IDENTITY TOOL KIT

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is an explorative paper aiming at presenting the development of a novel and comprehensive method to create a more inclusive and easily accessible design method applicable to a wide array of design projects, academic and professional. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the "Identity Tool Kit" (ITK) - a method aimed at assisting designers and clients in the creation of visual platforms and identities in relation to product and service development. The formulation of the method began 10 years ago and it has been employed by approximately 600 university students within several disciplines and in numerous projects outside of academia. Based on project evaluations, 90 % of the participants found the method very useful. Many students have continued to use the method as they have embarked on a professional career within the field of design. The Identity Tool Kit has proven to achieve set goals within different areas of design and in relation of different types of design processes. Crucially, the Identity Tool Kit is more than just a design method since it has extensive management implications. The case studies here presented reveal how the method was used in the region of Kalmar, Sweden. These particular examples are picked because of the nature of the project; the wide array of people's background and it illustrates how the method supports the participation of all stakeholders in design processes.

BACKGROUND

As a graphic designer much of my contract work concerned the creation of graphic profiles for a number of different types of organizations, ranging from private companies to governmental organizations. My client normally consisted of managerial representatives of the organizations' different departments as for example the head of the sales department, the CEO, the head of the communications department, the head of the finance department and so on.

When approached by my clients I was usually confronted with conflicting views within the company as to the nature and purpose of the organization. My goal of course was to draw out at uniform idea of that identity that could be translated into a powerful and functional graphic identity. I noticed quickly that the relations between the participants where often complex and entrenched which can be explained by the fact that they represented different interests and therefore saw the purpose of the project differently. When discussing the new graphic identity these conflicting views resulted in discussions that were heated and an end result without focus and clarity.

I also realized that most persons involved in projects lacked any familiarity with aesthetic terminology which made it difficult for them to make the connection between the goal of their work and the work on a new

visual identity (Fig. 1). These experiences lead me to explore how I could include the clients in the design process beyond them solely being passive customers shopping for a final product. This is what brought me to develop the Identity Tool Kit method.

The gap

What shade are you thinking of if I say blue?
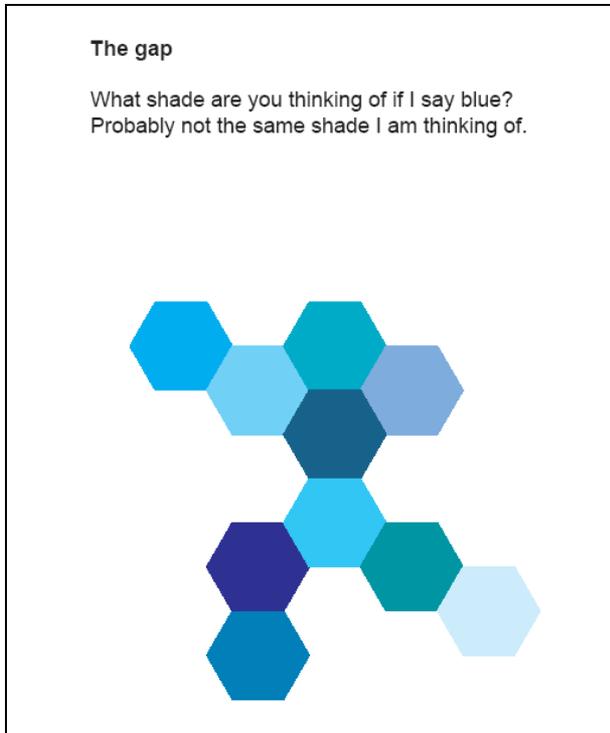Probably not the same shade I am thinking of.

Fig. 1

I realized that it was important to engage people from the very beginning of the design process in order to allow for the work to remain open, creative and explorative. The work form had to feel more inviting and give space and time for discussions, thoughts and several stages of reflection. All tools had to be as accessible to all participants in order to bridge pre-existing factions within the organization and allow for the process to keep focus on the overall goal – what the company is, what it would like to become and how it would like to represent itself. I started to work with a series of works shops, using images and words to engage the participants in the design process that to the participants should also be a management process.

THE IDENTITY TOOL KIT

The method consists of six individual steps. During most steps "affect boards" are used to express opinions and concerns. An affect board is a collage that expresses the image and sense that the organization wishes to convey. The process begins with expressing what the company stands for at the moment and eventually it leads to an articulation of what the future visual identity should express.

STEP 1: STATE BOARD (FIG. 2)

The first assignment is to describe the company's current visual identity. The company's profile is described in terms of "core value", where core value is taken to describe the spirit of activity of company. In that sense, a core value is not the same as the business idea which would connote the purpose of the activities rather than describing them. Example descriptions would be "environmental", "socially minded", "flexible" etc. Every core value should be precisely defined, i.e. the working group needs to work through what they mean by "environmental" or "socially minded". No definition should be longer than three sentences and no affect board should consist of more than five images. At the same time one should avoid using less than three images for the reason that this can lead to the discussion becoming too abstract and detached from the actual activities of the organization.

The purpose is to already at the first step actively work with anchoring a common language and understanding of the issues at stake making sure that problems arising from conflicting individual interpretations are jointly and directly overcome. The result shall be a shared understanding of the spirit, purpose and aspirations of the work of the organization. Many times the work with the first affect board have already created a group feeling and openness for discussing differing opinions.

Step 1: Stateboard

Describe the present profile of the company with five core words/core values and with five pictures.

The core words/core values shall be precise, with one explanation in each consistency.

The pictures shall not describe each word, but describe the visual experience/identity of the entire business.
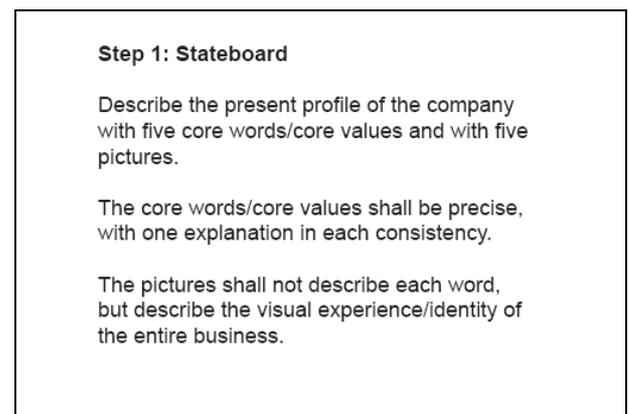
Fig. 2

STEP 2 – POSITION BOARD (FIG. 3)

The purpose of the position board is to describe the context within which the organization operates. Actual competitors should be avoided to be named instead the goal is to generally describe the context. In order to

frame the context the participants create a matrix using operational dichotomies to describe the organization's context. For example "expensive / cheap", "simple / complex". The context is described using the same method as the core values in step one and affect boards are created for every concept used. After creating the position board the organization is placed on the board in relation to other actors. In order to contextualize the organization in this way the participants are encouraged to think about their relation to their context and become more aware of it, something that can have determinate influence one future actions.
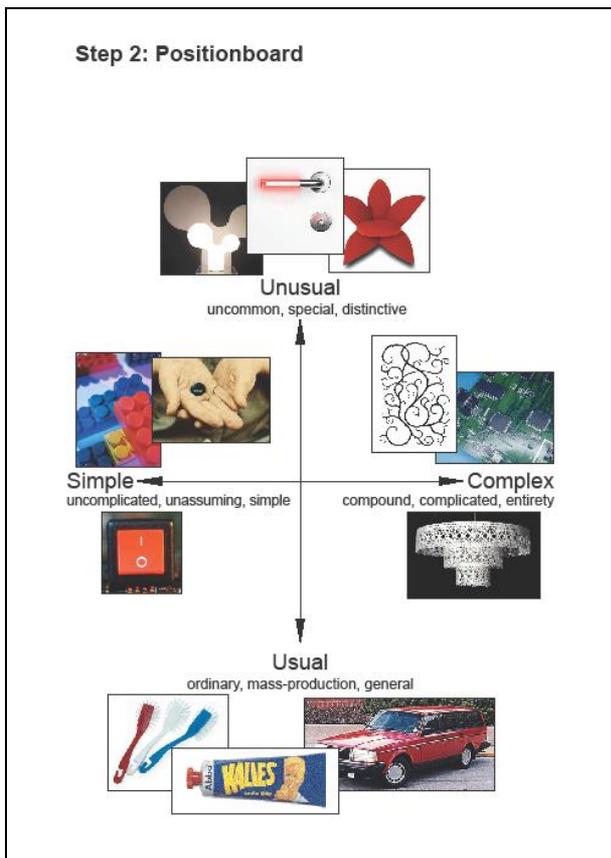

Fig. 3

STEP 3 – FUTURE BOARD (FIG. 4-6)

The aspiration board is supposed to illustrate the organization's future profile and visual identity. It is produced by the same method, using core values that the organization wishes to hold in the future, using the affect board for illustration. After making the boards you return the matrix from the previous step and mark the place of the desired future position.

In so doing, it becomes clear what the desired future development is and how that relates to the rest of the organizations context.
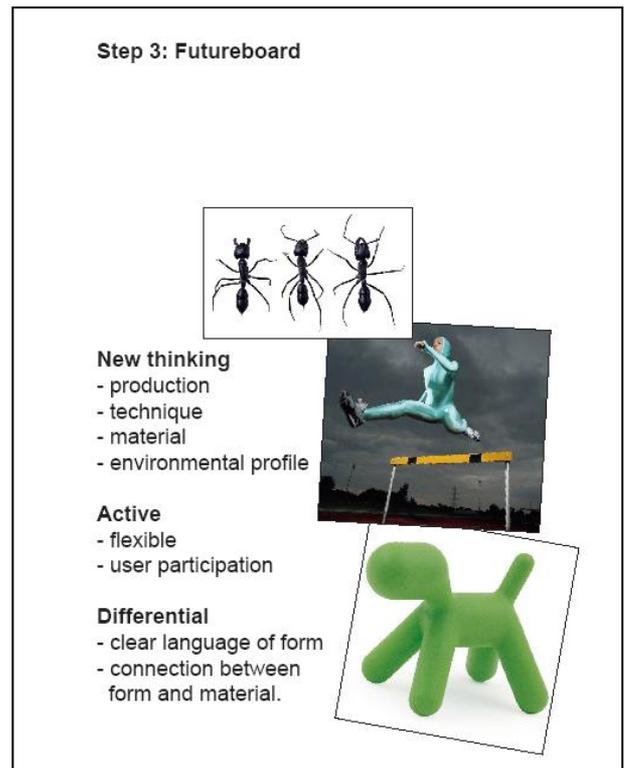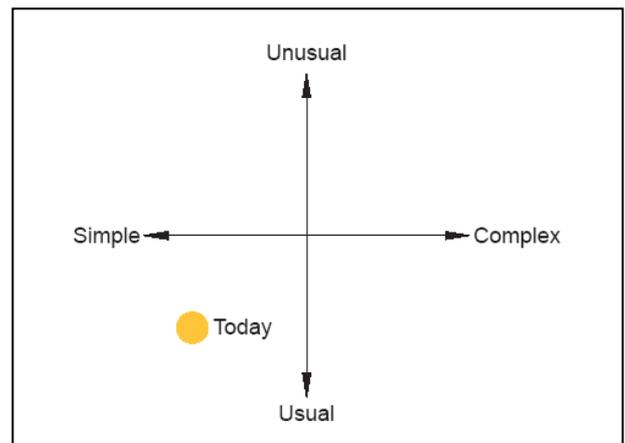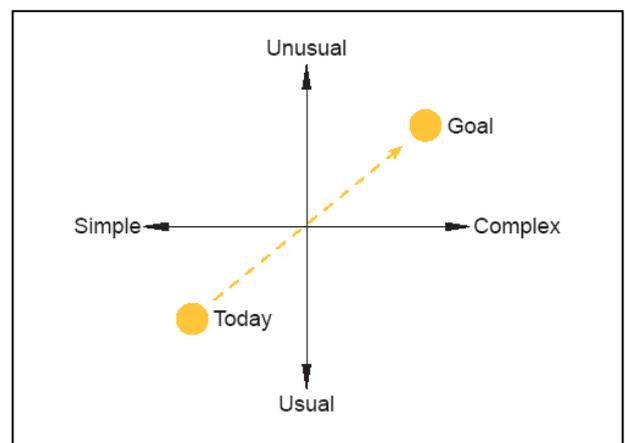

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

STEP 4 – COLOUR AND FORM (FIG. 7)

At this point it is time to create the basis for a future visual identity by trying to translate the affective qualities, shapes and colours present in the future board into building blocks. At this point it is still important to curtail the maximum number of colour and forms used in order to achieve clarity in the final visual profile.
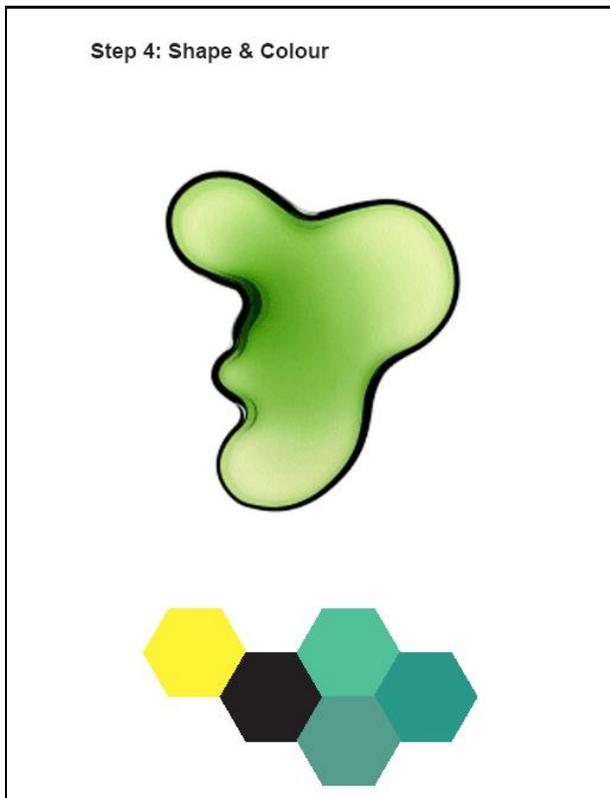

Fig. 7

STEP 5 – CONDITION/TONE

At this point it is time to consider what tone the organization whishes to have – fun, serious, aggressive etc., more than three key words risks leading to confusion. This part of the processes builds directly from step 4 and 5 and is aimed at arriving at an idea of the conceptual framework for the future profile and visual identity.
Example: Form – soft; Colours – cold; Tone – dynamic but not aggressive.

STEP 6 – GUIDELINES

All the material is compiled as guidelines for the following work with creating the new profile that should work both internally and externally. At this stage all components of a new visual identity is present, shape, colours and tone and are easily employed by the designer in order to create the new visual identity.

CASE STUDYS – YEAR OF LIGHT

The ITK method was applied to the planning and execution of the *Year of Design* activities in the region of Kalmar. The *Year of Design* was a focused commitment of behalf of the Swedish government to highlight the role of design in Swedish society; culturally, economically, politically, technological, historically and so on. The regional umbrella project, called the *Year of Light,* aimed at elucidating the role of light in the local community by discussing and reworking the lighting of a number of local public spaces in order to change their visual identity and expression. Below two projects that were parts of the *Year of Light* (within which the ITK method played a crucial part) will be introduced.

PROJECT 1

The first project aimed at elucidating urban spaces in the region. Three particular projects were conceived, firstly, the reworking of illumination of an apartment bloc facing increased levels of social problems; secondly, the reworking of the lighting of the main square in a small town in order to create an increased community feeling and thirdly, the lighting of a public park now completely disused because of the lack of illumination. Since the projects involved a number of people from different backgrounds (architects, politicians, representatives from the local lighting industry, engineers, fine artists and interested members of the public) the projects proceeded by applying the ITK method in order to bridge potential communication problems.

The project began with an introduction by Jan Ejhed, Professor in Lighting Design at the University of Kalmar and the Royal College of Technology, to the role of light in society and how to change the visual identity of public spaces with the help of light. The lecture was followed by an introduction of the ITK method and an explanation of how the method could help them discuss and develop their thoughts around the current visual identity of the spaces and the desired future visual identity. After an actual visit to each place the participants were divided into groups consisting of 4-5 people (all together about 70 people) and were given materials (in terms of pictures, images and actual small scale models of the places) in order to proceed with the help of the ITK method. The task for each small group, consisting of four to five individuals, was to come up with a concrete example of the lighting of

their particular place. Three randomly chosen groups were videotaped throughout the whole process.

Fig. 8

In this case the method was easily explained and employed and most groups presented their idea within a few hours (Fig. 8). The strengths and weaknesses of each suggestion were discussed and the workshop concluded with the facilitators drawing together common concerns and suggestions in terms of the role of light in these spaces, something that was later given in written form to the regional city planner and which has had some effect on the design of these spaces. The workshops did not only foster public participation in the urban planning of their own community but it also raised the awareness of the role of light in society among the politicians and regional administration.

The role of the designer in this case was to set up the structure of the workshops and collect all the material needed (images, models etc). At the time of the workshop the designer introduced the ITK method and continuously facilitate the discussions that took place in the small groups. The designer is supposed to be on hand to explain the method but not to steer the content of discussions. One reoccurring reminder was the necessity to be careful in defining the core values, since these steer the rest of the process. The designer is also instrumental in summing up the outcome of the process and communicating this back to the stakeholders.

One week after the conclusion of the project the participants were asked to evaluated their projects and the ITK method by filling in a form. The questions on the form concerned comprehension, inclusion and facilitation of communication. The number of responses was somewhat low but generally the method received a grade of 5.5 out of 7 in terms of its accessibility, impact and comprehension. However, one point that stood out

was that the ITK method had facilitated and reinforced the communication between a numbers of strangers coming together for one focused project.

PROJECT 2

The second project part of the *Year of Light* involved the students at School of Design, Kalmar, designing contemporary lighting plans (especially in terms of today's requirements for safety and feeling of community identity) for historical sites or buildings. The site picked for this project was the so called "radby" of Öland (a radby is the way the island villages were traditionally laid out in, all houses in direct physical connection with each other and also with the passing through-road). Öland is an island in the Baltic Sea, an environment that only few changes have been made to for the last hundreds of years. Öland's particular farming landscape (the "radby" being one of its defining traits) is listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO. This particular case concerned one of the many "radbyar" called Runsten.

Taking this into consideration contemporary life on the island has very different requirements when it comes to safety, infrastructure and living standards. Thus, the challenge that any modification to the existing environment faces is how to balance the heritage with contemporary needs of the local population. The challenge given to the students was to use light to make the "radby" a safer place to live and a safer place to drive through.

The official governmental rules concerning road lighting only address the challenge in general terms and do not provide any guidance as to how to deal with the particularities of environments like the one on Öland. Over and beyond taking the historical value of the site into consideration and balancing it with cotemporary needs, other defining characteristics that had to be taken into consideration were things like the local economy's reliance on tourism, the continued and changing nature of agricultural methods and other developments of the local infrastructure.

The students' decided to put the individual resident and his or her needs for safety and a good living standard in focus of the project. The further aim of the lighting plan of the "radby" was thus to create a sense of vitality, well-being, safety and comfort in the community while at the same time taking the special historical, social and

cultural traits of the local environment into careful consideration.

The project was carried out with the participation of the whole population of Runsten taking on the role of the buyer. The ITK method was in this case used to facilitate communication within the student group ("the seller"), but also to facilitate communication between the students and the villagers (Fig. 9, 10). The reason for not involving the whole village in the ITK process was that the students decided that the numbers of participants would be too large to be productive. The students also decided not to invite only a few representatives into the process, since that could limit the ensuing discussion vis-a-vis the whole village.
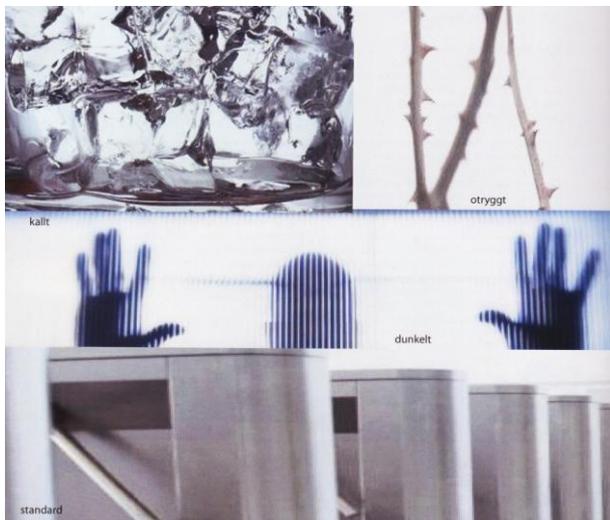

Fig. 9
Cold, Insecure, Dark, Standard, the State board of Runsten

Fig. 10
Diffrent, Warm, Welcome, Security, the Future board of Runsten

This example is included here as an example the process being applied to situation that cannot be fully inclusive but at the same time must be open to discussion between buyer and seller. The internal dimension of student cooperation was still there and the method served to clarify roles and facilitate communication within the project group. In relation to the whole village, the method clarified both the position of the buyers and sellers and as such led to a much more inclusive and successful result. The students also reported that the method helped them to further their understanding of what their future professional role as designers might entail. At the same time it grounded the end-result among the villagers which made them very content with the project's outcome.

The regional umbrella project, the *Year of Light*, itself within which these to projects fell received the Grand Prize from the government at the conclusion of the *Year of Design*. As such the final report filed by Kalmar County is included in the final document produced after the closing of the Year of Design.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper is meant to illustrate how it is possible through continuous practice and reflection to develop a practical method that aid work with the development of the way we approach the function of design in a number of different instances. Both focused (albeit in different ways) on the inclusion of people without a background in the field in order to make the final design product or in this cases a visual identity, a more relevant and powerful product or service. I developed this method based on an intuition I had and think that the way forward is to connect to other design professional working with similar questions. Important questions to discuss would include the possible ways of translating between visual and oral modes of expressions and how this relates to a wide array of design process, educational and professional. Simply put: how do we "speak" about design? And what are the possible ways in which design can operate as a management tool in order to foster greater participation by stakeholders in the design processes?

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