Research Article

It is Not All About the Tech or the Art

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Abstract.

In any design project, the technology must be correct and in any art project, the work must be captivating. While this is essential for a successful outcome, the author believes that it should be simply considered as the result, which it is assumed will be delivered. This project is the path to this outcome and presents a myriad of other challenges. In this paper, the author looks at two projects, First, the £18 million project to design significant improvements to Belfast's digital infrastructure; and second, the preparation of a 12-venue series of exhibitions featuring paintings drawn from the heritage of the Huguenots in Ireland. This paper aims to chart the way through the delivery of these two projects, with an approach that focuses on highlighting the core challenges of understanding vision, environment, and culture, describing how these were handled. The unavoidable conclusion is that the activities and skills applied in the two sectors reveal more similarities than differences. In pulling back the curtain, he contradicts the romantic myths of designer geeks and freewheeling artists. This paper will contribute to the world of art and design practically by filling in the existing gaps regarding how to handle large projects.

Keywords: technology, art, design, projects

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1. Introduction

This paper details how the interpersonal aspects of the two chosen projects were managed through a shared focus on the core challenges of understanding the vision, the environment, and the cultures. Rather than testing a predefined methodology, it calls upon the author's 25 years spent delivering complex projects in both the technology and arts industries. As such it proposes a battle-hardened 3-point framework which, with appropriate project-specific refinement, may be deployed to manage these critical aspects of project delivery. These initiatives have involved working with partner organizations and developing a range of strategies to address the specific challenges of Belfast [1]. The study concludes with a brief statement on the outcome of each project. It offers an assessment of the value derived from a focus on these three project

challenges. The study also cautions against an approach to project management which does not specifically identify and manage these areas.

Project #1: Super-connected Belfast - The 'Super-connected Belfast' Project originated from an open call issued by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in London in 2012 [2]. It sought bids from interested cities for an allocation from a £100 million fund to transform the digital infrastructure of 10 successful cities. Bids were to be submitted by City Councils and Belfast (BCC), made the decision to compete [2]. The deliverable of the project was a design for the transformed infrastructure and a bid document recommending it. Tommy Barr was selected to lead this design.

Project #2: Un beau refuge -The 'Un beau refuge' project is an ongoing series of visual art exhibitions, presenting a collection of 18 of my paintings. These draw from the legacy of the French Huguenot refugees who arrived in Ireland in three major waves during the latter half of the seventeenth century [3, 4]. Their major settlements in Ireland were in Cork, Dublin, Portarlington, Waterford and Lisburn in the North. In these areas they put down roots, opening their schools and establishing their churches (which were commonly referred to as the French Churches).

Having recently discovered that my ancestors were Huguenots, I had begun reading up on their history. On a visit to Greyfriar's Municipal Gallery in Waterford, the curator there casually mentioned that the building had previously been the French Church. This was the spark for the launch of the project.

2. Methods

This study involved a comparative analysis of two projects [5], using them as case examples to examine and evaluate specific aspects or factors of interest. Super-connected Belfast as project #1, and Un beau refugee as project #2. There were four stages conducted: (1) Identify initial problems and establish a shared vision for each project, (2) Define the pre-existing environment of each project, (3) Recognize the implications of organisational culture in each project management organization, (4) Draw conclusions from what is found. This study was conducted in Belfast (project #1) Northern Ireland and Cork, Dublin, Portarlington, Waterford, and Lisburn (Project #2).

3. Result And Discussion

3.1. Comparison of The Challenges That Arose at The Start

Project #1- At project initiation, the challenge was to understand the ambitions of everyone involved; then to align their disparate visions to create a shared direction of travel [6]. Failure by any participant to correctly understand or to fully buy in would potentially see the whole undertaking unravel. At best this would result in a contentious project beset with fraught relationships, lack of commitment and a compromised and disappointing result. The challenges were: (1) Understanding the objectives of the sponsor (DCMS). (2) Understanding the objectives of Belfast (BCC). (3) Aligning with the ambitions of suppliers. (4) Defining the limits of flexibility.

Project #2- The initial chalenges: (1) Understanding the objectives of the gallery. (2) Understanding the objectives of the artist. (3) Involving potential collaborators. (4) Future proofing and flexibility.

3.2. Comparison of The Design Environment

Project #1- In the design process, understanding the existing technological landscape and constraints was vital. To address this, (1) a telecoms consultancy was contracted to gather information on the infrastructure of different suppliers, ensuring transparency and trust. (2) The inter-agency collaboration aimed to leverage existing public sector infrastructure largely succeeded, however a lack of shared vision with the Department of the Environment (DOE) Roads Division hindered potential enhancements. (3) Navigating State Aid regulations, which restrict the release of public funds, required strict compliance and legal expertise. (4) To drive citizen uptake, financial incentives in the form of connection vouchers were offered to businesses and charities, encouraging them to upgrade their connection speeds. Education programs were also implemented to promote social inclusion.

Project #2- This knowledge was also growing as the project progressed. Ireland's arts and history environments are diverse and constantly changing. (1) Understanding current positions and sensitivities, especially in history, required the guidance of the Chair of the Irish Section of the Huguenot Society, who provided valuable insights into potential venues, upcoming events, and relevant networks. (2) Inter-agency collaboration with major arts and historical organizations enables focused and effective engagement,

maximizing results. While grant applications were considered unlikely to be successful, an intense focus on high-quality contacts resulted in significant achievements, such as obtaining copies of the original Edicts of Nantes and Fontainebleau. (3) Ensuring public uptake involves ample opportunities for engagement, including attending exhibitions, participating in workshops, organizing related events, and contributing companion books can increase visibility and promote collaboration with influential stakeholders.

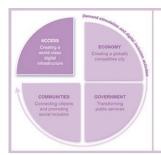## 3.3. Comparison of The Organisational Cultures

Project #1- Interpersonal and inter-organisational 'soft' skills were critical to the delivery of the project. The design was completed on behalf of an alliance of organisations with their unique and disparate ways of working. Their cultures were ingrained over many years and their processes, having grown within these environments, represented their values. It is always helpful to bear in mind that the organisations all wish to succeed and the individuals all wish to do well, however their processes may not always make it easy for any of us. The key challenges were: (1) The burden of oversight. (2) Existing organisational culture. (3) Dealing with the public. (4) The interaction with Suppliers, which was guided by an existing framework overseen by the Telecoms Regulator.

Project #2- The interpersonal and inter-organisational 'soft' skills required by this series of exhibitions may be dealt with in a short section. They mirror the requirements discussed above for the Super-connected Belfast project. Indeed many of the galleries were municipal and so once again the main partner was a Government Department. The design for this series was completed in collaboration with an alliance of organisations and individuals with their unique and disparate ways of working. Their views and approaches were absolutely determined by past practice and what had resulted in successful outcomes. They held deeply important values and reputations that they cherished, which needed to be understood and respected.

3.4. Overview of The Two Projects

Overview of the design Project #1: Figure 1 below presents the high level vision statement, agreed by the partners.

Based upon this, the final design was constructed around the four main streams presented in Table 1 below. Addition work was completed to consider the inclusion of

Figure 1: The high level vision statement, agreed by the partners.

an internet exchange, which would be located in a business park owned by the Council. In the end this was considered to be 'out of reach' and was not included.

TABLE 1: The four main streams.

Creation of the network of highspeed, fibre enable business park.	A connection voucher scheme for businesses and Charities.
Free WIFI across Belfast, in all public buildings and all public transport.	A programme of educational events designed to increase demand and encourage the use of new technologies.

Two additional allocations of funding were made available part way through the construction project, one from the Department of Agriculture and a second from DCMS. The design had been prepared to accommodate such opportunities and both were accepted and successfully deployed.

Overview of the project #2: Initially I created a set of three icons representing each of the five locations and La Rochelle, the main point of exit for Huguenots leaving towards Ireland; a total of eighteen. These were drawn from motifs remaining from the Huguenot contribution to that society (Figure 2). They were constructed as triptychs, echoing the format of the French Church windows. The original script of the Edict of Nantes was threaded through the icons, creating a calligraphic thread which binds the images together creating unity and providing context.

I then intended to exhibit the collection at each of the locations. The objective being to create a series of exhibitions which will once again link these communities and act as a celebration of this little part of the creativity and culture of Ireland.

However as the project progressed a second possibility emerged, to also retrace the passage of those many Huguenots as they left France, following multiple routes to arrive in Ireland and subsequently move on as "Irish men and women" to the new world (Figure 3). Their journey took them to every corner of the planet. Taking this underlying concept of the greater journey onboard allowed the project to broaden. A

Figure 2: Two of the icons showing the text from the Edict of Nantes and an image of the original document, courtesy of the French National Archive.

Figure 3: Images of the exhibition in Boston, the book and a lecture for undergraduate students in the Muzeum Kroměřížska, Czech Republic.

fuller more international result has been achieved which is the appropriate response to what was a truly global exodus. In this way the project may be considered to have actually over-achieved and to have exceeded the initial vision.

4. Conclusion

In both of the projects considered the structured approach described above was deployed to manage and strengthen relationships between the key players, with the objective of ensuring and maintaining this agreement [7, 9]. Both projects were delivered and accepted as agreed. Relationships at the time of delivery were positive and provided a firm basis for future projects. As is proposed in the abstract, The author considers this an essential part of the success of the projects, alongside the quality of the delivered designs.

This paper proposes that this 'route to the development of the design' must be considered an integral part of great design; since one that does not meet the need, no

matter how technically brilliant, can never be considered great. Collaborative mecha-nisms are often played down as designers and artists present themselves in a manner more in keeping with the ever popular romanticized personas [10]. However, this paper, having drawn back the curtain on this sleight of hand, makes clear that the successful leadership of projects in both sectors requires a structured and disciplined approach to interpersonal relationships [11], such as that described.

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