CREATIVE SESSION ON SYNERGY AT TD 12-10-2023, Uithoorn

In collaboration with Head of Teams, Martijn Arts, Hans Beumer, Koen de Groot

Facilitated by Hella Fontijn

Introduction

This report contains the outcomes of the creative session facilitated on October 12th in the Thamerkerk in Uithoorn. The session was hosted during the quarterly meeting of Total Design (TD). All head of team's (HoT's) from Total Design were at the Qmeeting. Team Design and Team Tech from Zuiderlicht (part of TD located in Maastricht) were also present. The HoT's are good representatives of the multidisciplinary teams at TD, as they are in close contact to their team members. Hans, Koen and Martijn also participated in the sessions. It's worth noting that even though they do not hold a HoT title, this report consistently refers to all participants as HoT, including Hans, Koen and Martijn.

The session contributes to the master's thesis with the following problem statement: "TD desires optimal integration of the domains technology, branding and communications, but experiences barriers that need to be defined and overcome". This leads to the following assignment: "Investigate the structure and processes within TD to understand and overcome the bariers to synergy and finally create an intervention and/or set up an advisory report to stimulate integration of domains". During this session, the HoT's, Hans, Koen and Martijn will investigate synergy creation at TD between teams, the domains and throughout TD.

All answers from the participants are digitalized. Quotes can be found in their original language in the appendix. The quotes in the report have been translated to represent the context and to be as true to the employees intention as possible. It is possible that the translated quotes in the report include a form of bias.

As answers may contain sensitive information, they have not been linked to the group formations or individual speakers.

Reading guide

This text layout is used for descriptive text on the session's outlines and offers an explanation of activities. It describes the technique of data gathering and processing and concludes with the outcomes of the session and future recommendations.

This layout is used for sidenotes like explanations of abreviations

Text like this shows what participants presented during the session.

A text layout like this is for notes made during the session. They are insights or quotes.

Orange pages contain figures or images that contain information either directly taken from the session or deducted from all the gathered data.

Objectives

HoT: Head of Teams TD: Total Design

Objectives of this session

- Discover HoT's view on synergy at TD: what value do they think it can create?
- Translate their vision of synergy to concrete and actionable goals
- Define current barriers and enablers to synergy at TD
- Brainstorm for solutions to barriers
- Collect examples of where synergy can be 'applied' in current projects

Objectives per activity

1. Association web:

This activity is meant to get the thoughts flowing and make sure everybody is on the same page in terms of what synergy means.

2. Value of synergy:

Discover what the value HoT's think integrating the domains/teams can offer. In this exercise, the goal 'to perfect the synergy between the three disciplines' will be translated into more concrete objectives. These goals/objectives will be the starting point to define concrete measures to achieve more synergy and can be used to define benefits.

3. Barriers & enablers:

The HoT's are given the time to write down what prevents synergy creation and what enables it.

4. Synergetic scenario:

Prior to the session, HoT's were asked to think of ways to create synergy for existing clients. In this exercise, they will share concrete examples of synergy creation in TD team-client context.

5. Designing solutions:

In this activity the HoT's brainstorm for means to stimulate synergy creation that TD could use in the near future.

Session plan

1. Association web,

The group is split into three groups and asked to write associations on postits. They are asked to read out loud as they place post-its on the flipover paper. All groups come up with a shared definition of synergy and share these with all HoT's.

2. Value of synergy,

The three groups are asked to think of the 'why' or the 'goal' of synergy. Why does TD want to strive towards this? Secondly, the HoT's are asked to define results/benefits that these goals would lead to and think of means to get there. A framework is offered to place post-its in.

3. Barriers and enablers,

In three new groups, the HoT's are asked to write down all barriers and enablers to synergy. To motivate discussion, they're asked to read post its out loud again and to cluster into groups and assign names/categories.

4. Synergetic scenario,

In this activity, everyone is asked to share their prepared example of how they can integrate disciplines/teams more with a client.

5. Designing solutions

Individually, everyone will choose two barriers from the previous exercise. Everyone is given a few minutes to brainstorm as many solutions for these 2 barriers and then they will swap with someone else, to offer them some solutions as well. Finally, everyone works out a solution to one of the chosen barriers and creates a poster to present to the group.





Association web

I asked the three groups to make association webs with 'synergy' as subject. They were given a few probing questions to stimulate thought. These can be found on the left. During this session some discussions already formed. When the groups speed of coming up with new associations slowed down, I asked the groups to come up with one definition to share with everyone else.

The pictures of the association webs can be found in Appendix 1A. I digitalized all post-its and combined the input from all groups. From this data, I made clusters, which can be found in Appendix 1B.

The association with synergy mentioned the most was 'trust' (mentioned four times). Mentioned by all groups as well was 'agreements'. Lastly, synergy means 'growth', '(added) value', 'shared knowledge', 'teamwork', 'utilizing qualities' and 'broader perspective'. My interpretation of this by attending the session is as followed:

Synergy means utilizing different qualities effectively in teamwork creating shared knowledge. This offers a broader perspective on projects, enabling value creation for clients. Lastly, synergy can lead to growth, by good cooperation that requires agreements and trust.

Other remarks I found interesting whilst checking on the groups can be found on the next page.

Finally, I asked all groups to come up with a shared definition of synergy:

- "Synergy = embracing diversity and steering it into the same direction. It's harmony and emotion. Not rational but intuitive."
- "Synergy means 1+1=3. It is a shared vision, shared values and goals. Its complimentary and efficient."
- "Synergy = TD. Synergy = not this morning's programme (where finances were discussed). You're faster by yourself, but together it's more fun!"

Probing questions: Ask yourself questions with who, when, how, why, what, where...?

For example: What is synergy? Why does TD want synergy? How to create synergy?



Notes from the association web activity

- The teams (from Amsterdam) have very high rates, but they have the space to creatively offer lower rates by offering them in package deals for example.
- Team performance: do employees know their individual and teams' performance in real time (in relation to targets and hours)?
- Teams are too internally focused, because thats what you're payed for: the success of your own team. If you help other teams, its often at the expense of your own team. Attaching someone from another team costs your team money and if their team has more compelling needs, they'll be prioritized.
- TD teams should collaborate more: "it should be like a supermarket, whereas now it sometimes feels like a mall with different shops clients can go to".
- There's insufficient rewards for teams. To perform well, you need to reach your targets, but attaching a very big client should be rewarded too, even/especially if you hand it over to a better suited team. Currently, handing the client over would mean a loss for your team.
- "Innovative ideas often are not payed for but do lead to innovative solutions" (a brainstorm before a project for example is not payed for by a client).



Value of synergy

During this session, I asked the same groups to think of the value that synergy offers/can offer to TD. I offered them a framework to guide their thoughts and structure them. I asked them to discuss (and place post its) of why TD would want synergy? What the results can be of striving towards these goals and also to think of measures to get there. When groups started to come up with certain barriers to synergy, I asked them to save those for later in the session.

The three groups have thought of many barriers and enablers to synergy and made clusters. The pictures of the flipovers can be found in Appendix 2A. I digitalized all post-its and combined the input from all groups. From this data, I made clusters, which can be found in Appendix 2B. The figure shows different goals for TD in relation to synergy, what reaching these goals will result in (benefits) and means to get there or motivate.

My interpretation of all post-its combined, keeping in mind what I've heard when attending the session:

Synergy is about growth, in terms of market creation and profit. It means a broader proposition for clients and offering more value. Its a certain way of working that requires alignment and shared values.







Barriers & enablers

For this exercise, the groups were mixed so the collective definition in groups that had formed is mixed as well. I asked the groups to come up with all barriers and enablers regarding synergy creation. I asked the HoT's to think of barriers and enablers in teams, between teams and on organisation-wide level (structures, culture etc). They were asked to do this plenary in their group: say the barriers out loud and write it down. This lead to many discussions in the groups. Sharing the barriers inspired other group members and the employees were given the time to 'let their heart out'. All day it felt as if we were short on time, because the employees had so much to say, but with this exercise especially. One group in particular repeatedly asked for more time to discuss certain barriers. I let them, to an extent, take more time and had them open the stage after the session to talk about their findings. Because we were short on time, I had every group present only the insights that were not said yet. It was good to see that the first group had presented much of what the other groups had also thought of. This validates the shared awareness of certain barriers.

The pictures of the groups' flipovers can be found in Appendix 3A. All postits were digitalized and put together to form barriers and enablers of all groups. These barriers and enablers were then clustered and can be found in Appendix 3B. During the session, I walked around and made notes of interesting quotes, which can be found on the next page. When the groups presented their insights, I took notes as well. These insights can be found on pages 12 and 13, listed per group. The quotes in this assignment have been semi-anonymised, as they are about barriers at TD and include personal statements and opinions.



Notes from the barriers & enablers activity

- "There is a lot of diversity at TD, in terms of both skills and demographics but they are clustered in silo's. Most non-Dutch employees for example are in team Branding International."
- "TD has a focus on the present, in contrast to being future-oriented. This gives a feeling of stress rather than space/freedom."
- "We don't know what talent our colleagues have. What skills do people from other teams have?" "We should know what others can do and what they are doing. This way, we'd know who we can ask for certain tasks and when they're available"
- "There's a big focus on productivity: writing hours." "I just write everything off on 'general', if its not related directly to a project." What if employees feel that there's room to write hours for addressing personal matters in teams or personal development?
- "A feeling of success should be normalised when sharing a client" Involving another team to work with a client means TD grows in the client proposition.
- "We don't have (standardised) work instructions on how to work"
- "It happens that you pick up a project brief for a client when another team might be more suited. To reach your own targets, however, you want to do the project yourself, sometimes resulting in lower quality" Teams at Zuiderlicht don't have this sense of competition.
- "To involve other people at the start of a project requires financial space. When you haven't started a project yet and you do a brainstorm, that already costs a lot of money". This creates tension with the feeling of productivity and can lead to hesitation to perform tasks that do not immediately show results.



Insights barriers & enablers shared per group

Group 1:

- Client ownership: for synergy creation, entrepreneurship and responsibility is essential. Someone has to act as director and integrate the disciplines in the client relation.
- Different teams have a different working method.
- Client relations have to be maintained, personally as well. The client-client manager interactions have to be handed over as well when they work with another team.

Group 2:

- The team structure is a barrier.
- The current structure has limitations like productivity as a measurement. More freedom is needed.
- The office space is not ideal. Meeting rooms are not ventilated well, working from home isn't as efficient either but concentrating at the office is hard. The distance between Amsterdam and Maastricht makes it hard to collaborate.
- We need a broader perspective to look at a client. There's no space for this now (so not immediately diving into working out the project with the team).
- There's a flat hierarchy, but would a junior developer 'talk back to' a senior?
- There is demand for knowledge and skill development, like effective listening training.
- There is demand for more insights in finances than just on projects. How each team is doing for example. This can stimulate sharing clients amongst teams.
- More attention on the long-term: for clients as well. What can TD do for them in the next years, instead of only answering their cur-

rent needs. Long-term vision!

 No one at TD is responsible for the human: aspect there's no HR so HoT's try to fulfill this role.

Group 3:

- There is a feeling of having to explain your hours. Entrepreneurship is needed to decide what to spend hours on. Some tasks are important even though they are not linked directly to projects (where money comes from).
- HoTs believe in teams structure but it doesnt work as organically as it should. Borrowing/exchanging people in teams should be made easy by the teams structure.
- Vision and strategy are made behind closed doors.
- Total Identity period had its perks: TD had a very good market approach and was more client focused. Total identity was aware of trends relevant to TD and clients.
- What is TD's position in society? What is TDs opinion and whats our goal?
- Teams are very proposition focused. They should promote TD with clients, but often only promote their team-specific-offering.
- The pipes leak at the plumber!! What is TDs message? And is there an alignment with the culture and their work? TD should be its own best client.

HR: Human resources Total Identity: Previous name of Total Design









Designing solutions

In this exercise, I asked everyone to pick two barriers and think of several solutions to these 'problems'. It was obvious that some people had barriers that were very important to them to be addressed, so some only focused on one. After thinking of several solutions, I asked everyone to look at someone else's barrier as well and think of solutions for that one/those ones too. Then, everyone was asked to make a poster and present their barrier and solution. This ended the day with several fruitful and implementable ideas for TD.

The drawings of the posters can be found in appendix 4. The presented ideas are summarized and can be found on the next page.

Presented solutions

Example Barriers (as stated in barriers activity by participants) Solution (as presented by participant)

Leadership, diversity, lack of strategy and HRM

"Operations or synergy director that addresses interests of the people. Someone responsible for managing the outcomes of this session, should be female positioned in the board."

Working method, knowledge gap, different processes per team

"An E-learning on everything! Work instructions and videos on and for TD, skills, etcetera."

"Database with knowledge of everything: clients, working instructions and what everyones skills and experience is with clients. A smarter intranet!"

Client ownership, (team)structure, knowledge gap

"Client focus should be bigger than the project focus. A client owner should always stay with their client and maintain the relation on a personal and business level. Monthly reports on client level for teams instead of projects and keeping client statuses, so everyone can see the current status with a client. And a client director that also takes care of sustainable client relations." "The client 'transfers' can be improved. When a new team works with a client, they should have sufficient knowledge on the client. Clients should never be actually transfered, as they should keep the same client owner." "About (ex)changing teams: a client director that represents 2 or more disciplines, being able to think with a broader perspective. This way, the need of a change in teams is foreseen early on."

Working remote, culture, substance & thought leadership

"Using 'open space', something often used in Denmark or Germany. Open space is about coming together around a central theme. People from outside the company can join as well. An example is to host lectures on themes that matter to TD"

TD vs Yuma, no vision or strategy, design proposition

"Yuma feels like a marketing stunt. TD should take this chance to find momentum and create change for TD as well. Practice what you preach. TD needs a collective ambition and culture."

"Changing TD to DT! To design the total. Theres a fragmented proposition, client base and markets and we need to define the end-to-end brand-essence. What we offer clients, we should do for ourselves. We should be our own best client."

"Thought leadership programme for the logo"

"Using brand & vision sessions to create a vision and strategy. With all creators (include everyone), collectively define vision & strategy and assign ambassadors"

"Creating a team-transcending vision, together with everyong of TD"

Yuma: A group of companies focused on digital transformation, which TD has recently joined

Notes from final discussion, topic: working remote

The agreements on working remote do not not support synergy creation. You don't know when people will be at the office or not. On friday's, there's no one there and that does not look good to clients. It's not representative of a hard working office, so clients can't come by on fridays.

There should be freedom to work remote, but people should also be motivated or asked to work at the office for a part of the week. It seems there's no standard start/end time of the day. There's little awareness of when you will be able to reach people, especially if they are working from home.

Productivity does show that working remote works good for some people.

There's no clear overview of peoples working routine and preferences, but it seems people may have very different ones. Some prefer asynchronised communication like e-mail, where others prefer to be called. What if every team has a working way and you have to adapt to the working way of each team you work in? Reaction: will not motivate to work with other teams.

Agreements or regulations often are implemented top-down from the board onto employees, and HoT's have to manage them. This however often creates a negative feeling as if its being forced onto employees.

Conclusion

The session started off with the association web. Associations with synergy mentioned the most were trust, agreements, growth, (added) value, shared knowledge, teamwork, utilizing qualities and a broader perspective. The associations can be grouped into either conditions or needs for synergy or into what synergy can bring. They are concerned with the work atmos-phere at TD, TD's processes and methods and the value creation for clients. The shared definitions of synergy per group were about working together towards the same di-rection. The groups mention 'diversity' and 'complimentary' here as well.

Defining the value of synergy helped to get everyone on the same page and to translate synergy to Total Design related situations. A summary of the findings is as followed: Synergy is about growth, in terms of market creation and profit. It means a broader proposition for clients and offering more value. Its a certain way of working that requires alignment and shared values.

The current barriers and enablers to synergy at TD can be categorized into themes. A theme that was mentioned the most is the team structure, both seen as a barrier and an enabler. Teams are too internally focused, should work with other teams more and promote TD's service offering as well as their own. A second theme that was discussed a lot is productivity. The strong focus on productivity and writing hours is seen as limiting the creative space. However, claiming leadership is proposed as an enabler, meaning employees should decide themselves what they find important to spend time on and write hours for. Other recurring barriers mentioned in a random order are lack of strategy and vision, the working space and working remote, a knowledge gap of TD's capabilities, lack of diversity and 'human care' (roughly expressed no one cares for the people at TD), client ownership and little stimulance for development. As the mentioned enablers are both existing enablers and newly proposed enablers to synergy creation, the input here does not clearly show what TD already does to motivate synergy and further research would be needed to investigate this. However, the enablers can serve as input for possible improvements that can be made.

Koen proposed two extra objectives for the session. The first being to create solutions that will increase multiple-team involvement with clients (how to prevent that a client only works with one team). Several solutions were proposed, like rethinking the teams structure, improving the awareness of skills, improving the exchanging system and bonuses. The second goal, which was to create solutions that turn projects into accounts, received too little attention and would need further investigation. In the last exercise, the HoTs presented their solutions to certain barriers. Most of the presented solutions were focused on the barriers client ownership and (lack of) vision and/or strategy. This could indicate high involvement or care for these topics. Further re-search will look into what barriers employees see as most pressing. The session concluded in a discussion regarding working remote. The board wants employees to come to the office more. The notes from the discussion can be found in appendix FIXME. There was no final consensus on the subject and the board members decided to get back to this topic later.

Insights and Analysis

The session was participated in enthousiastically and appreciated strongly by the HoT's. The interactive way of discussing work-related issues was considered a nice activity for the quarterly meeting. During barriers and enablers, the groups got into more personal discussion. This activity shows that the employees care about their work and want to improve the current situation. The session indicated that employees would like to further discuss them. Certain barriers were more important to some than to others. There were differences between Total Design Amster-dam and Zuiderlicht Maastricht, but there was agreement on most important barriers.

Unfortunately, there was not enough time for the HoT's to share their synergetic scenario. I left this exercise out, partly because not everyone knew they had to prepare such an example.

The last part was meant to end the session on a high note: thinking of solutions offered hope and having people present that have impact (like Martijn and Koen) was suspected to make the HoTs feel like they are being heard. During the barriers & enablers activity however, it may have caused people to hold back in speaking their minds, as the board members were present.

APPENDIC



APPENDIX 1A: Association web







APPENDIX 1B: Association web, analysis

"Synergy = diversiteit omarmen en gelijkgericht maken. Tis harmonie en ook emotie. Niet rationeel, maar intuitief."

"1+1=3

Its a shared vision, values, goals. Its complimentary and efficiency"

"Synergy = TD. Synergy = not het ochtendprogramma. Alleen ben je sneller maar samen is leuker!"



Tis harmonie en ook emotie



Its complimentary

diversiteit omarmen gelijkge Its a shared vision, values, goals.

gelijkgericht maken goals.



1 + 1 = 3



Synergy = TD



Niet rationeel, maar intuitief.



APPENDIX 2A: Value of synergy







APPENDIX 2B: Value of synergy, analysis





35

value

solutions

APPENDIX 3A: Barriers & enablers






APPENDIX 3B: Barriers & enablers, analysis



Enablers



APPENDIX 4: Posters

• Operations or synergy director that addresses interests of the people. Someone responsible for managing the outcomes of this session, should be female positioned in the board.



- An E-learning on everything! Work instructions and videos on and for TD, skills, etcetera.
- Database with knowledge of everything: clients, working instructions and what everyones skills and experience is with clients. A smarter intranet!





- Client focus should be bigger than the project focus. A client owner should always stay with their client and maintain the relation on a personal and business level. Monthly reports on client level for teams instead of projects and keeping client statuses, so everyone can see the current status with a client.
- The client 'transfers' can be improved. When a new team works with a client, they should have sufficient knowledge on the client. Clients should never be actually transfered, as they should keep the same client owner.



- About (ex)changing teams: a client director that represents 2 or more disciplines, being able to think with a broader perspective. This way, the need of a change in teams is foreseen early on. Client director that also takes care of sustainable client relations.
- Working remote: using 'open space', something often used in Denmark or Germany. Open space is about coming together around a central theme. People from outside the company can join as well. An example is to host lectures on themes that matter to TD



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 Collective ambition and culture! Yuma feels like a marketing stunt. TD should take this chance to find momentum and create change for TD as well. What does digital transformation mean for TD? How is the acquisition of TD transforming the culture at TD? Practice what you preach. What is TDs role in the new group and as a digital transformation partner?

geen collectière ausitie geen peckeelde coltaur (woorden) B. 2.0 JUMA transformatic (culturr) verander: ile tikits-orte: Heley leiderschap

- Changing TD to DT! To design the total. Theres a fragmented proposition, client base and markets and we need to define the end-to-end brand-essence. What we offer clients, we should do for ourselves. We should be our own best client.
- Thought leadership programme for the logo





- Theres no vision/strategy--> we need brand & vision sessions.
 With all creators (include everyone), collectively define vision and assign ambassadors!
- Creating a vision! Something team-transcending, and creating it together with everyong of TD



