

Chapter XIX

The Challenges of Co-Design and the Case of e-Me

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ABSTRACT

Setting up co-design processes involving several stakeholders is a complex task. In this chapter the authors have looked upon experiences from involving 120 future users in a process of incrementally developing and deploying an electronic assistant for students. The vision is to develop an electronic assistant, an e-Me, that acts as a filter and an agent in the information society. By interviewing some of the future users we have managed to derive some different challenges associated with co-design processes. These challenges have been discussed related to the following categories; perceived usefulness, user involvement in the development process, learning process and critical factors for future development. The authors analyze the empirical data and derive suggestions for possible improvements.

INTRODUCTION

The idea behind the e-Me project (www.e-Me.se) is simple and challenging at the same time: To build an electronic assistant that helps students in organizing their life. This involves activities such as organizing the course schedule, buying or lending course books, planning public transport, managing study progress, and so on. So far students have to go to a number of places, both physically and virtually, to accomplish that. e-Me is supposed to turn that process around

(Albinsson et al, 2006b). The vision is that the students should not need to go to the information; the information rather comes to the students based on the active profile set by the student.

The project, that this paper reports experiences from, explores whether an e-Me acting both as an agent for individuals and as a filter in the information galaxy for desired information services would be of use for creating a better society (c.f. Albinsson et al, 2006ab). It takes as its starting point the individual and his/her life situation, instead of the

organization which is providing services to the individual. The project, which formally begun in 2005, has applied a co-design (Albinsson, 2005; Albinsson & Forsgren, 2005ab) approach starting from a vision about an electronic assistant as a solution to student self-administration. An important part of the vision was also that the e-Me should evolve over time with input from different stakeholders by letting them share and design their view of reality together with others. To ensure both open and reflective participants a student setting at University College of Borås has been chosen. The e-Me project is in part a governmentally funded Swedish research consortium consisting of representatives from Umeå University, the University college of Borås, the city of Stockholm as well as several partner companies like Intel, Microsoft, VISA, Telia, Mecenat, and smaller student oriented companies (Lind et al, 2007).

One condition for e-Me is that e-Me Student-related services become accessible. To identify the relevant services a number of co-design workshops together with students in Sweden and Spain were conducted resulting in ten different scenarios (Albinsson et al, 2006a). To ensure representative results the participants of this study had been selected from different environments (e.g. cities and small towns), age groups (20 to 35) and countries (Sweden and Spain) with an equal gender distribution. These scenarios covered eight situations the students want to improve, such as *apply to university and begin studies*, *Monday morning*, *You've got lots of mail*, *change of plans*, *form-filling and reviewing*, *the elective course*, *finding jobs*, *the purse chase*, and *co-buyer groups*. During the spring and summer of 2006 these scenarios were verified by sending a questionnaire to 16 000 students in Sweden which resulted in more than 3 200 responses (Lindell et al, 2006). The most relevant services were implemented in a prototype. This prototype is the object of the current study. Figure 1 shows one snap-shot from the user interface of the e-Me pilot.

The scenarios were also used to involve the above mentioned stakeholder organizations in a conversation about their roles in a world with existing e-Me's.

After this verification a pilot version of the e-Me concept was designed and built (Lind et al, 2007). A small group of students were involved in testing and evaluation during this phase. After three months the first prototype of e-Me was deployed for a group of approx. 120 students (January 2007) who became a part of the e-Me project group and co-designers. The students co-designed e-Me by trying out the prototype – both in order to identify shortcomings in the application and identify new situations, both within and beyond the school setting, when an e-Me would be of assistance (ibid).

The core of the e-Me consists of the following components (Lind et al, 2007):

- **Calendar management**, in which the user's calendar can be shared with other e-Me users' calendars. Different categories of bookings can be highlighted by using different colors.
- **Mood management**, in which it possible to set and manage in which mood the e-Me user is. Three possible moods have been implemented in the prototype so far; private, meeting and open.
- **Mail aggregation**, in which mail can be popped from different sources and distributed dependent on the mood that is set.
- **Contact Management**, in which contacts can be grouped into different categories and a status of the contact, can be set in relation to the possible moods.
- **Archives**, in which files (of different types) can be stored and shared with other e-Me users.
- **Assignment**, in which the user manages all tasks assigned to the e-Me. In the pilot version four assignments has been implemented. These are the possibility for e-Me to receive study results (from Ladok – a national system for reporting study results), get the schedule into the calendar (from NeverLost – the school's scheduling system), receive this weeks lunch menu, as well as matching desires

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