

My interest in design thinking methodologies shapes a large portion of my identity as a designer. I am intrigued how a collective of methods and techniques can, when applied correctly, allow you to identify and tackle complex or even unknown problems from a user centered perspective. This semester I, for the first time, have been able to solely and intensely focus on executing this part of my identity and grow within this role. Doing this got me thinking about what it is about the design thinking methodology that fits me so well. I realized that the solution oriented approach of design thinking methods was a good match to my practical and realistic personality. In some way, it assured me that, when I would follow the methods, I would be able to come up with a good solution.

I'm someone who likes to be organised. I love to plan and bring structure to things that lack it in my opinion. Design thinking methodologies provide me with this structure when designing. However, I have also noticed this semester how it can be a pitfall. I was hesitant to deviate from the process that I had already established in my mind. Interviews should turn into insights, turn into opportunities, turn into ideas etc. And for a while this worked fine. At first sight there was nothing wrong with the results I was getting from my hard work. I was able to generate a lot of valuable data that helped me continue to the next phase. However, coming up to the ideation phase, I noticed that a bit of personality and identity was missing in the project. Instead of 'mindlessly' following the process, I was still an industrial designer that had competencies besides following a design process. I reflected on my expertise area profile and what interests and competencies I could implement and develop during the project. From that point on, I used the design thinking process still as a guide but it didn't prevail. In the setup of the ideation session I was able to put my creativity and aesthetics competencies to the test by stimulating creativity in the group through visual communication. When prototyping, I was able to explore augmented reality, new to both me and the company. Ways such as these allowed me to show and develop my skills and value as industrial designer more.

The second phase of the design process was quite a bit harder for me. First of all because of the reason mentioned above. I challenged myself more to get out of my comfort zone and try methods, technologies and a way of working that I was less familiar with. Also being quite perfectionistic, I knew that I wouldn't be able to deliver on my usual level because of this. During this phase, I had a lot of chats with colleagues who were experts regarding specific topics I was working on. For example setting up the experiment or prioritizing the found opportunities. These chats helped and taught me a lot. Not only how to tackle the challenges I was facing, but also that I was doing this project to learn, not to provide a perfect deliverable without any obstacles.

Only a few weeks into the project I encountered a challenge; balancing the requirements of my study program and the company needs and interest. It was also one of my goals to experience how to balance this. The first half of the project I got

very much pulled into the company's way of working, their organisation and what they were looking for in the project. Although this is not necessarily a bad thing, I noticed that the coach meetings with my mentor were what kept me grounded to the academic side of the project. Towards the second half of the project I started focusing more on my competencies, learning goals and requirements from the study, since I realized that if I would not do that, the company would have a very nice design but I would not pass the semester. Thinking about how to implement my technology competencies, literature research and knowledge from the two courses I was following parallel to the project allowed me to come up with more creative ideas and methods. Nearing the end of my project, I now notice that this shift did result in me letting go of the company's interest a little bit. Whereas in the beginning I regularly updated and checked in with the people responsible, this became less as time went on. As a result, the design I have now created still needs some small adjustments before it can be implemented. During my FMP this experience will be extremely relevant, as I will be working with two clients instead of one.

While this was not a regular internship (meeloopstage), and I understand why it shouldn't be in the masters programme, I did occasionally help with client work. In my experience, working on real-life cases is one of the best ways to learn a certain way of working. Coming across different kinds of projects teaches you to think about why and when to use certain methods, techniques or knowledge. I experienced this firsthand when I was able to use the insights I gained from working on a co-creation session for a client directly within my own project. Working on the client projects also confirmed for me that this industry - (service) design consultancy - is something that fits really well with my vision, identity and makes me happy. I believe that discovering this is an equally important learning and outcome as developing a new skill.