Who, when and how to involve in participatory design processes to get better results?

Masterwork:

IDEATOR
A game to develop
design mindsets

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It's Not Only the Participating that Counts -
Counts -

Thesis

01 | Using participatory design methods and letting non-designer stakeholder groups to influence design decisions can lead to better and quicker results in complex design projects because we can reduce research time.

02 | Participation can ensure that we use the knowledge of the stakeholders in the design process. With low-level participation methods (e.g. survey) we have to decide what information we need before the research. With high-level participation methods (e.g. co-creation) participants bring in all the information that they know and they share what we need when that need arises during the process.

03 | Often it is important to involve stakeholders in the early phases of the design process – even those who will join the project later – to ensure that they accept the results more readily later even though it is not perfect.

04 | There is no one-size-fits-all solution to involve stakeholders, it needs planning in every project. First you have to decide why you need participation, then who you want to involve, when and what input you need from them. Based on these decisions you can decide which methods to use.

05 | It is better to use direct, indirect, visual and verbal participatory methods combined to understand the big picture, because they all have advantages and disadvantages.

06 | Higher levels of participation can lead to better results but they make the design process much more complicated (organizing workshops, generating too much information, making decisions difficult), so designers have to find the optimum level to reach their goals but to avoid overinvolvement.

07 | Improperly planned and facilitated processes often lead to low quantities and/or low quality ideas by non-designer stakeholders, not because they are not talented or creative but because they are not used to the design mindset.

08 | Empowerment only means something if it is paired with enablement – to involve stakeholders effectively we need to give them the tools to participate (proportionally to the level of involvement). Without that we can only talk about pseudo-participation.

09 | The new role of the designer is not only to facilitate but to educate stakeholders as well – they need to be able to teach the right mindset to participants.

10 | Understanding and practicing divergent and convergent thinking can help anyone to design because in design we always repeat five steps over and over again: asking a question, listing the answers (divergent phase), organizing, evaluating the information and combining the most relevant into a single concept (convergent phase).