Chapter XIV
iCE:
Interactive Coinnovation Environment

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ABSTRACT

As it becomes increasingly important to work in new sociotechnological formations such as the virtual spaces across networks, so does the requirement to build new tools to furnish this emergent landscape. This chapter looks at the way a virtual space may be built and used to facilitate group, team and individual thinking in developing projects and also shaping practice in organizations where innovation is an important focus. The chapter describes the work being done to produce an interactive networked based 'coinnovation' environment (iCE); where members of an organization, individually and variously, may contribute their thoughts to help innovate—develop 'prospects'—for the organization's projects.

INTRODUCTION

Adopting a culture of innovation is a huge step for many companies, but it is clear that those that are able to make the step usually reap huge rewards. The Design Council (2006) in the UK reports that 80% of the Fortune 500 companies have listed innovation as one of their top priorities. This comes as no surprise. The move from the identification of the need for innovation to the implementation of stratagems to educe innovation is for most companies/organizations rather tricky, however. There is an innate difficulty, a kind of schizophrenia in organizations, where on one hand, they are looking to a logic of efficiency, low or justified risk, and clear and assured targets and on the other, they are looking for innovation, which requires flights of imagination, risk-taking, speculation, and experimentation; contradictory in every sense to the first position.

Design programs may help to alleviate the tensions between the two positions—stripping away the fear often associated with creative work by demystifying the processes of innovation. As stated by Stamm (2003) 'design as a profession holds some of the answers to integrating innova-

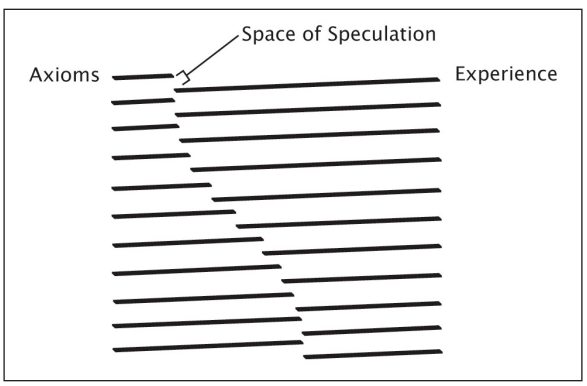
tion into the culture of business' (p. 3). Increasingly, design is becoming involved in business; producing innovative designs for businesses and, at the business end of businesses, using design thinking to facilitate innovative business practices (designs of business).

At Goldsmiths College we are currently designing an interactive coinnovation environment (through the rest of this chapter abbreviated to iCE) for organizations of various kinds. The environment is designed to help produce innovative designs for business but may also help produce innovative designs of a business. The core around which the iCE is conceived, is being designed so as to be able to make visible the flights of imagination, the process of speculation and programmes of experimentation, and, through this visualization, to some extent, implicitly, map risk through the course of an innovation process. This core is, in essence, the visualization of design thinking—virtual creativity made explicit.

BACKGROUND

Renaissance figures like Da Vinci and Galileo looked to diagrams to explore problems and conceive ideas; circumventing words and numbers to work in images of, and for, thought. Through drawing they made their thought process visible, considering connections and relationships between things. Working through homologies; for instance, observing connections in the spirals of a whirlpool vortex and the spiral growth of plants (Da Vinci)—they were able to understand something of the nature of things as they exist. They were also able to take these observations and extrapolate from them so as to make conjecture as to how things may be.

Figure 1. Diagram of Einstein's sketch showing a space of speculation or hunch



The iCE is particularly focused on how things may be. The roots of the iCE lie in earlier research of ours into a particular cognitive act; an act of thinking that makes a jump into what is not yet known or in existence—namely, the 'hunch.' Einstein (1949) wrote in his scientific papers, that the two postulates of relativity were no more than 'hunches'. In perhaps the most significant advance in science in history, rigorous scientific method was accorded no part by Einstein. And, the workings of the imagination were relegated to a point on the horizon of practice, where innovatory thinking disappeared as mere 'hunch'. He evolved his hunches into the postulates about time and space, which we now know as relativity, without recourse to experiment or testing. Instead, there is only the necessary mathematics built on an instantaneous thought; the hunch. In fact we may think of the mathematics as merely illustrations of those remarkable hunches. Mathematics that was valued for its aesthetic of sense; as it was only some time later that it was 'proven.'

The idea that the imaginative leap, the hunch, is dimensionless is of course absurd. Einstein is disingenuous and self effacing when he presents it as such. The hunch has thickness in his thinking. It is clear from the traces of his thinking (Einstein has left jottings and diagrams) that there is indeed more to his 'hunches' than he admits. He knows, understands, and destabilizes past practice and asserts new ways of thinking, connecting until then unconnected ideas and images; all the time hypostatizing his thinking through