

Workshop 2 - The Rapids

Workshop 2, The Rapids. Held in Saint John on the Bay of Fundy, where the Saint John river enters the ocean, the Rapids workshop references the reversing falls that churn and swirl as the world's highest tides go in and out of the estuary. The ideas and actions are set to mix and influence each other as the fresh and salt waters do. There was much to do and little time to do it in. Now that the prototyping teams were formed and out in the world interviewing their potential users, the NouLAB team took on the task of establishing in them a detailed understanding of the unique systems of Economic Immigration.

The New Brunswick Multicultural Council's annual conference, 'Growing Together,' was held the day before the lab and many of the participants attended, learning more details on the demographic challenges facing New Brunswick. In addition, two social innovation thought leaders, Eric Young and Sarah Schulman presented, giving context to and emphasising the importance of the work that NouLAB is doing in the province. NouLAB was mentioned a few times throughout the conference and some participants presented on a panel about the newcomer experience in New Brunswick.

The lab kicked off on the afternoon of day two of the conference. The first goal of the NouLAB team was to remind participants where they were in the process. Coming out of the Headwaters they were now into the the Rapids, where much important work had to be done in a short period of time. For the NouLAB team, setting expectations was important at this stage, to let participants know where they would be at the end of the workshop. Some of the objectives set for this workshop were to share stories of successes so far, establish an understanding of the end user, further develop the problem statements, and receive feedback from NouLAB coaches. And all this while being provided with solid working time in their teams!

As a check-in, the diverge, emerge, converge process was mapped out on the floor with tape and everyone was asked to stand where they felt they were at that point in the process. A share back revealed the reasons and degrees of agreement amongst participants for why they chose to stand where they did. This process was revealing, not only to the participants but to us as the coaching team. Getting people thinking in terms of whether they were zeroing in on 'solutions' or still diverging from the issue allowed us to bring it up and have discussions around it. At this point in the lab process, participants should still have been questioning and open to new ideas (and ideally this should carry on throughout the entire process).

After this the teams checked-in on how they were doing, and what they needed to show up well to this workshop. Building these practices into the flow, with a talking piece and some simple rules for engagement, is something the lab is hoping people will incorporate into their subsequent work going forward in the lab. Teams then checked in on how the interviews were going. What was a highlight? An insight? Was their anything surprising?

As an important step in user-centred design, the next activity was to develop a deep understanding of the actual end user that the prototype will be designed around. To accomplish this, a template was provided that described the experiences, the needs, the emotions, the interactions, the frustrations and ambitions that a person would go through at various touch-points in the system.

Continuing through the rapids on the next day, there was much to accomplish. After framing the day and providing an idea of where we would arrive to by the end of the jam-packed day, Rose Mosse moved right into guiding teams through building a 3D model of the Economic Immigration system as it currently exists for each team. Moving around the tables, team members all made different additions to the models built out of pipe cleaners, wooden blocks and play dough. Playtime! The result was a detailed description of the systems that each team was working within. One of the most important aspects of this activity was identifying the places in the system where interventions could be made. For example, the team working on increasing diversity within the employees of the Government of New Brunswick identified the various barriers diverse people faced along the pathways leading to higher-level positions in government. These various barriers can be seen as places where their prototype could intervene in order to influence or modify existing practices or structures.

Taking stock of where the 3D mapping process got the teams, the 'How might we statements' were reviewed and iterated upon. Teams were asked to answer questions such as: Is the user identified clearly? Is the system described appropriately?

Quickly jumping into the next section after a break, Amanda Hachey of NouLAB and Greg Woolner of CoLab ran the participants through a rapid-fire ideation exercise. To get the creative juices flowing, the question presented first was: 'How would I solve my team's challenge with a cruise ship?' From there a popcorn share back was presented by participants. Responses ranged from: "it can't be done!" to: "we could do an education campaign onboard, showing off the highlights of living in New Brunswick". The next portion of the ideating was a 'Crazy 8's' exercise. Based on the user experience and what teams had explored since the last workshop, participants brainstormed eight possible solutions to the challenge they were working on. Generating eight solutions is important to push past initial ideas and really get creative. Flowing from this, each participant prepared lightning demos of their potential ideas and presented them back to their team. From this, teams collaborated on a team lightning demo based on the best elements from all team members' ideas. After a working lunch, where teams improved upon and detailed their demo, teams presented their first prototype back to the entire group. Popcorn style feedback was offered in the form of questions to (and without response from) the presenting team.

Because of the heavy workload in this lab workshop, the rest of the afternoon was kept light. Teams were provided with templates to build an action plan around their lightning demo prototype. Coaches floated around the tables to answer any questions and guide teams on their journeys to a better understanding of the prototyping process. This time was essential as

there generally are many old habits to break when trying things without knowing precisely what the outcome will be. At this point in time, emphasis for the teams was on getting feedback. The goal for the fieldwork before next lab workshop would be to use the more precise description of the end user in order to have those folks comment on the ideas and prototypes developed during the lab workshop.

Throughout this workshop, many people expressed feelings of urgency - of wanting to get to solutions. Amanda brought some perspective with the statement: 'we've been looking at the problem from almost two months now and the solution for the past 45 minutes. So it's totally understandable that the answers seem vague and under-defined at this point in the process'.

Coming out of the Rapids workshop, the NouLAB team could feel we had put the teams through a fairly intense process. Instead of doing a check-out at the end of the day, teams were left to finish up any work they were engaged in and leave the room on their own schedule. The facilitation team convened on the balcony outside and did a check-out, the general feeling was that it was a fruitful, though somewhat rushed day and a half. Having a workshop paired with a conference was draining on both the NouLAB team and those lab participants who also attended it. On one hand, there was great insight and fresh information to incorporate, but on the other, lab workshops tend to be consuming as is, and require more time than the day and a quarter the conference allowed for. For NouLAB, it was a big learning in the organisation and design of the process.