DESIGN IS IN THE PROCESS

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Designers don't possess a magic wand that creates a final outcome, they use a variety of methods that lead them to the right (or sometimes wrong) solution. With the increasing number of tools available, everyone can be a designer making the design process a valuable asset to professionals.

In my role as a design educator I introduce students to an array of methods, models, and techniques as a way for them to practice navigating what is known as the "design process". Approaching the process as a series of artifacts adds value to something that could be overlooked or disregarded. In some cases, artifacts created as part of a process continue to evolve and change into another form or message.

Some methods may stick with a student once they transition into practice, others may not. Students may continue to use these methods but perhaps at a rapid speed where it might not produce evidence but create a spark that they act on in another way.

Critical thinking before and during a project are always important. Sketching, concepting and organizing are always vital. Maybe "methods" come and go, but the way you think as a designer is important and grows with your experience.
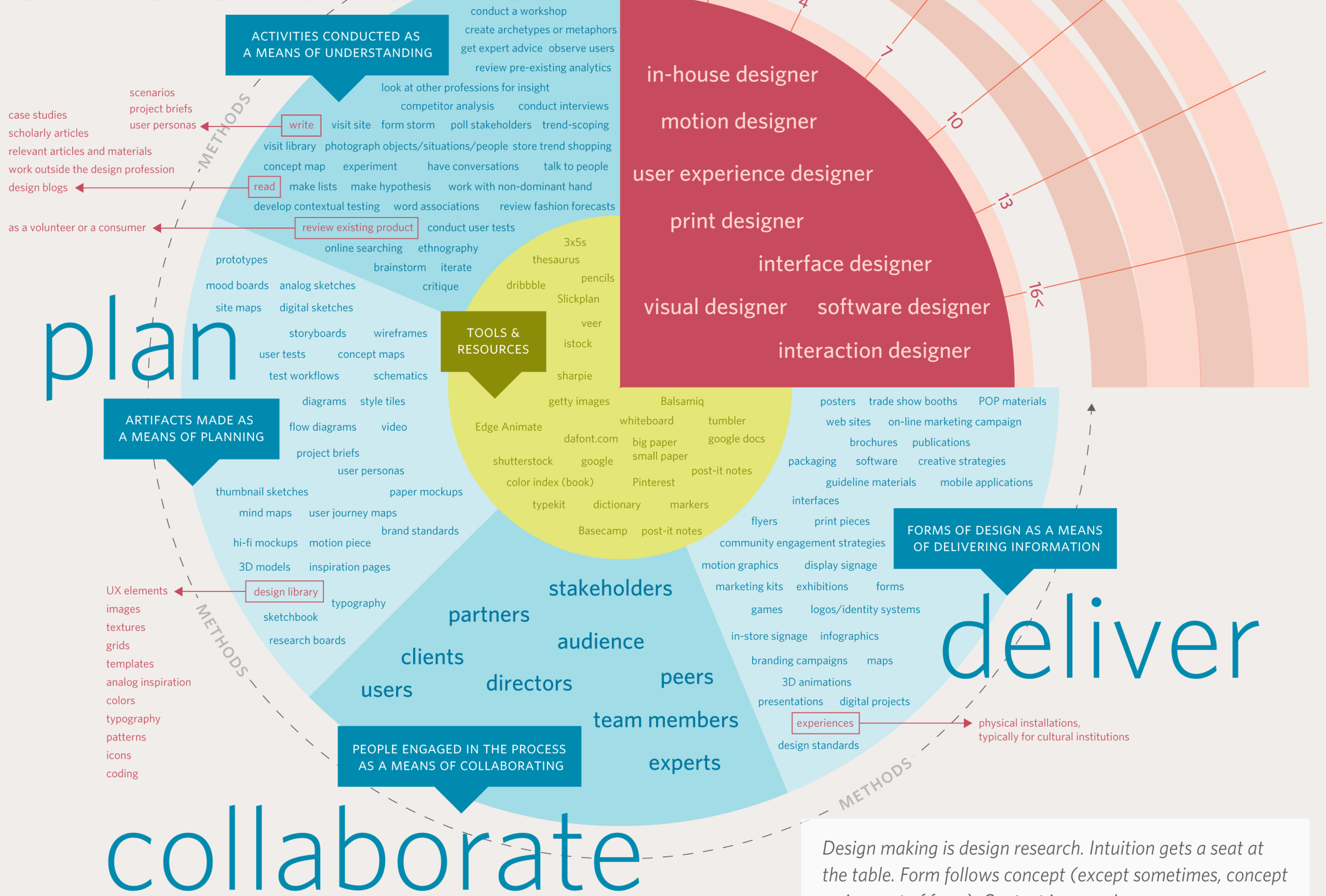
Process can also become a shackle if it creates tunnel vision.

I have let go of the idea of "finished." The process IS the product now.

EFFICIENCY
FLEXIBILITY
SELF REFLECTION
INTUITION

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
<1   4   7   10   13   16<

understand

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING

conduct a workshop
create archetypes or metaphors
get expert advice   observe users
review pre-existing analytics
look at other professions for insight
competitor analysis   conduct interviews
write   visit site   form storm   poll stakeholders   trend-scoping
visit library   photograph objects/situations/people   store trend shopping
concept map   experiment   have conversations   talk to people
read   make lists   make hypothesis   work with non-dominant hand
develop contextual testing   word associations   review fashion forecasts
review existing product   conduct user tests
online searching   ethnography

scenarios
project briefs
user personas

case studies
scholarly articles
relevant articles and materials
work outside the design profession
design blogs

as a volunteer or a consumer

METHODS

in-house designer
motion designer
user experience designer
print designer
interface designer
visual designer   software designer
interaction designer

plan

ARTIFACTS MADE AS A MEANS OF PLANNING

prototypes
mood boards   analog sketches
site maps   digital sketches
storyboards   wireframes
user tests   concept maps
test workflows   schematics
diagrams   style tiles
flow diagrams   video
project briefs
user personas
thumbnail sketches   paper mockups
mind maps   user journey maps
hi-fi mockups   motion piece
3D models   inspiration pages
design library   typography
sketchbook
research boards

UX elements
images
textures
grids
templates
analog inspiration
colors
typography
patterns
icons
coding

METHODS

TOOLS & RESOURCES

3x5s
thesaurus
pencils
dribbble
Slickplan
veer
istock
sharpie
getty images
Balsamiq
whiteboard   tumbler
Edge Animate   dafont.com   big paper   google docs
shutterstock   small paper
google   post-it notes
color index (book)   Pinterest
typekit   dictionary   markers
Basecamp   post-it notes

deliver

FORMS OF DESIGN AS A MEANS OF DELIVERING INFORMATION

posters   trade show booths   POP materials
web sites   on-line marketing campaign
brochures   publications
packaging   software   creative strategies
guideline materials   mobile applications
interfaces
flyers   print pieces
community engagement strategies
motion graphics   display signage
marketing kits   exhibitions   forms
games   logos/identity systems
in-store signage   infographics
branding campaigns   maps
3D animations
presentations   digital projects
experiences
design standards

physical installations, typically for cultural institutions

METHODS

collaborate

PEOPLE ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS AS A MEANS OF COLLABORATING

stakeholders
partners
audience
clients
directors
peers
users
team members
experts

I don't think its possible to work solo as that implies working in isolation. Simply by using Google images for inspiration you are being influenced by others thoughts and ideas.

I find that I'm thinking about the projects more when I'm not working on them.

Design making is design research. Intuition gets a seat at the table. Form follows concept (except sometimes, concept arrives out of form). Context is queen!

POSTER DESIGN PROCESS

Through the design of this poster, I diagrammed the variety of methods and tools used in the design process. I surveyed designers of their preferred processes and determined the ways in which these methods might evolve with experience.

42 professional designers participated in the online anonymous survey via survey monkey. The survey was emailed to my contacts and posted to twitter and facebook. The questions are shared here.

Please take a post-it note and contribute your methods to the poster.

STEP ONE:
had a conversation

STEP TWO:
write & submit poster abstract

STEP THREE:
write survey

STEP FOUR:
become a certified researcher at MSU
in order to conduct "human research"

STEP FIVE:
set-up survey online

STEP SIX:
share survey with contacts

STEP SEVEN:
read survey responses

STEP EIGHT:
make lists

STEP NINE:
organize content

STEP TEN:
make several analog sketches

STEP ELEVEN:
text marty for support

STEP TWELVE:
build structure in Illustrator

STEP THIRTEEN:
chat with marty for editing

STEP FOURTEEN:
design

STEP FIFTEEN:
print

STEP SIXTEEN:
engage peers