Rapid Design Labs — A Tool
to Turbocharge Design-Led Innovation

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We as researchers and User Experience (UX) designers want to identify and create products that change the world and therefore, we choose to engage in strategic research and design. In the real world though, coming up with a breakthrough idea or transformative design doesn't mean it will automatically be accepted or get to market. By definition, innovative ideas represent new ways of thinking. Organizations by nature seem to have anti-innovation antibodies that often kill new ideas—even disruptive innovations that could help companies differentiate themselves from their competition. As difficult as coming up with a game-changing idea can be, getting an organization to act on the idea often seems impossible. Perhaps we find ourselves in work routines that do not provide space to think differently. Our experience is that

practitioners and academics alike need new tools to meet this challenge—tools that empower UX teams in both business and universities to identify transformative new ideas, and then to get these big ideas and designs accepted. This course proposes *rapid design labs*—a design-led, facilitative, cross-functional, iterative approach to innovation that aligns organizations and generates value at each step. It provides tools and methods that turn attendees into catalysts, who systemically identify new ideas, and align multi-disciplinary teams around their ideas. Attendees learn how to lead workshops that foster ideation, collaboration, trust, and free expression. These workshops enable intensive brainstorming, purposeful play, design, user testing, and rapid prototyping. Learn how innovative companies and universities, such as Splunk, Deutsche Telekom Laboratories, the Berlin Technical University, Yahoo!, Mindjet, zSpace, HP, and more identify, design, and bring great products to market.

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Multidisciplinary design; Interdisciplinary Design; Design Methods; User Experience Design; User Experience Design; Games and Play; Participatory Design / Cooperative Design; Innovation

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5 Information interfaces and presentation; H.5.2 User Interfaces; Prototyping; User-centered design; Graphical user interfaces; Theory and methods

Overview

This course enables designers, researchers, managers, product managers, engineers, students, and educators to solve design (and broader business) challenges and rapidly gain alignment across organizations. It requires no prerequisite background. It is designed for anyone who wants to work collaboratively and creatively, for those who want to identify, design, and deliver ideas that change the way people interact in a domain. Participants in this course learn how to:

- facilitate design labs to collaboratively identify the next "big idea" and promote cohesion, fun, and trust
- practice innovation methods in a mock workshop
- lead ideation and alignment exercises
- gain agreement to lead design labs in their companies and universities

Content:
The course starts with an interactive exercise where the participants identify what type of innovator they are, according to a common social style index. Participants divide into groups of approximately eight, with each group generally comprising two of each style, to help balance interactions. This exercise is also aimed at bringing students' focus into the course, and functions as a team-building exercise. The group spends 20 minutes introducing themselves and their innovation style, and articulating what they hope to derive from the course.

Instructors then introduce several principles that promote innovation, and again show where design labs fit. They provide vivid examples from everyday experience conducting design labs via both slides and video highlights. Participants will internalize different flavors of workshops by learning about the different ways design

Justification:
Virtually every month, business literature and books emerge, articulating the importance of innovation. Few, however, offer practical advice and tangible lessons. This course teaches participants how to conduct design labs, which provide one set of tools many successful companies use to innovate and promote a unified vision and direction across teams. Design Labs are but one tool in an overall innovation and product lifecycle, and instructors show where workshops fit in this lifecycle.

labs are conducted in different companies, such Yahoo, Deutsche Telekom, Berlin Technical University, numerous startups, and some design firms.

Instructors then introduce participants to the process of divergence (brainstorming) and convergence (focusing down to the single best idea). Within this structure, instructors offer methods that can be used and combined differently to solve innovation challenges. Attendees learn how each workshop is unique.

In the next step, participants are ready to conduct a highly energized, condensed design lab on their own. Instructors present one problem that all sub-teams work independently to solve. Instructors identify a topic to solve that is relevant to as many attendees as possible. Each group gets a set of methods to practice in a design lab and to experience design methods in real life interaction. Throughout these exercises, instructors facilitate each group to help them understand and conduct the exercises successfully, and then help understand how to apply such exercises in design labs within their own companies or universities.

To wrap up the course, instructors collect lists of "lessons learned," and present highlights to the class. Instructors also provide from their own experience insights on what problems participants might encounter in their companies putting design labs into practice. Instructors address typical questions and comments participant might encounter, such as "How do I get stakeholders to come to my workshops?" or "What's a typical schedule?"

Many participants from previous versions of this class have indicated that this course alone was worth attending CHI all by itself. Come learn how to engage in purposeful play, brainstorming, choosing innovative ideas, align teams around these ideas, and get the concepts to market, and have fun!