

# Understanding motivation and enabling action towards change

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## ***Abstract***

*Social Technologies can be platforms for change as they facilitate actions and act as spaces for conversation and the dissemination of information. In this workshop paper we explore the concept of motivation in relation to our practice as technology designers. We are specifically interested in what motivates people to take action, and how we can support that as technology designers.*

*We frame our conversation about motivation, technology, and action towards sustainability by exploring two aspects of our design practice. The first aspect focuses on design research and using participatory methods such as Mobile Diaries to understand what motivates people to be involved, to take action, to contribute. The second aspect is the design of technologies, channels or tools that enable people to act upon their motivations effectively. We provide examples of this through case studies of our work.*

## **1. Digital Eskimo and our stakeholders**

Digital Eskimo is a design agency with a commitment to working on projects we consider to be progressing humanity towards a nurturing (more than sustainable) way of being. To achieve this we practice 'Considered Design'. This definition covers a number of aspects of how we approach our design and underlying company philosophy.

It means we are ethics and values driven. The act of doing design is meaningful to us, over and above the notion of monetary profit. Our practice is grounded in, and informed by the principles of sustainability. We think that change is produced collectively, created through action, experience and sharing knowledge. And we think design can make a difference.

Our clients are equally invested in social change and are often activists themselves, existing to promote or facilitate environmental or social causes. Many of our clients are non-government organisations and workers unions. Similarly the stakeholders, users or community members that we are designing for are also (often) interested in change - seeking action or ways to complete action. Our work talks to their motivations and interests. Some of our work focuses on creating and growing existing communities over time, some of our work focuses on

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capturing focused action one time, on a large scale. Our work is underwritten by an approach to design that focuses on understanding what motivates people to take action or be part of a community towards change.

While our core work is manifest in online technologies, it increasingly takes the form of more integrated services across multiple delivery systems, overlapping with ubiquitous and pervasive systems. Through the workshop we hope to explore how our approach to design can be applicable to pervasive systems, and contribute to expanding discourse on how we as designers we can build pervasive technologies that support or motivate sustainable living practices.

## **2. An approach to design**

Our work is guided by the traditions of Participatory Design [2][7], in that we recognize the expertise of the users and stakeholders, what Sanders calls a Participatory Mindset [6]. For these reasons we select research methods based on their ability to immerse the design team in the world of our stakeholders, methods that facilitate a collaborative relationship with clients and aim to enable all stakeholders to be appropriately represented in the design. We use participatory methods such as workshops and collaborative brainstorming and we build collective personas and scenarios with our stakeholders [3]. While we continue to employ a range of researcher driven methods such as interviews, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires we embrace methods that are more designerly (e.g. [1]) participatory (e.g. [8]) and interventionist (e.g. [5]) such as Mobile Diaries [4].

In this paper we briefly present three diverse “social technology” case studies where actions or discourse are facilitated through technology. The first is a Design Research case study using technology to understand underlying attitudes to sustainability as well as ways to support corresponding actions. The second and third, an Integrated Campaign and an Online Campaign site respectively both aim to motivate and facilitate change by using technology to amplify individual actions on a collective platform, albeit in quite different ways.

## **3. Case studies**

### **3.1 WWF Human Habitat Diaries (Design Research Project)**

Digital Eskimo conducted a research project with five participants over a two week period. Each was selected from one of the different demographic groups likely to interact with WWF's FutureMakers project. The intention was to provide a window into the lives of participants, a way for them to share their world with us, and their perspective on it. This research was to inform the design of online tools that enabled and encouraged such sharing between people on an ongoing basis.

Participants were prompted to reflect their environment and daily lives from a sustainability perspective and were invited to implement one of eight measures that would reduce their negative impacts on the environment. Participants used Mobile Diaries which include camera phones, low resolution video cameras, maps and notebooks to record their daily experiences at work and at home. SMS's and images with audio annotations were sent from the phone to personal Habitat Diaries (password protected blogsites) assigned to each participant that could be accessed by the participants and the designers/researchers. The notebooks, video cameras

and maps were mailed back to us at the conclusion of the study. Combined, they enabled us to develop a rich picture of the participants' lives, habits, and attitudes to sustainability. The data gathered enabled us to understand the participants motivations around issues of sustainability, the obstacles motivated people faced in making change, as well as identify when and why they might be motivated to participate in an online community focused on supporting change.

### **3.2 David Hicks – Amnesty International Australia (Design Case Study)**

In this case study Digital Eskimo was asked to develop an online facility to promote a project of Amnesty International Australia (AIA), raising awareness of the issue of David Hicks' imprisonment without trial in Guantanamo Bay.

AIA had built a full sized replica of the cell David Hicks lived in and the public were invited to spend a small amount of time in the cell alone to consider David's experience in Guantanamo Bay and the broader issue of his ongoing imprisonment. We saw an opportunity to use the online space to show and share people's reaction to their time in the cell as well as their attitude on the issue by placing a webcam in the cell that enabled visitors to record a 30 second message to camera that was then syndicated to one or more websites. The corresponding website enabled people who could not access the cell to understand a little of the experience, at the same time by broadcasting these messages we affected a far broader audience than would have originally have been reached.

Digital Eskimo's response to this opportunity promoted the tour of the cell and communicated AIA's campaign objectives. But furthermore it allowed people to act upon their motivation to do something about these issues: voice their opinion on the issues of David Hicks' detention and the imprisonment of terror suspects without trial; to hear the opinions and responses of others to their experience in the cell; and to share their own views among their networks.

### **3.3 ACTU Your Rights at Work campaign site**

The website is the hub of the ACTU's 150000 member campaign against the unpopular WorkChoices legislation. Our team designed the site with an emphasis on informing workers and inspiring specific targeted action.

The site delivers the ACTU's information in a simple and effective style, as well as telling the stories of workers who have been affected by the WorkChoices legislation. Primarily however the site is a campaigning tool that was designed to deliver single strong calls to action that can be updated by the ACTU at a moments notice.

This tool allowed the ACTU to easily and quickly communicate to their member base. It enabled motivated people to undertake a collective action and to easily promote such action to their friends and networks, amplifying the call to act and directing such activity in order to maximize its effect.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

Digital Eskimo is a design agency that utilizes social technologies to promote and progress a nurturing (more than sustainable) way of life. Key to our own motivation within our projects is that we share the goals of our clients. Key to achieving successful design outcomes is developing a richer understanding of the motivations of each project's stakeholders and our

ability to design technologies that encourage and enable people to act upon these motivations; connecting, sharing knowledge and working together to create change towards a nurturing / sustainable life.

## **5.0 Biography**

### **5.1 Penny Hagen**

Penny Hagen is the Executive Producer at Digital Eskimo. Prior to joining Digital Eskimo Penny spent 10 years freelancing as a producer, designer and trainer specializing in interactive media and community projects in Sydney and New Zealand. Penny has also worked as a researcher for UTS's Interaction Design Lab investigating mobile technology use and conducting research into social software and participatory design methods. Underlying her approach to technology design is a commitment to creating communication tools that acknowledge the emergent nature of social networks and encouraging appropriation by the people that use them.

### **5.2 Duncan Underwood**

Duncan Underwood is the Sustainable Development Manager at Digital Eskimo. Duncan graduated with a Bachelor of Design (Industrial) from UTS in 1997 and is currently enrolled in Master of Social Science (International Urban and Environmental Management) at RMIT. Before Digital Eskimo, Duncan worked in business development at Clean Up Australia.

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