

Designing for dialogue:

Exploring support in
design teams through
conversation and reflection

Colophon

Master thesis:

MSc Design for Interaction (DFI)
Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology

Author:

Natanya Cornet

Supervision:

Dr.ir. M.H. (Marieke) Sonneveld
Ir. C.P.J.M. (Caroline) Kroon

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*"Empathy is
about finding
echoes of
another person
in yourself."*

*— Mohsin
Hamid*

Executive Summary

In today's fast-paced and increasingly individualistic world, feelings of loneliness and social isolation are becoming more prevalent. For students, navigating group projects can be challenging, not just academically, but also emotionally. Working closely with peers can bring about pressures to maintain a professional front, leaving little room for open conversations about personal struggles or support needs.

Recognizing the growing issues of loneliness and social disconnection in academic environments, the Support Board was developed to foster reflection, open communication, and mutual support within student teams. This project, focused on the Industrial Design Engineering (IDE) faculty at TU Delft, aims to create safe spaces within teams where students can reflect on their support needs, communicate those needs, and offer support to one another. By encouraging dialogue around support-seeking and support-giving behaviors, the Support Board seeks to improve team cohesion and promote a more empathetic and supportive culture within teams, ultimately enhancing both individual mental well-being and team dynamics. This led to the following design goal:

Increase mental health of IDE students by developing a tool which helps create a supportive (team) environment and, in that way seeks to improve team cohesion

Through an iterative Research through Design approach, the project went through multiple phases of development, testing, and refinement.

Initial research highlighted the need for interventions that encourage students to reflect on and articulate their support needs in a structured yet accessible manner. To achieve this, the final design The Support Board, was created. The Support Board addresses these needs by incorporating recognizable archetypes, support tokens, and guided reflection exercises to help team members understand their roles in offering and seeking support, and stimulated them to have conversations about this.

The evaluations showed promising results in enhancing team members' understanding of each other's needs and creating an open space for dialogue. Although some usability challenges were identified, such as the need for more clarity and ease in navigating the tool, the overall feedback was positive. The Support Board facilitated light-hearted, meaningful discussions and hinted towards a deeper sense of empathy and connection within teams. Recommendations are proposed for further development of the Support Board. These recommendations include improving the usability, form and clarity of the current concept.

Looking ahead, the Support Board holds potential for refinement and expansion beyond its current academic setting, offering a valuable resource for any team or community aiming to promote collaboration, well-being, and social connection.

Preface

Dear reader,

This project marks the end of an era, my life as a student. In the past 8 years (I royally took my time, I know), I have not only been able to gather skills that are necessary for a designer, I have also been able to use these skills to develop as a person. Things like reflection, creative thinking and reframing is not something that just exists in the world of product design, I have learned it helps me in all facets of my life.

When my father passed away in 2014, a big part of my life halted. I had given myself one mission, to just finish high school, and would avoid anything that would make me more confused than I already was. When I started my study, at that time at the TU Eindhoven, a new world opened for me. I felt that I was finally able to explore again. I did not give Industrial Design much thought at first, as my dean just suggested it to me, saying she thought it would fit me well. And oh boy was she right. I fell in love with it. I love the diverse topics you tackle as a designer, and with every project you learn more about the world and about people. I soon figured out that I felt mostly interested in designing for people, and after my exchange to Japan, fight topics like loneliness. I want to design for community and togetherness, in any form possible.

This is what led me to this project. I knocked on Marieke's door, and together we came to the topic of "comforting" (and later on "support"). I started this project with a lot of enthusiasm, and now I also end it with that. However, I have also experienced a lot of struggles and stress this project. Doing projects completely by myself is not something I enjoy so much. I miss the discussions and brainstorming with others, that in a group project comes so naturally. Luckily I had my support group of graduating girls, with whom I've shared our little office the past half a year. I was able to complete this journey through the love and support that my friends and family have shown me. I would like to thank:

Marieke and Caroline. I want to give you special thanks for all the support, advice and trust you have given me, even if I didn't always believe in

myself. Your patience, encouragement, and belief in my potential gave me the confidence to persevere and grow, both as a designer and as a person. This project would not have been the same without your mentorship.

Eline, Lieneke, Kim and Katelijn, my little support group throughout my entire masters and study programme. Who have made my masters at TU Delft amazing, and made working through summer even (somehow) enjoyable! I'm not sure I would have been able to endure without you guys there.

Sophie, who was always there for me when I needed advice, distraction, help or a brainstorm partner. I also specially thank Sophie and Merel, who spent several hours in the evening and night cutting all the parts of my prototype, when I underestimated how much time it was to cut everything.

Aksel who supported me through all the challenging parts of this project. Who endured the Russian roulette of never knowing what mood I would be in when he picked up the phone.

Last but not least, I want to thank my mom, who has spent the past 8 years supporting my every whim, breakdown and when I suddenly change my plans again. Who supports me even when I call her crying, but then refuse to talk to about my concepts until the very end. Who I tell that I have quit my study as a joke, but then does not believe that it is a joke until I show her my supervisor handing me my diploma. So here you go mom, this project is for you.

*Love,
Natanya*



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Introduction

Introduction into the design space

1.1 CONTEXT

Comforting is an important part of most relationships, and usually done between people that know each other well, e.g. the inner circle contacts like friends or family. Because of this, comforting usually takes place only behind a closed door. However, emotions and worries are something that are inside every person, and are carried around wherever one goes. The role of inner circle contacts is more often somewhat clear; with them people can vent and find relief. But what does one do when we feel bad or have worries, and has to go to a place like university or work? In places like this, where most of the time of the day is spent, we are surrounded by people that are part of our community. They are not the people closest to someone, but often have a more formal relationship with; other students, teammates or colleagues. Despite being surrounded by peers, there exists an unspoken expectation to maintain a face of composure and professionalism, leaving personal struggles and worries to the shadows.

1.2 INITIAL PROJECT GOAL

At its core, this project aims to dismantle the barriers that hinder open expression and genuine empathy at a community level. By fostering a culture and environment where the taboo of expression is tackled and open conversation about one's needs can be embraced, we can cultivate a stronger, more resilient community. In this case focused on the community at the Industrial Design Engineering faculty at TU Delft. I want to design an intervention to improve the interplay between comfort-giving and comfort-seeking of young adults at the IDE faculty and in that way, create a more understanding environment in which comfort can more safely be expressed and received in all its forms.

Comforting can be a stressful and emotional moment not only for the comfort-seeker, but also for the comfort-giver. Both parties can have

struggles and fears which hinder them from being able to express their needs, and thus preventing them from having these needs met.

For this, focus is put on group meetings, as this is where and how students at IDE spend a big part of their time with their IDE community members and work in close proximity. In the context of group meetings, I want to design an intervention that empowers both comfort-givers and comfort-seekers within the IDE community to understand and effectively communicate their specific needs to their peers, fostering a culture of empathy, support, and mutual understanding.

1.3 RELEVANCE

Loneliness is a fast-growing problem worldwide and can have significant impact on a person's mental health (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015 & Seppala et al., 2013). Loneliness, often characterized by a feeling of isolation or disconnection from others, can affect individuals across all age groups and demographics. Also leading to mental health challenges as e.g. depression and anxiety (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015 & Seppala et al., 2013). While relationships within one's inner circle can play a crucial role in fighting loneliness and creating a sense of belonging, the importance of creating comforting strategies within the community can also be overlooked. The community layer can consist of, for example, acquaintances, neighbours, colleagues, and fellow citizens who collectively form the social fabric of a society.

1.3.1 Importance of social connection to mental and emotional well-being

Research has shown that strong social connections and a sense of belonging within one's community are vital for physical, mental and emotional well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015 & Seppala et al., 2013). When individuals feel supported and valued within their broader

social environment, they are less likely to experience feelings of loneliness or social isolation, which are often precursors to more serious mental health issues. Therefore, exploring what role community can play in comforting can serve as a potent antidote to the epidemic of loneliness that plagues current society and, in turn, contribute to better mental health outcomes (Owczarek et al. 2022).

1.3.2 Fostering Supportive Team

Zooming in onto the IDE faculty and its current culture, it is important to understand that working together in a team is a vital aspect of the IDE faculty's curriculum and culture. Thus, making it an ideal setting to implement supportive design interventions. By incorporating elements such as empathetic communication tools and structured group activities aimed at fostering trust and collaboration, comfort-giving and comfort-seeking dynamics within the IDE community could be enhanced. These efforts not only support individual mental health by reducing feelings of isolation but also cultivate a culture of mutual understanding, empathy, and support.

Ultimately, this creates an environment where students feel empowered to express their needs and provide comfort to one another, addressing individual struggles, promoting a sense of belonging and interconnectedness, and contributing to stronger team cohesion. This, in turn, enhances the overall project work experience and supports both personal growth and mental well-being.

1.4 BOOKMARKING

Existing initiatives such as facilitated workshops and projects aimed at fostering better teamwork have laid the groundwork for improving interpersonal dynamics within various settings. These initiatives promote collaboration, communication skills, and mutual respect among participants. However, despite these efforts, there remains a significant gap in addressing the specific needs related to comfort-giving and comfort-seeking behaviours.

1.4.1 Opportunity

This project is both relevant and innovative because it goes beyond the scope of traditional teamwork enhancement initiatives by focusing specifically on the emotional and psychological aspects of support within a community. It

recognizes that the ability to openly express needs and provide comfort is crucial for building supportive connections and fostering a bigger sense of belonging. By addressing these dimensions, the project not only complements existing efforts but also introduces a novel approach to community-building that prioritizes not only team cohesion, but also emotional well-being and empathetic interactions.

1.5 SCOPE

1.5.1 The role of community

As mentioned above, the focus in this project is put on exploring what role the community layer can play for comforting in an environment where usually contacts of the inner layer aren't present or available. This can be for example environments like universities or workplaces. Here, the community layer (often comprised of peers, teammates, or colleagues etc.) can serve as an essential support network. While they might not share the same level of intimacy that one has with their inner circle contacts, members of the community often possess a unique understanding of shared experiences and challenges within the specific context of the environment. By fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and mutual support within this community layer, individuals could feel more comfortable expressing their needs and seek and give comfort to/from those around them, in whatever form suits their situation. Furthermore, this could open up the opportunity for different forms of comforting not yet explored in current society.

1.5.2 Target group: Students at Industrial Design Engineering

The target group for this project is Bachelor and Master students at the Industrial Design Engineering (IDE) faculty. This demographic includes individuals of ages between approximately 18-26 years old, who are engaged in a creative academic study. These students are characterized by mostly working in collaborative environments where they work in project teams for most of their courses. These courses can differ between just taking a couple of weeks, to taking a whole semester. Understanding the needs, preferences, and behaviors of IDE students will be crucial for tailoring the project's solutions to effectively support their academic and emotional well-being.

Project Approach

Figure 1 illustrates the overall design process and the different phases respectively.

Research through Design (RtD)

This project further relies on the Research through Design method (RtD). RtD is a research approach that combines the process of designing with research inquiry, where new knowledge is generated through the creation and evaluation of designs. By iteratively developing prototypes and solutions, the designer learns from the act of designing itself, uncovering insights into both the design and the problem context.

Through Research through Design, a continuous engagement with users was maintained. Meaning that this phase consists mostly out of an iterative approach of designing, testing, evaluating and reiterating. With which constantly new ideas, approaches are explored and new insights are gained regarding the research questions. By engaging in an iterative process like this, the project aims to discover new insights into user-friendliness, ensuring that each iteration is brought closer to creating solutions that are both effective and intuitive for users. This hands-on, approach allows for the continuous refinement of designs, leading to more user-centered and innovative outcomes.

On top of this, a range of experts are involved throughout the project to give further insights. This iterative approach allowed for ongoing feedback, fostering a deeper understanding of user needs and ensuring that the design outcomes were both innovative and grounded in real-world insights. This approach is particularly crucial when addressing topics like support and comfort, as these are deeply personal and nuanced experiences.

The overall design process thus went through three consecutive phases:

1. Discover & Define

In this phase, research was conducted to understand the context and explore the design space. Together with utilizing different experts, more knowledge was gathered and at the end of this phase, the design goal was formulated.

2. Explore

After discovering what the design space at hand is, it is time to explore and iterate on different possible solution. In every circle a new concept is designed, tested and evaluated. At the end of this phase, requirements are set up, and the last iteration towards the final design is done.

3. Delivery

In delivery the final design will be presented and evaluated. This together with recommendations for future works for the design.

By continuously involving users and experts, I could empathize with individual needs and sensitivities. The iterative process allowed for the creation of solutions that create this space where participants learn to speak the same language regarding support and making it a set part of the project space.

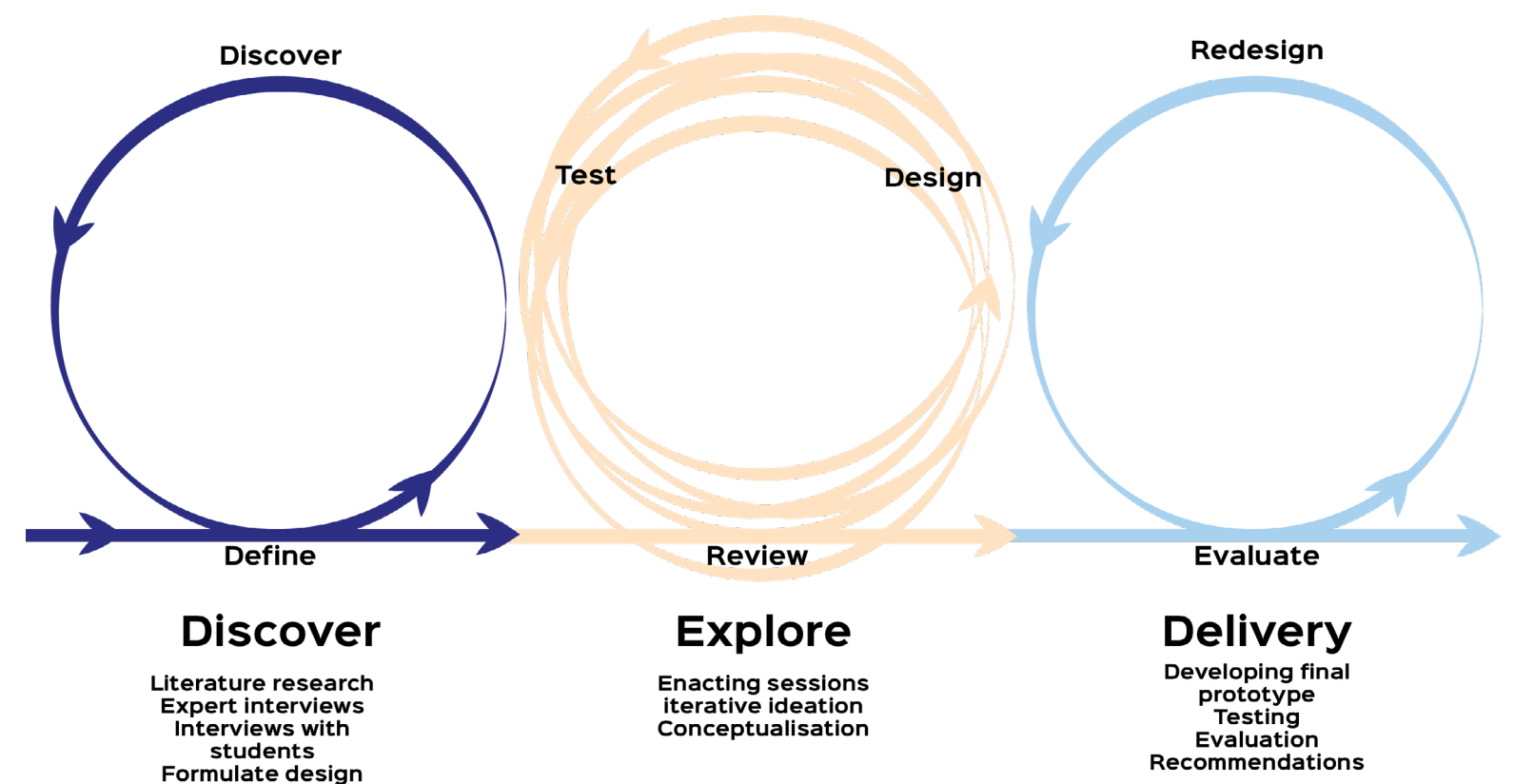


Figure 1: Project approach

02

Discover & Define



This section explores the topic of comfort, especially focusing on how it is perceived and experienced by young adults studying at the IDE faculty of the TU Delft. The goal is to understand what their needs are and in what way they are being met at the moment. Information from literature and findings from interviews are highlighted to identify the design space.

What is comfort(ing)?

Comforting can express itself in many forms. According to Oxford Language and comfort researcher Burleson (1994), the definition of “Comforting” refers to “serving to alleviate a person’s feelings of grief or distress”. But for how to do this, there is no one recipe or answer. The “provider” of such relief of distress could be anything. Not only another person and their actions, but could also be a drug (e.g., an antidepressant) or an event (for instance, passing an exam one was afraid of failing) (Miceli et al, 2009). The specific needs for comfort differ between people, reasons of distress and situations. In some situations, people prefer talking about it with others, whereas others rather take some distance and distract themselves from the worries experienced. In this project comforting, is divided into two behavioral roles: **Comfort-seeking** and **Comfort-giving**.

Comfort-seeking entails the need for relief of distress. This can be for any reason, and it does not matter how severe the reason of distress is perceived to be (Miceli et al, 2009). It’s important to note is that relief of distress does not have to intrinsically mean that the problem or feeling that is causing distress, has to be solved. Comforting can happen even without solving (think about distracting someone from an issue, instead of trying to solve it).

Comfort-giving, on the other hand, is the act of helping another person achieve this relief of distress. The act of giving comfort therefore, is nuanced and depends on a variety of factors: the personality of the Comfort-giver and Comfort-seeker, the context, nature of stress, specific comfort needs etc. It is important to recognize that what brings relief to one person, might not work for another. Therefore, Comfort-giving requires sensibility, adaptability and empathy. The Comfort-giver tries to accommodate to the needs and preferences of the Comfort-seeker, understanding that their role can change from being an empathetic listener to simply providing a distraction or a comforting presence.

2.1 BENEFITS OF COMFORT

Comforting and being comforted are essential for emotional well-being and overall mental health (Walker, 2010). When one seeks comfort, it can help alleviate feelings of distress, anxiety, or sadness, providing a sense of relief and security. This helps foster a sense of connection and belonging, which is crucial for maintaining healthy relationships. Being comforted can also help one process difficult emotions, thoughts or events, leading to greater emotional resilience and better coping strategies in the future.

On the other hand, offering comfort to others can strengthen bonds, increase empathy, and provide a sense of purpose, positively impacting the comfort-giver’s own emotional health. In both roles, comfort can help regulate stress levels, contributing to improved mental health, and reinforcing a compassionate and supportive environment (Walker, 2010).

2.2 WHAT ARE CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COMFORTING?

As stated before, comfort-seekers have different needs when it comes to effective comforting methods. Where one can prefer to talk about the issue or feeling at hand, another could prefer distraction or having some space to digest their thoughts and feelings. That being said, there are several general key conditions that contribute to effective comforting overall.

2.2.1 Person-centeredness

Person-centeredness is an approach that prioritizes the individual’s needs, preferences, and values in decision-making and care. It emphasizes treating people as unique

individuals, respecting their autonomy, and involving them actively in their care or interactions. The focus is on understanding and responding to the whole person, rather than just addressing their problems or symptoms.

In comforting contexts, person-centeredness refers to the extent to which conversations explicitly acknowledge, elaborate, legitimize, and contextualize the comfort-seeker’s feelings and perspective. Conversations that are low in person centeredness, tend to deny the comfort-seekers feelings and perspective by for example criticizing the other’s feelings, challenging the legitimacy of those feelings, or telling the other how he or she should act and feel.

On the other hand, conversations that are high in person-centered comforting explicitly recognize and legitimize the other’s feelings, help the other to articulate those feelings, elaborate reasons why those feelings might be felt, and try to assist the comfort-seeker to figure out how those feelings fit in a broader context (Burleson, 1994).

2.2.2 Motivation & Intention

With regards to comforting, it is usually not the way one comforts that matters most, but the intention and motivation behind it. Many attempts to comfort can be clumsy and maybe even ineffective (Burleson, 1990), but the Comfort-Seeker is often able to go beyond the quality of the specific attempt and appreciates and values the intent with which the Comfort-Giver extends their support. The Comfort-Seeker often recognizes the genuine attempt and the gesture of trying to offer help or support, and this is more often times already enough to feel comforted. Motivation and intention are therefore one of the most important conditions when it comes to effective comforting. This conclusion is well presented by a participant in a paper by Miceli et al (2009):

“An immediate response is comforting even if it’s only a gesture, I don’t know: going out for a beer together and trying to make you think about something else for a while. if you can feel that person wants to be close to you.”

The participant refers to the fact that comfort-seekers can simply want someone who can share the weight of their problems with them, without specifically having to solve or even do anything special.

Since what counts as effective comfort varies greatly from person to person, comforting preferences are highly individual. As a result, comforting tends to be a trial-and-error process. One needs to get to know the Comfort-Seeker and try different methods to understand their individual preferences.

The intention to help another person, if present, can consist of different sorts motivations (Burleson et al, 2007):

1. Goal Motivation: A desire to achieve a particular social outcome (e.g. alleviating distress of another person). “I want to help”
2. Effectance Motivation: The level of confidence a person has in their ability to achieve this goal. “I have the ability to help”
3. Normative Motivation: The desire to behave in role-appropriate ways (e.g. feeling like you want to say the “right” things when comforting another person). “I want to step into the role of comfort-giver”

If a Comfort-giver is lacking in one of these motivations, it could lead to a felt lack of intention for the Comfort-Seeker. Which in turn leads to ineffective comforting. All three need to be taken into account to see what could be a specific context-tied barrier to effective comforting.

2.2.3 The healing effect of Social Support: Acknowledgement

Acknowledging feelings felt by the Comfort-Seeker is crucial in order to provide comfort. This affirmation is important as it helps the individual feel that their emotional reactions are normal and accepted, reducing feelings of isolation (Burleson, B.R., 1984 & Miceli et al, 2009). Knowing that others recognize and understand their struggles can alleviate a sense of loneliness and foster a deeper connection with those offering support. To get a deeper understanding on this topic, a social worker from Joods Maatschappelijk Werk, often working with Second World War survivors, was consulted. She explains that some of her clients are looking for acknowledgement

of their experiences and losses. Second World War survivors can cope with trauma. While the context and severity of experiences vary, the underlying mechanisms of social support and its impact on mental health share similarities across different groups. Research on trauma survivors provides valuable insights into the comforting effects of social support, showing how effective comforting can significantly alleviate distress. The principles derived from these studies, such as the importance of empathy, connection, and a supportive community, are applicable in less severe but still challenging contexts, like those experienced by students.

The social worker expresses that getting this acknowledgement from others, sometimes even governmental instances, can give an enormous feeling of comfort. This is also seen in the expression of symptoms in PTSS patients. Typically PTSS symptoms have a more severe expression with patients that feel less social acknowledgement (Maercker & Muller, 2004) and social support (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003).

This connection shows the critical role that acknowledgement and comforting behaviors can play in alleviating distress. Recognition of one's feelings and experiences, be it by peers, authority figures, or institutions, can significantly contribute to emotional resilience and overall mental well-being.

2.2.2 Motivation & Intention

When providing comfort, understanding the nuances of how we address another's distress is crucial. The way one responds to emotions can significantly impact the sense of acknowledgement and support. In this context, it is important to distinguish between "normalizing" and "minimizing" the Comfort-Seeker's feelings.

Normalization involves acknowledging that the distress felt is a natural reaction or consequence of the circumstances, which helps the Comfort-Seeker feel that their emotions are valid and "normal" with regards to the situation that they are in. All feelings felt by a Comfort-seeker are authentic in their own experience. Often comfort-seekers feel insecure sharing their problems, fearing having their feelings dismissed and not feeling acknowledged. To be comforted, in some situations, means to have another person acknowledge that what one is going through is tough and the feelings felt are a natural consequence of the situation. A Comfort-

Seeker can feel alone or abnormal for having the emotions or thoughts that they have. By normalizing these, it allows for a space where Comfort-Seekers are free to vent their feelings (Miceli et al, 2009). Note that this is different from being "right", it simply means that it is understandable from their perspective that these feelings are felt.

Normalizing is inherently different to being met with a "minimizing" attitude. A minimizing attitude dismisses or downplays the significance of their feelings, which can undermine their experience and hinder effective comforting. Comfort-Givers, although often with the best intent of highlighting bright sides, can accidentally minimize the feelings of a Comfort-Seeker. This can be best displayed with a quote by Brene Brown:

"Rarely, if ever, an empathic response begins with the words 'at least...'"

An example of this, also from Brown, is:

*Comfort-Seeker "I had a miscarriage"
Comfort-Giver: "Well, at least you know you can get pregnant".*

When a comfort-seeker is expressing their feelings/problems, and is e.g. met with an "at least"-statement, it creates a situation where the comfort-seekers reason of distress is minimized and in that way, creates a space where the Comfort-Seeker is not free to express their troubles.

In summary, effective comforting requires a deep understanding of how to respond to another's distress in a way that acknowledges their feelings and emotions. By distinguishing between normalizing and minimizing, Comfort-Givers can make sure that their responses provide genuine comfort rather than (unknowingly) downplaying the Comfort-seeker's experience. Normalizing emotions fosters a space where individuals feel understood and free to express their feelings, which is important for effective comforting. In contrast, minimizing, even with good intentions, can have the opposite effect, leaving the Comfort-seeker feeling unheard.

2.3 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMFORTING

In image 1 a shot of a short video called It's not about the nail is portrayed. The video shows two people arguing, a woman (who has a nail lodged in her forehead) expressing her worries and distress to a man who is trying to tell her that removing the nail will probably solve all of this. This video reflects one of the most common misconceptions about comforting, which is that to alleviate a person's feelings of grief or distress, the problem causing those feelings has to be solved. And although this is certainly true for some cases, giving comfort is much bigger than this. It is reminiscent of Lazarus and Folkman's distinction between two types of coping; problem-focused, which is aiming to change a situation by solving a problem, and emotion-focused, which aims at regulating the emotional reactions to distress. Because at the core lies that the man (Comfort-Giver) is not answering the specific comfort need of the woman (Comfort-Seeker). In this situation, the woman wants to feel heard and wants her worries to be acknowledged, instead of the underlying cause of the problem to be fixed.

An important point to make here, is the fact that the Comfort-Giver's job, although it might have some similarities to that of a therapist, is fundamentally different. Comfort-givers' primary goal is to offer empathy, acknowledgement, and a relief of distress in the moment, helping the Comfort-Seeker navigate through their current feelings. Comforting usually addresses short-term emotional troubles rather than long-term (psychological) issues (Miceli et al, 2009). Therapists, on the other hand, are trained professionals who work

to uncover underlying psychological patterns and address long-standing issues that may require more structured intervention. This distinction is crucial because it highlights the importance of understanding the boundaries of comforting. Comfort-Givers are not expected to solve deep-rooted psychological problems but rather to be present, offer understanding, and create a safe space for the Comfort-Seeker. Recognizing this boundary can help Comfort-Givers avoid the pressure of trying to "fix" complex issues, and instead focus on providing the immediate comfort and reassurance that can be so valuable in times of distress.

Another interesting misconception, is the impact of gender on comfort needs. Even though there seems to be a general conception that the genders have clear differences in preferences for what kind of emotional support they want to receive, research shows that men and woman actually have the same preferences and reactions when it comes to emotional support (Cutrona, 1996 & Burleson, 2003). The difference lies in the fact that that men and women differ quite reliably when it comes to providing emotional support to others (Burleson et al, 2005). Men are less likely than women to:

- (a) undertake the task of providing support and comfort to a person seeking comfort (Burda, Vaux, & Schill, 1984),
 - (b) focus on the emotions of the distressed target when they do provide support (Trobst, Collins, & Embree, 1994), and
 - (c) use high person-centered forms of verbal comfort when seeking to reduce the distress of the target (Samter, 2002).
- This points to the notion that it might be more difficult for some men to provide effective comforting than it is for women, even though the needs are usually similar.

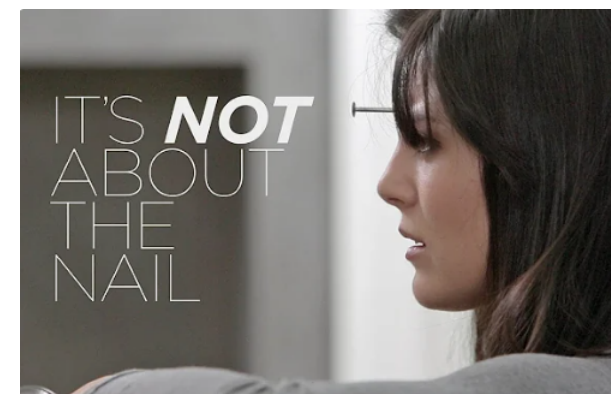


Image 1: It's not about the nail



Comforting at IDE

“Action over words”, it is the mantra that Motiv, an association that coaches new board members of study associations every year, hears more often. Hans van Drongelen writes in a reflective post about how the students in Delft are deeply averse to talking.

“I recall students who resolved to say nothing during the training at our office, waiting for the “socio-psychological nonsense” to end. They grumbled about time wasted and the lack of benefits. “Make a few solid agreements for collaboration, do your part, and that’s it.” – Hans van Drongelen

This attitude can also be seen back at the IDE faculty when it comes to comforting. Even though teamwork is one of the most important aspects of the study, comforting more often than not seems not to have a place in teams or in meetings.

2.4 PYRAMID OF LENCIONI

To achieve affective teamwork and create a comfortable team environment, some of the courses of IDE base their coaching and teaching on the Pyramid of Lencioni. This is a tool that provides a framework for understanding the challenges teams face when building trust and collaboration.

The five levels of the pyramid are portrayed in figure 2.

This can be highly beneficial for creating a culture of comfort at the IDE faculty, as it addresses key dysfunctions that often hinder effective teamwork and collaboration. By focusing on building trust, the foundation of the pyramid, students can feel more comfortable expressing their needs and vulnerabilities within their project teams. This openness paves the way for constructive conflict, where differing perspectives are valued rather than avoided, fostering an environment where both personal and academic challenges can be discussed.

Cohesive Teams display five characteristic behaviours

- ▲ **Focus on achieving collective results**
The ultimate goal of building greater trust, conflict, commitment and accountability is one thing: the achievement of collective results.
- ▲ **Hold one another accountable**
When everyone is committed to a clear plan of action, they will be more willing to hold one another accountable
- ▲ **Commit to decisions**
When team members are able to offer opinions and debate ideas, they will be more likely to commit to decisions.
- ▲ **Engage in conflict around ideas**
When there is trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas
- ▲ **Trust one another**
When team members are genuinely transparent and honest with one another, they are able to build vulnerability-based trust



Figure 2: Pyramid of Lencioni



Image 2: Interview Images of environments

2.5 STORYTELLING INTERVIEWS

To elaborately understand how students of IDE currently experience comfort(ing), and what place comfort has at the faculty and in project meetings, two rounds of interviews were conducted. The participants were of different nationalities, age, gender and years into their studies. All interviews were conducted 1-on-1 for the comfort and safety of the participants. In the first round of interviews (n = 7, Appendix B) conducted, the goal was to understand the context and to sketch the design space. An attempt was made to understand how the students navigate distress (no matter of what the cause) and how comfort is perceived and thought of at the IDE faculty and community. In these interviews, it was aimed to better understand what comfort can be, what the barriers are to ask and offer comfort and explored students' needs for both comfort-giving and seeking.

In the second round (n= 6, Appendix D), the focus was on storytelling. An attempt was made to understand how students at IDE would act in the role of comfort-seeker, and what role

the environment (Image 2) had on this. Three scenarios were created, based on common issues in student' phase of life. Participants were asked to create a ranking of most to least relatable. Thereafter, the interviewer would highlight a fictional day at the faculty, and from time to time ask participants to finish sections of this “fictional day” according to their own experience and probable actions. Finally, reflective questions regarding the answers were asked to gain deeper insight into their responses.

In these rounds of interviews, different comforting needs, habits and opinions became apparent. A summary of these results are outlined in the next section. Full results can be found in Appendix C & E.



Image [FIXME]: Interview 2 setup

2.6 COMFORT- SEEKING

What a comfort-seeker is looking for when in distress, is a highly individual need. It depends on the preference of the comfort-seeker, situation and reason for distress. However, after conducting several interviews with different students at IDE, some general themes of comfort needs (figure 3) and barriers for comfort-seeking can be distinguished. These insights reveal patterns in how the students navigate their emotional challenges, elaborating on the diverse ways comfort is sought in and out of the faculty, and the obstacles that can hinder its attainment. Understanding these themes not only helps to clarify what comfort means in different contexts but also portrays the shared struggles that students face, providing a foundation for developing more effective support systems within the IDE community.

2.6.1 Comfort Needs

When one is seeking comfort, this can take form in different ways, depending on the needs of the Comfort-seeker at that moment. Even though a wide range of individual needs were identified, a few recurring themes resonated over multiple participants. Common comfort needs included the need to vent, look for advice, be listened to or to get their feelings and hardships acknowledged, highlighting the value of emotional acknowledgement in moments of distress. But not all students underlined specifically wanting to be open about their distress. Some are looking for ways to take the focus away from their feelings. Common behaviors displayed the need for being surrounded by others. Students mentioned finding relief of distress through either mirroring the energy of their team members, getting distraction, or just enjoying their presence without necessarily participating actively. The mere presence of others itself can work as a comforting distraction, offering a sense of connection and easing these feelings of distress, without the need for a direct interaction. On the other hand, participants also emphasized the need for distance and autonomy. These included for example the desire for freedom and understand of going home early or to taking a small break for going a walk, or simply spending time alone listening to music. These responses emphasize the diverse ways in which comfort can

be experienced, either through connection and support from others, or through getting personal space. Understanding these is crucial for creating an environment that can cater to the varied comfort needs of students.

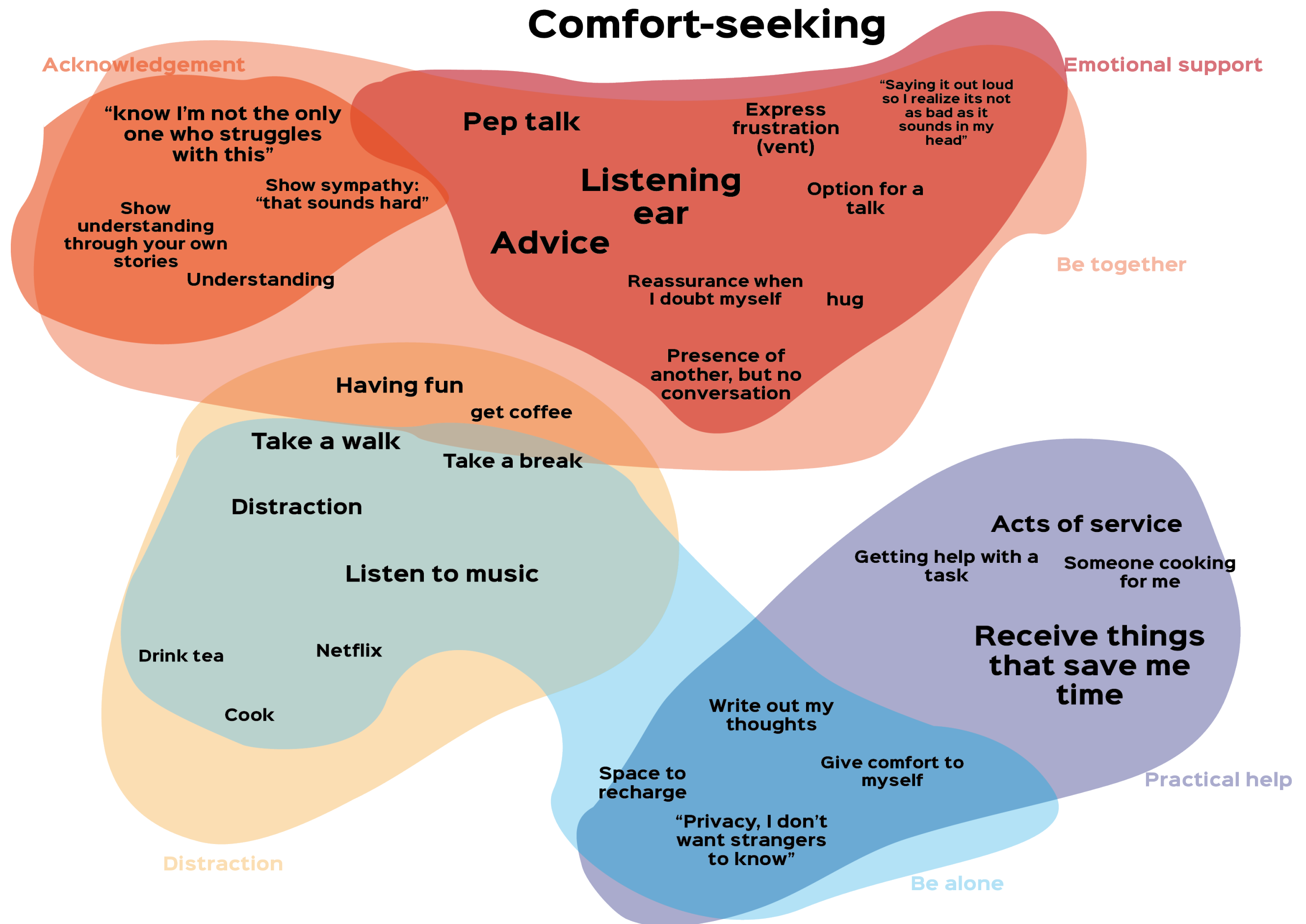


Figure 3: Summary of results from interview round 1

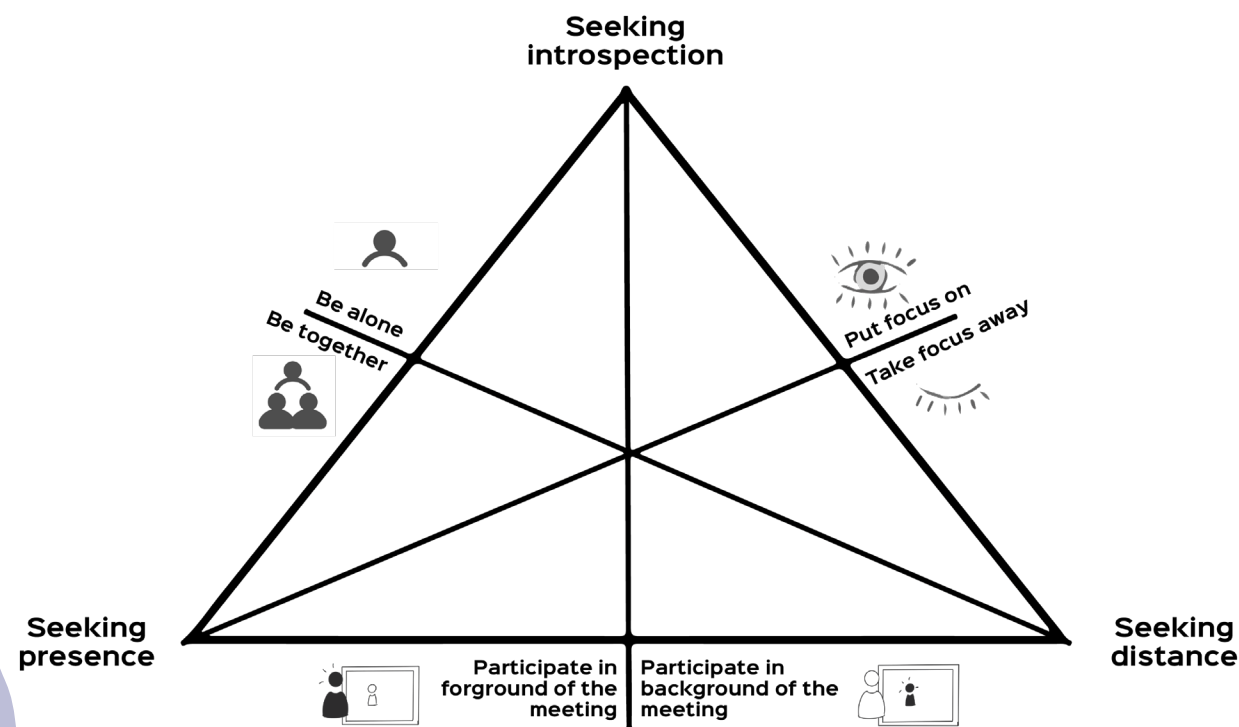


Figure 4: Comfort Triangle

This information was used to create a tool to categorize these many different comfort needs and wishes. Three main themes portray the comforting needs (fig. 4):

1. **Seeking Presence:** the need for help and/or care from others.
2. **Seeking Distance:** the need for a distance from the (reason of) distress, e.g. through distracting the Comfort-Seeker.
3. **Seeking Introspection:** the need to face or explore the reason of distress by oneself.

These are brought together in the form of a triangle, where each main theme occupies a corner of the model. To further specify distinctions in these main themes, three more sections are made (fig. 4):

Be Alone/Together

This section cuts Seeking Distance in two parts: expressing the wish for being together or being alone. Seeking presence fully falls into the Be Together side, where Introspection falls fully into the Be Alone side. Seeking Distance has a foot in both sides.

“Be Together” portrays the needs of Comfort-Seekers to have others around them. This can be in any way they feel necessary; discussing the reason of distress and seeking e.g. advice, or simply being around other people without participating directly.

Put focus on/Take focus away from the Reason of Distress

This section cuts Seeking Presence in two side; Put focus on/Take focus away. “Put focus on” highlights the needs for wanting to give attention to the reason of distress to either talk about it, or simply giving it mental space to think about it. This can either be because the Comfort-Seeker e.g. wants to feel heard and/or have their distress acknowledged, or because they want to find solutions for it.

“Take focus away” shows the need for distance from the reason of distress. Here Comfort-seekers want to distract themselves from it, and would perhaps like to receive help doing so; either to take their mind of the reason of distress for a while, or because this helps them to process their thoughts and feelings.

Be in the Foreground/Background

From the interviews, it became clear that there is a distinction between being able to participate in the fore- or background of a meeting. This is both up to the character, and the comfort needs of a person. In moments when thoughts or feelings are overflowing the mind, it can sometimes be difficult to match the energy of others in the group. This might cause a Comfort-Seeker to prefer to fall to the background and be more passively present. They can be entertained and experience relief simply by observing others and still feeling like a part of the world.

On the other hand, matching another’s energy can help a Comfort-Seeker to be distracted from their own distress. This can also work as relief.

2.6.2 Relation between Comfort needs and the Comfort triangle

This comfort-triangle can be used to group and identify different comfort needs. For example, a person can want to rant or vent about something that happened to them. This would in the middle left part of the triangle. In this part, comfort needs fit that represent the wish of being together with others, and wanting to put focus on the reason of distress. Furthermore, a person usually participates in the foreground of the meeting. On the other hand, the other side of the triangle, comfort needs fit that represent the opposite. Needs like going for a small walk, or closing off from others and just putting on some music, are highlighted. In this part of the triangle, students often explained the

need to be alone and not putting focus on what giving them distress. They explain feeling the need for distraction of whatever is bringing them down. They show up to meetings, but feel like being present in the background and want to simply perform task and often don’t feel like participating in intensive brainstorm or discussions.

There are almost endless possibilities as to what the exact need or wish of a comfort-seeker is. In figure 5, some examples of needs expressed in the interviews are portrayed. Depending on the situation, personal preference and mood, the needs at a specific moment swing between the points of the triangle. At the one moment they want to Seek Presence, and maybe vent their feelings and have their feelings acknowledged, and afterwards they can want to be distracted. It is important to note that one person is never strictly in one part of the figure. Depending on all factors (mood, energy, severity of distress, people surrounding them etc), one can fit in every part of it.

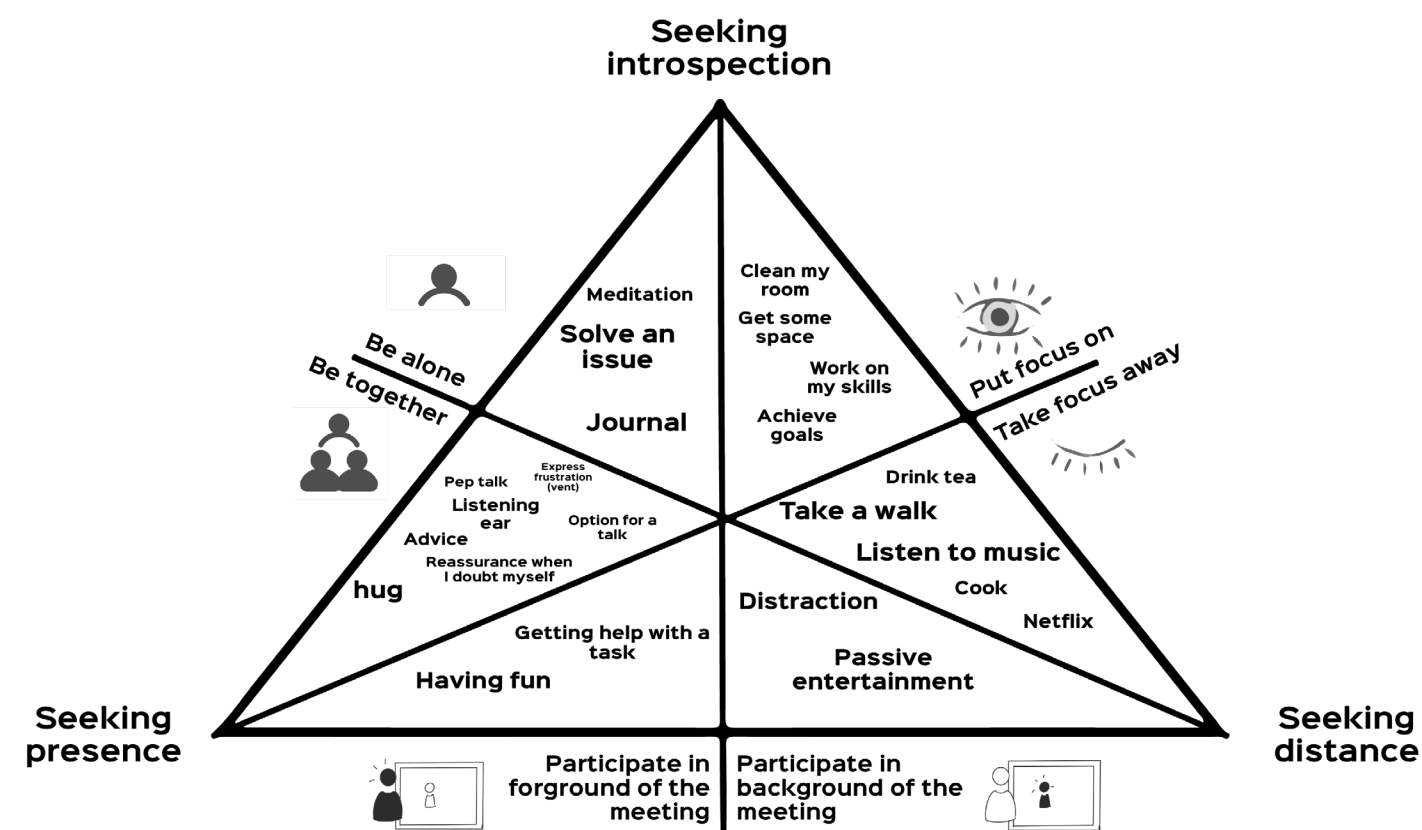


Figure 5: Examples of Comfort need filled into the Comfort Triangle

2.6.3. Effect of the environment

There are three different types of spaces in the IDE faculty; a big open space: the main hall, smaller semi-private spaces in which multiple groups come to meet: studio's and private meeting rooms where only one team fits.

In big open spaces, like the main hall (image 3), the area and the presence of many people and groups can provide a sense of energy and distraction, making it easier for some to blend in and feel less isolated. However, the openness and noise can be overwhelming for others, who may find it difficult to relax or seek privacy. One participant mentioned that the big space makes them feel "too seen" and that they feel they "have to be social", where another mentioned a space like the main hall helps them to take things their own pace and be as open or energetic as they feel able to.

In contrast, a studio (image 4) offers a more private and intimate setting. With fewer people and a cozier atmosphere, it allows for a balance between social interaction and personal space. This environment can foster a sense of community while still providing the comfort of retreat, making it ideal for those who need support but prefer a more subdued setting. One participant mentioned that in a studio they feel comfortable enough to open up a bit, but wouldn't go into any details of their needs or feeling if other groups were around as well.

Finally, the meeting rooms (image 5) provide the highest level of privacy, often reserved for focused, team-oriented activities. Its clinical appearance and exclusivity can create a sense of safety and confidentiality, making it an appropriate space for those who need a quiet, secure environment to process their feelings or discuss sensitive matters. For some, however, the more formal and isolated nature might also feel too restrictive or impersonal, depending on their comfort needs. Where some participants mentioned that they were able to open up much faster due to the private nature of the meeting rooms, others mentioned that they felt a "work-focused atmosphere" in the space, which made them hesitant to take the time and space for discussing their worries or needs.

In conclusion, each of these environments offer a different approach to comforting, highlighting the importance of tailoring the setting to the individual preferences and emotional state.

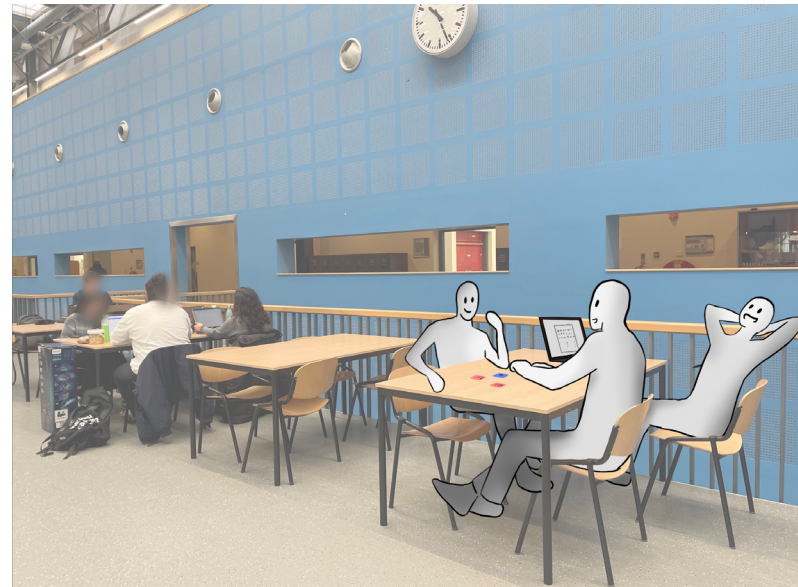


Image 3: Big open space; The Main hall



Image 4: Semi-private space; Studio's



Image 5: Private spaces: The meeting rooms

2.6.4 Communicating Comfort: DIY Comfort roadmap

In order to explore how to make Support-Seekers reflect on their own support needs, and how to communicate these, an exploratory exercise was designed and conducted. In this test, students were given a blank paper and asked to make a roadmap, explaining their comfort needs, and how these change across different situations (image 6). They were given some building blocks to start off with.

Key findings:
Many participants struggled to clearly identify and articulate their own needs. This highlights a common difficulty in recognizing and understanding their emotional requirements in different contexts. This suggests that while students may be aware of their discomfort, pinpointing the specific forms of support they need can be challenging.

Interestingly, one participant who had suffered from burn-out, was able to very clearly articulate and visualize his needs and moods across different situations. He explained this was because it was necessary to do this before with his teammates starting new projects. This in order to create empathy and understanding for the fact that he functioned differently to some common student team expectations. This insight underscores the importance of developing tools and interventions that can help individuals better understand and communicate their comfort needs, ultimately leading to more effective comforting and support systems.

2.6.5 Barriers for Comfort-seekers

Clear from all interviews and gathered information was that few people mentioned feeling comfortable showing distress and seeking support at the. If they did, it was because they had close friends at the IDE faculty, who they would visit in times of need. Otherwise often calling a parent or friend was mentioned.

Comfort-seekers at IDE are often reluctant to ask for comfort. This can be because of several reasons. They either don't want to expose their weaknesses and imply dependence on others (Albrecht et al, 1994). Students worry about being perceived as unable to carry the weight of their worries by themselves, especially in a "professional" setting, like at the IDE faculty. This means that there is a general conception that the

faculty is a place for only working, which does not include the time and space for eventual issues or emotions. "Problems are only to be discussed with friends and family".

Another barrier for students who want to open up, is that they are often afraid of getting misunderstood or being met with an minimizing or an indifferent attitude from their peers. This sometimes results in students staying home when they are in distress, because they would simply not have the mood or energy to put up the "act" of being okay. Students also noted the wish of seeking comfort in their project groups, but at the same time were not able to imagine how their peers could help them, and therefore usually chose not to chase this need.

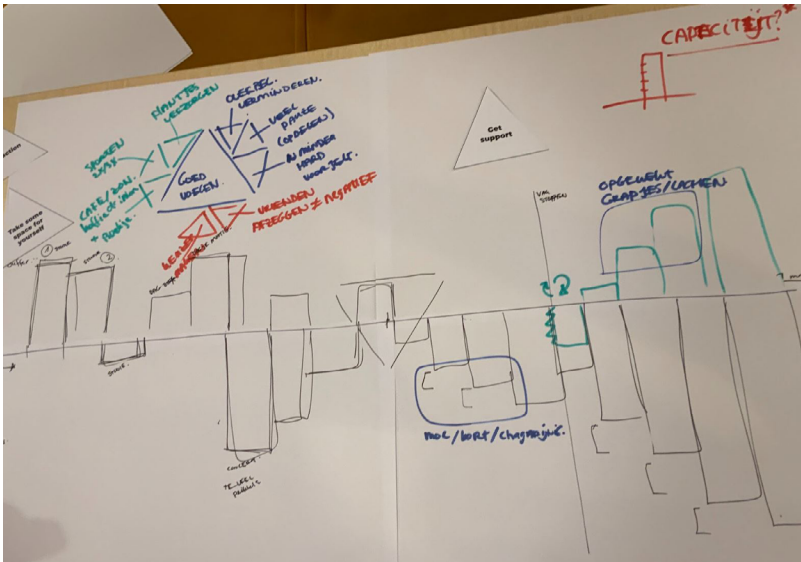
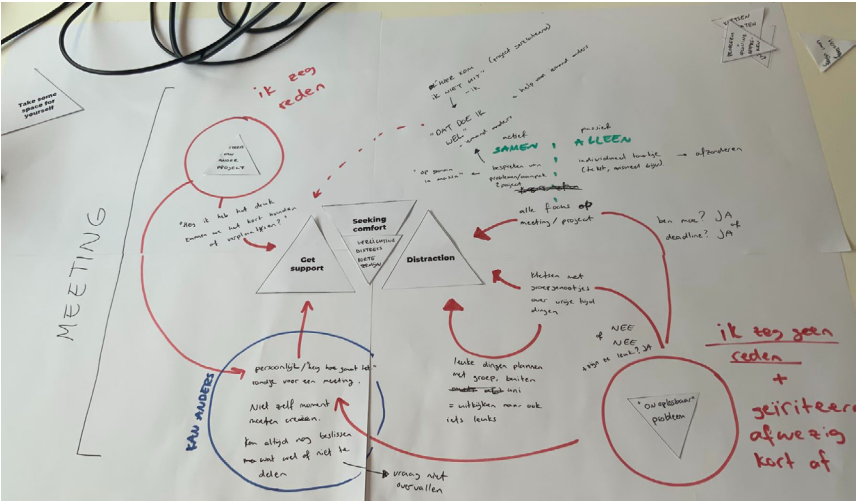


Image 6: Two examples of Comfort roadmaps

Quotes from participants

"I you look for comfort, you don't want to say it, because then you create the image that you cannot handle it yourself, which is a sign of weakness"

"I don't like the idea of burdening others with my problems, so I rather do it alone"

"I'm afraid people will think about me differently"

"It is still kind of a taboo, you seperate work and private life"

"I am afraid that other will make me feel worse, that they will laugh at me and tell me to get real"

It is very difficult for students to open up about distress when they want to, because they often feel like it's not "the right moment" or they are not supposed to talk about it (Burleson et al.,2005). Some comfort-seekers just want to be heard and have their emotions acknowledged, others can just want a distraction or space. In situations where someone does not want support at that moment, it can give reassurance just to know that this space is there (Miceli et al, 2009).

2.7 COMFORT-GIVING

In this section, we will dive into the multifaced nature of supporting the Comfort-Seeker, exploring how students provide each other with relief and support. An important note, is that a Comfort-giver can be another person providing relief of distress, but can also be the Comfort-seeker themselves, practicing self-care.

Unlike Comfort-Seeking, which focuses on the pursuit of relief of distress, Comfort-giving is centered around offering help and assistance with this pursuit. It can be a range of behaviors, from active and empathic listening, (verbal) encouragement to offering practical help or simply being present. Understanding the nuances of comfort-giving requires examining the dynamics of these interactions and recognizing the various forms that support can take.

By examining the role and experience of Comfort-givers it is aimed to deepen the understanding of how comfort is delivered. To highlight the importance of this vital aspect of human connection, whether in personal relationships, professional settings, or broader community interactions, the ability to provide meaningful comfort is essential for fostering resilience, building trust, and promoting overall well-being.

2.7.1 Comfort-giving strategies

It becomes clear from the interviews that there is more flexibility to Comfort-giving than Comfort-seeking. Students make clear that they are usually open to give whatever kind of comfort is necessary. However, they often experience challenges in precisely identifying what it is the Comfort-seeker is looking for. This results in the perception that you need to know a person closely before one is able to give comfort effectively.

Popular strategies for comfort-giving include dedicating time and attention, offering advice, and being present through active and empathic listening (figure 6). By investing time and showing genuine interest, comfort-givers can create a supportive environment. Providing thoughtful advice, when appropriate, can also be beneficial, as long as they don't take over the conversation with their own problems (Miceli et al, 2009).

"I shouldn't make it about me saying the right things, more of just me trying to understand what they are going through"

Comfort-giving strategies and barriers



Figure 6: Summary results from interviews

Finally , as mentioned before, Comfort-givers (in this case more often male comfort-givers) can easily fall into the trap of focusing too heavily on solving a Comfort-seekers problem, which sometimes feels as the most effective way to provide comfort. Problem-solving is a valuable approach, but tends to sometime overshadow other important comfort-giving strategies. In their eagerness to fix the problem, comfort-givers may overlook the fact that comfort-seekers often need more than just solutions— they may seek empathy, validation, or simply a compassionate presence.

2.7.2 Barriers for Comfort-giving

Several factors can make Comfort-givers feel hesitant to step into the role of Comfort-giver at IDE. They are afraid of not saying the “right thing” (Burleson, B.R., 2008). This is accompanied by the idea that they feel like they are not the right person (i.e. one of the comfort-seekers inner circle contacts), makes it hard to act. Comfort-givers often worry about being what the Comfort-seeker needs, and on top of that, it is often mentioned that they are afraid to make the Comfort-seeker’s feelings worse with incorrect chosen words or actions. This fear is compounded by concerns about not being genuinely helpful (Burleson et al., 2005). Comfort-givers might question their ability to make a meaningful impact, which can discourage them from engaging in Comfort-giving behaviors.

Another challenge is the idea that they are not part of the Comfort-seeker’s inner circle or personal support network. Comfort-givers sometimes feel that they lack the established trust or emotional connection necessary to offer effective support. This sense of being an outsider can create hesitation and uncertainty about how best to provide comfort, as they may doubt their legitimacy in fulfilling this role. This can result in the fear that they are unsure if the other is even waiting on them opening up a comforting conversation. With that, they might bring up feelings that the Comfort-seeker was not prepared for. Then they often choose to rather not say anything at all, than to accidentally hurt another.

“Sometimes I get anxious if I’m saying the right things”

“It is sometimes difficult to figure out what the other really needs”

2.7.3 Generative sessions

Generative sessions with students were conducted to further understand what their take is on comforting at IDE. See Appendix F to see materials used.

Goal:

Brainstorm with other student designers about the topic of Comfort, and further understand what they need, miss and what form this can take. Furthermore, brainstorm with experts about possible concept directions.

Findings:

It became clear that there was a correlation of how much empathy and understanding participants had towards their group members, regarding project duration. For projects that only last one quarter (approx. 3 months), participants had significantly less feelings of empathy and understanding than for group members of projects that take one semester (approx. 5 months). This makes sense, as there is much less time to get to know the others, and students are less likely to invest time and energy into creating some sort of bond with these team members. Community feeling is less, thus less motivation and intention to understand another or offer support.

Furthermore they mentioned that often space for getting to know each other is reduced to the initial meetings, that give some icebreakers to streamline these interactions. Afterwards attention is almost fully turned to work-related topics, and checking-in with each other is limited to asking how each other’s day or weekend was.

This gives clues for an interesting design direction. By extending the period of getting to know each other, making space for check-ins and incorporating intentional moments for team bonding throughout the project, stronger connections and a deeper sense of empathy among team members can be created. This could potentially lead to a more supportive group dynamic, where individuals feel more inclined to understand each other’s needs and provide comfort when necessary.

One idea that emerged from the generative sessions was of incorporating structured check-ins at regular intervals throughout the project. These check-ins would go beyond casual conversations about weekend plans and focus on emotional and

psychological well-being, allowing students to share their feelings and personal challenges they might be facing, if they would want to. This approach could encourage a more empathetic atmosphere, promoting a stronger sense of community within the team.

Another concept discussed was the potential use of prompts or activities that encourage reflection, helping team members open up about their needs and preferences in a way that feels natural and non-intrusive. These activities could take place in the early stages of the project and be revisited periodically to ensure that team members continue to connect and empathize with one another.

Exploring comfort at IDE



Figure 7: Sensitising Booklet for generative session

Conclusions & Design Goal

In this chapter, the multisided nature of comforting has been explained. Research clarified that comforting, as traditionally defined, includes a wide range of actions aimed at alleviating a person's feelings of distress. Comforting can take many forms, from simply listening to providing distraction, but it doesn't necessarily involve solving the underlying problem. Important at all times, is to acknowledge others' feelings, making sure comfort-seekers feel heard, or understood.

Comfort at IDE

The exploration of barriers to comforting within the IDE community shows significant challenges faced by both comfort-seekers and comfort-givers. It is evident that despite spending a substantial amount of time together, students often feel hesitant to seek or give comfort within the IDE community. This reluctance comes from various factors, including fear of judgment, concerns about their image, and uncertainty about how to effectively provide or seek comfort. However, in these challenges lie opportunities for improvement.

Firstly, it is important for the comfort-seeker to understand what their own comfort needs are. This is primarily to improve self-awareness and create more clarity on what one needs to feel comforted. If these are clear, it is easier for the comfort-giver to act upon this. This could create a more safe and understanding environment where these needs can be met. At the same time, the Comfort-giver should try creating a safe environment for the Comfort-seeker, so they feel more safe to open up about their needs.

Furthermore, ways to communicate the comfort needs of the comfort-seeker should be explored. In case of the Comfort-giver, there are several opportunities to empower and give them confidence to give meaningful and effective comfort. By also exploring what sorts of comfort

they are good at giving, and creating a space where comfort-seeking and comfort-giving is "allowed", one can foster an environment where Comfort-givers feel more capable and willing to engage. Encouraging self-awareness about their strengths in providing comfort, coupled with an open and supportive culture, allows Comfort-givers to more confidently offer the type of support that resonates most with Comfort-Seeker. Additionally, providing training and resources tailored to different comfort styles can further enhance their ability to give meaningful and effective comfort.

Incorporating strategies like the ones emerged from the generative sessions (chapter 2.6.3), e.g. regular check-ins, creating intentional moments for team building and reflection, not only addresses the lack of empathy in short-term projects but also creates an opportunity to design interventions that foster a more supportive and connected project environment overall. By integrating comfort into the core of team dynamics, we can enhance the overall group experience and improve both the emotional and practical outcomes of collaborative work. This is confirmed by the base layer of the pyramid of Lencioni. This explains that being honest with each other about one's needs and feelings, it creates a strong fundament and a safe environment for teams to work together.

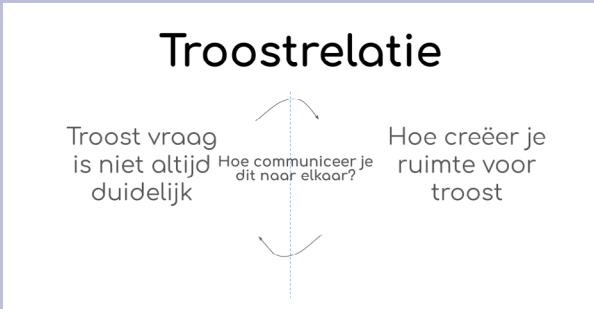


Figure 8: Comfort relation

2.8 CHANGE OF PROJECT GOAL

As the project evolved, it became clear that while comforting was a relevant starting point, it needed to be refined to better suit the context. Comforting is often associated with intimate and personal interactions, e.g. talking about your problems, getting a warm hug and being able to cry and being surrounded by the people that you love. Although the feeling engraved in these interactions are similar to what the desired outcome is, it was not a correct fit. Because simply, students do not want (a feeling like) to be hugged by their teammates, or let their emotions out in a project meeting. These are much too intimate interactions for people that have often just met each other, or know each other in a professional or acquaintance level.

In group dynamics, students don't seek the same level of emotional intimacy they might with close friends or family. Rather than comforting, the concept of support emerged as a more appropriate approach. Next to all students interviewed mentioned the need for feeling supported in their team meetings, where many reported not feeling the need to feel "comforted" in the same context. Support is a part of comforting, as both aim to alleviate distress and foster well-being. For comfort as well as support, students seem to run into the same barriers, but for support a close relation to another person is not specifically required. Support can be seen as a subset of comforting because it provides a powerful foundation for well-being by addressing practical needs, ensuring individuals feel competent and valued in their environment. While comforting typically involves addressing emotional pain or vulnerability, support contributes to emotional comfort by creating a secure, collaborative space. In this sense, support helps reduce

stress and frustration, making it easier for individuals to manage their challenges, thus indirectly offering comfort without the need for emotional intimacy.

Furthermore, unlike comforting, which can be intimate and emotional, support in group projects is about fostering a positive, collaborative environment where everyone feels valued, capable, and respected, regardless of any personal burdens. This form of support helps individuals feel empowered without necessarily having to dive into the emotional aspects of comfort.

This led to the following design goal:

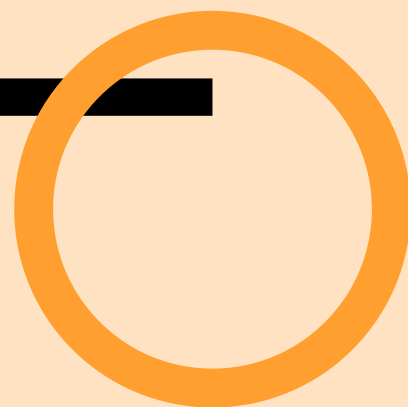
"Increase mental health of IDE students by developing a tool which helps create a supportive (team) environment and, in that way seeks to improve team cohesion"

- Subgoal:
- Stimulates understanding of (comfort) needs (within group settings).
 - Stimulates expression of (comfort) needs (within group settings).
 - Increased feeling of support felt by the individual

03



Explore



After the first phase of research and exploration, it became clear that shifting the focus from comforting to support would provide greater alignment with the wishes and needs of students. With this refined direction, the second phase of the project was dedicated to an elaborate exploration of what support truly means in a collaborative, project group environment like at the IDE faculty. This phase involved conducting a series of iterative user tests with students from the IDE faculty to investigate how they understand, discuss, and engage in the concept of support.

Furthermore, the goal was to uncover what helps students think and talk together about support, making it a more prominent aspect of their interactions during project meetings. Through these iterative tests, it was aimed to identify strategies and tools that could make the role of support in these team environments more apparent, fostering a culture where it becomes an integral part of teamwork and collaboration. This chapter dives into the insights gained from these experiments and how they structured the next steps in the design process.

3.1 PLACEMENT

To create a clearer and more framed design space, it was chosen to design the intervention for usage in team meeting. This because of several reasons:

Firstly, it became clear from the previous interviews that even though teams spend a lot of time together, many students often felt uncomfortable to share their issues with team members, even if they wanted to. This for the reason that they were scared to create an image that they are not able to carry their weight, or had fears of being viewed as “unprofessional”.

Furthermore, it was felt that there was a big opportunity for creating more understanding towards each other and each other’s support needs. Some mentioned struggling with things that is often thought as normal by most students, and some mentioned feeling uncomfortable for asking the type of Support that they felt most needed.

3.1.1 Opportunity

Combining information from previous interviews, the generative session and information of the pyramid of Lencioni, a rough project group flow can be determined for creating a supportive space.

1. Familiarize: This is when the group members first get to know each other. This is usually characterized by doing icebreakers together, and breaking though the “superficial” layer of getting to know each other. This step is important, as diving right into business, without first taking the time to get to know each other, can feel awkward.
2. Building trust and introducing support: To create a supportive space, it is important that

team members become aware what it is that they need of each other in different moments, as well as what they are able to do to help each other. This is necessary for them to build trust. The foundation of a successful team is trust. When it is absent, it can lead to an unwillingness to be open about weaknesses or concerns. Team members could start to fear judgment and avoid discussing personal challenges or asking for help.

3. Check-in: Regular check-ins are important to maintaining open communication and ensuring that team members feel supported throughout the project. These check-ins offer an opportunity for individuals to express their current needs, concerns, or progress in a non-judgmental setting. By creating a structured space for team members to voice any struggles or ask for help, the group can foster a culture of support-seeking and support-giving. This process reinforces trust and helps prevent issues from escalating, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable addressing challenges as they arise.

4. Reflect: Reflection is a crucial step in creating a truly supportive environment. At key moments in the project timeline, for example after milestones or major challenges, the group could take time to reflect on both the project and their collaboration. This reflection allows team members to discuss what went well, what could be improved, and how they can better support one another moving forward. Reflection helps making clear what the lessons learned throughout the project are and enables the team to continuously evolve, creating a stronger foundation of trust and understanding for future collaborations.

A typical project timeline could thus look like this:

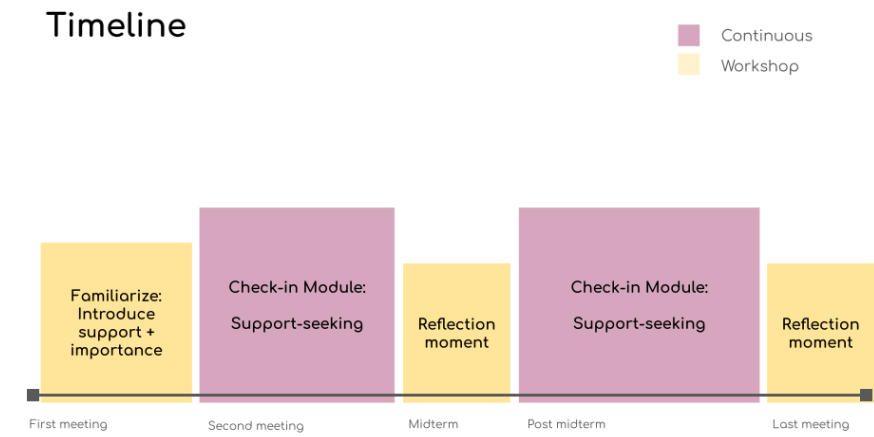


Figure 9: Potential teamproject timeline



Image 7: Interaction Vision: A campfire night

Even though familiarizing and reflecting is an important step, it was chosen to mostly focus on the building trust and check-in stages of building a supportive space. This is because for the familiarizing step, there are already many existent tools (icebreakers) that could be used to achieve this step. Furthermore, taking into account the timeframe of this project, it was chosen to leave out reflection for now as a focus point, as this can also still be achieved and added later on.

3.2 INTERACTION VISION

To design the desired feelings and interactions, an interaction vision was created centered around the concept of a campfire night (Image 7).

This vision is fitting for several reasons. Firstly, a campfire requires preparation: tasks like building the fire, arranging seating, and preparing snacks such as marshmallows necessitate effort and collaboration. Initially, there is a need for energy, active participation, and teamwork. Once everything is set up, participants can sit down and relax. A campfire offers a dynamic environment with space for storytelling and conversations, as well as moments of silent reflection. It embodies a warm and cozy atmosphere, aligning with the project’s goals. Exactly this flow is what I want to translate

to the group meeting environment. Initially, this process requires energy and active participation, much like the beginning stages of a campfire gathering. Team members will work together on activities that help them understand each other’s comfort-giving and comfort-seeking preferences. As the initial phase progresses and team members become more comfortable, the atmosphere can shift to a more relaxed state allowing for more conversation and deeper understanding.

Similar to a campfire offering space for storytelling, conversations, and silent reflection, this project will provide a variety of interaction opportunities. Participants can share their personal experiences, discuss their support needs, and engage in both group discussions and one-on-one interactions. The warm and cozy atmosphere of a campfire night will be mirrored in the project’s environment, creating a safe space where team members feel comfortable expressing themselves and supporting each other.

By fostering an environment that balances active participation with relaxation, and structured activities with open-ended conversations, this project aims to build a cohesive team dynamic. Team members will learn to understand and communicate about their support needs, ultimately creating a more supportive and empathetic community.

Ideation

The first step in the ideation phase involved brainstorming specifically around creating a tool to reflect on a support-seekers own support-needs, and to after communicate this in a team. The goal was to explore and understand various types of reflectional tools and conversation starters and determine which would best align with the project's objectives and context. A possible direction to explore, was that of game design.

Recognizing the value of game design in social interaction and engagement, card-based games came forward as a particularly suitable format for a reflection and discussion tool. Card games are powerful tools for encouraging communication and collaboration within teams. As Salen and Zimmerman (2004) suggest, games offer engaging and interactive experiences that promote social interaction and facilitate meaningful conversations, as well as the tangibility of using cards fitting the sometimes delicate topics at hand. Using games is also beneficial, because it can guide and stimulate reflection and conversation, without taking away the attention from what is important, namely, each other. The game-design principles as formulated by Salen and Zimmerman (2004) offer interesting benefits for this project.

Benefits of a game-based format:

- **Conflict and Challenge**
Games typically involve “conflict”, where players face obstacles or opposition, either from the game system itself or from other players. Challenge is an essential element that keeps players engaged by offering goals that are difficult, but not impossible, to achieve. By framing reflective questions or prompts as a challenge, reflecting on a possibly sensitive topic can evolve from being just difficult or uncomfortable to becoming a motivating experience. Players could be more likely to engage deeply with the subject matter.
- **Games as Emergent Systems**
Incorporating emergent gameplay into the ideation direction allows for rich, unpredictable interactions. As students could use the game to explore their support needs, unexpected team dynamics may emerge, leading to new insights about how the team functions. This could be through evolving

group roles, unexpected collaboration strategies, or changes in how individuals seek support over time.

- **Interaction**
This project is inherently about interaction, as it facilitates conversations around support needs and team dynamics. By designing interactions that are fun, engaging, and meaningful, the game can foster deeper team connections.
- **Iteration**
Iterative design can be applied to the direction, by encouraging teams to reflect on their experiences and refine their approaches over time. After each use, the team could reflect on what worked and what didn't, and adapt their strategies for future sessions. This ongoing refinement mirrors the iterative process in game design and leads to continuous improvement in team dynamics and support strategies.

3.3 ENACTING SESSIONS

Goal
To get a better understanding of how group dynamics influence individuals, especially those who carry their own personal struggles and stories while being often unfamiliar with one another, enacting sessions were conducted. The sessions were designed to simulate real-life scenarios to observe how participants interact, collaborate, and respond under various conditions.

Werewolves of IDE

Average team member

Situation:
You are meeting with your teammates for a group project. One of your team members is not having a great day today.

Mission:
Find out who is not feeling so good today and what type of comforting your teammate needs (e.g. distraction or support), but WITHOUT asking directly and putting someone on the spot.

Werewolves of IDE

Conflicted team member

Situation:
You are meeting with your teammates for a group project. You are NOT having a great time today. Your boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with you and you feel absent-minded. You are happy to go to uni though and would like just some distraction. You at the same time feel a bit bad towards your team for underperforming.

Mission:
Find comfort/distraction in a way that feels that brings you some relief of distress. However, you don't want to share with your team what is up, that is your privacy and they don't need to know. You would like to take a moment for a little break and get a coffee to distract yourself from everything and take a moment to chat with your team.

Image [FIXME]: Situation Cards

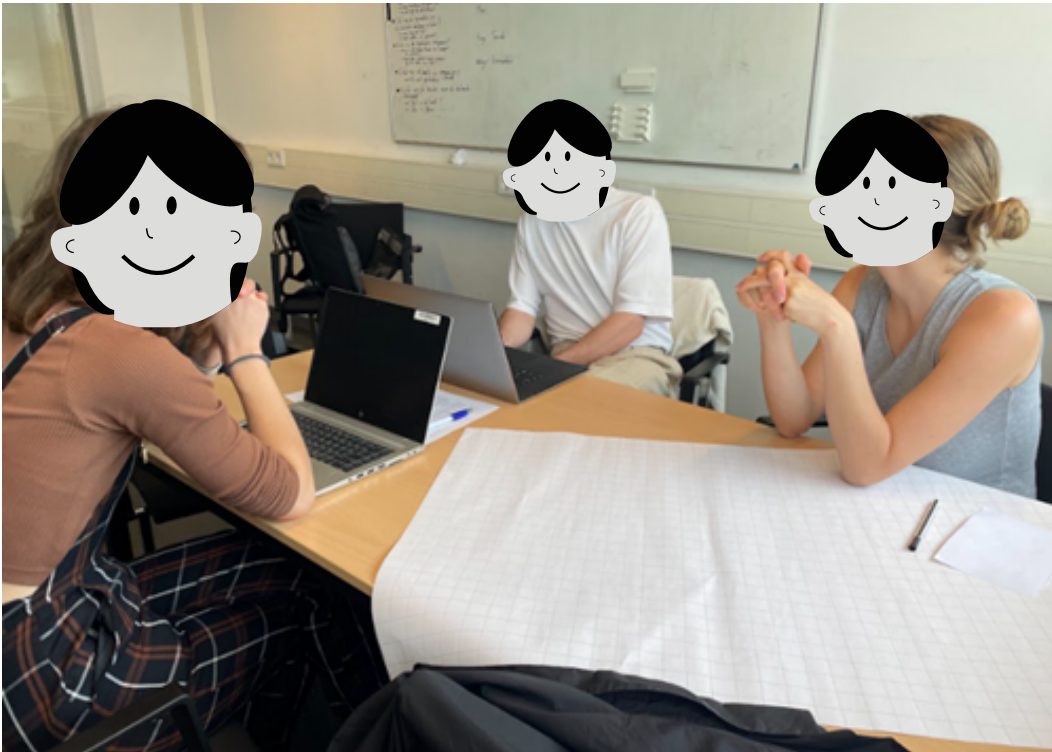


Image 8: Participants discussing during enacting session

Set-up
During these sessions, participants were given cards with a short situation sketch, and a mission. These cards were loosely based on the game “Weerwolven van Wakkerdam”, a game where a group of people work together to figure out who the werewolf is that is attacking the villagers. The situation on these cards represented a real-life scenario that could easily happen to a project group, which was someone clearly not having the best day. The mission nudged participants to seek and give comfort. With these cards, participants were asked to work together and act out how they would react in these situations. An effort was made to understand how a group can approach comforting, without having the Comfort-Seeker disclose the reason of distress. As it is often the case that Comfort-Seekers feel uncomfortable with opening up to people they are unfamiliar with.

Gained Insight
The key take away from the discussion following the enacting session, was that the intervention should be fully integrated into the meeting space. Participants had a strong preference for having an intervention at the start of the meeting, to have more of a chance to check-in with each other. Furthermore, they felt that the intervention

would be most effective if it were confined to the meeting space. If it consisted, for example, exercises or activities to be completed at home participants believed it would likely go unused, as they wish to keep their private spaces separate from work-related activities. This is important, as the active participation and presence of all team members are essential for creating a supportive team environment.

Design Implication

- **Intervention should exist strictly in the meeting space/time.**

After this starter, the ideation phase really started. Ideation took three concepts as its basis:

- Support-tokens created from initial research
- A “boardgame” based on the Support triangle
- Archetypes created from the initial research

Several tests were conducted as exploration, to see how to best stimulate participants with regards to reflecting on and communicating their support needs and styles.

3.4 SUPPORT TOKEN CONCEPTS

Based on all gathered information from research and interviews, Support Tokens were created. These tokens reflected and visualized popular Support needs that were mentioned.

3.4.1 Support Tokens V1

Goal:

The Support Tokens Concept is based on the idea of helping users think about their support needs by giving them a language and choice to start thinking about what they feel they need. Many interviewees had trouble concretely describing what support works for them. Out of all the different methods mentioned in previous interviews, a selection was made that included both specific and non-specific support-need examples.

Set-up

Because what kind of support one needs is greatly linked to what a person is feeling in that moment, the first step included asking participants to describe their current feelings in five words. This also to gently ease participants into a reflective mode. For this a word list was made to offer participants vocabulary, based on an adapted version of the Microsoft product reaction cards (figure 10). The cards contain a diverse array of descriptive words that prompt individuals to reflect on their emotions. This can make it easier for them to identify and also articulate feelings they might not have been fully aware of or struggled to express

After the step, participants were asked to pick Support Tokens (figure 11) based on what they need, and what they could give that day. Then followed a discussion on what they had put down.

Gained Insights

The Reaction Cards are effective in helping participants describe their moods and feelings, because they offer a structured yet flexible approach to emotional expression. By providing language to help them reflect, the cards effectively expand participants' emotional vocabulary, helping them find the right words to accurately convey their mood. In group settings, the cards also facilitate clearer communication by allowing participants

to express their emotional states in a way that others can easily understand. This improves mutual understanding and empathy within the group. On top of that, the process of selecting words from a predefined set can reduce the pressure of having to independently articulate complex emotions, making participants feel more at ease in sharing their feelings.

The participants expressed really enjoying this help in creating a moment of standing still and reflecting on their mood and needs. The Support-tokens helped greatly with regards for reflecting on what their current support needs are. However, seeing as everyone has their own paper and feelings and needs are regarded as quite private topic, participants mentioned it feeling "illegal" to look at others' papers, even when they were presenting it. This calls for another way of presenting the results to each other that feels more natural and fitting for the delicate information.

Design Implications

- Participants find it difficult to decide on what they are able to give other's that day. They mention beince and tone this brings to the project should be considered.
- Product cannot stand on itself yet, facilitator is necessary to explain the steps and keep the conversation going. Different ways to make it work without a facilitator should be explored.
- Participants feel uncomfortable looking at each other's stencil, even when presenting due to delicate information. The form should change so they feel like they are allowed to look at each other's writings.
- Reflecting on current mood is effective "warming-up" for reflection. This has to stay in the design.
- Reaction cards help achieve more in-depth reflection and communication of mood and feelings. This has to stay in the design.



Empathetic	Trusting	Resilient	Grateful	Motivated
Fearful	Apathetic	Neglected	Disconnected	Jealous
Resentful	Confused	Angry	Burned out	Distrustful
Insecure	Disappointed	Isolated	Exhausted	Overwhelmed
Conflicted	Impatient	Anxious	Frustrated	Misunderstood
Flexible	Respectful	Balanced	Compassionate	Joyful
Accountable	Confident	Supportive	Embarrassed	Optimistic
Ecstatic	Creative	Discouraged	Stressed	Enthusiastic
Helpful	Passionate	Tired	Patient	Relaxed

Figure 10: Stencil with Reaction Cards



Figure 11: Stencil with Support Tokens

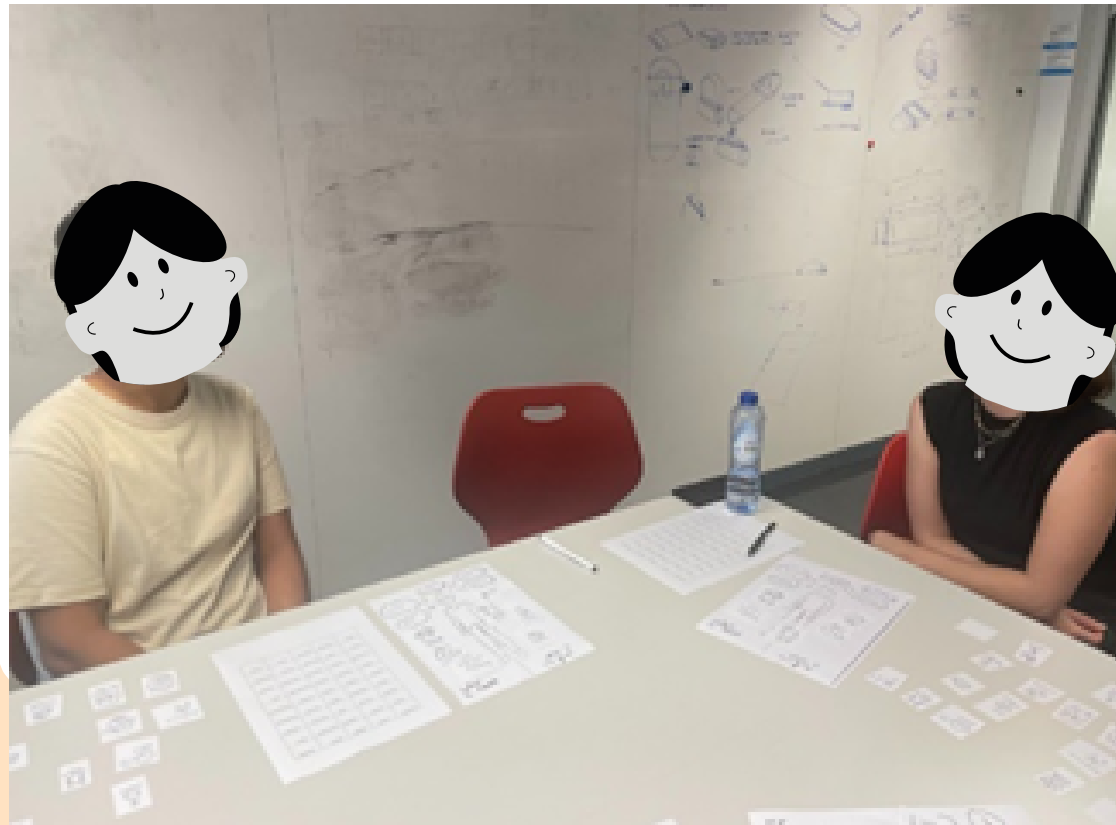


Image 9: Support tokens V1 test

3.4.2 Support Tokens + Dice

Goal

In this iteration it was tried to find a way where it would be more comfortable for participants to look at and discuss the result of their reflections. This together with an exploration to find different ways to further facilitate discussion, without the help of a facilitating person. In this case it was chosen to explore usage of a dice with prompting questions.

Set-up

Mostly the same set-up as previous test was used. In addition to this, a dice (image 10) with different prompting questions on each side was presented.

Furthermore, to create a more comfortable tool to look at and discuss the results from reflecting on their mood and support-needs. This was done by making a visual of a table, which was cut into three parts (figure 12). Each part representing a participant. As before, mood descriptors were to be written into the bubbles. Then, the support-needs were literally "put on the table".

After reflecting on their mood and needs and putting these down, participants were asked to put the figure together, so the puzzle pieces turned into a group picture.

When the picture was formed, the participants first discussed the results portrayed, and afterwards the dice was used to facilitate the

discussion further, and stimulate them to consider different perspectives.

Gained Insights

Similarly to previous test, reflecting on their moods and support-needs was regarded very positively. Participants mentioned feeling a stronger team feeling, and felt closer to each other. One participant mentioned feeling more relieved after openly expressing their needs, and felt more motivated to find ways to work despite not feeling their best.

The bringing together of the different individual pieces into a group model, worked well with regards to making it more comfortable to view and discuss the individual results. They noted it now felt very natural to look at the delicate information and discuss it together.

The interaction with the dice was regarded as fun and did facilitate the discussion towards deeper and more clarifying conversations, but also seemed to get slightly boring fast.

Design Implications

- Look into other ways to facilitate the discussion further
- Using prompting questions to get conversations to higher level works well
- By having a form can be filled out individually, and then connected, participants feel more free to look at each other's needs.



Image 10: Facilitation dice

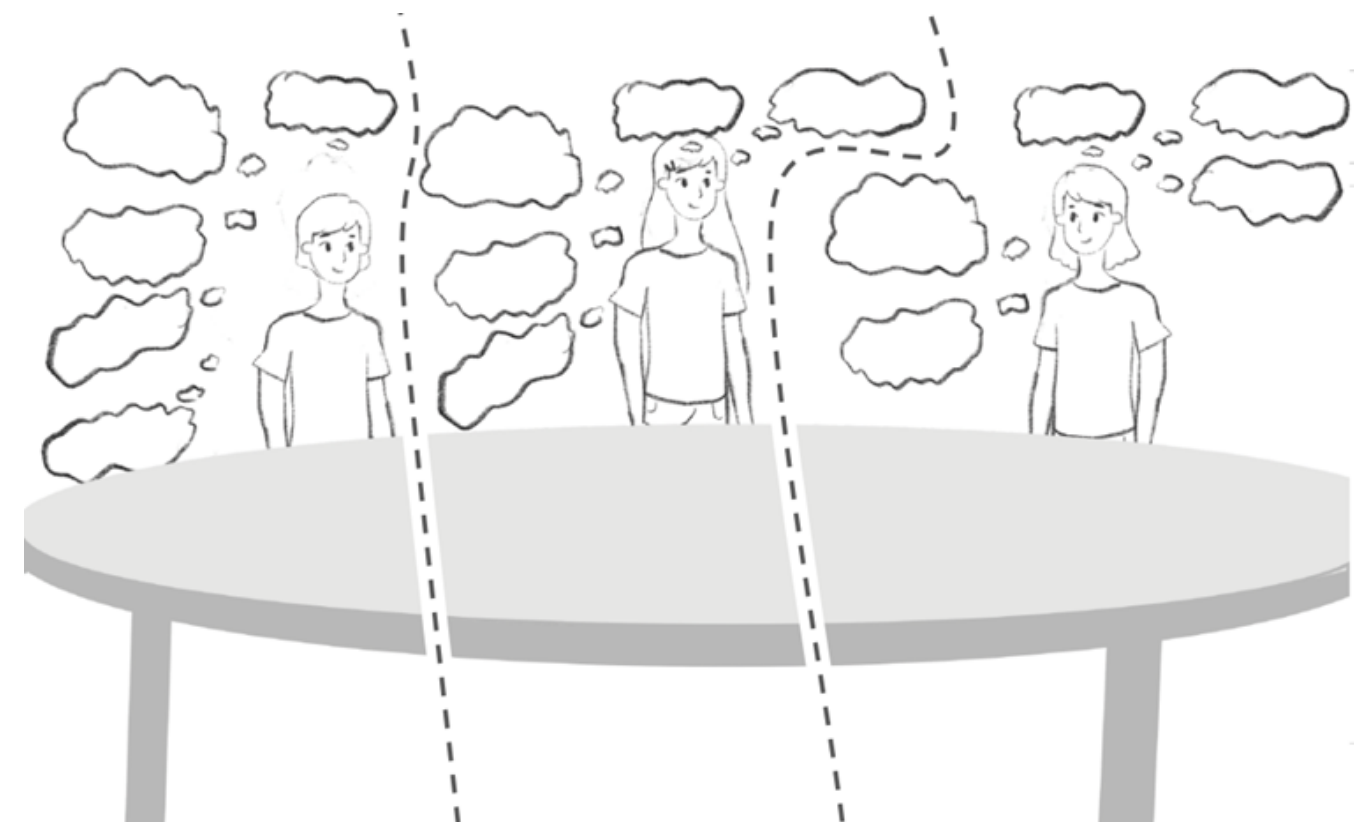


Figure 12: Stencil coming together

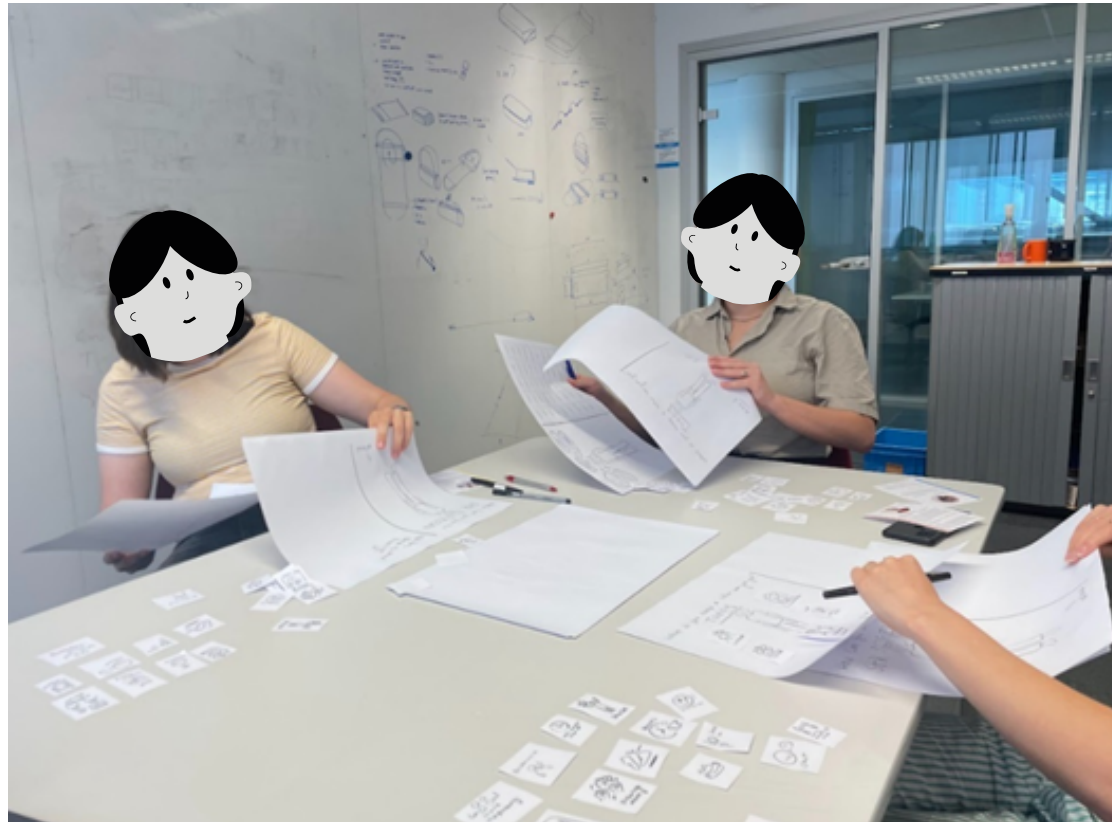


Image 11: Roleplaying Discussion tool session

3.4.3 Roleplaying Discussion tool

Goal

Explore if the usage of a digital facilitator can enhance the process, and see how roleplaying might help create an even more empathic attitude towards the different needs and characteristics of team members. Additionally, assess if support-giving can be effectively and enjoyably “trained” this way.

Set-up

Differently than the tests before, participants were given roleplaying cards. These cards portrayed three vastly different characters, that they were asked to play as. So all the questions they were asked, they answered in the role they were playing.

As the tests before, the Support token stencil was used. First participants were asked to write down their mood and feelings that day. After, they were asked to pick support-tokens that they felt they needed that day. This time, also a page of stressors was added, to see if this added extra depth into the discussions.

Voiceflow was used to create a digital facilitator that lead the participants through the steps. After, the digital facilitator asked questions to the participants and stimulated discussion.

Gained Insights

It became evident that the Voiceflow did not contribute to the setting and facilitating that was necessary. As support is inherently a very intimate topic, introducing a robotic, outsider voice disrupts the connection necessary for open discussion about ones mood and needs. The key insight was that roleplaying proved not to be a suitable method. Participants perceived it to be difficult to talk about specific needs and detailed emotions when just portraying a character. Proving it to be much more enjoyable, easier and effective to speak about their own experience. The difficulty of having to portray a character, took away the attentions of trying out new support-giving strategies.

Design Implications

- Introducing stressors did not add any notable benefits, this should be removed as it only makes the interaction more confusing.
- A digital facilitator does not match the intimate atmosphere required for open conversation about support. This should be removed.
- Discussing personal needs directly allows for greater depth and authenticity, more focus should be put on prompting to talk about own stories and needs.

3.5 SUPPORT TRIANGLE CONCEPTS

After evaluation previous finding, it became clear that the Support Tokens significantly helped with reflecting and creating open discussions about individual support needs. However, I aimed to push this understanding further. Beyond just talking about needs, my goal was to create a richer comprehension of each team member's character, and in that way potentially cultivating greater empathy towards another's support needs. This following the thought that it could be beneficial to find a way to show users that there can be similarities among their support-needs or approaches. When one can relate a need also to themselves, it is easier to also have a more understanding attitude to another. To achieve this, it was explored how integrating the Comfort Triangle framework (figure 4) could enhance the depth and insight into each other's support needs, providing a more nuanced approach to comfort-giving.

3.5.1 Comfort triangle exploration

Goal
An exploration was done if the Comfort Triangle can add a deeper understanding and greater empathy of each other's Support Needs.

Set-up
For this test, participants were provided with a printout of the Comfort Triangle (figure 4) to guide the exploration. In addition to this, Support Need Tokens and Reaction Cards (figure 10), similar to those used in previous tests, were also included. The Comfort Triangle served as a visual tool to frame the discussion around individual support preferences, while the Support Need Tokens helped participants articulate their personal needs. Reaction Cards were used to capture participants' responses to each other's needs and to facilitate a deeper conversation on how they can better support one another. The combination of these tools aimed to encourage reflection and promote empathy within the group.

As before, they were asked to reflect on their mood and current Support Needs first. After, they were asked put draw themselves into the Comfort Triangle.

Gained Insights
It was clear from the start that the Comfort Triangle required a lot of explanation before participants were able to work with it. Furthermore, due to this difficulty to understand, participants got frustrated and there was little discussion.

Design Implications

- The Comfort Triangle is difficult to understand, requires a lot of explanation. Another form could be more beneficial and should be explored.
- Because of the confusion and ambiguity, there was much less discussion. Only needs related to the success of the project seem to be discussed, and less focus on what one actually needs.
- Instead of an empathic atmosphere, there was frustration due to the difficulty of using the Comfort Triangle.

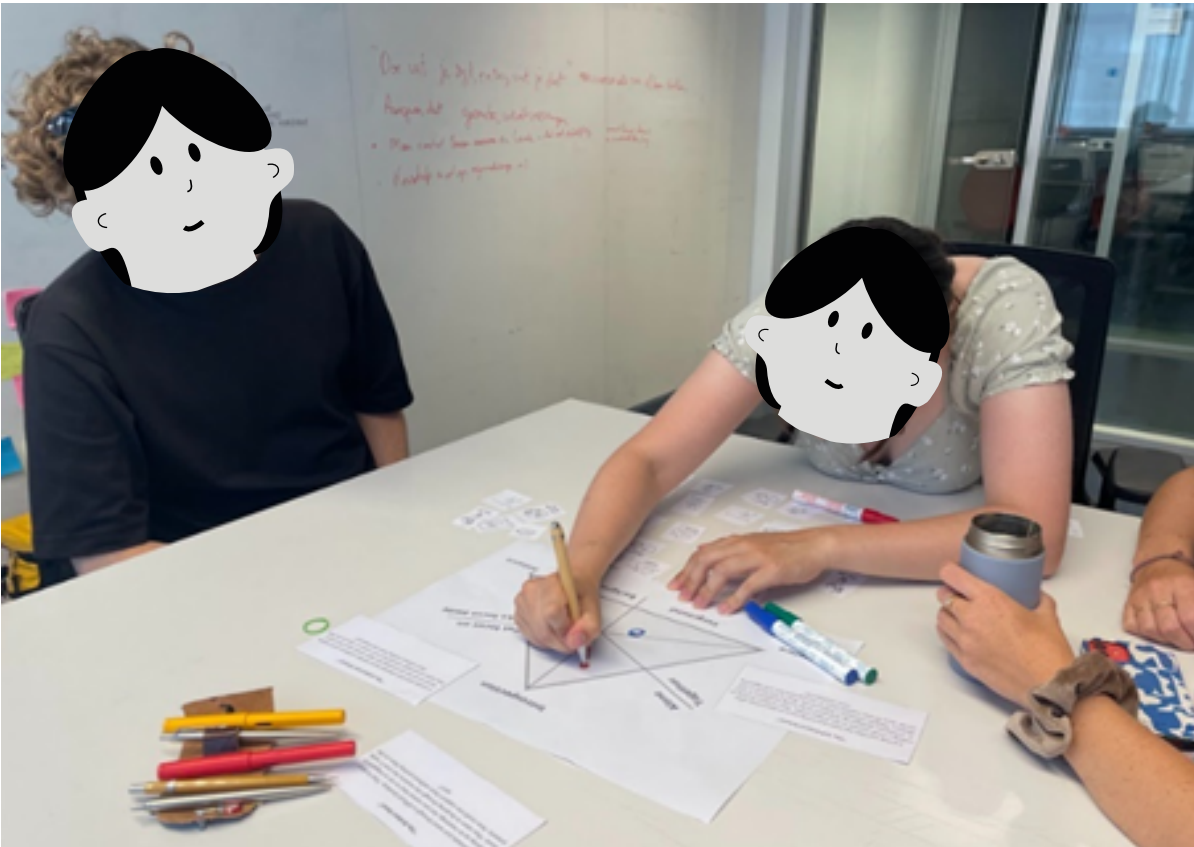


Image 12: Comfort triangle + Situation cards session

3.5.2 Comfort triangle + Situation cards

Goal:
To try and solve the hardships of the first test, situation cards were added. This to see if practice and playing around with the triangle could help create a better understanding, before trying to put oneself on it. Furthermore, as previous tests had a bigger focus on Support-seeking, with this was explored how to effectively bring more thought and practice towards Support-giving.

Set-up
Set up is similar to previous test. Participants were provided with a printout of the Comfort Triangle (figure 4) and Support Tokens (figure 11) to guide the them. This time also situation cards (image 13) were added, highlighting different scenarios in which a teammember seemed to be struggling.

Participants were asked to discuss the scenario's on the cards, pick out Support tokens of support this person might need, and finally give them a place on the Comfort Triangle.

Gained Insights
Participants showed to find it difficult to talk about what another fictional person would need, without really knowing the person. Furthermore, the Comfort Triangle stayed being a difficult tool to use. Much explanation is needed for them to effectively

"The Mental Health Struggler"

A teammate has been open about their struggles with mental health in the past. Recently, they've started withdrawing from the group and missing deadlines. You're worried they might be going through a tough time again. How do you support them without overstepping boundaries?

"The Broken Heart"

A teammate just went through a difficult breakup. They've been showing up to meetings, but you notice they're not as engaged as usual. They seem to be going through the motions but aren't really present. How could you support them without putting them on the spot?

Image 13: Examples of the situation cards

understand it, and it does not seem to add much value due to the frustration and confusion it creates.

Design Implications

- Find another form containing the same type of information as the Comfort Triangle
- Use of Situation Cards seems promising, but should be adjusted for participants to discuss to topics related closer to themselves or common experiences.

3.6 ARCHETYPE CONCEPTS

Archetypes based on the Support-need triangle were created in order to find a form with the same content of information as the Comfort Triangle (figure 4), that was easier to grasp. Archetypes could be valuable because they simplify complex concepts and can enhance empathy and connection. Archetypes can distill traits, motivations and behaviors into familiar characters. This makes it easier to understand and communicate complex topics. In its turn, this simplification could allow for clearer

3.6.1 Archetypes V1

Goal
Explore a different form of the Comfort Triangle that is easier to understand, but at the same time has the same richness of information.

Set-up
Participants were provided with a printout of Support Archetypes (figure 13) and Reaction Cards to guide the them.

First they were asked to write down their current mood and feelings with the Reaction Cards. Afterwards they were presented with the Support Archetypes and discussed together where they felt they fit in best.

Gained insights
Understanding of the different Archetypes and discussion between participants went far more smoothly, but they did mention feeling like they didn't totally fit into one archetype. They felt a combination of multiple. This did somehow bring a negative feeling with it, as if the model was not catering to their needs.

Design Implications

- The current archetypes are not adequate enough, more Support Archetypes should be created to have clearer nuances
- Discussion should be facilitated more

	A1: Distance	A2: Introspect	A3: Emotional support	A4: Distract
Preferences	Alone/take focus away	Alone/put focus on	Together/put focus on	Together/take focus away
Ex. Support needs	 	 	 	

Figure 13: Archetypes V1

















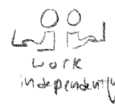










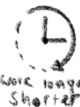

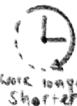

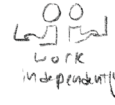
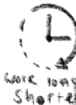

<div><p>Together</p></div> <div><p>Be in foreground</p></div> <div><p>Put focus on</p></div>	<div><p>Together</p></div> <div><p>Be in foreground</p></div> <div><p>Take focus away</p></div>	<div><p>Together</p></div> <div><p>Be in background</p></div> <div><p>Take focus away</p></div>
<p>Example of needs</p> <div><p>Encouragement</p></div> <div><p>give/get advice or feedback</p></div> <div><p>Hug</p></div>	<p>Example of needs</p> <div><p>collaborate</p></div> <div><p>Distraction</p></div> <div><p>chat</p></div>	<p>Example of needs</p> <div><p>Distraction</p></div> <div><p>work independently</p></div> <div><p>Breaks</p></div>
<div><p>Alone</p></div> <div><p>Be in foreground</p></div> <div><p>Put focus on</p></div>	<div><p>Alone</p></div> <div><p>Be in background</p></div> <div><p>Put focus on</p></div>	<div><p>Alone</p></div> <div><p>Be in background</p></div> <div><p>Take focus away</p></div>
<p>Example of needs</p> <div><p>work longer/shorter</p></div> <div><p>carry more/less load</p></div>	<p>Example of needs</p> <div><p>work longer/shorter</p></div> <div><p>carry more/less load</p></div>	<p>Example of needs</p> <div><p>work independently</p></div> <div><p>work longer/shorter</p></div> <div><p>PeP talk</p></div>

Figure 14: Archetypes V2

3.6.2 Archetypes V2

Changes:
The six parts of which the Support-Need Triangle consists out of, were now turned into 6 distinct characters. This six character represent the different support dimensions.

Set-up
Participants were provided with a printout of Support Archetypes (figure 14) and Reaction Cards (figure 10) to guide the them. First they were asked to write down their current mood and feelings with the Reaction Cards. Afterwards they were presented with the Support Archetypes and discussed together where they felt they fit in best.

Gained insights
Participants felt much more able to relate to an archetype, but were still confused about what all icons meant. Presentation makes answers very ambiguous,. In turn this makes it difficult for them to discuss, as this creates frustration instead.

Design Implications

- Turn cards were more relatable by using a more storytelling-like presentation, more focus should be put on this aspect.
- Using less icons, they do not speak to imagination and create confusion instead.
- Combine Archetypes with Support-tokens to create a more comprehensive and intuitive framework for understanding and communicating the support needs.

3.7 EVALUATION OF FINDINGS

After going through multiple cycles of developing, testing, evaluating and iteration the next step was to list all gathered findings. By bringing together the research conducted in chapter 2 and all findings gathered from the testing, we can start converging towards a final concept.

3.7.1 Goals and requirements

Based on done research, results and insights gathered from the testing, interaction vision and design goal, goals and requirements are formulated to guide towards the final form of the intervention.

- Creates a light-hearted atmosphere and interaction
- Stimulate students to reflect on and understand their own support needs
- Stimulate open conversation of support needs
- Stimulate reflection on support-giving strengths
- Create a space where support can be expressed and in that way increase the feeling of support felt by the team

3.7.2 Insights for the final concept

Understanding of own needs:

- Support-tokens help a lot for thinking about what ones own support needs are.
- The Support-need Triangle is too difficult to grasp and use on its own.
- Framing archetypes in a storytelling way makes the dimensions very understandable and relatable. But there need to be examples of specific Support-needs/Support-Tokens to have a clear imagination.
- Focus on/Take focus away makes it difficult to use for people that are not specifically in need of support at that moment.

Creating a space for Support:

- Support-tokens help talking about one's own support-needs and elaborate on what exactly it is they need, but are not enough to start the conversation about support.
- It is difficult to talk about what exactly one is able to give. As participants mentioned

often being open to give most of the things. Talking about what one can not give is easier, but goes against the striving of talking in a "supportive tone".

- All concepts make taking about one's needs more light-hearted.

Placement & Duration:

- Participants prefer to start the meetings with it as a check-in moment, because then the meeting can be adjusted based on the individual's needs.
- After approximately 20-25 minutes interest and attention starts to decrease

Creating phases

- Prolonging getting to know each other
- Understanding the product and each other
- Creating a clear space for support within meetings check in module

3.8 BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Based on the above gathered insight and Based on the above gathered insight and evaluation of all concepts, a final concept was developed, which was still tweaked after some testing. As also stated above, the final concept is a combination of the promising parts of earlier concepts.

This (final) concept is a toolkit designed to guide teams to reflect, understand and communicate support.

3.8.1 Placement

In the meeting space, used every start of a meeting.

3.8.2 Phases

The kit helps team members through two phases, portrayed each by a module: An introduction Module and Check-in. The introduction module serves as an introduction to support, and lets users get to know all different components. After, the Check-in module creates a recurring space for support in the meetings.

Phase 1: Introduction Module
In this one-off session (figure 15), team members get to know the archetypes and are challenged to reflect and communicate about their own support-seeking and support-giving behaviors. This is done by presenting them with different exercises and questions to prompt them to think about the topic of support.

Figure 15: Walkthrough Phase 1: Introduction Module

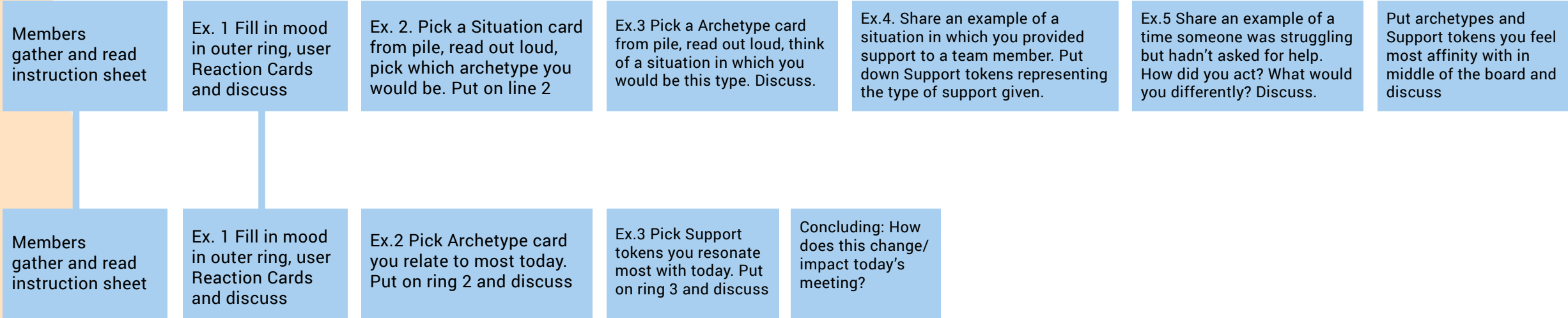


Figure 16: Walkthrough Phase 2: Check-in Module

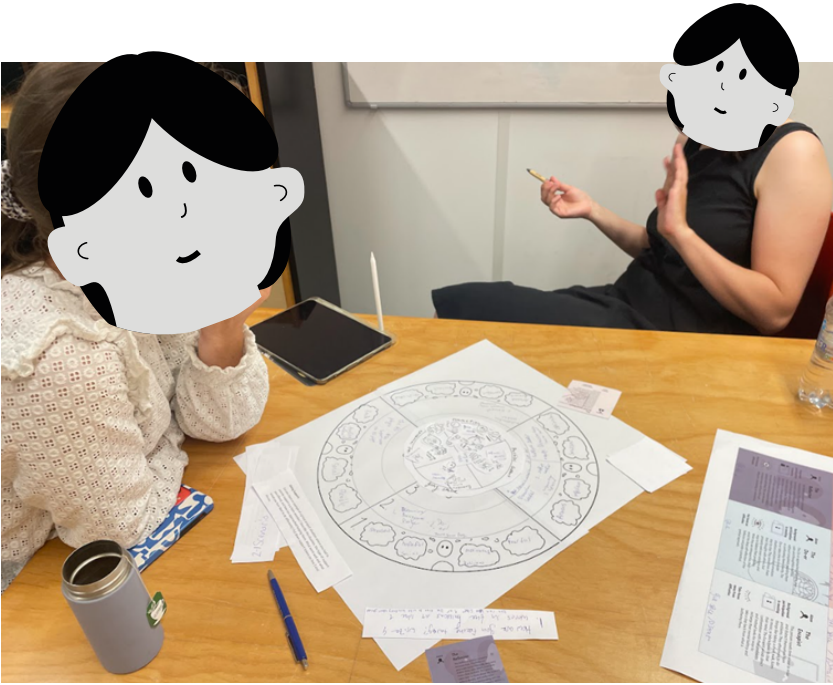


Image 13: Final Concept testing session

Phase 2: Check-in Module
This phase (figure 16) encompasses a recurring meeting opening, in which a space is created where team members reflect on their emotional state of that day, and communicate and discuss their support needs.

3.8.3 Components

The kit consists out of several components:

- **Instruction sheet:** helps guide the team through the exercises
- **Situation cards:** to help users understand how they would react differently (or the same) in different situations.

- **Archetype cards + tokens:** cards representing different support archetypes to help users reflect on what type of support they can need and are good at giving. The tokens are made to make it easier to put archetypes on the board, while still maintaining readability.
- **Support Tokens:** tokens representing different support needs to give users an introduction into what support can look like. Furthermore, it doubles as a tool to reflect on what the user needs themselves.
- **Support wheel:** a help categorizing the Support tokens into 4 different categories: practical support, distraction, emotional support & giving space.
- **Communication Board:** a board consisting of different movable pieces on which users can put their answers, and then present it to each other.

3.9 FINDINGS

Positive experiences:

- **Enjoyment and natural forming discussion:** Participants mentioned exercises were fun and helped them reflect on what their support character is. They expressed that it became much easier and natural to talk about their individual preferences and felt comfortable that they were able to discuss this together. One mentioned it being a great addition to take this moment to check-in with themselves and each other.
- **Light-hearted atmosphere:** The atmosphere in the space was enjoyable and light-hearted. It was clear participants felt quite comfortable discussing some sensible topics.
- **Increased understanding of what support can look like:** Participants mentioned it was easy to identify themselves with the archetypes. Furthermore, participants felt guided through thinking about support-giving and support-seeking. Without the archetypes and Support tokens, they mentioned not being able to understand and discuss about their needs. One participant mentioned: "Without the overview of the Support tokens I would have not been able to really answer if you asked me what I would need at the moment. I think I would have just told you I was fine and don't need anything, even though that might not really be true".
- **Increased understanding of team members:** Participants expressed having a better understanding of who their team members were and how they could help them, free of judgement.
- **Support wheel:** Support wheel made it easier to select tokens fitting their needs and gave more insight in why certain actions are helpful to give.
- **Clear place for support:** Using this concept, participants expressed an increased feeling of support

Points of improvement:

- **Support wheel:** The presentation of the support wheel makes it look cluttered and therefore slightly overwhelming. Participants did not, like before, take the time to carefully select what resonated with them.
- **A lot of reading:** Reading all the archetypes required a lot of reading right of the bat (exercise 2). This is slightly time-consuming and time-consuming. This combined with the instruction being just text, which again also requires a lot of reading.
- **Visuals on board unclear:** Visuals and signing on board were not always clear. It took a moment for the participants to figure out what to place where.
- **Archetype confusion:** There is some confusion about the difference between The do-er and the reflector.

IMPLICATIONS AND DESIGN CHANGES FOR THE FINAL DESIGN

Based on the insight gathered from this final test, necessary final tweaks to the final concept were identified and listed:

- **Improve balance between Support-giving and Support-seeking:** After reflection on the current concept, it was clear that the amount of attention given to Support-seeking and Support-giving was a bit out of balance. This because it was concluded that it is overall easier for users to discuss about Support-seeking and the matching needs. As prior research also concluded, Support-givers are usually open to give whatever support necessary. However, this overlooks that individuals are definitely better at giving one type of support over the other. It was decided to match the design goal better, more balance should be created between attention given to Support-giving and Support-seeking in the introduction module. For this, archetypes based on the 4 categories (Practical support, Distraction, Emotional support & Giving space) were added.
- **Switching exercise 2 and 3:** When switching exercise 2 with 3, users are already introduced to the archetypes when starting the scenario card exercise. This means they have to read less text right of the bat, which eases them into the exercises better.
- **Clarify Archetypes:** Make adjustments on the Do-er and the Reflector so it is better to understand the difference between them, and thus make them more relatable.
- **Support wheel presentation:** Color co-ordinate Support tokens to create less visual clutter.
- **Improve visual style:** Create a clearer and coherent visual style, that makes better use of color coordination. This to make distinction between Support tokens also clearer, and creates a more visually pleasing product overall.

With this, the exploration and testing phase was concluded. Although there are still areas that could use improvements and other potential directions that could be explored, it was decided to stick to the current concept and develop this further into a final design. Given the project deadlines, the focus shifted towards refining and developing this concept into a final design, allowing for more in-depth progress within the available timeframe. Adjustments were made to make sure the design looks coherent visually and further improve functionality, resulting in a more polished and cohesive outcome. The design's final form is presented in the next chapter.

04

Deliver



After taking into account all the gathered design implications from the exploration phase, it was time to come to a final design. This transition marked an important moment in the project, where insights gained through the earlier iterative research and user feedback began to come together into a concept. The objective was to create a design that not only addresses the identified needs but also resonates with the intended users, ensuring that the solution is both effective and engaging.

In this phase, careful consideration was given to the feedback collected during user testing, as well as the overarching goals of fostering a supportive and communicative environment within teams. By fusing the various different elements identified during both the discovering and exploration phase, e.g. the significance of trust, the necessity for reflection and open communication, and the importance of creating a safe space for expressing these, the final design aims to bring together all these principles in an intuitive form.

Ultimately, the goal of this final design chapter is to present an overview of the final concept, its components, usage, objectives and workings.

The Support Board

The Support Board is a tool designed to help teams foster open communication and enhance their understanding of support-giving and support-seeking behaviors. By providing a set space and guidance for reflection, the Support Board encourages team members to explore their individual roles in giving and seeking support, as well as explores their ever evolving needs. Through guided activities, participants can better articulate their support styles and express what they require on a given day, creating a culture of empathy, understanding collaboration, and openness. This tool is designed for teams aiming to strengthen interpersonal connections and improve overall group cohesion by ensuring that everyone's needs are acknowledged and respected.

4.1 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

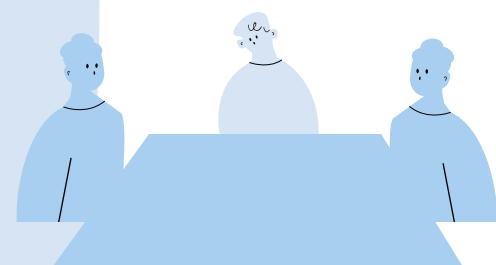
The primary goal of The Support Board is to help IDE students create a more supportive environment within their project teams. By fostering open communication and mutual understanding, the tool aims to strengthen team cohesion while also providing more space for better mental health and well-being among the students.

The objectives include:

- Stimulate students to reflect on and understand their own support needs.
- Stimulate open discussion of these support needs.
- Stimulate reflection on support-giving strengths.
- Providing a shared language to improve communication.
- Create a space where support can be expressed and in that way increase the feeling of support felt by the team.



How it works



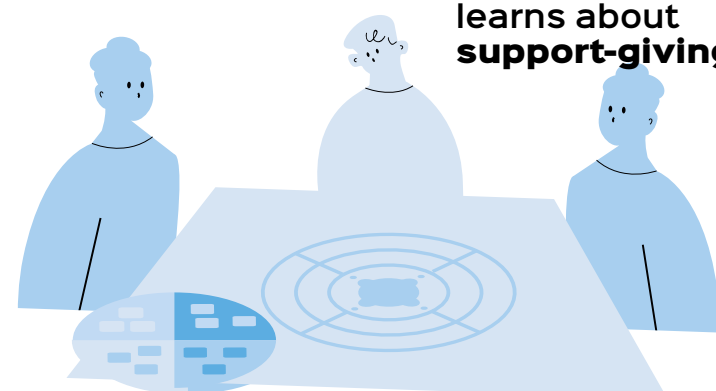
1. It's the first meeting day, the team gathers

First, the team goes through a one-off introduction session

Introduction session



2. Every member reflects on their mood that day



4. The team learns about support-giving



Scenario cards



Archetype cards + tags

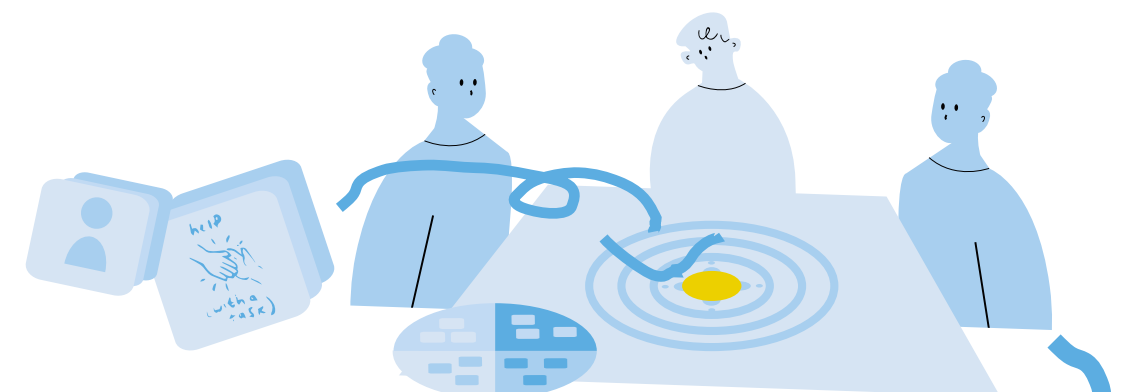


Support Tokens + Wheel

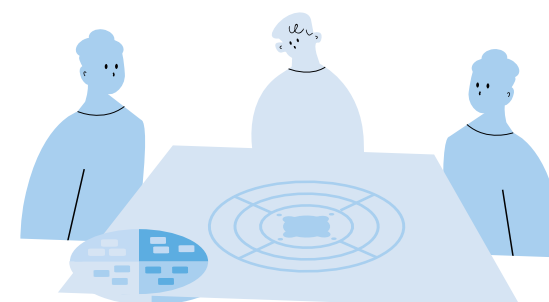
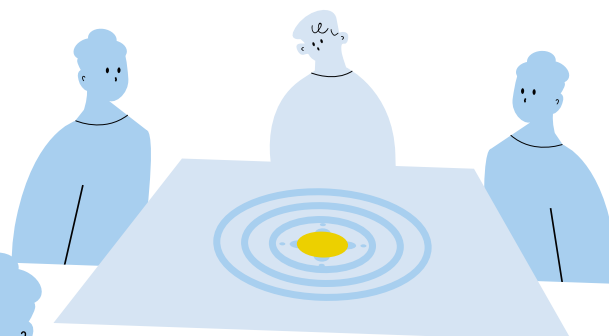


Archetype cards + tags

5. Session ends with a **reflection** on own preferred support-giving and -seeking types



8. How does that change the meeting?



7. Reflection and discussion about that day's support-needs

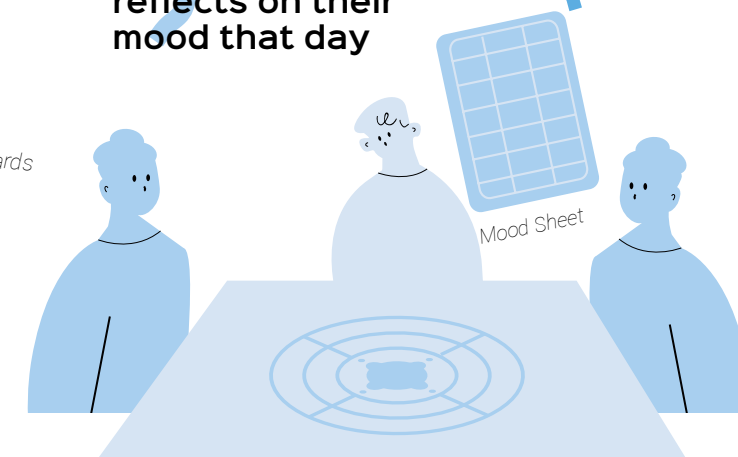


Archetype cards + tags



Support Tokens + Wheel

6. NEXT MEETING: Every member reflects on their mood that day



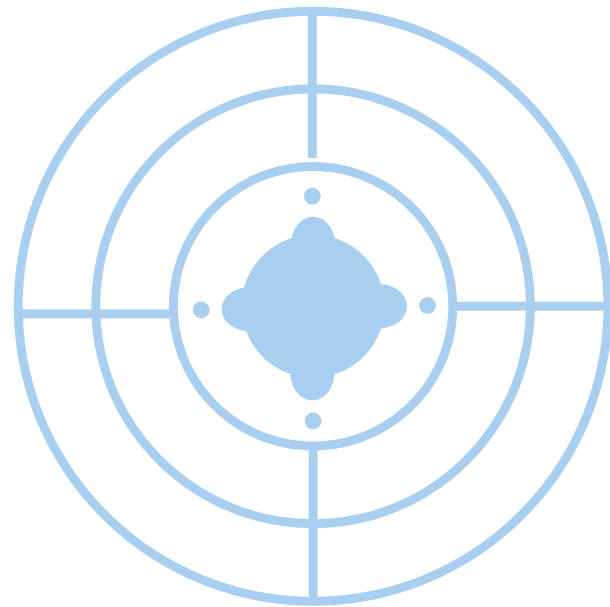
Ultimately resulting in the creation of a supportive space for the team!

Check-in session

The check-in session becomes the new start of every meeting, and is thus repeated every time

4.2 COMPONENTS

- Support Playboard
- Support-seeking Archetypes
- Support-giving Archetypes
- Mood Cards
- Scenario Cards
- Support Tokens
- Support Wheel



Support Playboard



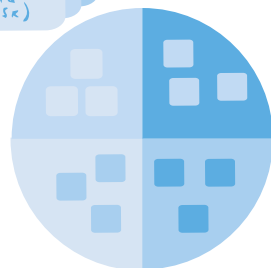
Archetype cards
+ tags



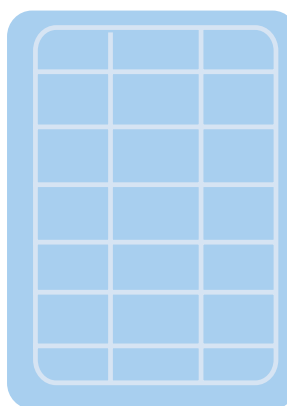
Scenario cards



Support Tokens
+ Wheel



Instruction
Sheet



Mood Sheet

The Support playboard

The Support Playboard (image 14) is the central space where all tokens, answers, and reflections come together during team discussions. It serves as a shared canvas where participants place their selected support archetypes, communicate their current needs, and engage in activities that encourage reflection and collaboration. By visually mapping out each team member's preferences and responses, the Playboard helps create a clear, open dialogue about how support can be both sought and given. It also provides structure to the process, making the exchange of comfort and assistance more intentional and organized.

The board is cut into 6 pieces, each representing an individual team member. The middle "table"

represents the team and always stays in the middle. Each side can be disconnected from the table and brought in front of the individual. This to foster a safe space for them to reflect and put down their answers, to then afterwards connect it back to the board to present and discuss the answers. Furthermore, disconnecting also helps for practical reasons: for members to put it in front of them and easily write or put down their answers.

The number 6 is chosen, because this is on average the biggest size of a project group for a semester project at the IDE faculty. When there are groups that consists out off less members (e.g. three or four team members), users can just leave out the unused slices.

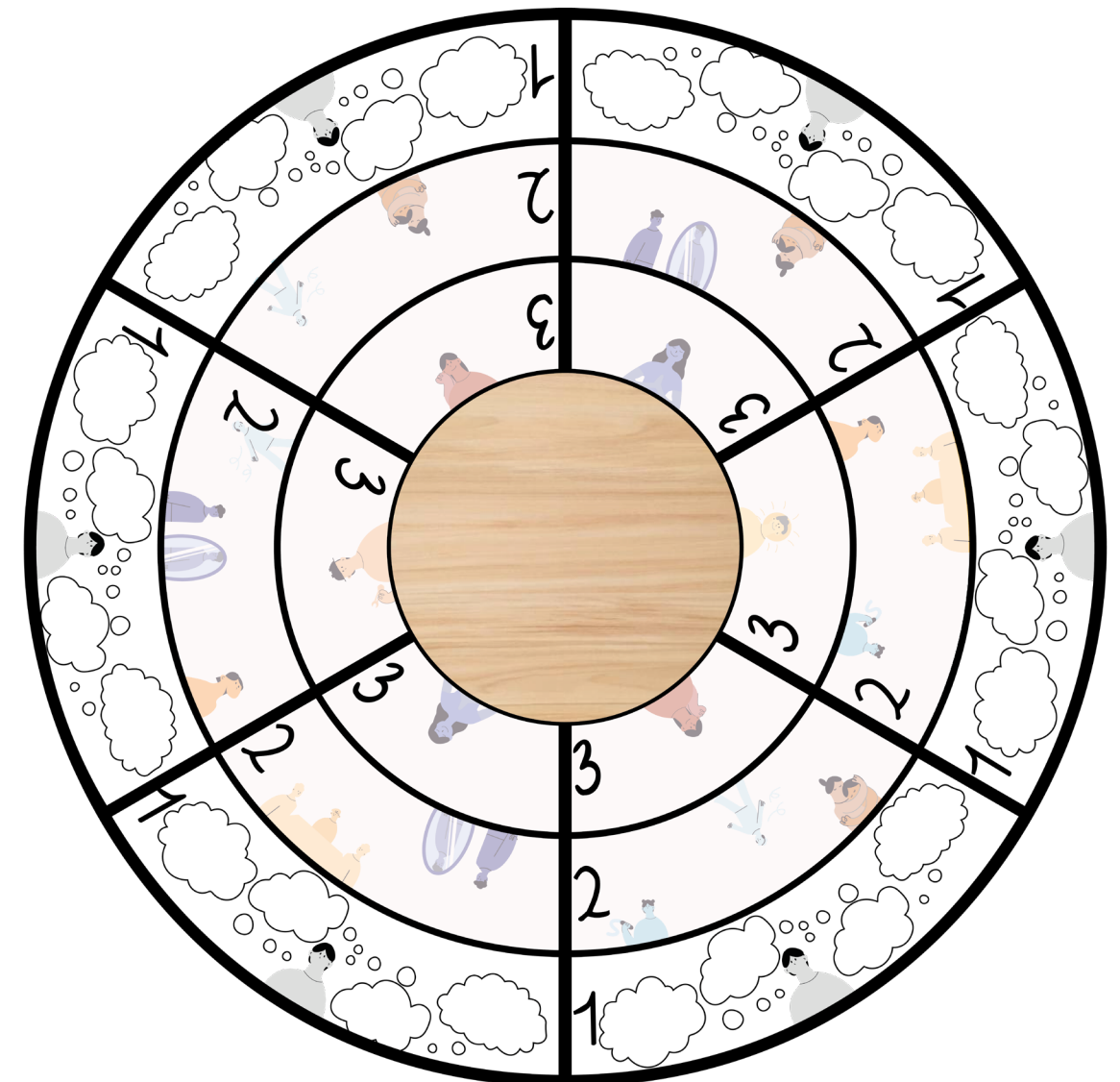
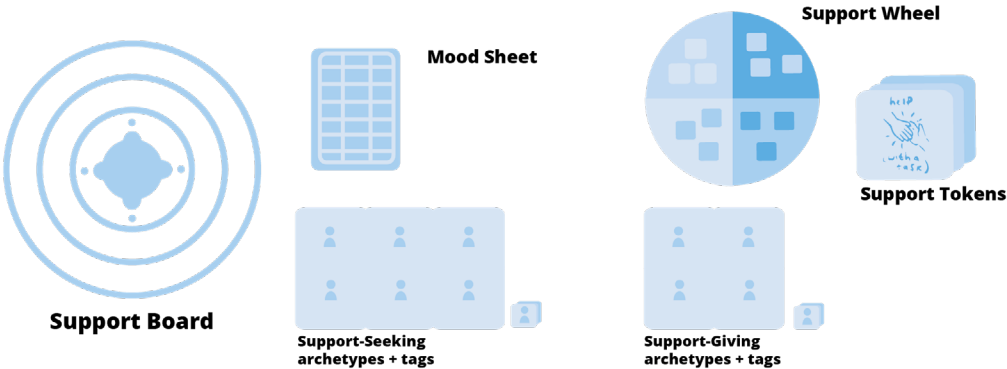


Image 14: Support Playboard

Instruction Sheet

The instruction sheet contains the instructions for the *instruction module* and the *check-in module*. These guide the students through the different exercises and phases.

SUPPORT BOARD: CHECK-IN SESSION



Read all instructions aloud!

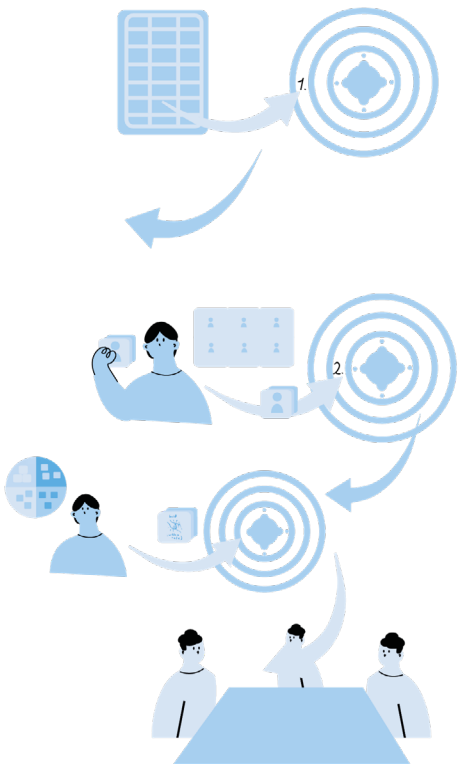
1. How are you feeling today? Use the *mood sheet* for inspiration, or come up with it yourself. **Write your answers in line 1 of the Support Board** and discuss.

Support-Seeking

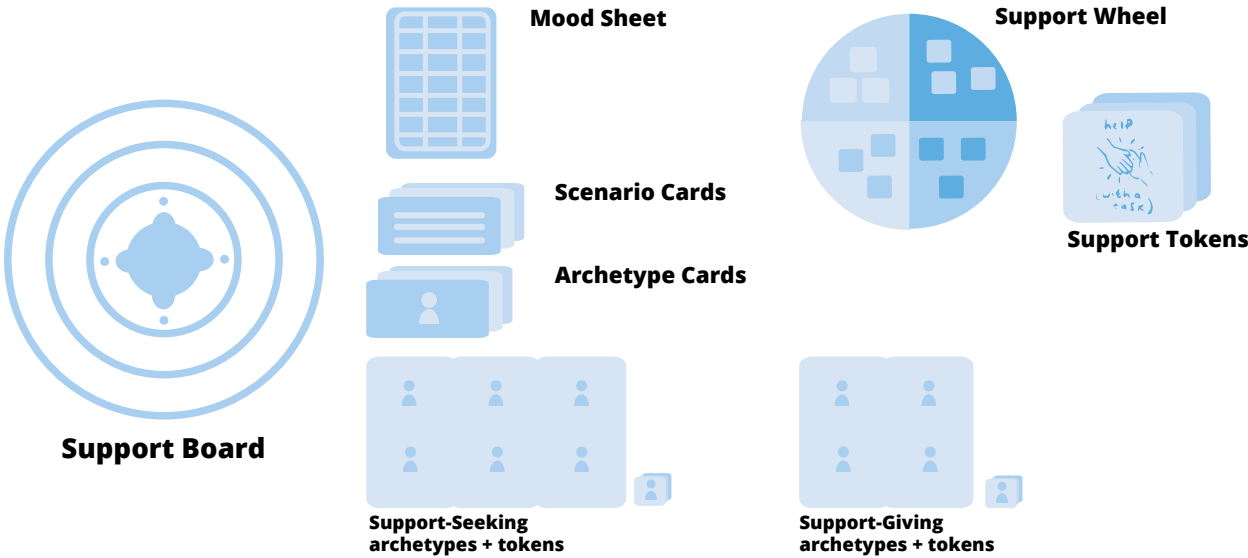
2. Which archetypes do you relate most to today? **Put these Support-seeking archetype tags down on line 2 and discuss.**
3. What do you feel like you could need today? **Take the Support tokens that resonate with you and put them on line 3.**

Coming Together

4. How do these needs change/impact today's meeting? What can you do to incorporate these needs into the meeting? **Discuss together!**



SUPPORT BOARD: INTRODUCTION SESSION



Read all instructions aloud!

1. How are you feeling today? Use the *mood sheet* for inspiration, or come up with it yourself. **Write your answers in line 1 of the Support Board** and discuss.

Support-Seeking

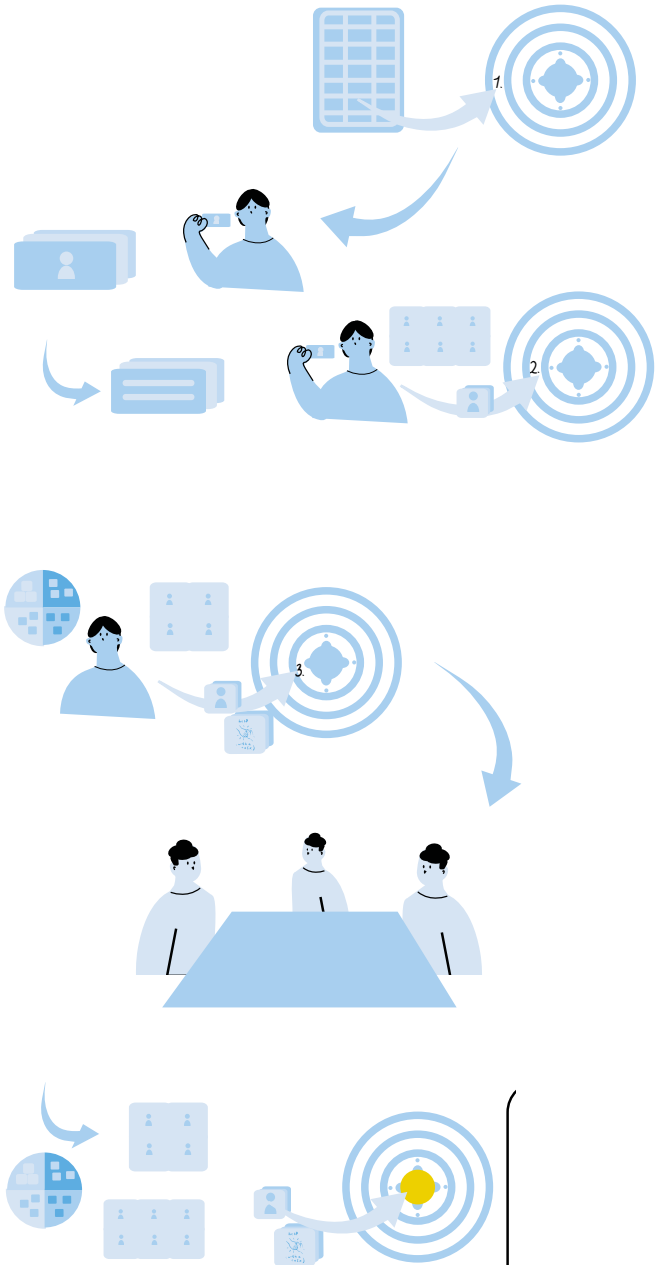
2. Pick an *archetype card* from the pile. Read the card out loud, and discuss together in which situation or scenario each of you could be this archetype.
3. Pick a *scenario-card* from the pile. Read the card out loud, and discuss together in which archetype you would be in this situation. Discuss at least two and put these archetype tokens down on line 2.

Giving Support

4. Can you share an example of a group project situation where you provided support to a team member? Describe the situation, the type of support you offered, and how you approached helping them. What went well and what would you have liked to do differently? Put down the *Support-giving archetypes tokens* and *support tokens* on line 3 and discuss.
5. Think of a group project where you noticed that a team member was struggling but hadn't explicitly asked for help. Describe how you identified their need for support, the type of support you decided to offer, and how you approached the situation. Reflect on the outcome: Did your support make a difference? What signs will you look for in the future to identify when someone might need help but isn't asking for it? **Discuss with your group.**

Coming Together

6. Which archetype(s) do you feel most affinity with? And which types of support do you feel like you are best at giving? **Put it down on the table in the middle of the Support Board** and discuss!



Archetypes

4.3 GIVING SUPPORT A FACE

The Archetypes embody different Support-seeking and -giving behaviors. They represent the varied ways in which individuals approach seeking or providing support within a team or group setting. By identifying these distinct

behaviors, we can better understand the unique needs and tendencies of team members during times of stress or difficulty. These archetypes help individuals reflect on their preferences, and help teams to communicate more effectively and empathically, allowing both support-seekers and support-givers to navigate complex emotional landscapes.

Purpose:


The different archetypes help individuals to reflect on their support-seeking needs and support-giving strengths. By offering a framework for understanding varied behaviors, these archetypes foster greater empathy and awareness of diverse needs and preferences within teams. This because individuals will be

able to identify themselves up to some level with all archetypes, depending on the situation. Most importantly, it helps the team members to communicate these needs within the team.

Support-seeking Archetypes: The Support-seeking archetypes consist out of 6 distinct characters (image 15), based on the Comfort-triangle (figure 4).




Support-giving Archetypes: The Support-giving Archetypes consist out of 4 distinct characters (image 17), based on the type of support that can be given to the Support-seeking Archetypes.


These cards are accompanied with smaller representative tokens (image 16 & 18), so they are easier to place on the board.



THE SUPPORT SEEKER




The Support Seeker is very open about their problems. They actively ask for help, share their feelings and struggles with others. They have a strong need for guidance and feel comfortable being vulnerable in public. They often want to be just be listened to, or want someone else to give them advice on the things they are struggling with.






THE DISTRACTION SEEKER




The Distraction Seeker seeks distraction to cope with problems. The Distraction Seeker does talk about their problems, but in a more superficial way, often to shift attention to something else. This person prefers to do something enjoyable to take their mind off the issue rather than delve deeply into it. They like to divert their thoughts with the help of others to feel better.






THE BACKGROUND PLAYER



The Background Player feels most comfortable in the background, where they can be passively involved without actively participating. They find relief in routine tasks and prefer being entertained by observing rather than speaking up when something is on their mind. They value structure and freedom to work at their own pace, with subtle, non-intrusive support from others.






THE REFLECTOR



The Reflector prefers complete introspection. They proces issues internally and rarely share them with others, even with those close to them. This person takes time to think about the issues, reflects deeply, and seeks inner wisdom and understanding without the need for external support and is content with that. This can be done in various ways, such as through reflection, journaling, or meditation.






THE DO-ER

The Do-er approaches problems in a calm and thoughtful manner. They take time to consider situations and processes emotions step by step. Sometimes they share their thoughts with others, but primarily seek inner solutions and ways to balance their problems. While they are introspective, they avoid the deep self-reflection and prefer a practical, gradual approach.





THE DREAMER

The Dreamer needs time alone to relax and distract themselves from problems. They often want to do things like taking a short walk, listen to music, or take a break to clear their mind. They avoid direct confrontation with their problems and instead looks for ways to recharge their mental battery and take a step back from what is bothering them.

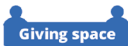



Image 15: Support-seeking Archetypes



Image 16: Support-seeking Archetype Tags

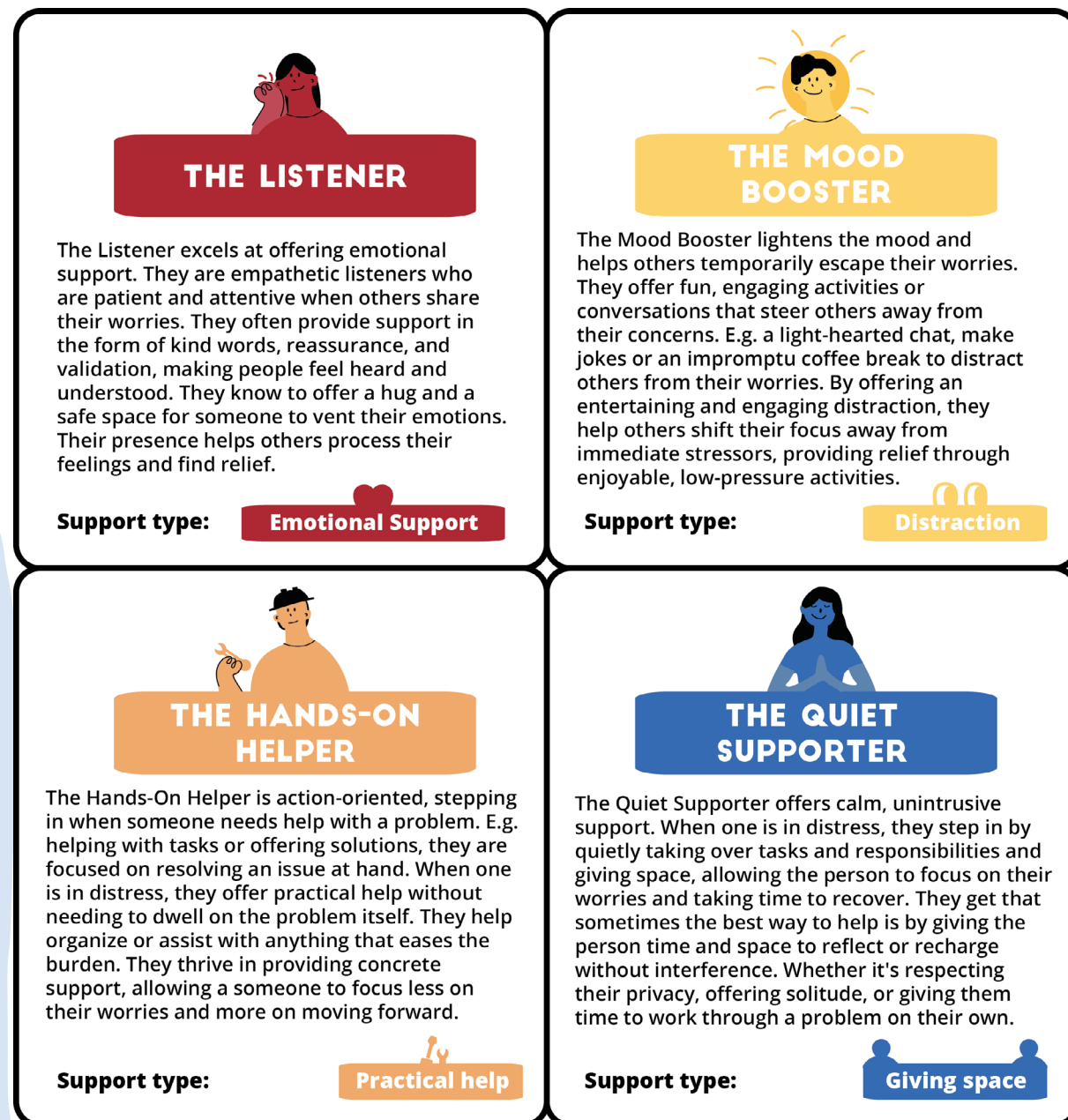


Image 17: Support-giving Archetypes



Image 18: Support-giving Archetype Tags

Scenario cards

The scenario cards (image 19) are part of the Introduction module. They represent several possible recognizable scenario's that students can relate to, that can have impact on their mood and needs during a meeting. These cards are used to create a more understanding attitude, and in that way also get to know the different archetypes.

Purpose:

- Challenge individuals to reflect on how their support needs and type change due to different scenarios
- Show individuals that they could fit into multiple archetypes, depending on the scenario

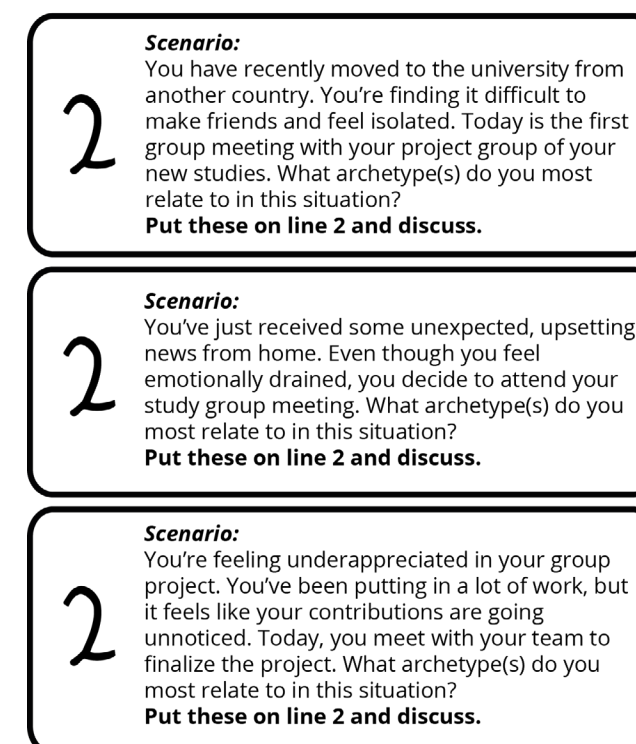
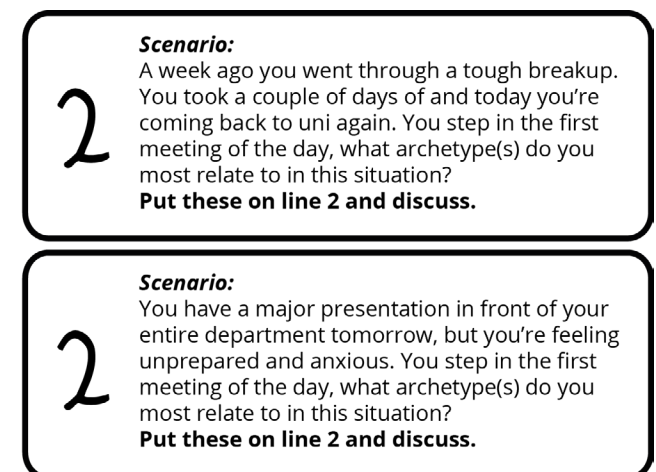


Image 19: Scenario cards



Support tokens + Wheel

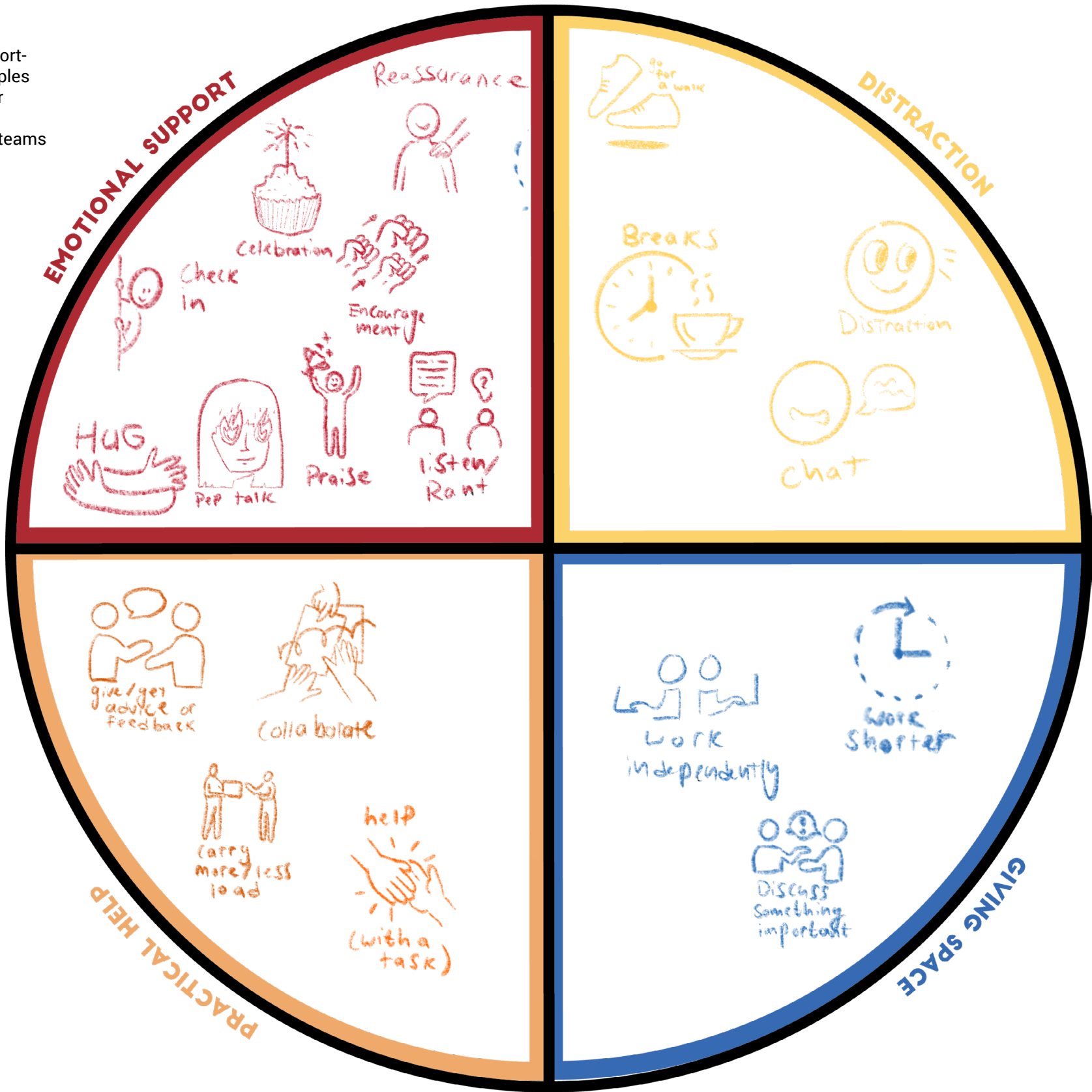
The Support Tokens are tangible representations of the different support needs individuals may have within a team. Each token can be put in one or several categories of support: emotional, practical, or the need for space or distraction.

The tokens are used as tools to help individuals reflect on and express their current needs in a clear and straightforward manner, facilitating communication that might otherwise be difficult to articulate. By using these tokens, team members can effectively signal what type of support they require at a given moment, fostering a more responsive and understanding team dynamic.

The tokens are placed on a wheel matching the support-giving archetypes (image 17), to create a clear link between possible support-seeking needs and support-giving actions.

- Purpose:**
- Help individuals reflect on their own Support-needs by giving them clear options/examples
 - Help individuals express and discuss their needs
 - Create a space for support within project teams

Image 20: Support wheel, with tokens lying on it



Mood Card

The Mood Cards are a reflective tool designed to help individuals better understand and articulate their emotional state. Inspired by Microsoft’s Product Reaction Cards, they provide a diverse range of moods and emotions that serve as prompts to encourage deeper reflection. These cards assist in guiding individuals into a more introspective mindset, making it easier for them to express their current feelings. By offering concrete examples of various emotional states, the Mood Cards elevate the level of reflection, allowing for more meaningful self-expression and ultimately fostering more open and authentic communication within teams.

Purpose:

- Stimulates emotional reflection
- Promotes self-expression
- Helps enhance level of reflection
- Creates a shared language

MOOD CARD

Empathetic	Trusting	Resilient	Grateful	Motivated
Fearful	Apathetic	Neglected	Disconnected	Jealous
Resentful	Confused	Angry	Burned out	Distrustful
Insecure	Disappointed	Isolated	Exhausted	Overwhelmed
Conflicted	Impatient	Anxious	Frustrated	Misunderstood
Flexible	Respectful	Balanced	Compassionate	Joyful
Accountable	Confident	Supportive	Embarrassed	Optimistic
Ecstatic	Creative	Discouraged	Stressed	Enthusiastic
Helpful	Passionate	Tired	Patient	Relaxed
Energetic	Excited	Calm	Festive	Disconnected

05

Evaluation & Conclusions

This chapter wraps up this graduation project. In this part, product evaluation, results and conclusions are reflected on. After, I will reflect on my personal learning experiences and journey towards the end of my master degree.

Project Evaluation

5.1 EVALUATION

Evaluating the project has offered valuable insights, despite the challenges posed by its intended long-term use. The Support Board is designed to be used over time, fostering reflection, encouraging the expression of support needs, and gradually creating a space where students feel more supported within their teams. These outcomes are meant to unfold as students repeatedly engage with the board, becoming more familiar with both the tool and each other, while deepening their reflections.

Although a full evaluation would require extended usage, evaluating the introduction session could already point into a direction

The project’s main design goal is evaluated through the following goals:

- Creates a light-hearted atmosphere and interaction
- Stimulate students to reflect on and understand their own support needs
- Stimulate open conversation of support needs
- Stimulate reflection on support-giving strengths
- Create a space where support can be expressed and in that way increase the feeling of support felt by the team

5.2 EVALUATION METHODS

To check whether the project goals have been achieved, different evaluations were conducted. The following evaluation methods have been used, see Table 1).

The results are organized in FIXME based on the project goals and requirements, summarizing key findings from all evaluation methods used.

Method	People	Goal
Observation	21 (6 groups)	Observe user experience and identify bottlenecks
Online Survey	13	Gather more information about user experience after observation session
Qualitative session	3 (1 group)	To assess the achievement of project goals and evaluate the effectiveness of the workflow
Expert interviews	4 coaches	Gain insights into the potential long-term impact of The Support Board and to identify possible bottlenecks or challenges in its sustained implementation.

5.2.1 Observation session and Online Survey

Goal:

To observe how users interact with the Support Board, an observational study was conducted. The goals was to observe the user experience in a real life scenario and identify bottlenecks.

Method

Participants

There were 21 participants, divided into six groups. All of them doing a minor at the IDE faculty.

Procedure

The session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. During the sessions, observations of the participants’ interactions with The Support Board were made as I walked around the room. Questions were answered only when necessary, to minimize interference and allow natural usage of the game.

To get more information from the participants of the observation session, a survey was made. In

this questionnaire the Attrakdiff user evaluation method was used to gather insights about their experiences with the Support Board. AttrakDiff is a standardized tool that assesses the perceived attractiveness of interactive products. Developed to provide insights into both usability and emotional qualities, it captures how users feel about using a tool and how this aligns with its intended purpose. For a tool like the Support Board, which is designed to foster effective communication and reflection, user perception is important to ensure that it encourages positive interaction, meets support needs, and integrates smoothly into team dynamics. Furthermore, some qualitative questions were also added to the survey.

Of the 21 participants of the observation session, 13 replied to the survey.

Findings of the observation and survey can be found in Appendix G

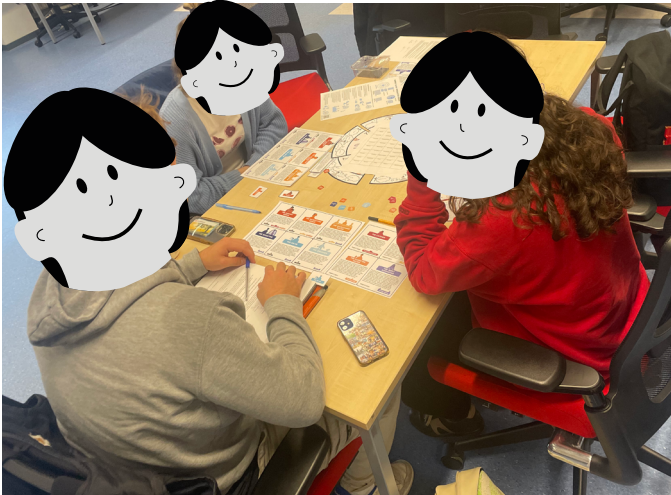


Image 21: Shots of the observation session



Table 1: Overview of used evaluation methods

5.2.2. Qualitative Session

Goal:

To assess the achievement of project goals and evaluate the effectiveness of the workflow, in a more qualitative way.

Method

Participants

Three participants, who together formed one group. All master students at IDE.

Procedure

The session lasted around an hour. Prior to starting the session, the participants were explained the purpose of the session and Support board. During the session, observations of the participants' interactions with The Support Board were made. Questions were answered only when necessary, to minimize interference and allow natural usage of the game.

Afterwards, a group discussion was conducted to gather qualitative insights into the participants' experience with The Support Board. This discussion focused on understanding how the game impacted their reflection on support needs, team dynamics, and overall engagement with the process. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on the ease of use, the clarity of the prompts, and how the game influenced their understanding of giving and receiving support within their teams. Additionally, feedback was sought on any challenges they encountered, as well as suggestions for improving the game. This open-ended discussion provided valuable, in-depth insights into the strengths and areas for development of The Support Board from the perspective of the users.

Findings of the qualitative session can be found in Appendix H.

5.2.3. Expert Interviews

Goal:

Gain insights into the potential long-term impact of The Support Board and to identify possible bottlenecks or challenges in its sustained implementation.

Method

Participants

Three participants, who together formed one Expert interviews were conducted with 4 design coaches at the IDE faculty.

Procedure

The expert interviews began with an overview of the purpose and context of The Support Board, providing the coaches with a clear understanding of its objectives and intended use. Following this, a step-by-step explanation of the tool's functionality and workflow was provided to familiarize them with its components. Throughout the explanation, and in the discussion that followed, coaches were encouraged to share their thoughts on potential improvements, identify any bottlenecks that could hinder long-term implementation, and highlight the features they found most valuable. This open dialogue allowed for a comprehensive exchange of ideas aimed at refining and enhancing the tool's effectiveness.

Findings of the Expert interviews can be found in Appendix I.

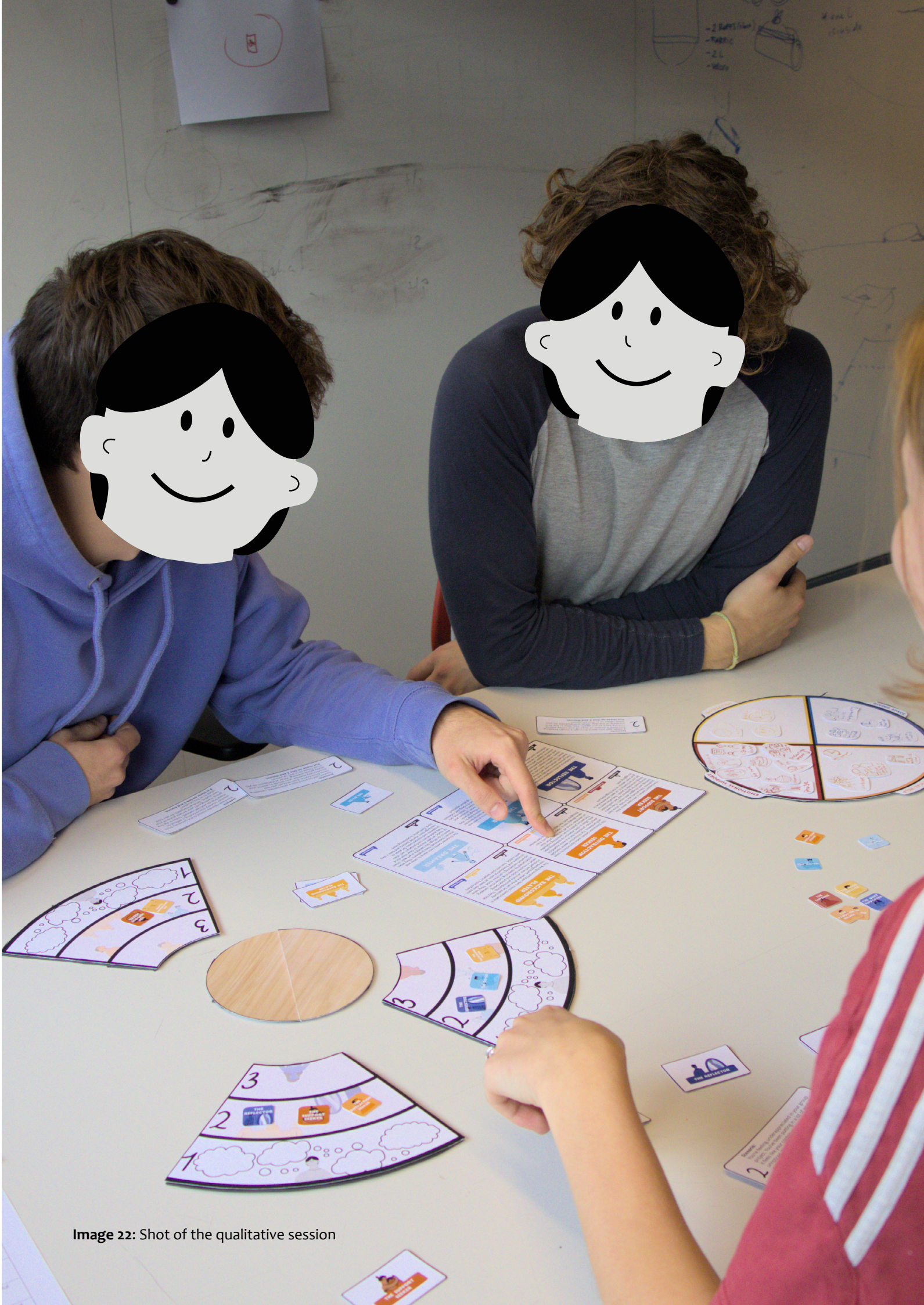


Image 22: Shot of the qualitative session

Conclusions

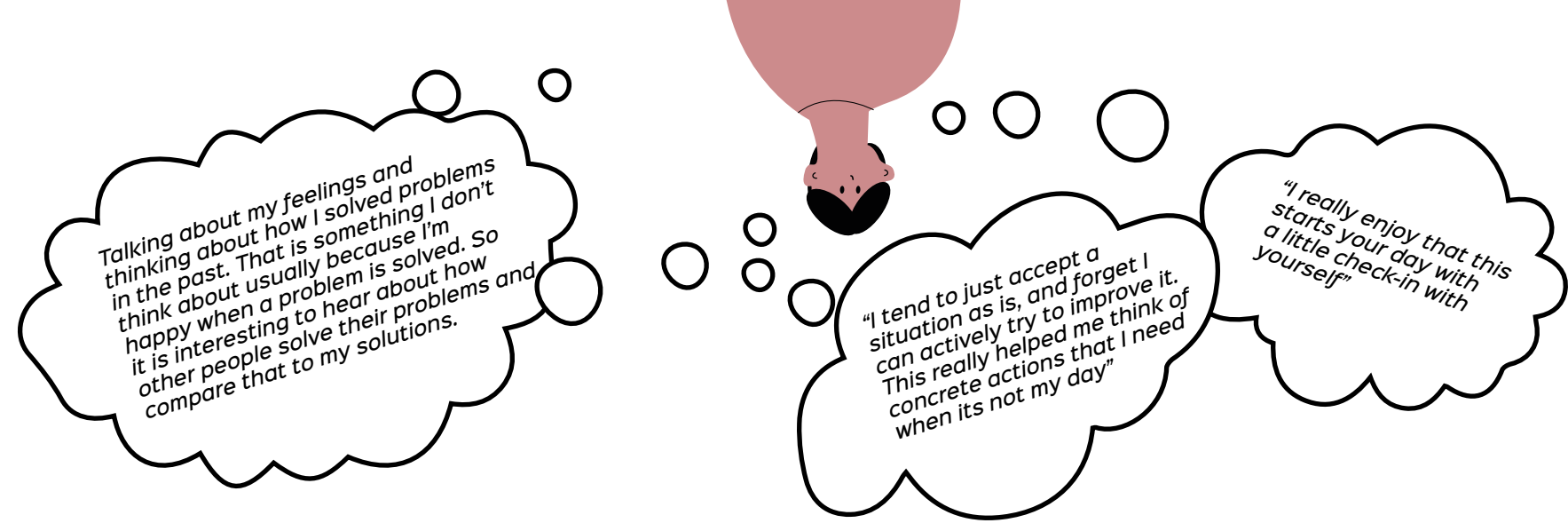
5.3 GOAL & REQUIREMENTS

Here, I will evaluate the earlier set goals and requirements, with the information gathered from all evaluation methods.

Creates a light-hearted atmosphere and interaction

Although it's difficult to quantify the impact of this tone, observations during the introduction sessions revealed moments of laughter and levity among participants. This positive and relaxed environment may indicate that the game not only encourages reflection but also helps ease the often sensitive topic of support needs, making it more approachable. The laughter observed suggests that the game successfully balances serious reflection with a playful and engaging experience, which could be key to its overall effectiveness.

Furthermore, the results of the AttrakDiff evaluation indicated a tendency towards being perceived as unprofessional and undemanding. This could suggest that the experience offered a more light-hearted and approachable interaction, in contrast to the more formal and challenging dynamics typically associated with professional tools/interactions.



Stimulate students to reflect on and understand their own support needs

After reflection of one's own needs, it is important to open up a conversation where users talk about what support needs they have. This to in the long term, create a space for support within teams. From observations and the qualitative session it became clear that there was definitely discussion about support needs. Multiple users opened up about struggles they experienced currently or in the past, in different extents to how in depth they would open up about the details of these struggles. Some would put all details right on the table, others stayed more reserved. However, this still created an interesting base for conversation as to how the team could help or react in these situations.

It was also clear that not all groups were as proactive. Some groups simply just announced which archetype fit them, and no further conversation was held. Several answers in the questionnaire point to a feeling of frustration in some participants, as they mention some of the instructions are unclear. This could be part of the lack in participation. Expert interviews also further clear up that one of the dangers with using The Support Board, is that it is

preventing a problem they don't have yet. By trying to stimulate open conversation about support needs, a better group atmosphere could be created, and teamwork enhanced. However, without experiencing what bad teamwork and lousy atmosphere feels like and also impacts work, motivation of students tends to be low to prevent this. Then it will become "just another thing they have to do for the course", instead of seeing and experiencing the benefits, highlights one of the interviewed coaches.

On the other hand, another coach mentions that even if it does not help all teams or all individuals, helping some is already enough, and he states all bits help.

While The Support Board may not resonate equally with all teams or individuals, its potential to create a space for meaningful dialogue about support needs remains significant. Even if not every group engages deeply in the conversation, the tool has proven effective in encouraging more open discussions. As one coach pointed out, even small moments of connection can make a difference in creating a supportive atmosphere, and helping even a few individuals can have a lasting impact on group cohesion and support. Moving forward, refining the instructions and exploring ways to better demonstrate the long-term benefits of these conversations could further enhance engagement and ensure that more teams fully experience the positive effects of The Support Board.

[On which insight they got during the session]
"I support different than others"

"I feel like I really got to reflect on where I can help others"

"I would like to work on this [supporting skill] more"

"I like that we get to think about what we are good at with regards to Support-giving. I think that is not something that I tend to think about often"

Stimulate reflection on support-giving strengths

One of the key features of The Support Board is promoting not only self-reflection on one's own support needs but also on one's capacity to support others.

In both the qualitative session and questionnaire results came forward that suggests improved reflection on Support-giving strengths. During observation, it seemed easy for users to identify themselves with the different Support-giving archetypes and Support-tokens, and choose which fit them in the context they were sketching. Afterwards, some users even underlined archetypes they would like to work on to become better at. This showed reflective thinking on what they could still work on.

It was also mentioned by some users that they enjoyed the space that was made to talk and think about Support-giving, as they highlighted that that is usually not something that gets space in the project meetings, or even in general.

Stimulate open conversation of support needs

After reflection of one's own needs, it is important to open up a conversation where users talk about what support needs they have. This to in the long term, create a space for support within teams.

From observations and the qualitative session it became clear that there was definitely discussion about support needs. Multiple users opened up about struggles they experienced currently or in the past, in different extents to how in depth they would open up about the details of these struggles. Some would put all details right on the table, others stayed more reserved. However, this still created an interesting base for conversation as to how the team could help or react in these situations.

It was also clear that not all groups were as proactive. Some groups simply just announced which archetype fit them, and no further conversation was held. Several answers in the questionnaire point to a feeling of frustration in some participants, as they mention some of the instructions are unclear. This could be part of the lack in participation. Expert interviews also further clear up that one of the dangers with using The Support Board, is that it is preventing a problem they don't have yet. By trying to stimulate open conversation about support needs, a better group atmosphere could be created, and teamwork enhanced. However, without experiencing what bad teamwork and lousy atmosphere feels like and also impacts work, motivation of students tends to be low to prevent this. Then it will become "just another thing they have to do for the course", instead of seeing and experiencing the benefits, highlights one of the interviewed coaches.

On the other hand, another coach mentions that even if it does not help all teams or all individuals, helping some is already enough, and he states all bits help.

While The Support Board may not resonate equally with all teams or individuals, its potential to create a space for meaningful dialogue about support needs remains significant. Even if not every group engages deeply in the conversation, the tool has proven effective in encouraging more open discussions. As one coach pointed out, even small moments of connection can make a difference in creating a supportive atmosphere, and helping even a few individuals can have a lasting impact on group cohesion and support. Moving forward, refining the instructions and exploring ways to better demonstrate the long-term benefits of these conversations could further enhance engagement and ensure that more teams fully experience the positive effects of The Support Board.

Observation: Mentioning and explaining decisions lead to opening of conversations

[On what was interesting for them] How others react to your problems

[On what was interesting for them] My teammates and I now understand how we cope with things

[On what was interesting for them] How people expect or would like you to act when they have troubles



Create a space where support can be expressed and in that way increase the feeling of support felt by the team

A central goal of The Support Board is to create a space where team members feel safe to express their support needs, fostering an environment where individuals can both give and receive meaningful support. By encouraging open communication and mutual understanding, the game aims to enhance the overall sense of support felt within the team.

Looking at the results, there positive hints that the Support Board can help create a supportive space for teams. It scored positively in the category “Brings you closer to others”, with a mean of 5.4. Also, on (alienating-)integrating (mean 5.2) and Isolating – Connecting (mean 5.2). This is promising, as one of the core goals of the Support Board is to foster a sense of connection and collaboration within student teams. By scoring well in categories like “Brings you closer to others” and (alienating-)integrating, the results suggest that the tool is effective in helping team members feel more integrated and less isolated, which is crucial for creating a supportive environment. These positive results can indicate that the Support Board may facilitate the kind of open communication and mutual understanding that is essential for strong team cohesion, which in that line can improve students’ mental health. The scores reflect a sense of interpersonal closeness and the ability of the tool to create a shared space where team members can express their needs and offer support more easily. Such outcomes align with the board’s primary function of enhancing both collaboration and reflection.

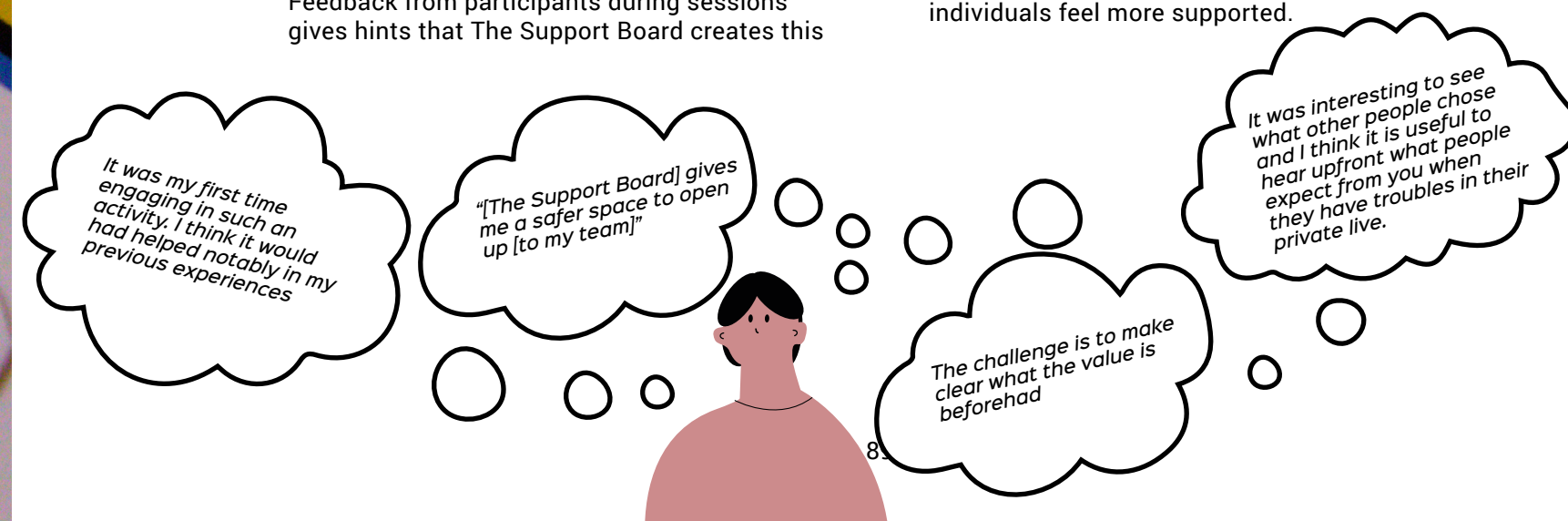
Feedback from participants during sessions gives hints that The Support Board creates this

supportive atmosphere. One participant noted, “[The Support Board] gives me a safer space to open up [to my team],” highlighting how it helps reduce barriers to vulnerability. As also stated by one of the coaches during the Expert Interviews, by providing prompts and guidance, the tool facilitates deeper conversations that might not occur naturally in everyday interactions of the groups, creating a more inclusive and empathetic environment. This is seen back during observation, where it became clear that several users started to open up about recent or current issues, that could also impact them as a team.

One of the strengths of the Support Board, is that it gives the space for constant change. Instead of once determining which type of person one is, it allows one to choose based on the situation, needs and feelings of that day. The Support Board plays into this by stimulating users to connect to all different archetypes. "Recognizing of another, that you also have a piece of that, that is the core of Empathy. This is stimulated by The Support Board" expresses one of the coaches.

However, there are also challenges still ahead. As one of the coaches also mentions, that because the Support Board solves the challenges that groupwork can bring, it is very important to make clear beforehand what its value is.

Overall, by creating a space for open expression and reflection, The Support Board helps increase the feeling of support felt by the team. This shared experience not only promotes empathy but also strengthens the team's ability to navigate challenges collectively, enhancing both individual and group well-being. To precisely say to what extent the Support Board is able to create this open and supportive, more research has to be done over longer term. But until that moment, there are hints that this helps several individuals feel more supported.



5.4 OTHER GOALS

Functional Requirements

Initiation should not rest on one person

Currently, the implementation of The Support Board is designed to ensure that initiation does not rest on any one individual. Instead of relying on a single person to introduce and encourage its use, the responsibility should be integrated into the structure of the course or led by the coach, making participation mandatory for all students.

By embedding The Support Board into the course framework, it becomes a regular and expected part of the students' routine. With this, it will not be the burden of one person. This integration could help to create an environment where all participants are equally involved in reflection and support activities, thereby fostering a more cohesive and collective engagement with the tool.

Check-in module should not exceed 20 minutes

Due to time constraints, only the introduction session has been evaluated. Further research has to be done to say whether this goal has been achieved.

5.5 MAIN DESIGN GOAL

The project was started with the following goal:

“Design an intervention that improves the interplay between comfort-seeking and comfort-giving of young adults at the IDE faculty and in that way, create a more understanding in which comfort can be more safely be expressed and received in all forms.”

Which after initial research turned into the following design goal:

Increase mental health of IDE students by developing a tool which helps create a supportive (team) environment and, in that way seeks to improve team cohesion.

The goal of increasing the mental health of IDE students by developing a tool that fosters a supportive team environment and enhances team cohesion has been achieved through The Support Board. The tool creates structured opportunities for students to reflect on their own support needs as well as recognize the needs of others, which encourages open communication and mutual understanding within teams.

Observational results, feedback from participants, and qualitative evaluations suggest that the tool successfully facilitates conversations around support. Students reported feeling more connected to their peers, with increased awareness of how they can offer and receive support within the group. These interactions are essential for building trust and a stronger sense of team cohesion.

By fostering these supportive interactions, The Support Board indirectly contributes to better mental health outcomes. Research consistently shows that feeling supported and part of a cohesive team reduces stress and improves well-being. Therefore, while the full mental health benefits may be realized over time, the tool has laid a strong foundation by creating an environment where support and cohesion are prioritized, aligning with the goal of improving students' mental health.

In conclusion, the development and implementation of The Support Board have successfully met the project's design goal of fostering a supportive team environment to enhance team cohesion and contribute to the mental health of IDE students. By encouraging open communication, mutual understanding, and the expression of support needs, the tool has demonstrated its effectiveness in helping students feel more connected and supported within their teams. Although the full impact on mental health will likely be seen over a longer period and still improvements have to be made to the design, the initial feedback and observations indicate that the board has created a strong foundation for cultivating trust and collaboration. As students continue to engage with the tool, it holds great potential to further reinforce the supportive dynamics that contribute to both individual well-being and team success.

Discussion

5.6 LIMITATIONS

Due to time constraints, it was chosen to mainly evaluate the introduction sessions, which serve as the initial step in the process. While these sessions are crucial in setting the foundation, they do not provide the full picture of how the Support Board impacts students over time. This limitation makes it difficult to measure whether the game achieves its long-term objectives of increasing the frequency and depth of student reflection or creating an environment where support can be both expressed and felt. These outcomes naturally evolve over a more extended period of play and reflection.

5.7 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the evaluation sessions, several recommendations are proposed to further refine and enhance the Support Board. Each recommendation is accompanied by a clear explanation of its goal and the underlying reasoning, ensuring that the suggested improvements are aligned with the needs of the users and the tool's intended purpose.

The recommendations (table 2) are divided into the following three themes: Form, Function and further research.

Recommendation	Goal	Reason
Form: Bigger archetype cards	Improve ease of use	During observation session, users mentioned the cards were small, which made it difficult to read
Form: Change form or amount of instruction cards	Reduce confusion and make sure several members can read the instructions at the same time	Often, one member took the instruction sheet and started reading it by themselves. This left other members with the rest of the components, without an idea what was what and what to do. This could be improved by either making more instruction sheets, so more people can read it at the same time, or make sure the instructions are fastened to a central piece, which nudges to read together.
Form: Clearer labelling of components	Improve understanding of which pieces are which	Participants mentioned having difficulty by identifying which component was which. Labelling the component either with a title

Table 2: Recommendations

Form: Reduce components	Improve ease of use	During observation it became clear all the different components caused initial confusion. By either reducing the amount of components, or making sure the different components are introduced more structurally (and are not all lying on the table already at the start), this can be prevented.
Function: Make modifiable for students	Increase relevance to the group	Participants mentioned wanting to be able to think of Support-tokens themselves too, and add these.
Function: Make modifiable for coaches	Increase relevance to the coach	In the expert interviews, it was mentioned that coaches would be interested to easily to modify it to cater the lessons that the coach wants to teach.
Further research: Engaging users that don't value topics like reflection and support	Make all participate equally	It was clear in the observation sessions, and also came up in the expert interviews that not all students value reflection and supporting one another. To engage these students, e.g. another step could be introduced to inform them of the benefits.
Further research: Engaging first year students	Increase value for users not used to teamwork	For students who do not have (much) experience of groupwork, the value of working on increased communication, support and team dynamics often is not understood. To engage these students, e.g. another step could be introduced to inform them of the benefits.
Further research: Ideal frequency of the Check-in session	Improve relevance and desirability	By testing what the ideal frequency of performing the check-in session, relevance and desirability could be further improved.
Further research: Research potential value for usage outside of the IDE faculty	Explore implementation opportunities of the concept in other team-based or community-focused environments.	Implementation opportunities in other team-based or community-focused environments are being explored to understand how the concept can foster reflection, communication, and support in diverse contexts. Broadening its application of use will allow the concept to benefit diverse groups and maximize its impact beyond the original scope and context

5.8 Wrapping up

Now we are coming towards the end of this project. The Support Board has hinted its potential as an effective tool for fostering reflection and encouraging meaningful conversations about support and support needs. In the different evaluation sessions, the tool has successfully engaged students, helping them reflect on both their personal needs and the ways they can support others. Some participants have shown increased reflection on their support needs and strengths, and a greater willingness to talk about their support needs, highlighting the game's capacity to create a space for support.

However, the project's full impact on long-term behavioral changes, such as creating a sustained environment for expressing and meeting support needs, remains difficult to measure in the short term of this project. Even though the evaluation sessions offered valuable insights into engagement and reflection, the game's true potential to influence deeper levels of reflection and support-seeking behavior will require further, long-term evaluation.

Feedback from participants and coaches suggests that The Support Board holds significant value, especially in environments which require a lot of teamwork, like the IDE faculty. However, there are still many areas for improvement, e.g. practical improvements, addressing the repetitive nature of the check-in

module to find the optimal frequency of use for different users, and further researching how to further improve engagement. Further research is needed to explore these aspects and to better communicate the benefits of reflection to students who may not yet fully appreciate its value.

In conclusion, while there are challenges ahead, The Support Board has made significant steps in promoting reflection, open conversation and perhaps even connection. With further refinement and long-term evaluation, it has the potential to become a powerful tool for fostering both personal and communal support in educational settings, and in that way, improving mental health conditions of the individual.

5.9 PERSONAL REFLECTION

This project lies very close to my heart. It has been a great learning experience, but has also been very challenging for me. Before this project, the only project I had only done completely by myself, was my Final Bachelors Project (at the TU Eindhoven). Because this was during COVID where everyone was working completely solo from home, I remember it as a very stressful period. I felt like because this time I would work at the same time as other friends, it would be different. But one thing I have clearly seen this time, is that stress does not only come from your surroundings, it comes from within yourself. I have really been able to learn not just a lot of things about my project, but also about myself.

Reflecting on the design process: Confidence and moving to the next phase

Throughout the course of this project, one of the biggest challenges I faced was a lack of confidence in my own ideas, knowledge and decisions. I found myself often looking to my coaches for validation, rather than trusting my own judgment. Instead of presenting my concept with conviction, I would seek reassurance that I was on the right track. This reliance on external approval made it difficult to fully own my work, and I frequently hesitated to take decisive steps forward without first getting their feedback. While seeking guidance from my coaches is an important part of the process, I needed to shift from asking for permission to approaching them with more specific questions. I began to recognize that I am the expert on my own concept, and that my coaches were there to help guide me, not dictate the direction of my project. I consciously worked on changing my tone in discussions. Instead of seeking approval, I started presenting my ideas with more confidence, framing my questions in a way that showed I had already thought through my decisions. This change allowed me to take more ownership of my project, and I began to feel more empowered in steering its course. Now, and in the future, I take a moment for myself before (important) meetings, and reassure myself that I am knowledgeable, and if not, will have prepared the questions I need to become it.

This struggle with confidence is also something that was holding me back from moving to the next step. Often I kept being stuck in one phase

for a long time, because I felt I didn't know enough to move to ideation, or didn't explore or test enough to move to conceptualization. This constant doubting of myself on a professional level, is something I keep struggling with. Finishing this project, however, has given me the confidence that I am a good designer, and I know what I'm doing. In the future, I will be kinder to myself, be more open about these struggles and most importantly, be more reflective and communicative of my support needs to overcome this.

While confidence is something I will keep working on, this experience has taught me the importance of trusting my own expertise and learning to approach feedback as a tool to refine, rather than define, my direction.

Work-life balance

Another thing I struggled with greatly during this project, is putting it beside me after working hours. Even when I would close my laptop, or would go home for the day, I would continue thinking about it in my head. Also in weekends. This made me very restless and made me way less productive in hindsight. The thought of putting it away for a bit, was more stressful than just continuing. After a while, I realized what was happening, and spontaneously decided to take a week off. In this week I did not touch my laptop, and did not allow myself to think about my project. After this week I felt reset and noticed I was able to calmly and effectively finish up my concept.

I am stricter with myself and make more deliberate efforts to maintain a healthy work-life balance. By setting clearer boundaries, I've learned that taking time to rest not only improves my mental well-being but also enhances my productivity and creativity when I return to the project. This experience has taught me the value of stepping back to recharge, and it's a lesson I will carry with me as I continue to navigate future professional and personal challenges.

My own journey: A product that reflects me as a designer

This project means a lot to me because it tackles a subject that aligns with my vision and identity

as a designer. Over the last couple of years, I have really tried focusing my project into directions that I found interesting, and when that was not possible, at least made sure it was not in conflict with my vision.

Connection to my design vision

I want to be a designer that helps promote social contact and social connection. That helps people be reflective of their goals, needs and wishes, and most of all, creates a safe space in which these can be expressed. I want to create strong and valuable ties between people and create strong communities. This, to help fight the loneliness and individualist epidemic. Loneliness is increasingly recognized as a significant issue in modern society, contributing to both mental and physical health challenges. As a designer, my goal is to use design as a tool to foster connection and build environments where individuals feel supported, heard, and valued. I aim to create interactive experiences and social spaces that encourage people to reflect on their personal aspirations, express their needs, and engage with others in meaningful ways.

Technical skills

I feel with this project I have made a tool that definitely stand in line with my vision. However I would have liked to also show my technical skills as a designer. I am used to making physical-digital prototypes for my projects. Although I wanted to also include this in my master thesis, it was clear that this form did not fit the context, form and timeframe of this project. However, I also realize that, even though this is the end of my time as a design student, this does not have to be the end of this project. This realization has not dampened my enthusiasm or ambition. On the contrary, I see this project as the beginning of a longer journey. Even though my formal education is coming to an end, my work on the Support Board does not have to. I'm excited by the possibility of further developing this tool beyond the boundaries of my studies, exploring new forms and incorporating technological elements that could enhance its functionality and reach.

Onwards to the future

I envision evolving the Support Board into a more interactive and adaptive platform that could incorporate digital features, such as real-time feedback, while still maintaining the human-centered approach that makes it accessible and effective. By continuing to iterate and expand on this concept, I hope to create an even more impactful tool that can help teams, communities, and individuals foster stronger connections and improve their overall well-being.

This project has laid the groundwork for a tool that I believe can truly make a difference, but it's only the first step. I look forward to exploring new directions, pushing the boundaries of both technology and design, and ultimately creating solutions that combine the emotional and functional in meaningful ways.

In summary, I am happy with the outcome of my final master project. The Support Board reflects my vision of promoting social connection, reflection, and support, and it serves as a strong foundation for future development. While I acknowledge there is still much to learn and improve as a designer, this project has reinforced my belief in the power of design to create meaningful human experiences. I'm excited to continue growing, honing my skills, and exploring new ways to use design to positively impact communities and foster deeper connections in the future.



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Appendix A:

Project Brief

Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Name student Natanya Cornet

Student number 5,657,865

PROJECT TITLE, INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM DEFINITION and ASSIGNMENT

Complete all fields, keep information clear, specific and concise

Project title From awkward pat to heartfelt chat: Exploring comforting in a community setting

Please state the title of your graduation project (above). Keep the title compact and simple. Do not use abbreviations. The remainder of this document allows you to define and clarify your graduation project.

Introduction

Describe the context of your project here; What is the domain in which your project takes place? Who are the main stakeholders and what interests are at stake? Describe the opportunities (and limitations) in this domain to better serve the stakeholder interests. (max 250 words)

Emotions can arise from all sorts of reasons and can be too much to handle all by yourself. Luckily, most people have a place to find comfort for this (Centraal Bureau voor de Statestiek, 2020). Despite spending the most of our time within communities of school (or work), these environments often paradoxically feel as not such a supportive space for expressing our deepest worries and emotions (Eisenberg et al, 2007). Despite being surrounded by peers, there exists an unspoken expectation to maintain a facade of composure and professionalism, leaving personal struggles to the shadows.

Comforting is frequently viewed as having to solve a problem and take negative feelings away. Comfort-givers have fears of not saying the "right thing" (Burleson, B.R., 2008) or not being of any help (Burleson et al., 2005). This accompanied by the idea that they feel like they are not the right person (aka one of the comfort-seekers inner circle contacts), makes it hard to act.

Also for the comfort-seeker it is very difficult to open up, because they often feel like its not " the right moment " or they are not supposed to talk about it (Burleson et al.,2005). Some people just want to be heard and have their emotions acknowledged , others can just want a distraction or space. In situations where someone does not want comfort, it can give reassurance just to know that this space is there (Miceli et al, 2009).

At its core, this project aims to dismantle the barriers that hinder open expression and genuine empathy at a community like the students of IDE faculty at the Delft University of Technology are in. By fostering a culture and environment where the taboo of expression is tackled and emotions can be embraced, we can cultivate a stronger, more resilient community—one where students feel empowered to share their struggles and find comfort in the collective support of their peers and feel the safety to express their needs, whatever these are.

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Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. (2020). *Hoe eenzaam voelen we ons?* Retrieved from <https://longreads.cbs.nl/nederland-in-cijfers-2020/hoe-eeenzaam-voelen-we-ons/>

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image / figure 1 Sources

image / figure 2

Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Problem Definition

*What problem do you want to solve in the context described in the introduction, and within the available time frame of 100 working days? (= Master Graduation Project of 30 EC). What opportunities do you see to create added value for the described stakeholders? Substantiate your choice.
(max 200 words)*

Comforting can be a stressful and emotional moment not only for the comfort-seeker, but also for the comfort-giver. Both parties can have struggles and fears which hinder them from being able to express their comfort needs, and thus preventing them from having these needs met.

In this project I want to dive into how design can SUPPORT a community like the IDE faculty improve the interplay between comfort-giving and comfort-seeking. Furthermore, I want to explore the role community can have in comforting, as now this care often falls solely on the shoulders of the inner-circle contacts. This all to create a more UNDERSTANDING and SAFE environment for the community members, which, in this case, are the students at the IDE faculty.

Sub questions

- What is comforting?
- What are the barriers for comfort-givers when trying to offer comfort. What enables them?
- What are the barriers for comfort-seekers when trying to offer comfort. What enables them?
- What are the general requirements for a safe and understanding environment?

Assignment

This is the most important part of the project brief because it will give a clear direction of what you are heading for. Formulate an assignment to yourself regarding what you expect to deliver as result at the end of your project. (1 sentence) As you graduate as an industrial design engineer, your assignment will start with a verb (Design/Investigate/Validate/Create), and you may use the green text format:

In this project, I want to design an intervention to improve the interplay between comfort-giving and comfort-seeking of young adults at the IDE Faculty and in that way create a more understanding environment in which comfort can more safely be expressed and received in all its forms.

Then explain your project approach to carrying out your graduation project and what research and design methods you plan to use to generate your design solution (max 150 words)

I will start off with gathering information through literature, introductory interviews with the target group and experts like psychologists to get to know the design space I am working in. After, I want to use storytelling in some of the interviews to create situations in which participants can empathize and see themselves in. This is important because it can be a blurry line between the way a participant wants or hopes to act, and the one they actually do. So sketching a situation they can more easily place themselves in is important. Furthermore, I want to focus on working in a human-centered design way and include the target group for co-design sessions. As comforting is a broad topic with many different preferences and needs.

I will make use of the RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN method. Testing with tangible (low-fi) prototypes is important in my opinion because it makes it easier for the target group to imagine working with such a product, while at the same time not having to lose a lot of time creating said prototype. After coming to a final concept, I want to build a higher fidelity prototype and test this with students of the IDE Faculty in final user testing sessions. This, to see how the intervention changes their experiences.

Project planning and key moments

To make visible how you plan to spend your time, you must make a planning for the full project. You are advised to use a Gantt chart format to show the different phases of your project, deliverables you have in mind, meetings and in-between deadlines. Keep in mind that all activities should fit within the given run time of 100 working days. Your planning should include a **kick-off meeting, mid-term evaluation meeting, green light meeting** and **graduation ceremony**. Please indicate periods of part-time activities and/or periods of not spending time on your graduation project, if any (for instance because of holidays or parallel course activities).

Make sure to attach the full plan to this project brief.
The four key moment dates must be filled in below

Kick off meeting 1 Feb 2024

Mid-term evaluation 11 Apr 2024

Green light meeting 4 Jul 2024

Graduation ceremony 28 Aug 2024

In exceptional cases (part of) the Graduation Project may need to be scheduled part-time. Indicate here if such applies to your project

Part of project scheduled part-time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
For how many project weeks	
Number of project days per week	4,0



Comments:

Motivation and personal ambitions

Explain why you wish to start this project, what competencies you want to prove or develop (e.g. competencies acquired in your MSc programme, electives, extra-curricular activities or other).

Optionally, describe whether you have some personal learning ambitions which you explicitly want to address in this project, on top of the learning objectives of the Graduation Project itself. You might think of e.g. acquiring in depth knowledge on a specific subject, broadening your competencies or experimenting with a specific tool or methodology. Personal learning ambitions are limited to a maximum number of five.

(200 words max)

In this project I wish to show the things that I have learned over the course of my design studies. I want to make a product that not only addresses the project at hand, but also fits within my personal and professional design vision, a product that enables people to create and deepen their interpersonal bonds and treasure the people that surround them. So, in the end, we might be one step closer in enabling leaning on each other more. This by showing my expertise on creating physical-digital prototypes and create low-fi prototypes which I can gather information with faster (ITD & EI), ending with a higher fidelity final prototype.

I also want to increase my knowledge regarding the user & society competency. I want to include user perceptions throughout my project more and also explore strategies that I have not tried yet before, like co-creation and storytelling. Thus waving through user opinions in my process in ways that I haven ' t tried before. This as well as improving my already existing skills.

So in summary:

- Create a product fitting to my design vision
- Increase my knowledge on interpersonal connections
- Increase my knowledge in user & society competency, by trying new methods
- Increase my interviewing skills; having a clearer plan and use more time to think of the proper phrasing

Appendix B:

Qualitative Interview Script

Qualitative Interview Script

This 1-hour interview, semi structured interview followed the script loosely. It was used as a guide, but with the flexibility of following the natural flow of the conversation and participants' thoughts. As an opener, participants were first asked to choose two pictures that represented "Comfort" for them.

GOAL:

- Understanding how students of IDE currently view the IDE community and their place in it.
- How do the students experience comfort-giving (barriers/enablers)
- How do the students experience comfort-seeking (barriers/enablers)

Script:

#1 IDE COMMUNITY

- Can you describe the IDE faculty?
- What are the social dynamics within the IDE faculty like?
- Can you describe yourself within the IDE faculty?
- What does your social life within IDE faculty look like?
- How is this different or the same from your social life outside of the IDE faculty?
- What was your best/moment memory/moment during your studies?

#2 COMFORT-GIVING/COMFORT-SEEKING

Specific situation Comfort-seeking:

- Can you name a thing you've been upset about lately? You can go into as much detail as you feel comfortable with.
 - o how did you feel about it
 - o The people involved
- Did you share this event with others?
 - o How?
 - o How did you experience this?

Specific situation Comfort-giving:

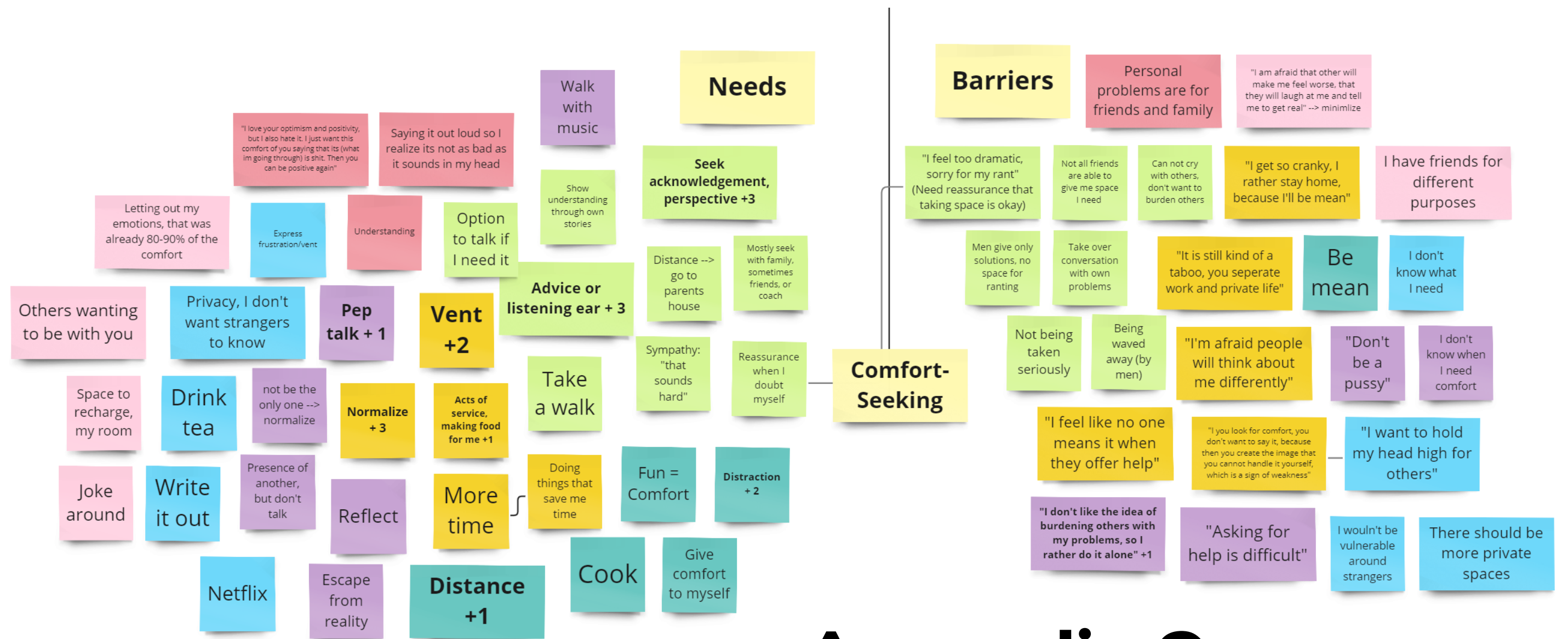
- What is the last situation you have comforted someone?
- What did you do?
- How did you experience this situation?
- What would you like to have done differently?
- Who are the people who come to you for comforting?

Reflection

- How would you describe "comfort-seeking"?
- What are the moments you feel you need comforting, and what do you do in these situations?
- How would you describe "comfort-giving"?
- What are the moments you feel you need to give comfort, and what do you do in these situations?

#3 COMFORTING AT IDE

- When you feel you need comfort at IDE, what do you usually do?
- o What do you feel you need at such a moment (distraction, talking etc)
- Do you feel like your needs are met?
- What would you like to see differently?

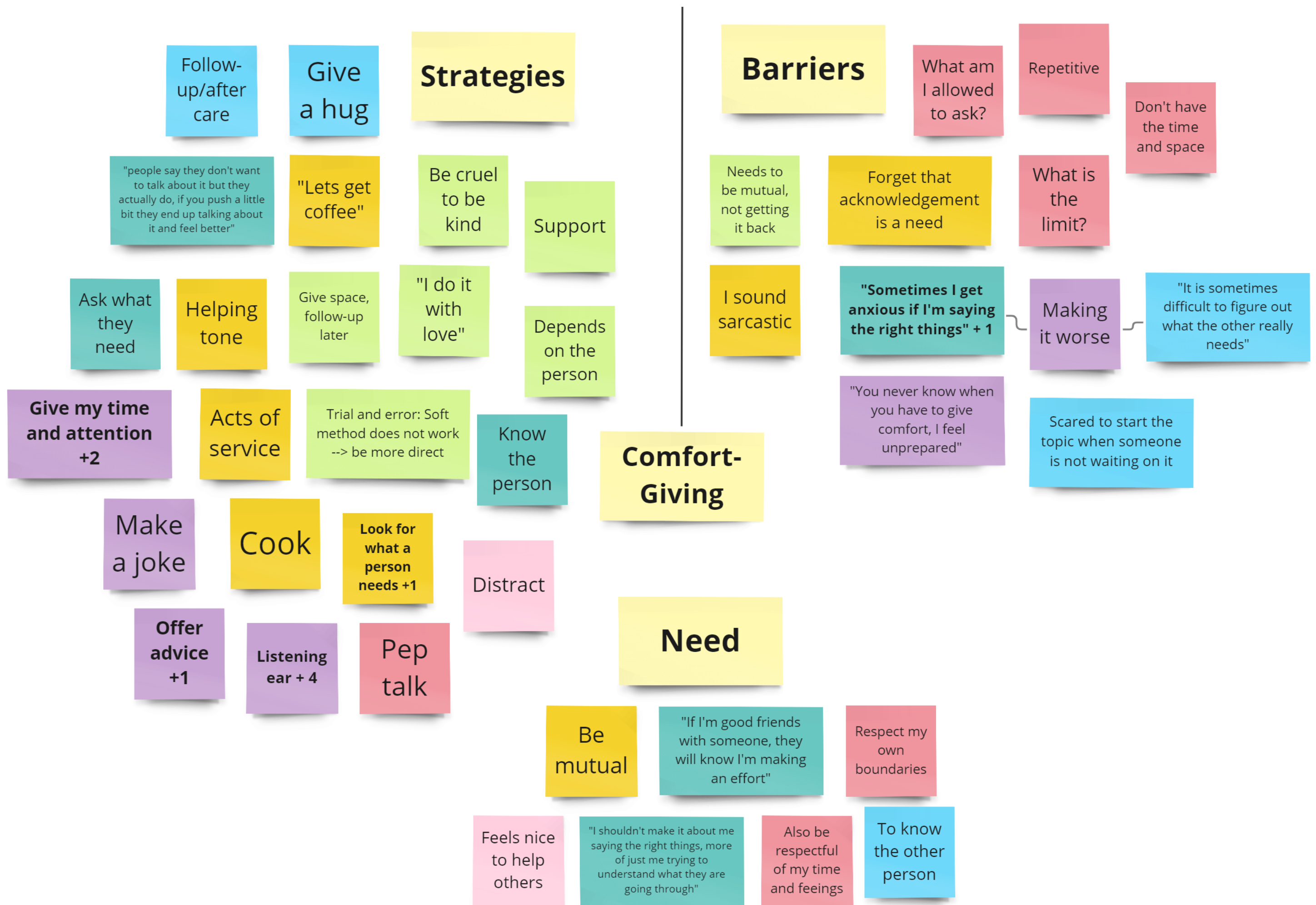


Appendix C:

Qualitative Interview Data

Here the data gathered from all the qualitative interviews are presented. Every color represents one of the participants





Appendix D:

Storytelling Interview Script

GOAL: How comfortable do students feel bringing their personal problems to the IDE faculty and why?

- How do they handle them with community members like team members?
- What is the effect of environment?
- How do they react to introduction of personal problems in team meetings

In this structured interview, participants were first asked to rank three scenario's according to the relatability and relevance to them. Depending on these answers, a different starting scenario was chosen to start with. The interviewer would begin introducing the scenario by reading out loud. The participant was then asked to finish the scenario in a way that they felt they would react.

Variables in scenario's:

- Environment
- Scenario
- Person

Scenario's:

Can you please rank these scenarios from most to least relatable in your experience?

- Parting ways with a friend/SO 1
- Family Issues 2
- Mental health issues 3

Pick most relatable issue

Scenario 1:

It's Monday, there is a long week ahead of you and you have 3 team meetings for your IO semester courses today. You've had a pretty rough week last week, your friend/SO sat you down and told you they want to part ways with you.

Can you describe how you feel?

Scenario 2:

It's Monday, there is a long week ahead of you and you have 3 team meetings for your IO semester courses today. You've had a pretty rough week last week, your mom is sick, she has severe depression and had a very bad week.

Can you describe how you feel?

Scenario 3:

It's Monday, there is a long week ahead of you and you have 3 team meetings for your IO semester courses today. You've had a pretty rough week last week, you are coping with a lot of stress and negative

thoughts. You are very insecure and unconfident.
Can you describe how you feel?

CONTINUATION:

But after the weekend, you feel it's time to go back to university, also to get your mind a bit off of it. It's time for your first meeting. This is the first time you meet these people and you and your team have to do some ice breakers to get to know each other. You notice though that you cannot seem to get into the mood to enjoy them.

Continue the story until the end of the meeting

You finish this meeting and it's time for the break. You have an hour until the next meeting

What are you going to do?

The break ends and you and you walk to the next meeting-spot. This team you've already seen a couple of times and there is an open but professional vibe with these. They are good teammates but you wouldn't call them friends. You notice that you are a little absent-minded and find it difficult to focus on the ongoing discussion.

Continue the story until the end of the meeting

The action points for next meeting are set, and you go for a quick coffee to get some energy to get through your last meeting. Luckily this is with a group that you've known for a while and there is usually a good vibe with them. You guys even went to get a drink together after a meeting sometimes. They aren't specifically friends, but there is always a friendly and understanding vibe in the meetings.

Continue the story until the end of the meeting

The meetings for today are done and its almost five. You don't have anything planned specifically but you feel tired from the day and the meetings and also feel a bit emotional.

Continue the story until the end of the day

Closing questions:

- Do you feel these scenarios are realistic?
- Do you feel like personal issues have a place at the IDE faculty now?
- What do you feel like you need when thoughts or feelings about your personal issues come up at university.
- What would you need from your team members?
- What is the effect of the environment?

Appendix E:

Storytelling Interview Data

Which scenario	3/2	3	3	3/2	3	1
How are you feeling	Stressed	Stressed and overwhelmed Guilt when I am unable to do the things I said I was gonna do (e.g. stuff for meetings)	Insecure about my capabilities Not sleeping well	Distraction Depends on the groupmates how much I'll disclose	Wanting distraction	Looking for distraction
Continue the story until the end of the meeting	Participate, but give most basic answer possible Ask other people questions so I don't have to talk I don't like that it's so personal, I don't want to disclose that with strangers	Personal questions will make me emotional, I don't want to cry the first meeting Feels not like the place during ice breakers Leave asap, my head is not in the right place	I would feel awkward, is it because of me? I wouldn't say anything because I don't want to make it worse Maybe it is because I promised to do something, that I can't do, and then they are angry/disappointed	A bit distracted, half with my mind in the meeting, half somewhere else Wouldn't be so enthusiastic I can really pull myself up on other people's energy If I don't feel a connection with the team, I rather have the space to go take a walk I would make some jokes to avoid the negative thoughts On a walk I can take the time to really feel the emotions that I am coping with, and then give it a place before I return	Pull myself up on others if they are excited, if they are not then I'll be cranky I'm very good at masking my emotions so I would never show that to strangers I feel fake when I act like I'm happy It really helps me when I can mirror other peoples high energy	Lock away my feelings
What are you going to do?	Find my friends	"Put on music, it's my medicine" Have food and take walk Call with my friend	Eat some lunch, do some little tasks in between	Lunch with friends Either vent my issues or find some distraction with them	Ask if my friends to break together Small talking, if it goes really bad, we will discuss it (but not too long) I don't want it to go over my troubles the whole time Make jokes about the issues If I'm doing very bad I really feel the need to talk about it with others, even strangers, I just need to get it off my mind	My breaks are usually already planned with stuff If I have nothing to do I would continue working
Continue the story until the end of the meeting	Talk at the start	It will be better because I will have eaten and had my comfort meal in the break I have ADHD so my head is just not always there But still similar in terms of acting like I am fine		Talk with them on what they are working on and get the energy to work again too Or accept that the energy is not there and chill a bit on my laptop while I am surrounded by them	I wouldn't disclose how I really feel, I want to leave Would like to chat, but they would want to work	Turn off my feelings Reflect on my thoughts. Sometimes write them down once I get home Take a small walk alone When I feel sad I will think "Don't be such a pussy" I would say I am relatively open, but not in the first stage of meeting someone, then I would rather wait a bit
Continue the story until the end of the meeting	Digress on the abs, either really concentrate, or getting distraction through joking around and chatting They would more be a positive energizer than that I would feel able to express myself I need to really know a person to talk about sensitive topics, so I would mostly want distraction	Because I was there a bit longer I would feel confident enough to tell them that I can not sleep so well, maybe even that I would not sleep at all because I don't want to be alone in a "homestay" situation with them Scared that if I tell someone I'm not feeling well, they respond in a cold manner: "Oh, don't care" If someone would open up to me I would feel a way together to still work with the least amount of burden to that person I would only open up to people that I feel the potential for becoming friends I am scared that me opening up comes across as a random excuse	Keep it efficient I like talking to others because then I realise my problems are actually not that big Chat a bit casually about how we're doing See that people are going through similar things -> normalize	Be a bit more passively present Ask more questions to keep up Push away my feelings Open up that I am a bit alone and not feeling too well, but I really enjoy being here. I hope it will pass soon	I am not usually absent minded I would take on a bit more passive role You guys should solve it	
Continue the story until the end of the day	When I get overstimulated I would go home, except if we would go out for a drink	Go home and eat, doomscroll on the phone	I would be relieved the day is over Go home a bit earlier	Eat with my friends & vent Self-care	I don't want to be alone for sure	Sport, write down my feelings in a journal, eat with friends
Do you feel like personal issues have a place at the IDE faculty now?	Yes and no, its easy to be open about "professional" struggles surrounding university but not really personal issues You usually only talk about "fun" stuff at uni, and never really open I want to do tasks like drawing that you can still do with less concentration	Postive stories bond more than negative I'm scared people will think I'm an "aansteller" I don't want people to pity me	My ADHD issues look very similar to what someone is just not putting in the effort, but it's something I kept struggle with I feel people don't understand that	No, a lot of my issues come from this study Make time for myself to give things a place Reflect on my feelings Zone out when I need to My personal life and uni life is really separated, I don't want to address it at uni	Yes, but I have to make the space myself The graveyard park With my "colleagues I feel like I cannot really be open"	No, I'd go to friends for that
What do you feel like you need when thoughts or feelings about your personal issues come up at university?	I need rest If it is a longer standing issue, I want to walk with my best friend	Moment for myself A safe space to be honest to say when it's not going well	Plan something fun to look forward to To show up makes me feel good already	Distraction by being here Candy I am not always feeling like swallowing my feelings, so then I stay home	No, it feels very technocratic Impersonal Working together independently Want to be or talk to people	The freedom to do with my day what helps me Separate professional and private life Distance and anonymity
What would you need from your team members?	I find it difficult to be open about not feeling great, so I like it when they can already feel it and put less pressure on me I don't like when they ask what's up, I don't want to talk about it	(General) understanding Give space for me to take a walk e.g.	Go home if I have many things on my mind But I don't want to say what is on my mind Not force me to participate by addressing me		Talk to them Only talk a bit, I need them to put my thoughts into perspective Acknowledge my feelings, not wave it away	Give me space Don't want them to see me as weak Use the meeting itself as distraction
Effect of surroundings	More distraction is better, but not so much I cannot concentrate anymore Studio's work best for me	Studio I would open up faster I wouldn't go into detail if there are others too	If I am surrounded by others, I feel the pressure to "be social"	It does not feel cozy at the faculty	The studios are very clinical A place like the aula really helps me as it is very open so I also grab a quick coffee	Big space makes me feel too seen
Conclusion Needs	Distance or distraction			Distractions Self-care Pull myself up on others Go home earlier	Pull myself up on others Be together with others Put my thoughts into perspective	Distance Freedom for self-care

Appendix F:

Generative sessions: Sensitising Booklet

Exploring comfort at IDE



Introduction

Welcome!

Thank you for joining this research! I am interested in how students of IDE experience comfort(ing) at the faculty and in the group-project setting. This to look into how we can improve this experience.

To prepare for the generative session, I would like you to fill in this booklet during the coming week. It will take approximately 5-10 minutes everyday. This will be used to prepare and to be sensitized for the generative session. Therefore, please take it with you for the generative session. I will contact you to plan a date for this session.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and exercises in this booklet! I am curious to your personal experience, feelings and opinions. So you can go into as much detail as you feel comfortable with!

There is a space at the back of the booklet to write down any thoughts or questions you have during the exercises.

Thank you for participating and see you soon!

If you have any questions or comments, you are welcome to contact me at XXX(call or message) or XXX

Who are you?

Name

.....

Age

.....

Study Phase (Ba/Ma, which year?)

.....



1. Mindmap

What are your associations with comfort(ing)? What does comfort(ing) mean to you?

Exercise: Write down your thoughts in the mindmap presented below.



2. Your comfort style

Exercise 1: Can you think of a few situations you were having a difficult time, or were upset. What kind of comfort do you like receiving in these situations?

Ex. Listen to music

*Ex. Talk about it with
my friends*

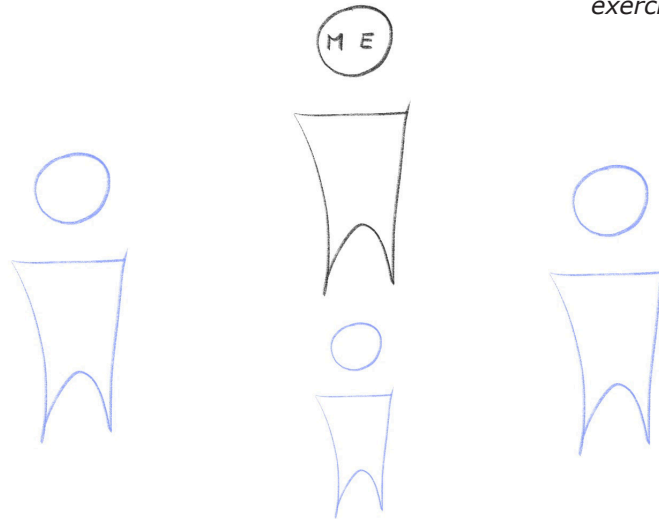


2. Your comfort style

Exercise 2: Imagine yourself in a group (project)meeting. What kind of comfort do you like to receive from your groupmembers? How is that different or the same from before?

Ex. Listen to music

Ex. Get help with an exercise



2. Stinky fish

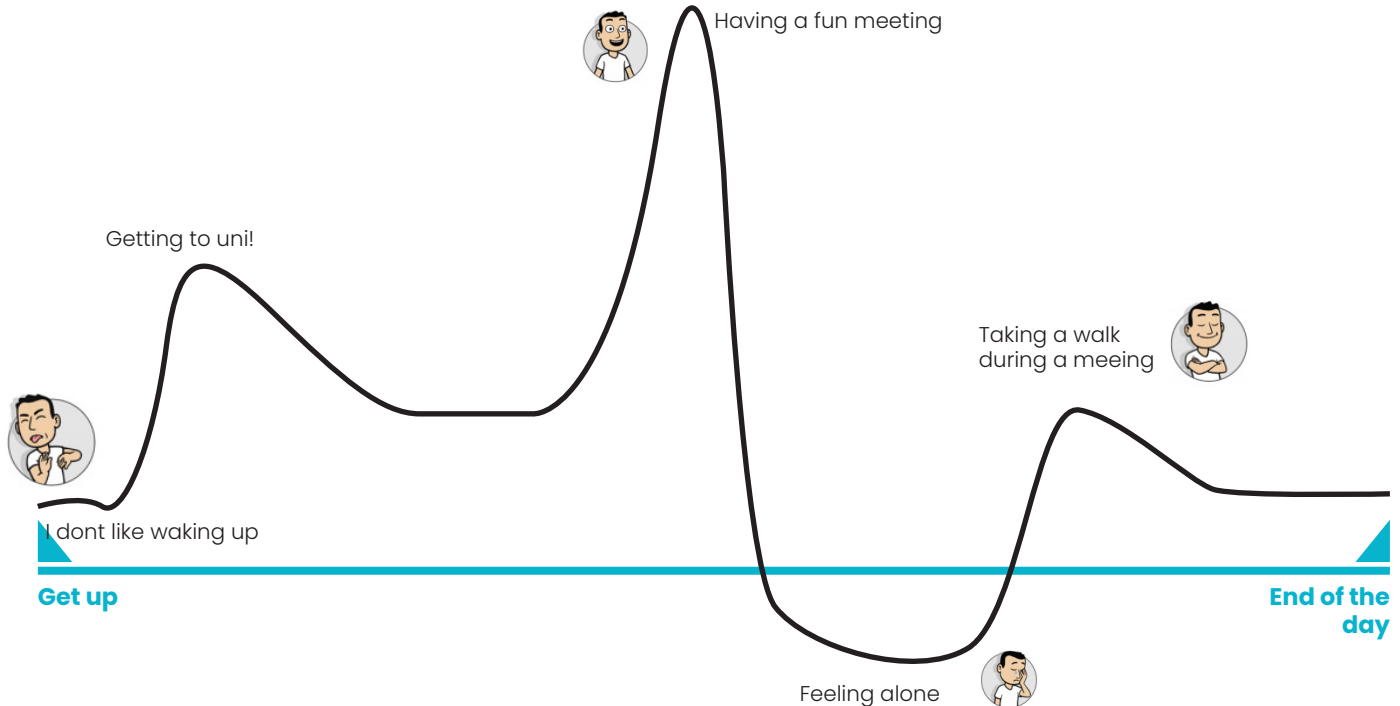
Exercise: The stinky fish is a metaphor for “that thing that you carry around but don’t like to talk about - but the longer you hide it, the stinkier it gets.” Can you think of a thing or thoughts that you have been carrying around today or recently but been reluctant to bring up in a group setting?



4. Tracking your day

Example page

Exercise 1: Choose a typical uni day and portray on the timeline below what your activities and feelings are on such a day. Who do you meet, what do you do and how does that make you feel?



Exercise 2: When you were feeling down, what was the cause? And what comfort need did you have? Can you specify this need?

Cause:

- ☒ Personal circumstances/worries
- ☐ Family circumstances
- ☐ Stress for uni
- ☐ Other:

.....
.....

Explanation:

One of my teammates told a story about
his weekend and I was suddenly reminded
about some things about my ex-partner.
That made me feel lonely, and a bit sad. I
kind of lost concentration for the meeting
after.

Comfort need:

- ☐ Distraction
- ☒ Feel supported
- ☐ Comfort myself
- ☐ Other:

.....
.....

Explanation:

I had trouble concentrating on my
part of the task during the meeting. In
hindsight, I would've liked someone to
help me with the task just to take my
mind off my thoughts and back to the
meeting.

4. Tracking your day

Exercise 1: Choose a typical uni day and portray on the timeline below what your activities and feelings are on such a day. Who do you meet, what do you do and how does that make you feel?



Exercise 2: When you were feeling down, what was the cause? And what comfort need did you have? Can you specify this need?

Cause:

- ☐ Personal circumstances/worries
- ☐ Family circumstances
- ☐ Stress for uni
- ☐ Other:

.....
.....

Explanation:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Comfort need:

- ☐ Distraction
- ☐ Feel supported
- ☐ Comfort myself
- ☐ Other:

.....
.....

Explanation:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5. Giving comfort

Exercise 1: Please answer the following questions:

What is the last time you have given or offered someone else comfort?

.....

.....

.....

.....

How did that make you feel? And why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Is there anything you would have liked to do differently? What?

.....

.....

.....

The end!

If you have any questions or notes, you can write them on this page! Please take this booklet with you to the session!

[illegible]

Appendix G:

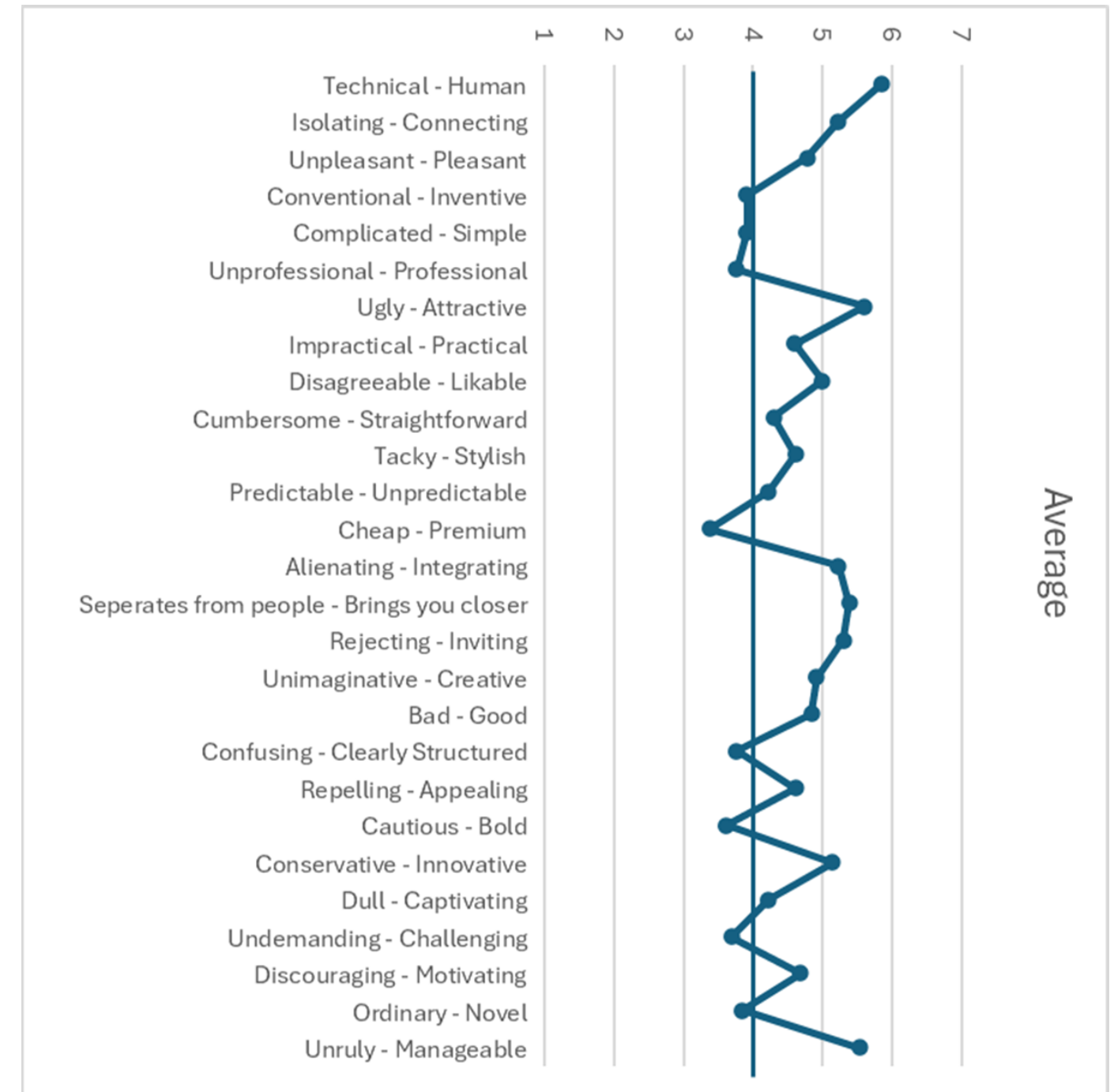
Observation & AttrakDiff Results

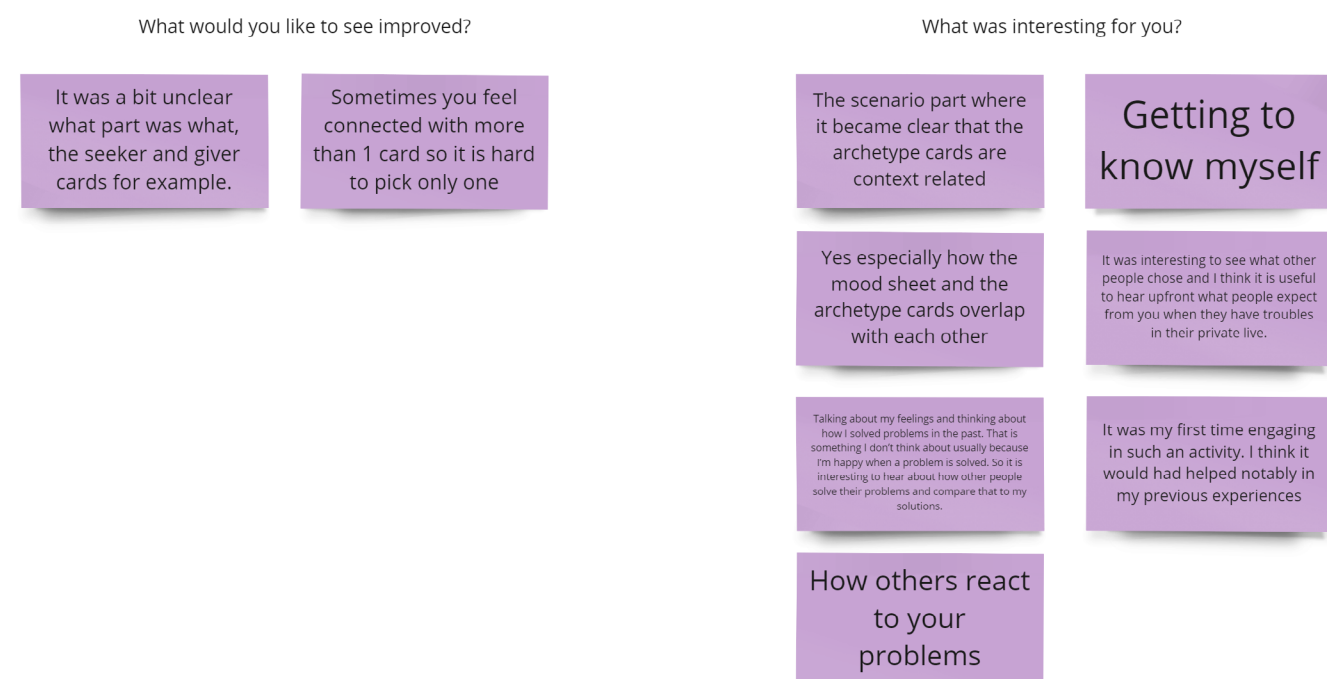
Usability

The results of the survey indicate that there is still improvements to make at usability level. The Support Board scores still mediocre when it comes to clarity of use. It scores slightly below the middle in the categories Confusing – Clearly Structured and Complicated – Simple. These findings were further supported by observations, which showed that participants occasionally struggled with understanding how to engage with the tool effectively. This came, for example, due to the instructions. Often, one member took the instruction sheet and started reading it by themselves. This left other members with the rest of the components, without an idea what was what and what to do. Furthermore, participants sometimes struggled to identify which component was which, and what the difference was between Support-seeking and Support-giving archetypes. Lastly, participants not always understood that they could pick multiple archetypes, when identifying with more than one. Moreover, one group misunderstood that every team member was only allowed to choose one archetype, each time. When an archetype was already picked, another team member wouldn't be able to pick that one, even if they identified most with that archetype too. However, some level of initial difficulty is to be expected. One of the key objectives of the Introduction session is to familiarize users with the different components and functionalities of the Support Board. This early learning phase is designed to ensure that, once users are comfortable with the tool, subsequent Check-in sessions become quicker and more intuitive to navigate.

Material

The lowest score was in the Cheap – Premium category, which can be easily explained by the fact that the prototype was printed on standard, slightly thicker paper which is easier for testing with a bigger amount of people. However, this is not a significant concern, as the Support Board is intentionally designed to feel human and accessible, rather than a high-end, premium product. While there is room for improvement in making the interactions more enjoyable and perhaps enhancing the tactile experience of using the board, a high score in this particular category isn't a priority. In fact, keeping the product accessible and inviting is more aligned with the intended goal. The focus is on creating a supportive and comfortable environment, rather than delivering a luxury product experience. That said, small enhancements in material quality or design can still contribute to a more pleasant user experience without losing the board's approachable and user-friendly feel. Creating a balance will help ensure that the Support Board remains a tool that students are comfortable using regularly, reinforcing its value in team dynamics.





Green = Observational results
Purple = Survey answers

Appendix H:

Qualitative session Results

"I like that we get to think about what we are good at with regards to Support-Giving. I think that is not something that I tend to think about often"

Difficulty understanding the steps

"I feel like I have never really thought about I can ask others for my need"

I wouldn't prefer every single session, maybe just sometimes

"I feel like I really got to reflect on where I can help others"

One person taking the lead, but it seems to work

"Maybe it takes a little bit too long"

I really like the visual style

"I would like to work on this [skill] more"

A lot of laughing!

"Using the board made me reflect on my own support needs, which I don't usually think about in a team setting. It helped me understand what I need to feel more comfortable."

In the beginning it was a little awkward

"I tend to just accept a situation as is, and forget I can actively try to improve it. This really helped me think of concrete actions that I need when it's not my day"

Archetypes G/S difficult to distinguish

It really helped us bond as a team. Before, we were just working together, but now I feel like we're actually supporting each other.

Maybe add more instructions?

"I really enjoy that this starts your day with a little check-in with yourself"

Unclear if you can take multiple

I think this would be really helpful in every project team. It's not just a one-time thing; we could use it regularly to keep checking in with each other

It was difficult to always listen

Appendix I:

Result expert Interviews

"it makes the things that are usually not said out loud more explicit

Can help groups, because they don't usually come together in an organic way

I as a coach don't always have the time to properly focus on group dynamics, as much as I would like

Especially in the beginning of groupwork the product has a big value

Make words also more visual, like premo, so its easier to read also from a distance

Gives a change to talk more explicitly about emotions that are created by things that happen due to the group

