Co-Created Personas: Engaging Founders in Organisational Design

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Research aim

Our research aims to fully map the range and breadth of values of all real and potential stakeholders in an organisation through co-design to ensure that their organisational culture and business model accurately reflects and acknowledges their shared values.

Research context

- We worked with two emergent value-led micro-businesses in a longitudinal research project in 2013 and 2014.
- Drawing together ideas and communities of stakeholders with shared values.
- Moving towards sustainability in terms of the quadruple bottom line.
- Research focus was on organisation founders.

Research question

"Can the design technique of value-led personas enable engagement with the values of stakeholders".

Personas

- Personas are a concept that has been developed in the design of systems for human-computer interaction.
- They take the form of fictional individuals who represent the users of the system.
- Personas embody some notion of the values and beliefs held by users.
- We go one step further to create specifically value-led personas.
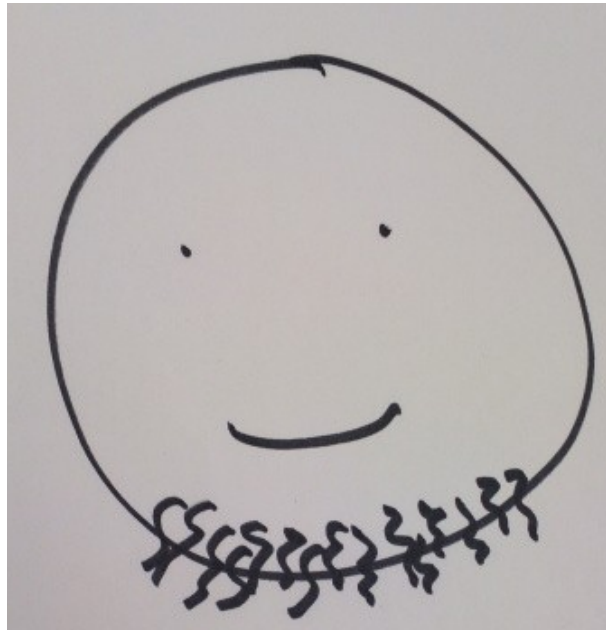
Value-led personas

- We took a Value Sensitive Design approach to developing value-led personas.
- We initially developed values from qualitative data on each organisation.
- Values were then developed with research participants as co-researchers.
- These values were represented by value-led personas in a series of workshops.
- Our research was in a four stage process.

Stage 1: Establishing core values

- Analysis of initial qualitative data identified several core values for each organisation using existing values frameworks.
- These values were then the basis for initial value-led personas created by the facilitator.
- The workshop first considered the core values of each organisation from the analysis, then explored their values further.
- The workshop then introduced simplified value-led personas – a cartoon and quotation.

Example value-led persona

"Breadboard" Bill

"I really understand how it works now"
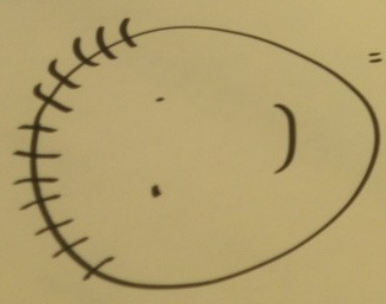(competence)

Example value-led persona

"Friendly" Freda

"I quickly realised this course was about the relationships you make" (relatedness)

Stage 2: Co-creating value-led personas

- Participants were invited to first consider if the value-led personas created by the facilitator represented their stakeholders.
- They were then invited to create additional personas to more closely reflect the 'reality' of the organisation's stakeholders.
- Co-created personas are a technique that is under-represented in the literature.

"OPEN" OSCAR

"BREADBOARD" BILL

"BUDGET" JANE

"MICHAEL" STEVE

"MALASSEO" JOHN

"RHEOSTAT" RICK

"I MADE IT MYSELF"

TEACHER

HOBBYIST
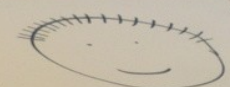
"Bloody Banks — could we do it differently,"

"Learning for learning's sake?"

"How do I get away from my dead-end job?"

"Can I do teaching practice with you,"

"You can run a course at our place."

Stage 3: Exploration of business models

- This stage introduced business models to be explored in the light of the co-created VLPs.
- In particular, we explored the open source guild model, developed during discussions with participants and from the literature.
- Participants reported deeper understanding of their existing business models and to conceptualise their working practice and organisational culture.

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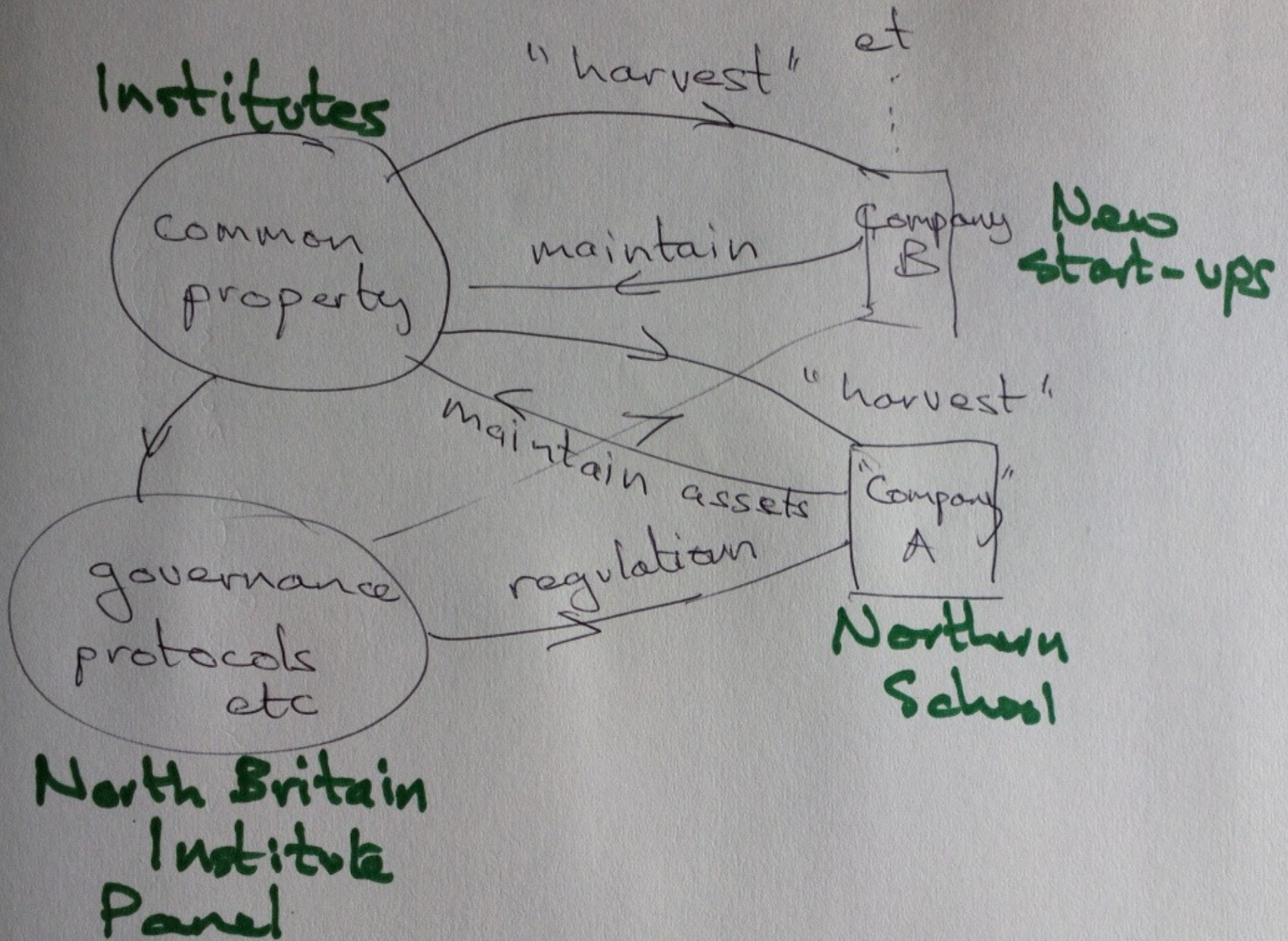
"Company" A

Northern School

North Britain Institute Panel

Stage 4: Deepening understanding of stakeholder values

- We held second workshops with each organisation 1 year after the first workshop.
- VLPs re-imagined in more detail (with an additional 150 words giving realistic detail).
- These VLPs incorporated the co-created personas from the first workshop.
- The technique was helpful in identifying stakeholder gaps and gaining a clearer picture of the breadth of stakeholder values.

"Open" Oscar

"Open" Oscar
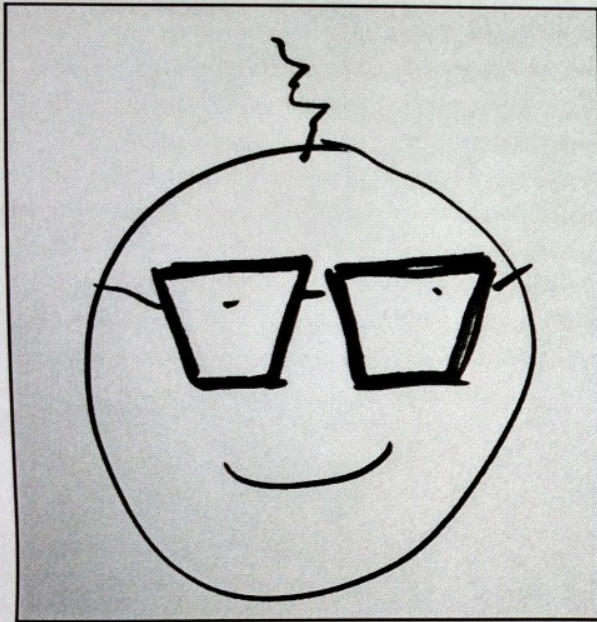
"It's like Linux for micro-controllers"

Oscar supports the values of open source, having used the Linux operating system and exclusively open source software since 1998. However, he feels frustrated that the hardware isn't as open as the software, particularly for the embedded devices such as thermostats that he wants to program. Having experimented with the Arduino, this is a step in the right direction, but the Shrimp is the real deal, as not only can it be built up from the basic components, but the micro-controller chip itself can be programmed from an existing one. Oscar finds this nicely recursive, like his 3D printer he built mainly from components made with the 3D printer at FabLab.

"Friendly" Freda

"Friendly" Freda
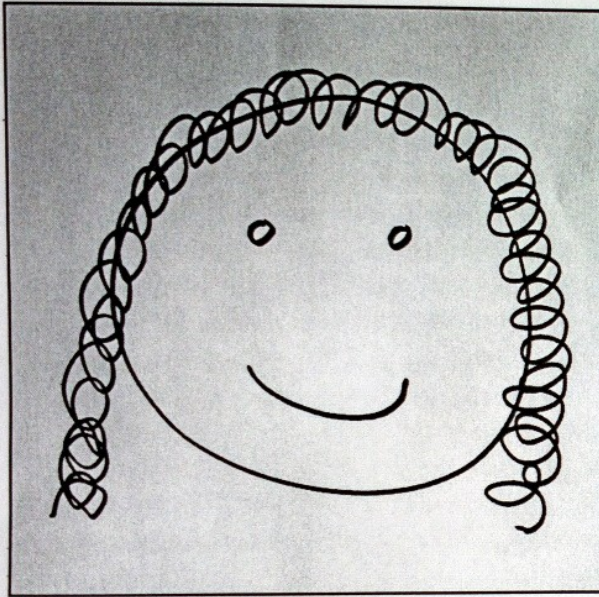
"I quickly realised this course was about the relationships you make"

Freda loves meeting new people, online as well as in person. When one of her 5,000 Twitter followers said "See @perma_north, #permaculture isn't just about growing stuff, it's about the #people and the #relationships", she was intrigued enough to take a look at the Northern School of Permaculture. She was inspired by how their "planetary repair work" started with the people and the relationships they had that were based on co-operation and sharing. After taking their introductory course in Chorley, she quickly met many like-minded people in the Lancashire area and felt privileged to be supervised by the "David Attenborough of Permaculture", Angus Soutar himself, for her project on Urban Permaculture. Freda likes to tell people that even a window-box can express the larger principles of permaculture, just as the small (but growing) group of permaculture designers can express the larger society they are aiming to create.

Project Findings

- The use of value-led personas helped participants identify groups of stakeholders and their value-base more readily than using 'standard' qualitative methods.
- The limited co-creation in this project was successful in identifying stakeholder groups and the values they hold by representing them through value-led personas.

Implications of VLP co-design methodology

- Further and more in depth use of VLPs and a participatory research methodology.
- The methodology could be widened to incorporate VLPs in working directly with stakeholders.
- The initial founder participants can operate as researchers, with or without assistance from us.
- This is extending the value chain, where researcher role moves more towards 'observer'.

Thank you

Any questions…?