Chapter 7.3

Commodity, Firmness, and Delight:
Four Modes of Instructional Design Practice

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This chapter is interactive, with surveys and reflective examinations of the reader's own work in instructional design. It examines instructional design using four professional models: manufacturer, engineer, architect and artist to help develop a broader understanding of the process of design. The values of the instructional design are also challenged, with the chapter examining the balance between utility and aesthetics, function and form. It concludes with a call for the instructional designer to work more as an artist, and offers tactics to encourage that change.

INTRODUCTION

How do *you* solve an instructional design problem? Do you attempt to craft a solution based on the unique demands of each problem and the application of well researched instructional strategies? Or do you build upon an existing model, one that has worked many times before, selecting from solutions developed for a range of previous projects?

Your work is directly connected to your conceptualization of your role within the field of instructional design. And that conception includes assumptions and biases about processes, theories, and products. In the course of this chapter we

will ask you to re-conceptualize your professional practice as an instructional designer and to recognize the roles of instructional manufacturer, instructional engineer, instructional architect, and instructional artist. We will describe how the working ethos of each shapes their practice.

What then, would happen if you were an *instructional artist?* As an instructional artist, you might be encouraged to create fundamentally different designs and work in a completely different manner. You might begin from an idea, engaging and desirable, but unconnected with learning, only later to apply it to instruction. It might work; it might not; but the application would be entirely different. We can see that the perspective through which we view ourselves biases how we understand and address problems.

Your Balance in Design

The following survey is intended to stimulate personal reflection and discussion of the ideas included in this chapter. Participating in the survey will help you to engage with the article, to stimulate understanding of the concepts presented, and to reflect on your personal practice as an instructional designer. The survey was built from the characteristics which will be explored in this chapter, and will focus on the Vitruvian values of *commodity*, *firmness* and *delight*. We will pose these questions twice in the course of this writing, the second time at the conclusion of the chapter.

To complete each question, select the point on the Likert scale most aligned with your *current* practice. Note that there is no middle point and there are no right or wrong answers. Questions are intended to create difficult choices, encouraging

personal reflection. After completing the survey, score each response according to the directions that follow.

Scoring of Each Item in the Survey

Each question is given two scores which are entered in the boxes to the left and right of the Likert scale. To determine the score for the left box, count the number of blank spaces from the right margin to your entry (each margin is set at 0). For the right box, count the number of blank spaces from the left margin to your entry. In the illustration below (see Figure 1) the sample entry is three steps from the right margin, scoring 3 points for pedagogy. Likewise, the check is two steps from the left margin, scoring 2 points for Innovation. Together, the total points awarded for each question must sum to 5. There are 21 questions, with 105 points in total.

Calculating Your Score

After scoring each item, use the table below to assign points to the three categories (i.e., commodity, firmness, and delight). Each question will produce two scores. The short answers for each question are included in the table to help with proper scoring. For example, in the scoring example above, "pedagogically sound" will be in one box, and "Innovative" in another; the appropriate score should be written in each box. Shaded boxes designate comparisons not included for that question; do not write in scores in those places. Add the points when complete to achieve a total score for commodity, firmness, and delight.

Figure 1. How to calculate the survey score
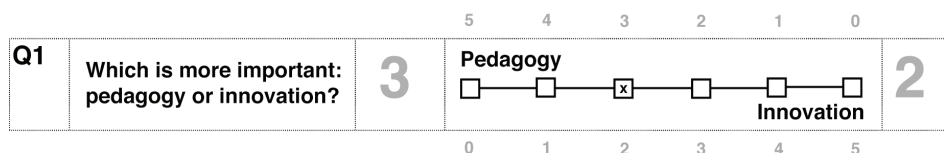
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