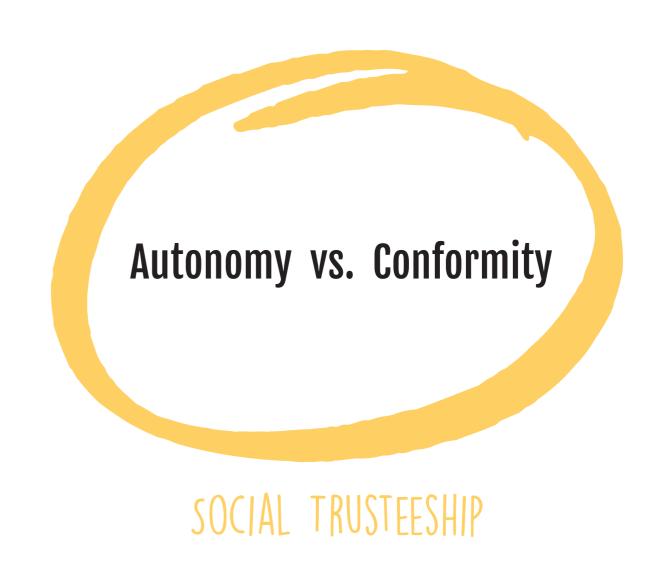# DESIGN FOR AUTONOMY

DESIGN ROLES IN DESIGNER–CLIENT CO–CREATION PROJECTS

As design challenges are becoming more and more complex, we aim to solve them by including an increasing variety of perspectives and opinions into the creative problem-solving process. Co-creation aims to achieve this by involving stakeholders throughout the process. Including all these different opinions makes co-creation activities increasingly complex, risking the quality of the outcome.

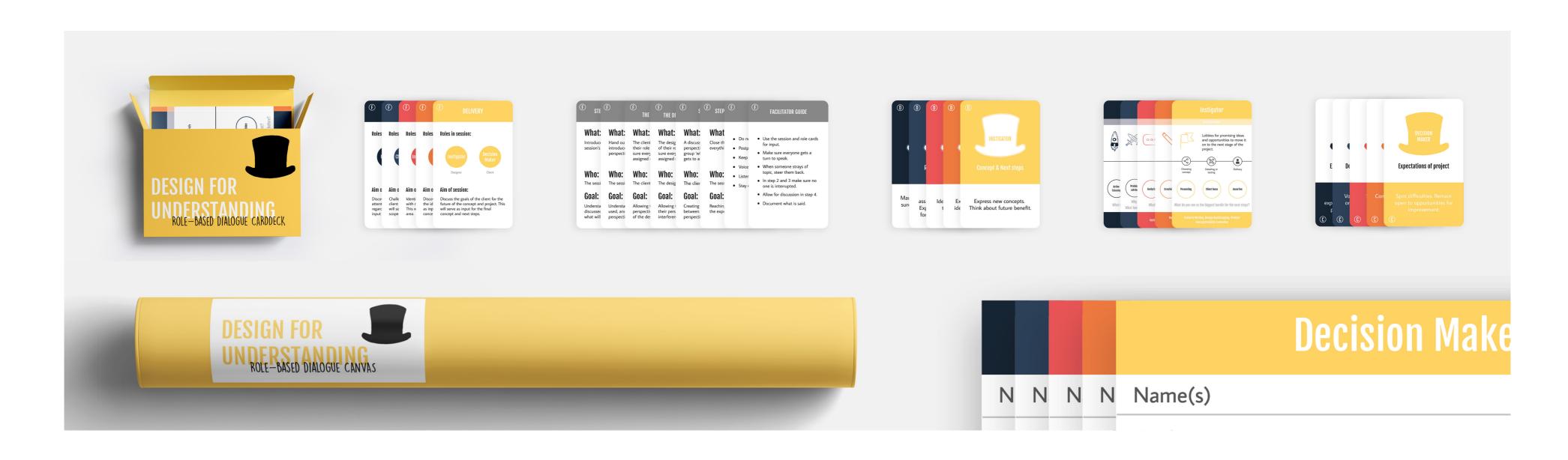Autonomy vs. Conformity

SOCIAL TRUSTEESHIP

Designers take on a facilitating role.

Semi-structured interviews with designers showed that they do not have enough influence on their projects. This indicates a lack of autonomy for designers in co-creation projects. Based on a literature review to discover the cause of the lack of autonomy and further synthesis of the interviews, it was found that a tension exists between autonomy (independence) and conformity (obedience) in the context of social trusteeship (acting in the best interest of the client), or: "Do you give the client what they ask, or what they need?" (P8). This tension is strengthened by the difference in perceived status of the respective members of the co-creation team, resulting in a power imbalance. In this imbalance, the designers have taken on a facilitating role, whereas the client takes the dominant role. Resulting in the client taking over the project and limiting the input of the designers expertise. It was found that the balance in autonomy is good when both the expertise of the designer and client are respected and utilized.

Design for Understanding toolkit.

To improve the power imbalance, five roles were identified which the designer and client take on during a project. Based on these roles, a new approach was introduced to co-creation projects by changing the dialogue between designers and clients. Through this dialogue, a rich understanding is reached about each other's perspectives for the project. With this understanding room is created for the autonomy of the designer. To facilitate this dialogue, the roles were converted into 'thinking hats'. These thinking hats are introduced in the Design for Understanding toolkit. The toolkit contains these thinking hat cards, role cards, explanation cards and canvases to use to document the dialogue.

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Design for Autonomy:
Design roles in designer-client co-creation projects
July 10th, 2020
Strategic Product Design

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