about seeing the bigger themes and concrete cases and how these relate to each other. During my board year at study association Lucid I learned how to do this, seeing these different levels has become a part of my mindset. I think creativity is a great asset for associating, as it allows for unusual connections to be made, such as we did the MVP where we designed NoFoodWasted to be a part of Level Up Life. NoFoodWasted in this case would be the concrete, the case level, whereas Level Up Life would be the abstract, the visionary level.