summer '15 Fellowship

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The Fellowship

The Design Impact Group (DIG) is the only design practice embedded within a strategic consultancy purely focused on social impact. And I was their summer intern! It was an incredible learning experience, mostly as a result of collaborating with one of the most diverse teams of some of the most driven and humbling-ly bright people I’ve had the opportunity to work with (MDP excluded of course).

Over 14 weeks I assisted on a range of projects - from visual design support, to conceptual modeling and frameworks, workshops, and a trip to Nairobi. While my role varied greatly from project to project, when projects direction felt uncertain or workload got intense, the studio culture of collaboration and support was one of the most gratifying parts of the whole experience.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking aspect of my fellowship was the exposure to the world of designing for development. The applications of HCD to systems-level issues, and the integration of design studio with strategic consulting, are two pretty fascinating experiments to be a part of. I’m so excited to see how DIG evolves and grows; if it’s first year of work is any indication, it seems like this model stands to provide a lot of value for a lot of people.

In sum, it was an incredible summer in which I learned a lot about myself as a designer, and how design - as pervasive as it is today - can still be applied to solve hairy problems in completely new ways.
Workshops
Facilitating workshops - in a range of scopes and flavors - is a core competency for DIG. During my fellowship, I co-facilitated one HCD session with over 100 participants!

CX Toolkit
The longest-term project I helped on was the Customer Experience (CX) Toolkit, which extends through September. I had the chance to help with concept and research phases.

Information Design
I had the opportunity to put my engineering training to use and create several system maps (customer journey, stakeholder and ecosystem maps) that covered a variety of topics.

DIG Studio
By mid-summer, the studio celebrated its first Anniversary! I helped design a microsite commemorating its success, and later captured and synthesize learnings from the first team retreat.
Workshops

i. planning + process

ii. participants

pre-GES Summit, Nairobi
In July, I had the opportunity to go to Nairobi! DIG senior designer, Tosh Juma, and I co-facilitated a workshop on the topic “Entrepreneurial Solutions to Post-Harvest Loss” at the pre-Global Entrepreneurship Summit. Our lead-up time was very short, and much of the context for our activities- including the nature of participants - was not set until very late, which made planning the agenda and tone for the workshop a special challenge.

Dalberg and the project partners provided a solid framing for the topical content (the agricultural value chain for maize and mangos), so we developed personas of stakeholders from different points in the value chain as a starting point to ground the workshop. We then crafted a series of design activities and prompts for participants, including stakeholder mapping and concept sketching.
DIG senior designer, Tosh Juma, making a plug for our workshop (which had to compete for time and space with the event’s sponsored programming) at the main pre-Summit presentation!
The workshop was open call for any participants who attended the pre-Summit. Despite limited ability to advertise our programming within the larger pre-summit agenda - (which included two parallel break-out sessions) - we had over 100 participants! Participants included students from several local schools and universities, farmers, businesspeople, and many others.

Participants came from a variety of backgrounds and represented organizations such as: Geological Society Of Kenya, University Of Nairobi, Vacid Africa, Alliance Schools, Villgro Kenya, Ascetic Coffee Roasters, Dedan Kimathi University Of Technology, Growth Partners, Gs1, Studio 22 Agencies, Frog, Patnet Steel Makers & Maflora Agencis
At the conclusion of the breakout session, participant groups had come up with 60+ ideas and 10+ final interventions that addressed issues related with post-harvest loss. Final concepts fell into four theme areas:

1) Information Access
2) Producer Cooperatives & Community Groups
3) Transportation Interventions
4) Leadership & Policy Initiatives

A synthesis of these ideas and concepts was the final deliverable to the client.
Information Design

i. planning + research

ii. layout + design

Apparel Stakeholder Mapping

Apparel System Mapping
One of the first projects I helped with at DIG was doing some light research and design to facilitate a coalition of stakeholders in the apparel and footwear production ecosystem in Vietnam, with the goal of moving the industry towards more sustainable practices.

At the beginning of the project, I helped research and categorize stakeholders within the value chain. From that typology, we come up with an initial stakeholder map - to help visualizes the approximate relationship these stakeholders have to each other within the ecosystem.

The initial stakeholder map framework I developed was a starting point for the first collaborative workshop of the project coalition. It was used as a rough framework to facilitate an interactive discussion of stakeholders and their roles and relationships in the apparel and footwear production ecosystem.
Two rounds of workshops with the clients resulted in a series of maps that captured different aspects of the overall footwear and apparel ecosystem. I helped synthesis four of these maps into a master version.
CX Toolkit

i. conceptual framework
ii. content
iii. layout design + testing
The longest-term project I supported throughout the summer was called the Customer Experience Toolkit. Designing the toolkit turned out to be a complex assignment.
As we established the conceptual framework for the kit, we wrestled with some very challenging questions, like who the user would be (a middle-manager type?), what the role of the toolkit actually is (a guide to execute a small-scale project? A strategic-level conversation starter?), and what unique voice we, as designers, could provide (Human-Centered Design as a lens for solving business problems?).
Research required us to develop a large catalog of existing tools and case studies, from CGAP, Nesta, Ideo.org, and many other places. In parallel, we conducted a series of interviews with both FSP administrators, and experts in analogous industries, to gain additional insights into the materials we were working with.

Over the course of the summer, we also led workshops with our clients - in NYC and DC! The client conducts a lot of research related to financial services for development, so it was important for us to work closely with and learn from their existing body of work.
Currently, the toolkit team (led by a badass visual designer) is prototyping layout and design. The final product will be a combination of digital and physical formats. Beta testing for the physical version of the toolkit will begin with partner FSPs in September!
DIG Studio

i. 1st anniversary microsite
ii. team summit report
By mid-summer, DIG was celebrating its First Anniversary! I helped design a microsite to celebrate. The site was hosted on Squarespace and so, with some custom CSS, it was fairly simple to build out our grand vision. In addition I found a handy web tool called Thingly - that supports layered media embedding - and became a convenient solution for custom project “mapping.” The majority of the project workload was actually content collection - tracking down photos, and creating an index of past projects.
As a continuation of 1st Year Anniversary activities, the DIG team held its first annual Team Summit in NYC, the last week in August. The Summit took place over two days, and was largely led by the studio principles, Robert and Ravi. DIG studio members from London and Nairobi flew in to join in the workshopping activities.

Post-Summit, I helped to catalog and synthesize dozens of insights and ideas, which ultimately manifest as a fun infographic.
One final output of the team summit in NYC was a flurry of self-initiated internal projects, project board seen here. The projects respond to a variety of wants/needs that were revealed during the retreat activities, and will act as a good gauge for internal growth for next year!
Thank you!

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