Dialogue Approach for Creating New Value: Outline of Future Solution Workshop

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In this age of change in business environment, what value should Fujitsu create for the future? Fujitsu is required to create a new value for the future by providing new products and services that correspond to changes in the future. The Future Solution Workshop (FSW) is a process of creating a new value through dialogue among a diverse range of people. We design a space for a workshop to facilitate dialogue and combine the wisdom and experience of people from various fields. By promoting dialogue, we help the participants develop a rapport with each other and shift their frame of reference and generate new ideas. Here we discuss the need for FSW as a way to create a new value. We also show the difference between a workshop that is based on logical thinking and FSW. In addition we show how to apply the practical method of FSW to our solution business. We then introduce our vision of creating additional value by showing our customers how to come up with innovative information and communications technology (ICT) solutions for their future.

1. Introduction

Recently, the business environment has been undergoing significant change and the importance of innovation for changing corporate activities is increasing year by year. The same can be said about Fujitsu's solution business, and innovation to generate a future value is called for from all sides both internally and externally.

Conventionally, the mainstream of innovation in an enterprise was top-down, across-the-board activities. With Fujitsu's solution business, the forms of systems and their value have been changed according to the technological trends of the world from host computers through open systems to the Internet. As a recent trend, however, diverse values seen in social networks, for example, are gradually bringing overall change to the entire society and economy. It has made it difficult to give rise to innovation that generates values that fit the requirements of stakeholders only with one-dimensional decision-making and top-down measures in corporate activities.

In this environment, activities for generating future values have gradually gained momentum at Fujitsu. As one such activity, the Future Solution Workshop (FSW) is a process of creating a new value especially in the solution business. It is intended for generating a future value by having diverse stakeholders cooperate while using a method of invigorating the space as a workshop to encourage dialogue and idea generation. Here a future value refers to a benefit or advantage provided by new products and services realized from a medium- to long-term perspective. The idea of the FSW is that it is important to go back to the basics to consider what value should be generated and provided by future products and services.

This paper presents the background of the FSW and future outlook including World Café, which is a specific method.

2. Background of FSW

The FSW is intended for generating future products and services. Attempts have been made in workshops for discussing new products and services in various fields and Fujitsu has also practiced the activity. However, the change in the solution business has brought change to the processes of workshops.

Workshops that have conventionally been practiced in Fujitsu's solution business target system

integration and have their focus on logicality and comprehensiveness, in which fixed processes were used for the entire procedure from the recognition of issues to formulation of solutions. These workshops are effective for finding problems, recognizing issues and formulating solutions in already assumed frameworks of management, operations and systems. However, they may impose restrictions on the generation of future values that are yet to be clear. One important value of system integration in the conventional solution business was pursuit of improved efficiency, which means having computers take over operations carried out by manual labor for ensuring high quality and reducing delivery periods and costs. An easily recognizable value of improved efficiency is easy to share and, with the shared value as the starting point, targets can be set and approaches to achievement can be formulated.

In workshops practiced based on this background, logicality and comprehensiveness are more emphasized and any unnecessary noise irrelevant to the conclusion is eliminated as much as possible. In addition, processes are standardized to allow anybody to draw a conclusion in any situation and the degree of freedom is not high. Up to now, many workshops with these processes have been carried out at Fujitsu.

Recently, system-based improvement of operational efficiency has reached a certain point and the next move, or generation of a new value, is called for in the solution business. This is not an extension of the existing efficiency improvement; rather, the question is how an enterprise introducing a system will change, or how it will bring about innovation. This means that it is now necessary to reconsider the conventional ways of thinking and study how to bring a totally new value to an enterprise.

Furthermore, the advance of cloud computing and software as a service (SaaS) in the solution business means that rather than offering functional values, system vendors are required to consider what such values bring to enterprises and so higher-level values are sought. Vendors that provide systems need to generate values that provide additional benefits to the systems.

With this situation in the background, Fujitsu is required to take steps that generate new values. However, in the present age in which a variety of values exist, it is too difficult to generate new values with limited human resources and the attempt does not lead to an organized move, either. The FSW emphasizes the creation of a workshop, or a space with the participation of everybody, and new ideas generated by dialogue and also has its focus on motivating people to participate.

3. Need for workshop with focus on dialogue

There are many different definitions of a workshop. One general definition is "an interactive style of learning and creation in which participants take part and experience for themselves and learn and create various things in the course of interaction within a group."[1]

Workshops of logicality and comprehensiveness that are held to solve issues have been practiced at Fujitsu, and they are intended for visualizing current issues and formulating solutions by discussion.

In the FSW, attempts were initially made to generate new ideas based on visualization of issues. However, for generating future values with no clearly-defined goal to target, it is necessary to identify the issues themselves and we sometimes felt the limits of a process starting from sorting out issues. Generation of future values requires subjective, personally-felt visions rather than objective recognition of issues.

What should be done to have a vision for generation of a future value? Excessive pursuit of logicality and comprehensiveness in a workshop may decrease the participants' awareness of the need for thorough study of unclear future values. This is because it is easier to sort out and renew awareness of issues and solutions that already exist.

Communication between participants in workshops in pursuit of logicality and comprehensiveness may be confined to mere information transfer between them. As a model of such information transfer, there is a concept of a "conduit metaphor."[2] A conduit metaphor represents how information is recognized as a concrete object and transferred from one person to the next as if through a conduit (pipe). In workshops seeking logicality and comprehensiveness, communication as illustrated by this conduit metaphor may become the mainstream. In conduit-like information transfer, information other than that which is necessary is regarded as a noise and eliminated during the

transfer. Noise elimination is effective for determining information and communications technology (ICT) system-based solutions starting from current issues. To consider products and services that are unclear future values, it is difficult to clearly decide whether a certain piece of information is noise or an answer. On the contrary, the idea of eliminating any noise tends to make people hesitate to express a variety of ideas, and this hinders the generation of totally new values.

To avoid such situations in the FSW, many different ideas are brought out and expressed through dialogue without definitely eliminating noises from the initial stage in order to increase the opportunities to discover new values.

4. Creating space for dialogue

At the core of the generation of new values by the FSW is dialogue. The dialogue here is different from what generally takes place in conferences and meetings such as conversations, debates and discussions. While general discussion seeks a conclusion rather than the process itself, dialogue focuses on how discussion progresses on one theme. That is, it is intended to have the participants share and agree on what is decided, and in what way, or what is not decided. The pressure of having to draw a conclusion may cause participants to compromise and lead to an easy, run-of-the-mill compromise proposal to a future value that has no clear-cut answer. Meanwhile, dialogue does not demand any definite conclusion, and so it gives the participants a feeling of ease and allows them to bring out their own values and transform them into something different for enhancement through interaction.

5. Process of dialogue and effects of World Café

The FSW adopts World Café as a method of realizing dialogue. World Café is a new style of conference proposed in 1995 by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs.[3] It is used in many parts of the world, and it covers a wide variety of scenes from community topics involving citizens to vision formulation of enterprises. **Table 1** lists the characteristics of World Café.

It features dialogue with a certain degree of freedom maintained, rather than fixed processes, and allows participants to discuss themes with their true feelings and see them as their own matters. In the

FSW, World Cafés are held for various purposes and used for formulating visions of the next solutions, designing the concepts of new businesses and generating new values with the involvement of different stakeholders (**Figure 1**). **Figure 2** shows a typical process of a World Café.

6. Contributing to future solutions

World Café is characterized by its capability of drawing out the true feelings of participants in the course of repeated dialogue in a relaxed space for

Table 1
Characteristics of World Café.

| Characteristic	Description
Theme to discuss	Everybody takes part in a discussion on one theme. It does not necessarily need to lead to one conclusion. Participants are divided into groups of four or five, where they should be mindful to listen to each other's opinions and acknowledge and respect the opinions.
Group shuffling	The time is divided up and group members shuffled. Sharing what has been discussed up to a certain point with new group members simulates discussion with everybody participating in the discussion on one theme.
Dialogue	No hasty conclusion should be formed. The purpose is to develop empathy and share insights and profound questions by having repeated dialogue on one theme to lead to the next step.
Draw	A large piece of paper is placed on the table of each group and the members freely write on it the content of the dialogue.

Figure 1
Session of World Café.
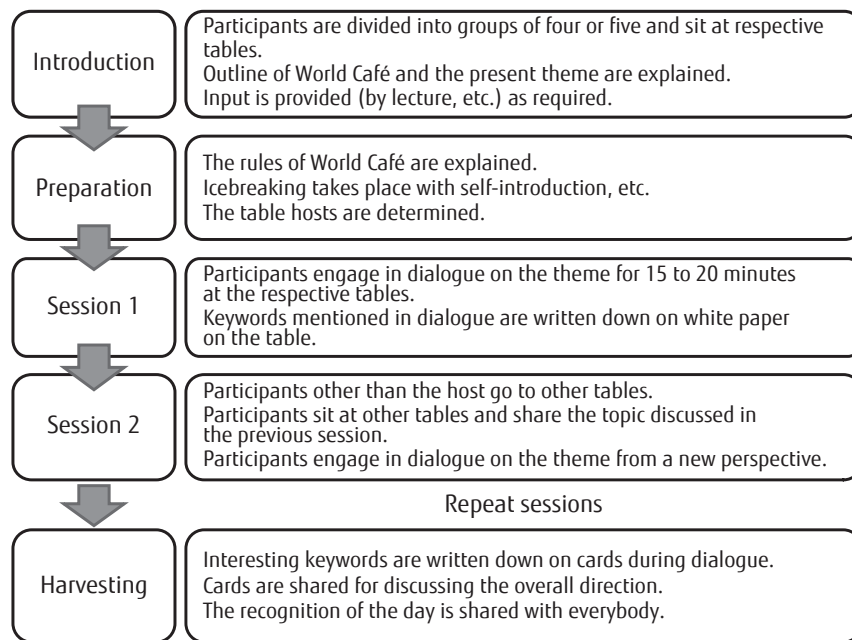
Figure 2
Process of World Café.

acquiring new findings. It is an excellent process in that new findings may provide sources for generating ideas of future solutions but the outputs were often confined to abstract ideas and not materialized.

In order to improve this point, the FSW incorporates methods of materializing participants' ideas after holding a World Café. One example is brainstorming, in which ideas are discussed divergently.

Brainstorming in general is a process of generating many ideas by participants' free expression of ideas. It is often held in an atmosphere of a "waigaya" session (a type of brainstorming proposed by Honda Motor Company), where opinions are expressed without constraint or reserve. In reality, however, participants are required to be familiar with idea generation processes. Otherwise, it is difficult to generate many ideas.

This point is taken into account for the FSW and processes of brainstorming enhanced with contrivances are adopted. Representative ones among them are shown in **Table 2**.

Of these, the FSW often utilizes brainwriting as a method of putting the participants' wisdom together. The following section describes how to make use of brainwriting.

Table 2
Types of brainstorming.

Type of association method	Description
Brainwriting	Matrix sheets for putting down ideas are prepared, and the participants write down ideas on them. The sheets containing the ideas are passed around among participants. New ideas are generated by referring to other people's ideas.
Analogy ideation	Characteristics without any relation to ideas, such as categories of business and occupations, are listed. The characteristics listed are used as clues to generate ideas. Using words with no relation to ideas as insights facilitates generation of unprecedented ideas.
Speedstorming	Participants face each in double circles. They discuss their ideas on a theme with those directly facing them for three minutes. When the time is up, the participants move over and do the same with different partners. Ideas are expressed in an extemporaneous manner, which facilitates generation of innovative ideas.

7. Brainwriting for broadening ideas

Brainwriting is an application of brainstorming that facilitates divergent generation of ideas, in which ideas are written down on a sheet as shown in **Figure 3**. Ideas are written down in the cells in one row within a
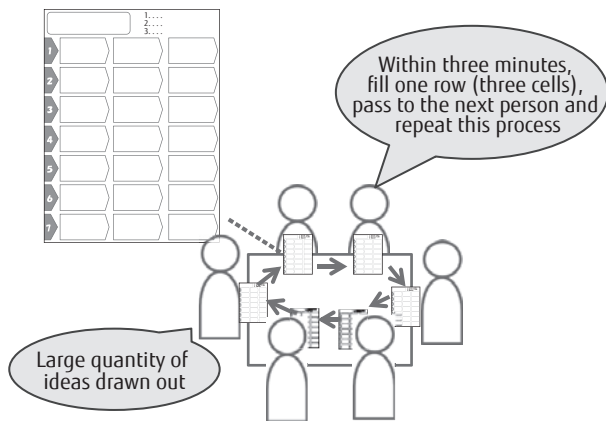
Figure 3
Process of brainwriting.

time limit and the sheet is passed on to another person.[4] One sheet contains ideas of various people, and it can be used as the starting point for generating new ideas.

In the FSW, after discussing the ideals of future products and services by dialogue, a phase is provided in which brainwriting is used for harvesting ideas. This is the starting point for considering specific systems and functions after the direction of a new solution is identified.

For considering future products and services, pursuit of logicality and comprehensiveness may confine ideas within the framework of established facts. New perspectives can be found by broadening ideas generated through dialogue and using idea generation techniques such as brainwriting.

8. Conclusion

As explained in this paper, the FSW practiced at Fujitsu is a process of finding out what new values are provided by Fujitsu through revitalizing dialogue and idea generation of people concerned. FSW is different from the conventional workshop that pursues logicality and comprehensiveness, and it builds up recognition of issues and solutions. What can Fujitsu, as a business partner, provide in this age with diversity including various values mixed together? FSW is intended for finding a totally new direction in which to head for a future vision formulation that takes advantage of a dialogue process and methods that revitalize idea generation.

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