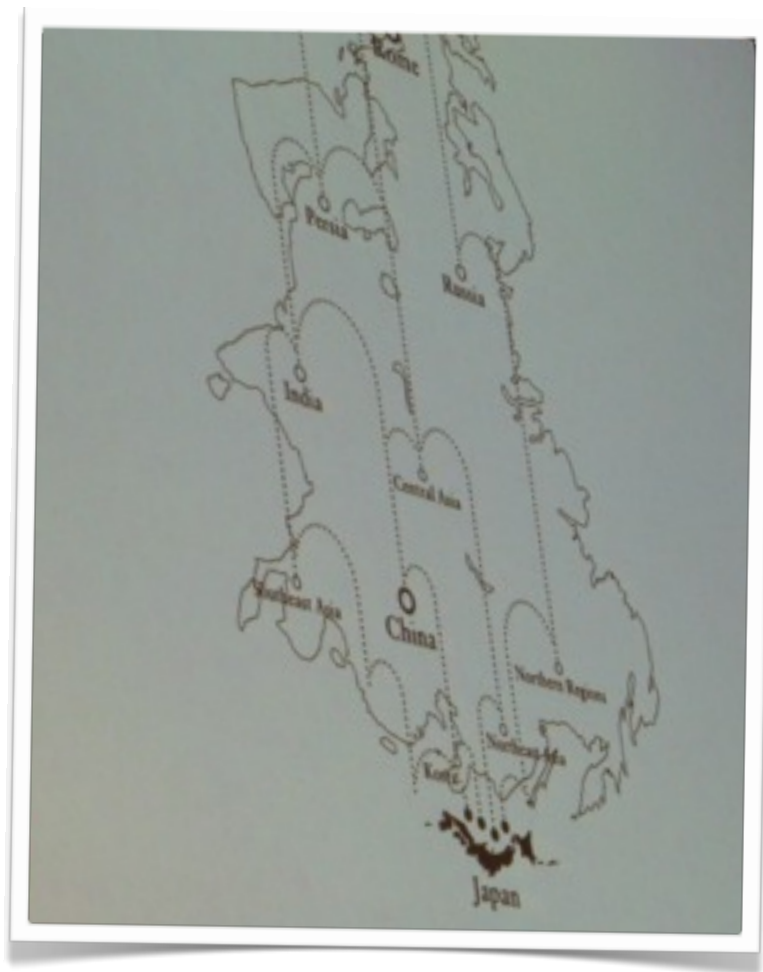


EPIC 2010

Notes of the best thoughts



(visualisation by Kenya Hara of how thoughts percolated into Japan from across Europe and Asia over centuries)

#1: hyper-skilling



This paper is built on the case-study of the reinvention of Chinese sports brand Li Ning by an American innovation design company Ziba.

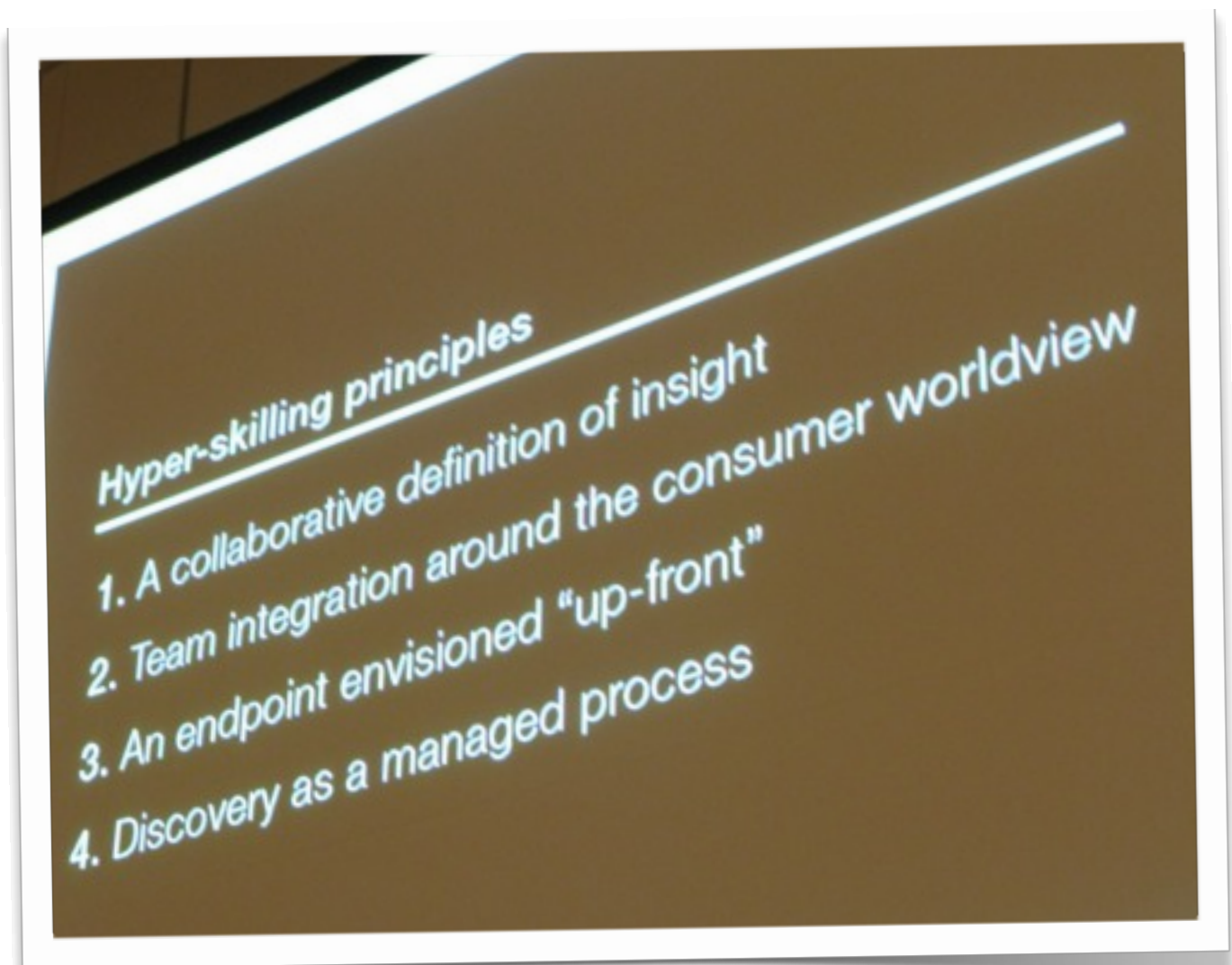
Collaboration between disciplines helps to move away from deskilling in ethnographic practice (and other deep disciplines for that matter) towards 'hyper-skilling'.

It has been noted that time, money and actionable result focused industry projects lead to de-skilling in ethnographic work.

Collaboration between deep disciplines, here business strategy, product design, communication design, cultural mediation, consumer worldview investigation (or ethnography but the authors avoid the term to be able to call the team as a whole an 'ethnographic task force') and trends,

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allows all team members to use their deep knowledge while conducting coordinated and organised research and insight creation.



Hyper-skilling builds on 4 principles

To make these principles work, the team members have particular roles and field visits are organised in a particular way. People in the teams have one or maximum two of the six roles defined above. They typically go out in groups of three, often the consumer worldview investigator, a cultural mediator and a business strategist or a designer. To me this sounds still very similar to the well known ethnographer, local assistant and stakeholder teams that are common. But the way they collaborate and the roles they have are more new.

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An end-point envisioned "up-front"

Upfront with the team as a whole a working hypothesis is agreed upon (unusual for ethnography that is inductive rather than deductive, but typical for business). The hypothesis gets adjusted enormously during the work, bringing the openness and surprise typical for ethnography back into the research.

Team integration around the consumer worldview

A blog for extensive notes by all and in-field team interviews to document observations, emerging understanding and first ideas are two crucial tools used. The consumer world view investigator has the responsibility to tie this all together from the perspective of the participants in the study.

The blog acts as the teams communal memory. It is deliberately raw, like a scrapbook, unlike a report. Together with the team interviews this was how the team documented first observations and ideas together. This helped the worldview investigator to integrate the team's observations into insights from the human perspective. The business strategist is responsible for integration from a business perspective.

The interviews of consumer worldview investigators with designers and strategists in the field serve to explore early integrative insight creation. They are short, terse formulations of first thoughts, recorded on video to be analysed later by the consumer worldview investigator. To me this sounds like a very useful new format for what we call empathic conversations in the team, informed and inspired by the everyday lives of the participants. We will definitely try these in-field interviews ourselves too.

A collaborative definition of insight

The insights are strictly defined in the formula Insight = Actionable + Integrative. The business must be able to act on it (from a business strategy and design perspective) and the six different lenses or disciplines must be integrated in the insight. The business strategist is responsible for moderating the formulation of these insights on the wiki, and for resolving disagreement between different disciplines that

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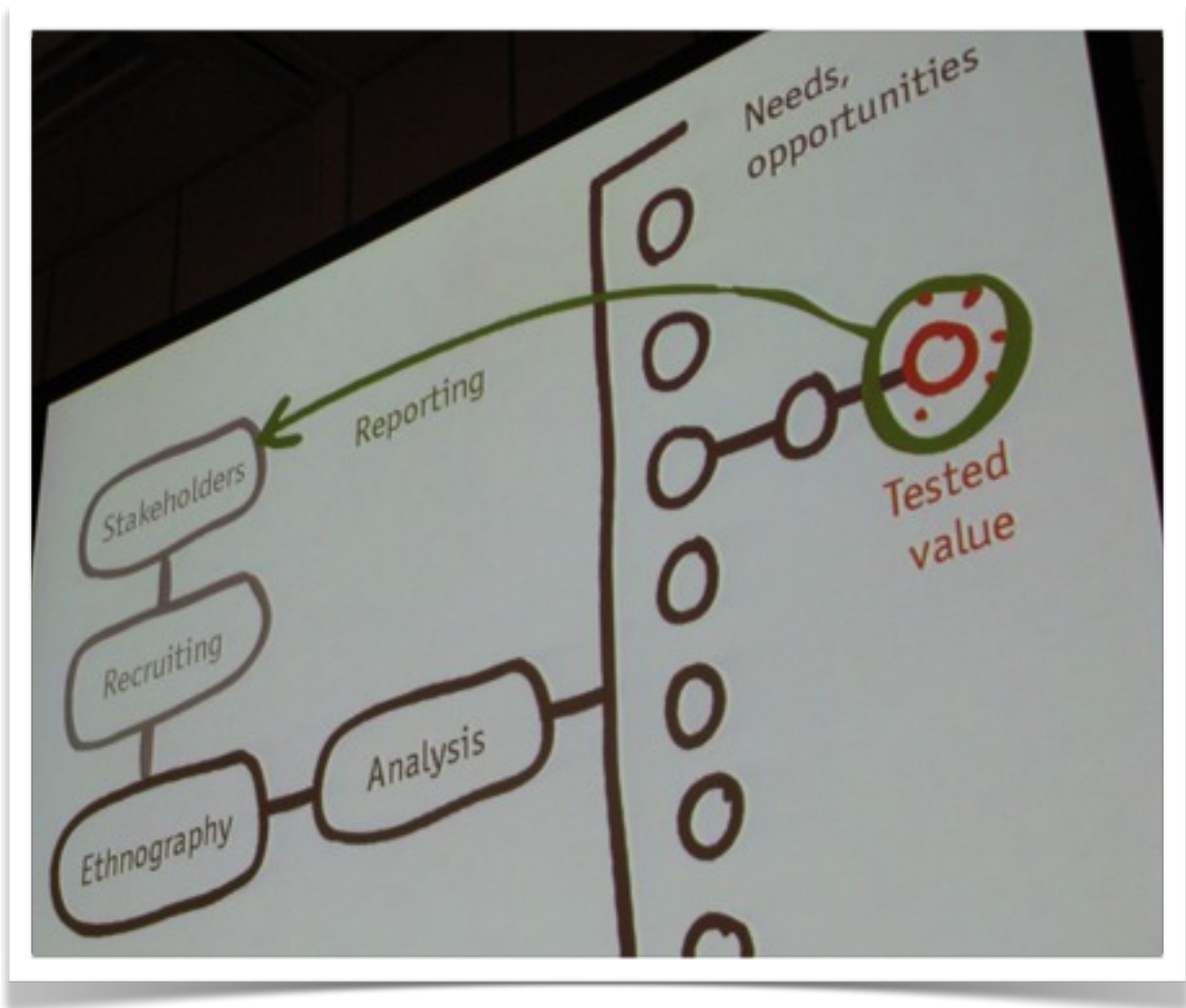
might arise, before moving on with the integration. Thus the wiki can act as the collective understanding of the team.

Discovery as a managed process

The hyper-skilling argument that this paper builds is presented as a move away from academic practices that are mostly personal and not as goal driven as businesses are. Hyper-skilling requires the ethnographer to add skills to her or his set, in particular multidisciplinary collaboration skills and solution oriented skills that designers and strategists have. The collaboration is a managed process with specific roles and tools. This is all very valuable and already present in STBY's approach. When we talk about T-shaped people in our teams, this also stresses collaboration across disciplines while keeping the deep knowledge of disciplines. 'Hyperskilling' as an idea offers opportunities to further explore and deepen that approach. This is very welcome as the paradox of stronger integration of disciplines while demanding more depth from the disciplines involved is particularly prominent in service innovation today.

#2: internal ethnography

Ethnographers from Ricoh expressed the recent need they felt to change the presentation-based transfer of ethnographic knowledge to stakeholders in their company. The dimly lit rooms where their audiences passively absorbed the ethnographic insights were not satisfying anymore because the ethnographers felt left in the dark about the influence of their work on the company. Hence they moved from a presentation-based approach to knowledge transfer to a collaboration-based approach. This indeed is a very important step to take we know at STBY. We always deliver results in workshops, never in presentations or reports. The value of the insights we create and the opportunities we formulate is so much larger when engineers, designers, marketers and business strategists share ownership of ..STBY..



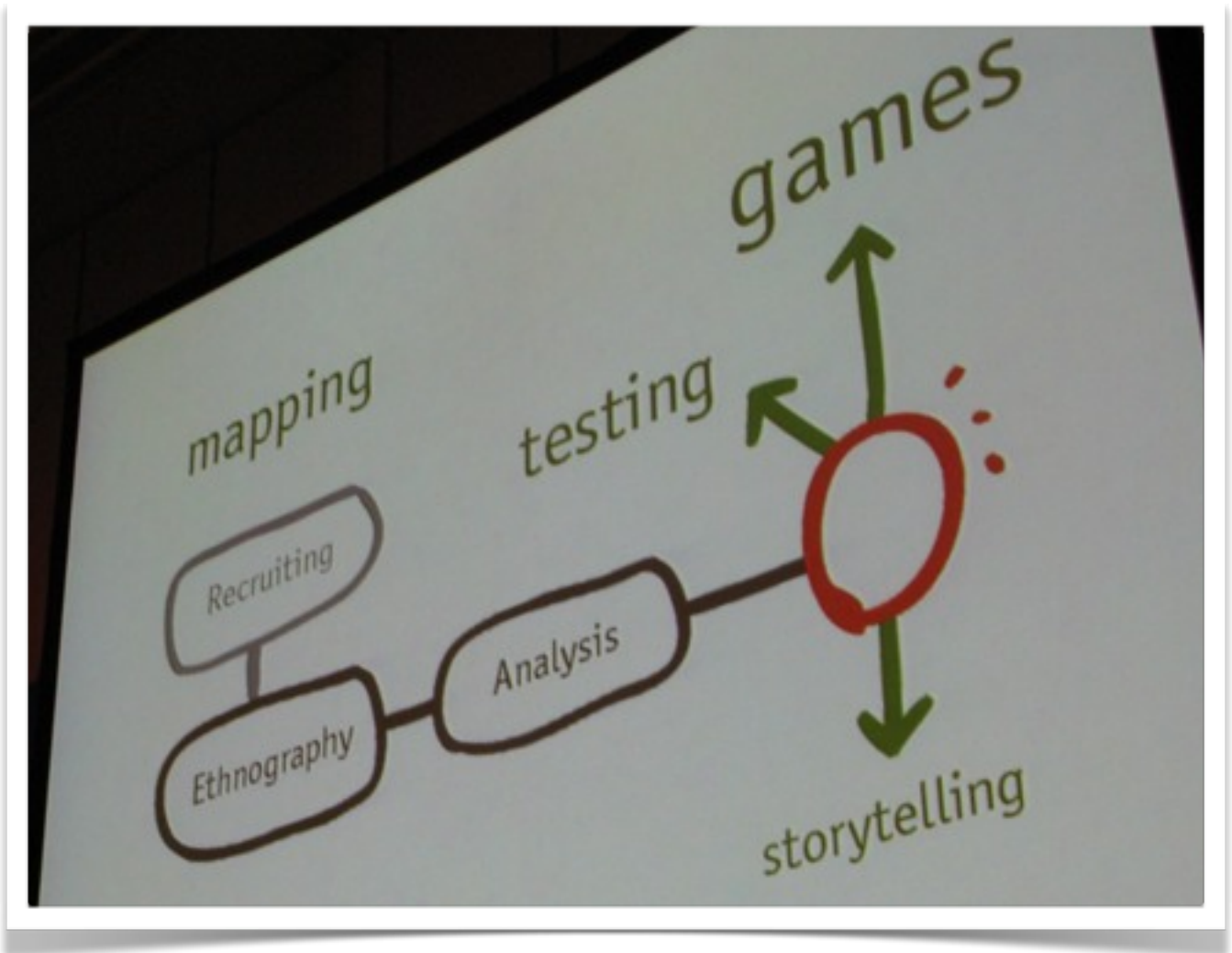
insights and opportunities because they have developed them with us in workshops.

Their traditional process ethnographers of Ricoh got unsatisfied with...

A crucial question then becomes which stakeholders to invite to those collaborations and how to collaborate? To answer that one, the Ricoh ethnographers set out on some internal ethnographic explorations. They used their skills to understand how people create and are created by cultures to better understand Ricoh's corporate innovation culture, the people driving that culture and how they relate to each other including formal and informal power relations.

As part of this effort they also opened up their own practice to their non-ethnographer colleagues, deliberately steering away from suggestions of ethnography as an exotic and objective practice. By talking about their own practice they were able to help change their

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corporate innovation culture to a much more collaborative one where knowledge is more openly shared.

The new process the ethnographers of Ricoh developed, also for internal ethnography, based on collaboration with colleagues from different disciplines.

This transformed the ethnographers' perception of their role in the company. Where they previously thought they should 'only' point out business opportunities for Ricoh, they now saw themselves more in the role of helping their organisation to think differently about collaboration with colleagues and customers, and even about people in general they claim.

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To my view this pushes ethnographers towards having a role in organisational change management. At STBY we have on occasions run into the conclusion, with and without our client, that organisational change is needed, but for a different reason. When we explore business opportunities in workshops with our clients, we sometimes see that the opportunity is great but the organisation is not (yet) capable of delivering the service we envisioned. Organisational change is then needed to take that opportunity.

In these workshops we mostly need to go by what our clients bring to the fore about their capabilities. It has however occurred to us and some of our clients that doing internal ethnography in their organisation could be really beneficial to understanding the capabilities, possibly partly hidden, they have for delivering new services. And to formulate, perhaps even initiate, the organisational changes that would be needed to actually deliver these new services.