

AFFINITY DIAGRAMMING

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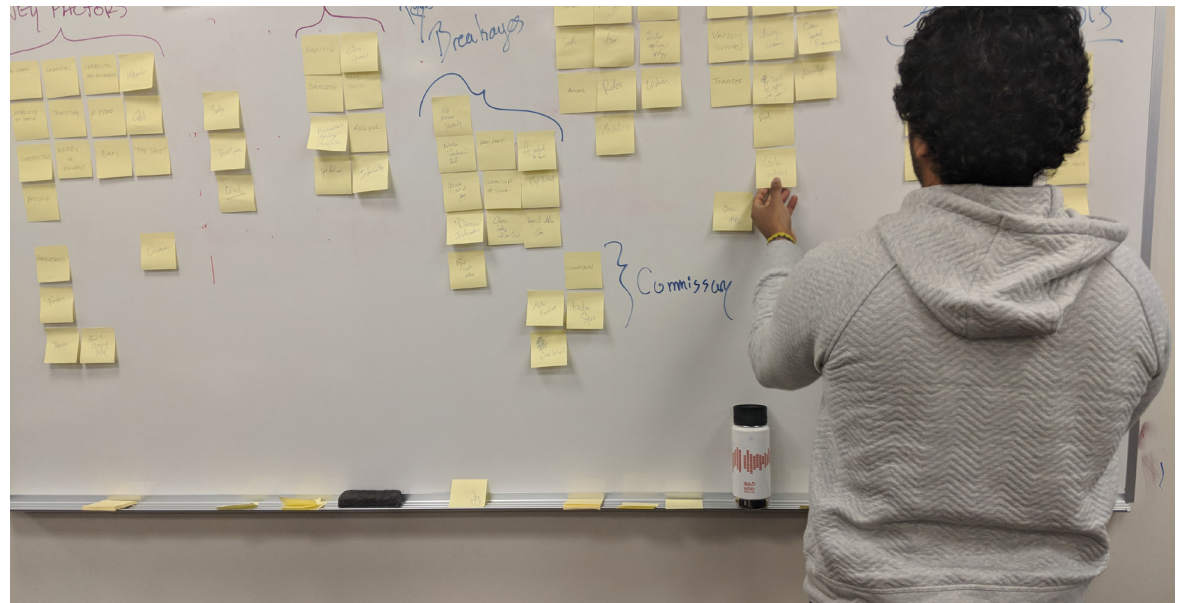
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Summary of Major Insights

There are roles (even though chaotic), although not always explicit. (very organized). (Insight 1)

Throughout our time spent within the food truck environment we have learned that there are specific roles for every member of the truck. For instance, whoever mans the window is also in charge of making the side orders (manning the fryers to make mozzarella sticks, fries, or mac and cheese bites). Additionally the person in charge of the grill was also making sure there were enough starter sandwiches for the evening. They are also in charge of making sure everything in the steam tables is ready and the correct temperature. These sub roles are very important because it allows the actors to perform their required duties without interfering with the overall flow of the truck. While it seems like there is no order within the sphere of the food truck the exact opposite is true. Without these explicit roles and order the participants would not be able to efficiently perform their duties and provide the level of customer service that they currently provide.



Summary of Major Insights cont.

It is especially important to prep before shift change, especially late night. (Insight 2)

The Big Cheeze operates within a very delicate eco-system. As was mentioned previously each person working on the food truck has a unique role. If someone fails to perform their duties or roles it not only forces the person working the shift after them to compensate for their inaction but it causes a disruption in this eco-system. This evidenced by my research partner and I having to fulfill the roles of our actor due to two major factors:

1. The person working the previous shift did not prep any sandwiches and as a result we had to prep sandwiches, take food orders, make the sandwiches, and deliver them to waiting customers.
2. The other participant who was supposed to show up for that shift did not show until about an 1.5 hours after the shift had already begun and so during this time there was only one participant trying to accomplish the roles that needed to be filled.

To be frank that particular session was chaotic because our participant could not only not focus but he wasn't accomplishing the tasks in a satisfactory manner. Not to mention he was appearing to become very flustered.

Summary of Major Insights cont.

Location is everything. (Insight 3)

The Big Cheeze has a specific location where they can be found most nights. This location is key because not only is it a prime location in relation to how far it from two of the more popular bars in Bloomington but it is also located on the of the more important more traveled streets in Bloomington; Kirkwood Avenue.

The proximity from the bars gives them a high volume of customers who frequent the Big Cheeze because it is “cheap” and fast and not only that, it doesn’t require a lot of travel in order to get there. Another important factor is they need to relatively stay in the same spot night after night. This gives the truck a sense of permanency not afford to most food trucks since they are toted as mobile restaurants for those who just want food without having to wait a long time for it. On any given night you can generally on the corner of Dunn St. and Kirkwood Avenue. We have found that almost every other food truck parks in what seems to be unspoken “assigned” spots. We believe that this is because customers will not go far looking for their favorite food truck.

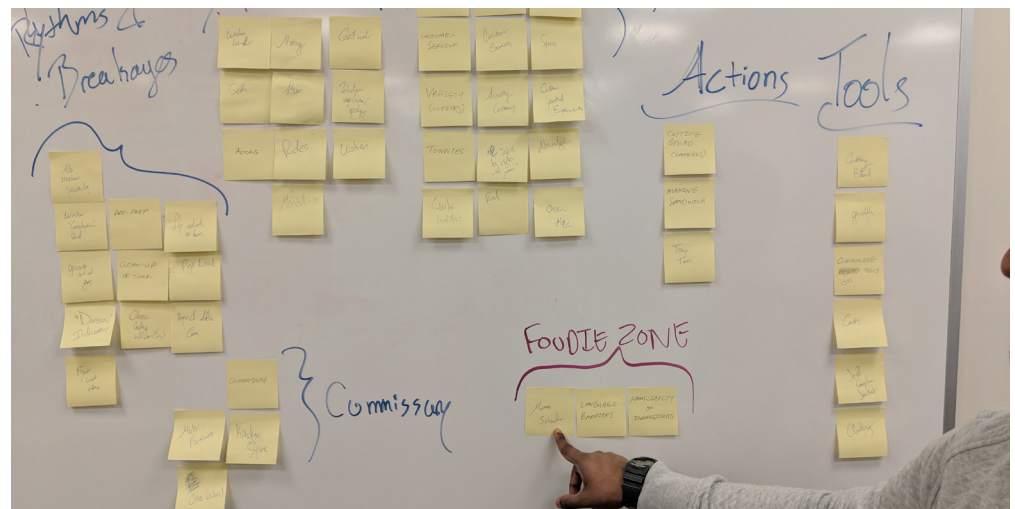
Summary of Major Insights cont.

Sense of community not just between customers & workers, but also “homies.” (Insight 4)

This sense of community is fostered because of the participants outlook and placing a lot of importance on the value of customer service. Each customer, sober or otherwise inebriated, is treated in the same manner. For the regulars of the Big Cheeze they can come back night after night and expect to receive the same kind of customer service. Not only that but the customers can become very territorial in the sense that whenever possible they will prevent any other food truck from taking the parking spot that “belongs” to the Big Cheeze.

Another factor in this is the relationship between the workers of the Big Cheeze and the homeless community here in Bloomington. Every night food is available to those who are able to help clean up the area around the food truck. Prior to this “homies” as participants call the homeless of Bloomington, would receive any leftover food. However, they have since switched to afformentioned system.

In this fashion we believe that the Big Cheeze has had a positive influence on the community that is their customer base.



Summary of Major Insights cont.

No concern of competition, because unique food selection among food trucks. (Insight 5)

We believe that the Big Cheeze is not concerned by anything offered up by other food trucks. In the city of Bloomington you have several taco trucks, a couple of kebab trucks, and some ice cream trucks. However, there is only one truck that serves the type of food served on the Big Cheeze. That is, grilled cheese sandwiches in various forms. They do so well in fact that there are two Big Cheeze food trucks that operate here in Bloomington.

Summary of Major Insights cont.

Use surrounding businesses as “rush indicators.” (Insight 6)

For the last shift of the evening special attention is paid to the surrounding bars. As the night wears on and more people crowd into Kilroy's on Kirkwood, The Upstairs Bar, and Recess the volume of customers eating at the Big Cheeze increases. Whether it be because they are hungry or go to the Big Cheeze because of it's proximity to their bar of choice the amount of people at these three bars is directly correlated to the amount of customers serviced during the late night shift.

Summary of Major Insights cont.

Weather predicts how many customers to expect. (Insight 7)

As mentioned earlier bars are used to anticipate a rush of customers. Weather is used to predict the volume of customers for any particular evening. The worse the weather is outside, the smaller the number of people coming to the Big Cheeze. This is actually really important when it comes to food waste because if the weather is particularly bad, less “starter sandwiches” are made which in turn means less food is wasted at the end of the night.



Summary of Major Insights cont.

Even though there are breakages to rituals, customer service is paramount (i.e., even taking orders and serving when the generator stops, truck goes dark, and smoke fills the cabin). (Insight 8)

Customer service is the bread and butter of the Big Cheeze. Above anything else is providing the customer with a unique experience that keeps them coming back and spending more of their money at the Big Cheeze. This is the more obvious takeaway because of course every business values customer service. For the Big Cheeze it is a point of pride. Not only do the participants take pride in the work that they take part in when making sandwich orders but also their interaction with customers. One thing to note is that each customer is treated with the same amount of respect regardless of whether or not they are sober. Which given the proximity to bars, the prevalence of drunk customers is high. In spite of that the participants (workers) have an admirable amount of patience with drunk customers with a propensity to be beligerant.

Initial Concept #1

Concept Sources:

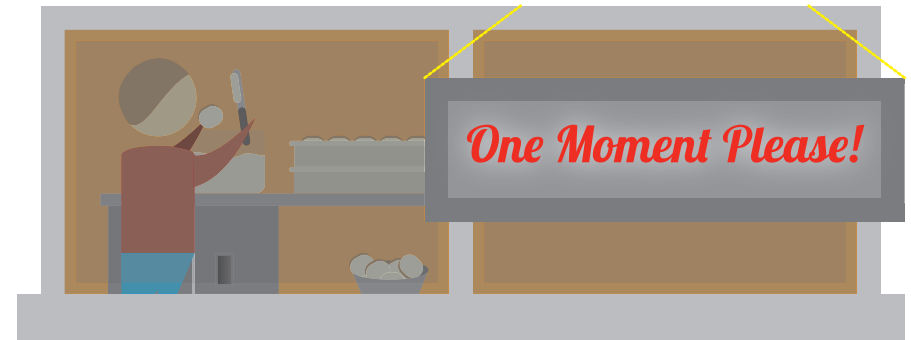
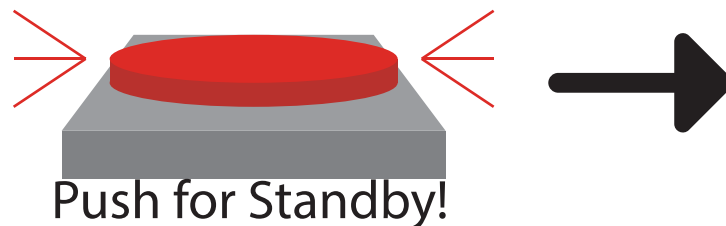
Insights 1 & 2

Elaboration:

The ordered during a late night shift at the Big Cheeze requires ample preparation from the shift prior to the arrival of the late night workers. Further, it is necessary for workers to keep fluidity between their roles dependent upon the demands of circumstance. These demands may incur between the dinner shift and late night shift. Such demands of intolerant, or impatient customers may make the preparation process impossible for the worker to switch from the window worker role, to become the prep worker, even if just for a short time.

Design:

To make possible for the worker to allocate attention to prep work, no matter what the customer situation is outside of the truck, one initial concept is to have a hanging sign at the service counter. Whenever the worker presses the “Standby” button, the sign lights up, alerting customers that their orders will be taken after the worker finishes their preparations. This also allows the worker to avoid the awkwardness of direct conversation, when preoccupied by their duties.



Intial Concepts #2

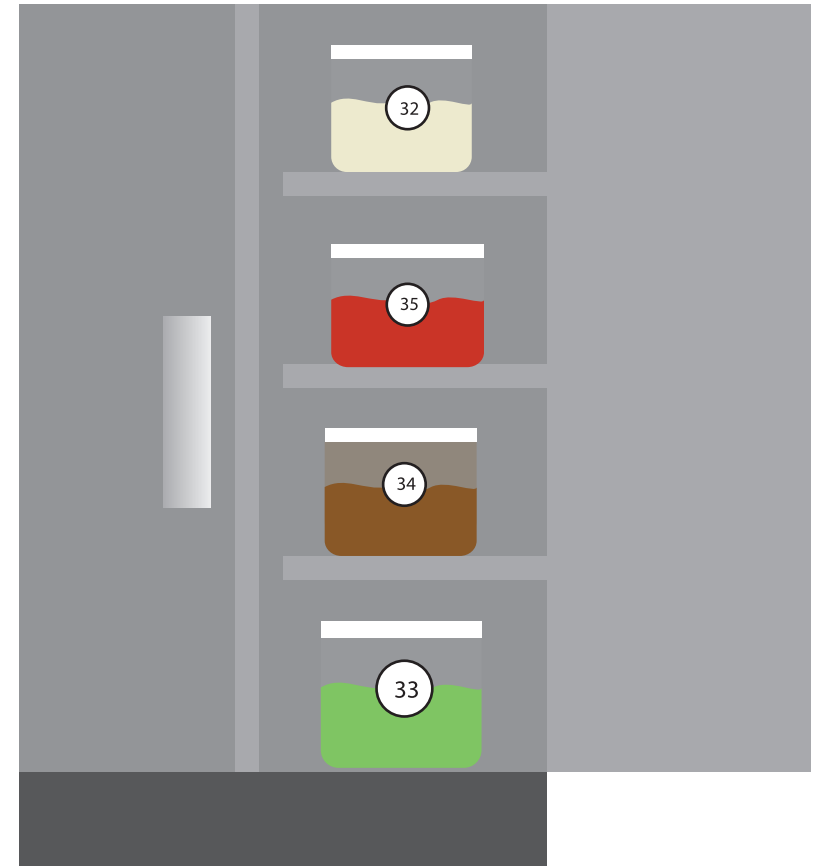
Concept Sources:
Insight 8

Explanation:

Despite the multiple breakages in ritual and rhythm throughout the night, attention to customers and quick service is paramount. Part of this attention to customers is not only when making food for them, but preserving food. One factor which gets in the way of quick service is the necessary steps taken to keep a temperature log of food. This, however, deals with successive cleanings of the thermometer between each food item, as well as digging through the refridgerator in order to find the proper food and their dates to temp.

Design Concept:

To simplify this process, we propose a design where there are stickable, reusable temperature readers on every food container. This way, the workers are able to quickly read the temperatures, and get back to their customers. Further, this enables a process of discretion amongst the workers, as they may not always wish to make explicit if some food item is not quite up to par.



Initial Concepts #3

Concept Sources:

Insight 1, 4, 8

Explanation:

When switching between roles on the food truck, employees are mandated to change their gloves, especially whenever handling credit cards or cash. This need is also an enormous, albeit necessary as of the moment, waste. Further, hassling with gloves when participants' hands were sweaty delayed time that they could interact with their customers and their tasks at hand. Also, there is a need for on-the-go hands sanitization for the homeless who assist participants at cleaning the surroundings of the truck at night.

Design Concept:

Imagine that you hands are dirty from any number of food service related rituals. Or, perhaps, you wish to provide your customers with a quick alternative, low waste, opportunity besides contemporary gel hand sanitizer. Or maybe, you want to provide sanitary means for locales who have no welcome or pre-established opportunity to sanitize their hands. With these in mind, we propose a cleanliness ray to opt out of traditional hand sanitizer. As well, this is looking towards the future of making the excess disposal of food service gloves obsolete.



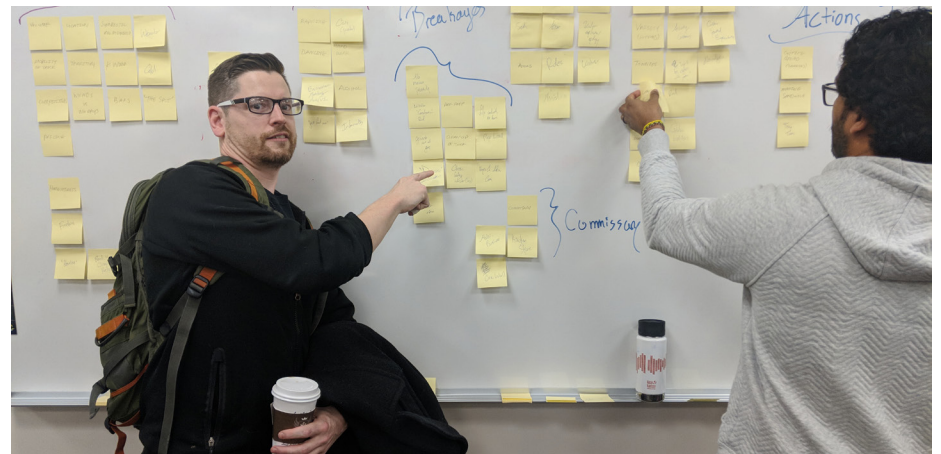
Critique of Affinity Diagram

Affinity Diagrams(AD) present a simultaneous reduction of information, as well as expansion. This method demands of researchers to pull apart knowledge and networks and flow, as to place data into the smallest cogent bits as possible.

Due to this nature, AD force the researcher to reflect and put into question the data received. This rumination may even further the data previously considered to be truths, digging deeper into introspection of the methods, some may have seemed perfunctory, other arbitrary. But what else could have been hard taught skills to the subjects? Questions such as these benefit a process where the sheer quantity of data generation is paramount. The more data, the more questions and networks can form.

Insights from this exercise allowed us to abstract intention more from our participants. This was not merely attached to their personal actions, but also their behaviors through the lens of rituals and networks. How did our participants work in rhythms? How did any one behavior or ritual include customers, the community, the artifacts? Occlude? How are the behaviors presented by the participants results of past problem solving? Insights from the AD also demanded of us to take prima facie ostensible truths. For example, that sometimes a burnt sandwich is a burnt sandwich is a mistake.

That said, Affinity Diagrams do not allow for sophisticated storytelling, due to its constraint of minimal content per item of data. The narrative of how behaviors or rituals come into being may be woven by researchers after data is organized. However, by the time the organization is completed, the spirit, flow, or energy of the research may be flattened to a sterile objectification. Although these insights may have a breadth of inquiry, they may not provide a robust delve into any one item.



Critique of Affinity Diagram cont.

We learned that the practice of Affinity Diagramming requires time, patience, and idea separation. We found ourselves stunted after a mere 30 points of data. This is closed minded. As well, we feel like we would find ourselves questioning whether or not what we recall was accurate. The more we teased apart scenarios, we conjectured about their alignments to the actual experience or context which we observed. With this in mind, we would have much rather organized the data immediately after the sessions with our participants. Next encounter, we might ask our participants to help us label or add categorical items to ensure our reports with greater confidence, as well as when we wish to recall data later on in the design process.

To speak upon the sketching and concept process, we felt like the longer we waited since our direct experience, there was greater allowance for creativity, but also less passion to design for our participants. To expand, we allowed ourselves to make creative, futuristic concepts. There was a detachment to the feeling that our designs would have serious implications on our participants. On the other end of consideration, we did not feel the immediacy which comes with having a fresh mind about the design implications of direct insights. Once we left the session, we took time off to decompress our minds and pursue other responsibilities. However, our difficulty with brainstorming our Affinity Diagram demonstrates that we ought to return to our data as soon as our sessions are completed. Of course, this cannot be extrapolated as a universality. This is our observations of our current tendencies as a designers and researchers. We must be patient and diligent to our behaviors as we change and grow.

