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MA Digital Experience Design 2018

05. Part 1

Managing Projects & Teams

A critical evaluation and analysis of team and project management

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Introduction

This academic paper will outline how different project management thinking methods and techniques have been utilised as part of the Digital Experience Design programme at Hyper Island. I will evaluate the range of roles and responsibilities required in a team in response to complex challenges and review how teams and processes within clear and complex constraints have been structured. The ability to work autonomously in teams and as individuals on parallel projects will be discussed, as well as how the effectiveness of using professional development tools like reflection, feedback and self-assessment have been used to improve working practice. Finally, I will explain how teams have collaborated effectively in response to change and challenges in a professional working process.

There are several tools available that can be used when managing teams and projects which requires a discipline of planning, organising, and managing resources to bring about the successful completion of specific goals and objectives. (Milosevic et al., 2007, p. 2) This paper will outline those tools.

Agile Vs. Waterfall

Choosing the best tools to use for each team can be as important as the team setup itself and the tools used will vary from team to team. Agile, for example, is a project management methodology best used for projects that require quick turnarounds on research, synthesis, prototyping and iteration before delivery. It values constant collaboration, frequent deliverables and continuous evolution of requirements. (Murray, 2016, p. 34). Agile, therefore, requires a sense of autonomy and quick decisions from the team to ensure time isn't wasted unnecessarily.

Fig 1. Agile sprint cycles
Source: Ivanecky, 2016.

As shown in the image above, Agile works on short 'sprints' where planning, design, building, testing and reviewing the solution happens over a short period. This allows the team to report back to the client for feedback and then go back and work on anything that needs iterating. This process continues throughout the whole project. Agile requires teams to work through a lot of ambiguity. Because there aren't any requirements up front, teams must discover the problem, define areas to focus on, develop potential solutions and revisit them through feedback-based iterations before delivering a solution that works.
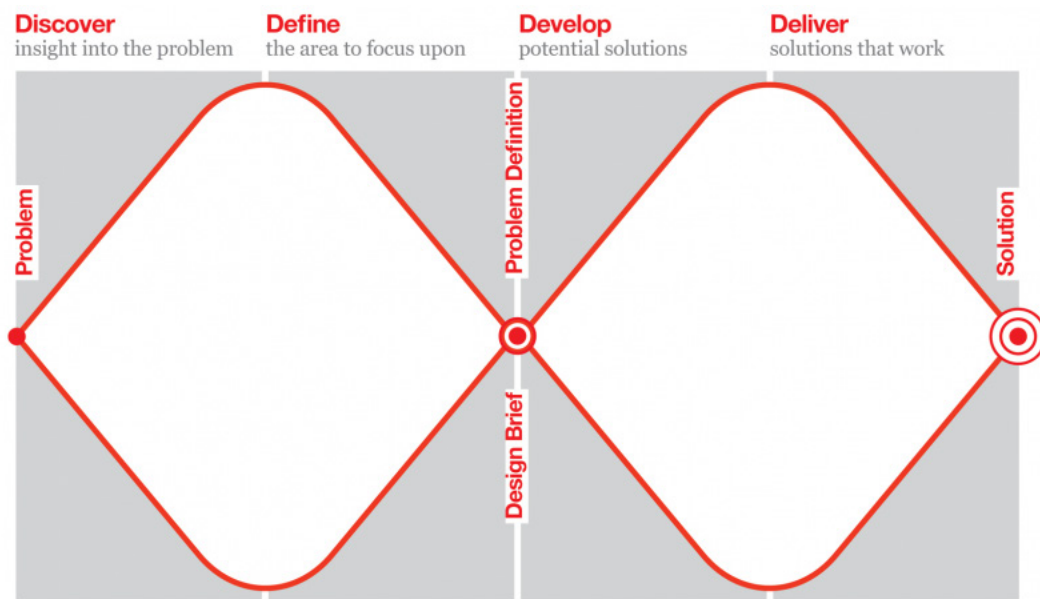
Discover
insight into the problem

Define
the area to focus upon

Develop
potential solutions

Deliver
solutions that work

Problem

Problem Definition

Design Brief

Solution

Fig 2. The Design Council's Double Diamond
Source: The Design Council, n.d.

Waterfall, on the other hand, is a traditional project management methodology which is more linear in its approach and stretches over a longer period. Waterfall methodologies follow a sequential process. As the image in Fig. 3 shows, one step of the Waterfall cannot happen before the one preceding it. The issue with Waterfall is that problems can begin to arise in the first step: client requirements. Two common issues are that requirements took so long as to be impractical, and requirements were also missed. (Murray, 2016, p. 32).
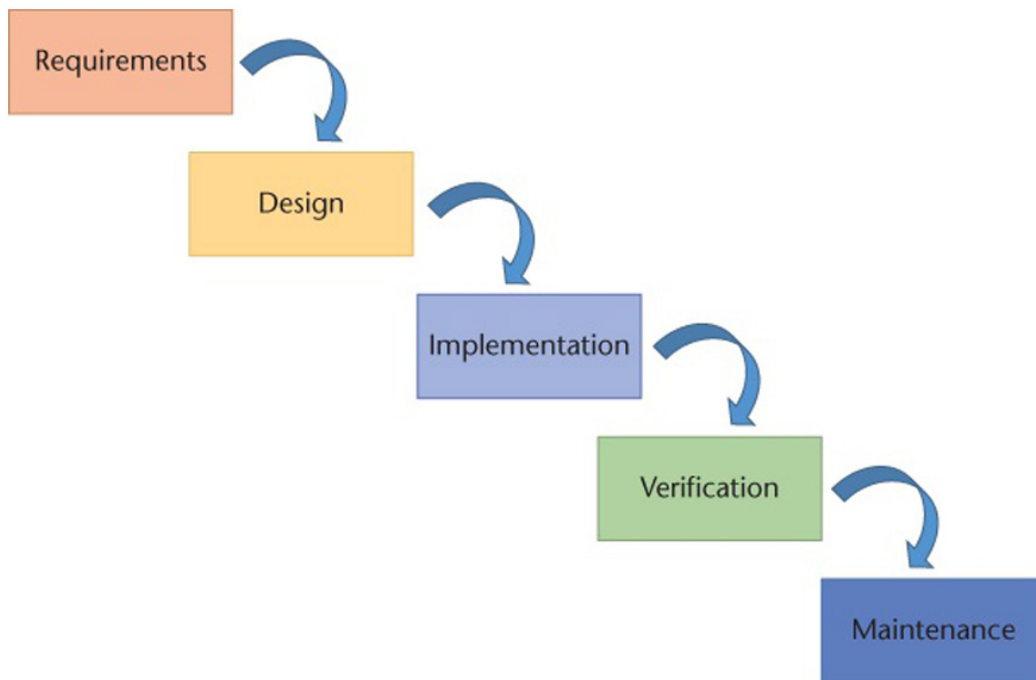
Fig 3. Waterfall Methodology
Source: Murray, 2016.

Projects are given a list of client requirements that aren't always what the customer wants or need. (ibid.) As well as being impractical from a time point of view, Waterfall methodologies can also be costly. If a change is needed once the product has been launched, it must go through a lengthy, bureaucratic "change request". Another issue is there is little to no room for iteration before the product is launched. Often stakeholder needs and desires change midway through a project, meaning what they wanted when they handed over their requirements might not be what they expect when it's launched.

Deciding which methodology to use for a project depends on a number of different factors:

• Size of the project
• Duration
• Complexity
• Organisational factors
• Clients or stakeholders, external and internal. (Haworth, 2017)

The projects that have been undertaken at Hyper Island have followed an Agile methodology, due in part to the three-week project timeframe. These short sprints have enabled newcomers to the methodology to learn on the fly and get to grips with how Agile works..

Fig 4. The Hyper Island Crew being talked through the programme rollout in week 1

Management Tools

The team canvas model is used to define roles within a team that makes use of each's experience and specialisation. It also helps to define individual strengths and weaknesses and provides alignment across common goals and finally a team purpose. Roles and responsibilities can include nominating a team rep, a facilitator, a time whip, 'joker', mediator, documenter and in one particular team, the role of 'mum' was assigned to someone whose job it was to provide snacks and drinks for the team. This team highlighted the expectations of each role, so each person knew exactly what they had to deliver to the team.

Kanban is simple in its execution, but this isn't to say kanban will work for every team. It requires teams to designate a team member to keep on top of moving the tasks through each stage. Personal experience of the kanban model has been somewhat negative, and its effectiveness diminished through a lack of time investment into the tool. Although it was someone's role, it quickly became forgotten about and was just another piece of paper stuck on the wall.

Muris Lage Junior (2010, p. 20) conducted a review of thirty-two variations of the kanban system, concluding that the "system has many desirable characteristics, but on the other hand, it indicates that the system is not appropriate to the new productive organization needs. Therefore, adequacy to reality is required to be used in manufacturing."
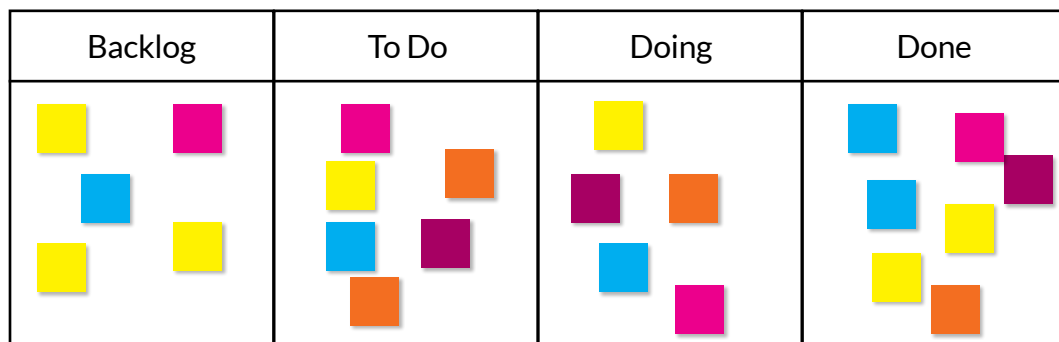

Fig 5. Kanban board

A better tool for project management has been the project calendar. By plotting out the key dates of the project, teams can have the foresight of what needs to be done and when it needs doing by. When done correctly, it enables teams to be able to manage multiple projects at once, as evidenced through practice during the Business Transformation module. By setting mini-deadlines on the calendar, the team was able to schedule in time to work on parallel projects without the added stress of the current project.
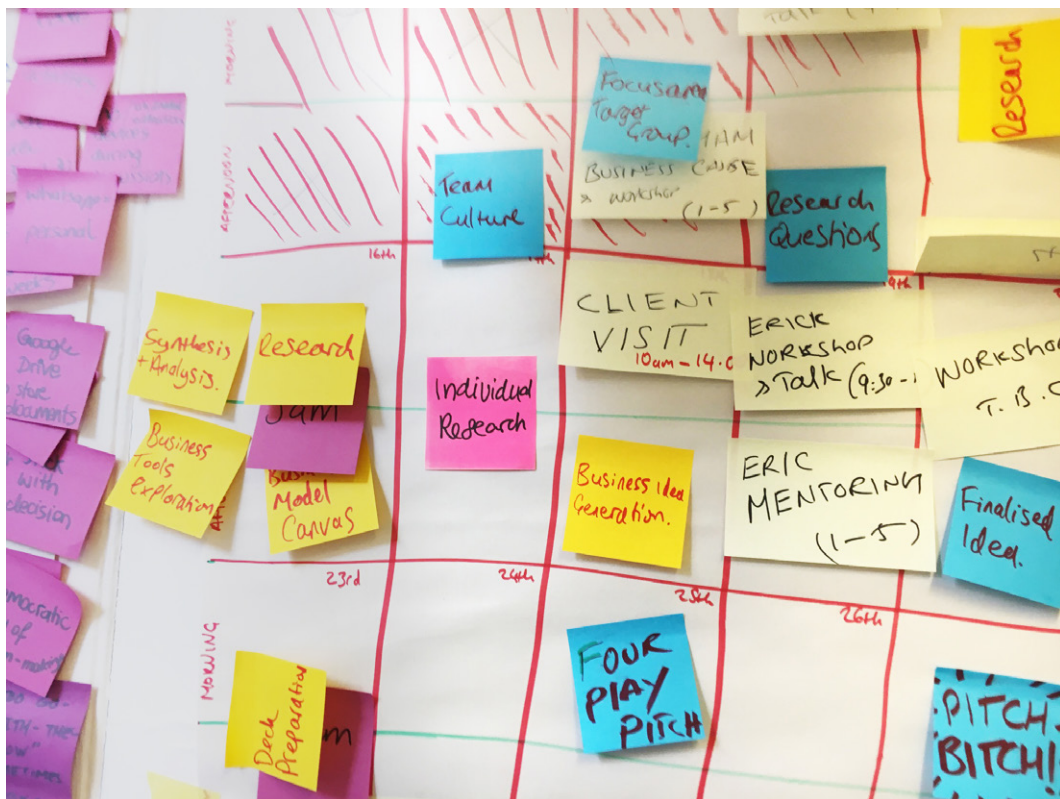

Fig 6. Project calendar for the Business Transformation module

Conflict Resolution

Team formations rely on getting the right personnel for the right job. During the Experience Design module, the Hyper Island crew was tasked with forming their own teams based on a series of pre-defined characteristics of each crew member. However, the teams were formed through what was later described as a 'popularity contest', which set an undertone of tension right from the start. This meant that conflict was rife for most of the project, which significantly impacted team morale.

Other important aspects of team management include the resolution of team conflict, which is the extent to which team members have different opinions, perspectives, and views of the task. (Jehn, 1995, as cited in O'Neill and Allen, 2014, p. 159). It could be argued that conflict within a team is healthy if it remains constructive, on-topic and does not impact on the project. There are several tools available to help resolve team conflicts.

Personal reflections – spoken from the 'I' -, feedback and self-assessment are important in maintaining a balance within a team. By speaking from the 'I', team members can take the time to reflect on how their actions might be positively or negatively affecting the team dynamics and provides the space for team members to ask questions or seek clarifications for the betterment of the team. Emotional intelligence helps individuals to keep their thoughts and feelings in balance and gives them the courage to be honest with themselves about any roles they played in how things turned out. (Grainger, 2010)

However, when put into practice, reflections have had various results. While individuals have been able to talk about their grievances in one team, the dynamics were damaged beyond repair because of the severity of the conflict that happened before the reflection. On the contrary, the reflection of another team enabled small annoyances to be dealt with while enhancing the working environment. Results from this session were apparent within the same day.

Feedback should be a 'gift' passed from one team member to another. Team members can use the following format on a post-it note:
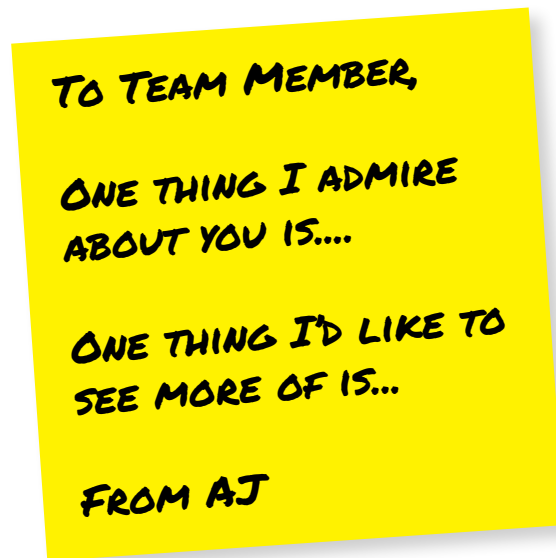

Fig 7. Feedback should be considered as a gift

This format allows an individual to point out something they admire about the recipient, but also something they'd like to see more of. By providing this feedback, team members can provide safe, constructive feedback that is aimed to help the recipient to grow.

Susan Wheelan (2010) provided a model named the 4-Stage Integrated Model of Group Development. This model outlines the four stages that most teams will go through within a project. It can be argued that teams cannot go through the model without first passing through the preceding step, meaning that before a team can reach a place of trust and structure, they must first go through counter-dependency & fight. It is at this stage that the conflict resolution techniques above will be utilised the most. Stage four, considered the optimal stage for team development (Wheelan, 2010), is a time of intense team productivity and effectiveness. Having resolved many of the issues of the previous stages, the group can focus most of its energy on goal achievement and task accomplishment. (Ebrary.net, n.d.)
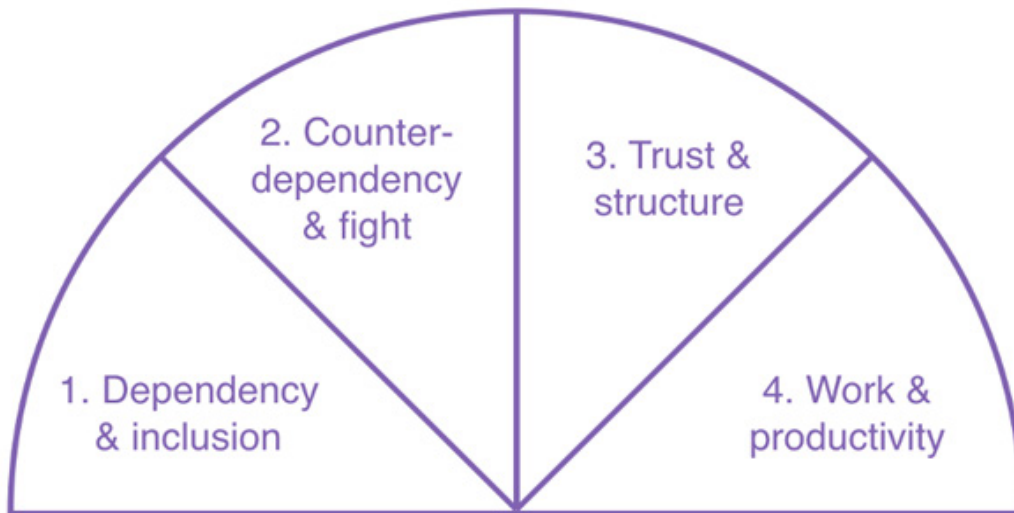
Fig 8. Susan Wheelan's 4-Stage Integrated Model of Group Development
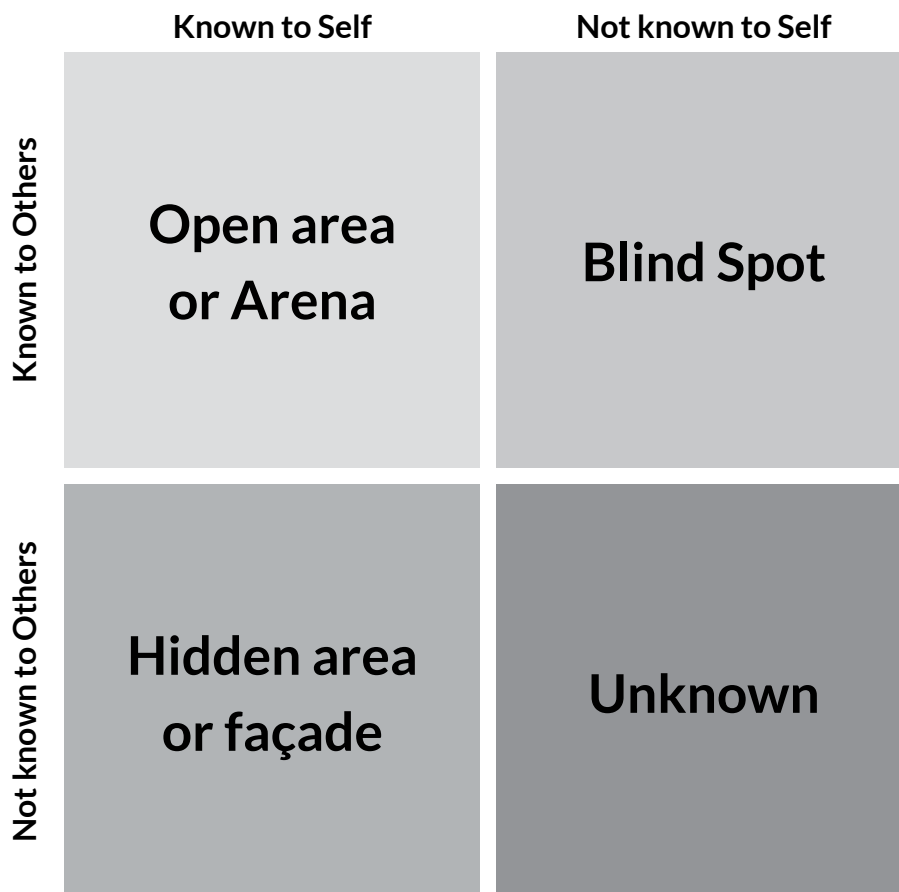*Source: Andersson, 2016*

	Known to Self	**Not known to Self**
Known to Others	Open area or Arena	Blind Spot
Not known to Others	Hidden area or façade	Unknown

Fig 9 Johari Window can be used when providing feedback during reflection sessions
Source: Communication Theory, n.d.

Conclusion

To conclude, companies can use either Agile or Waterfall methodologies, depending on the size of the company, time, budget, complexity and stakeholders. Regardless of the methodology used, there are further tools that can be used in projects to help keep teams at an optimal working level. If any conflicts do arise – and there are bound to be some within multidisciplinary teams – the likes of reflections, feedback, self-assessment and Susan Wheelan's 4-Stage Integrated Model of Group Development can help to iron out any problems in an effort to push the team into a place of high performance and productivity. It could be argued that innovation should not come at the cost of personal friction between team members and individuals. The ability to reflect upon how one's actions will affect the team is as important as pointing out the positives and negatives of others. If a team is to be successful, enhanced communication and collaboration between all members are required to coordinate, provide and document the delivery of efficient, high quality and satisfying solutions. (Rosenstein, Dinklin and Munro, 2014)

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Fig 2. Design Council. (n.d.). The Design Process: What is the Double Diamond? *The Design Council.* [online] Available at: https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/design-process-what-double-diamond [Accessed 20 Feb. 2018].

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Fig 4. The Hyper Island Crew being talked through the programme rollout in Week 1. Personal archive.

Fig 5. Kanban board.

Fig 6. Project calendar for the Business Transformation module. Personal archive.

Fig 7. Feedback on a post-it note should be considered as a gift.

Fig 8. Andersson, K. (2016). Chapter 4: What is culture?, *Medium*. [online] Available at: https://medium.com/the-double-diamond-of-culture/chapter-4-what-is-culture-623543be3509 [Accessed 25th May 2018].

Fig 9. Johari window.