

Background and problem area

Researchers at the Division of interaction design department at Chalmers University of Technology had stumbled upon problems using certain words and nouns describing users. In projects developing products, systems or services designers and others use words to define or describe people. The words used seemed to represent different things for different stakeholders. Even the commonly used word *user* led to confusion and misunderstandings. Some perceived the users as problems, some as ignorant and some as victims. The users defined themselves not as users, but as people - parents, adults or children. They also often deepen the picture by stating that they are stressed, tired, interested or motivated. The word *user* is demonstrably far too shallow to describe a target group. And what is a *target group*? Even narrower descriptive words such as *blind* or *retired* has the same lack of depth. Some of the nouns used are even stigmatizing such as *normal* or *disabled* and should be avoided. Discussing the words gave a very rewarding exchange of experiences and created a number of new and exciting questions in the project group. This was the starting point for the cooperation between Chalmers, University of Gothenburg and HDK that resulted in a very appreciated workshop at the conference Include 2015 at Royal College of Art in London.

The team and the workshop

The researchers at Chalmers contacted me on an early stage to share their thoughts on these nouns. I had very similar experiences from my work as an industrial designer. A team was then formed with people representing various areas such as applied IT and Human factors with the aim to spread the idea of questioning commonly used words that describe target groups. The Inclusive design movement uses these words in order to show how important it is to include everyone in the design solutions created. The team therefore aimed to create a discussion in this movement by holding a workshop at the seventh Include conference in London.

The workshop was based around discussions on certain nouns that were aimed to provoke the participants to create new and better words and descriptions. In order to make the workshop more active and interactive, a clothesline was set up in the room. The group of participants were divided into teams that discussed a number of nouns, expressions and words. After every discussion they posted, or hung up, the new ideas, questions and statements that came up. The publicised words could be seen by all teams, which created a very dynamic movement and interaction. People protested and commented the posted words. Some took them down and re-wrote them, others used the posted words to fuel their own discussion. In the end the clothesline served as a presentation surface that we all gathered around.



The value of the workshop, was nicely summarised by one of the participant, who was a designer, saying that: By reflecting on our own starting point for design, we can change it - and change the solutions we come up with. The participants were designers, researchers, lecturers, journalists, architects and students that came from all over the world, such as Argentina, Mexico, Japan, UK, Italy and the US.