

# THINKTANK + INCUBATOR + GAMING WORLD CHANGE = MY 14 WEEKS AT ASHOKA CHANGEMAKERS

DESIGNMATTERS FELLOWSHIP (SPRING 2012)

*Each year, three Designmatters fellows are selected to fulfill Art Center's mission to 'Influence Change' by serving organizations that perform humanitarian work on a global scale. Through the generosity of funders and partners, these high-level internships provide fellows with an insider's view of the intersection between design and social responsibility, thus cultivating design as a change agent and the citizen designer who leads by design.*

## TELL US ABOUT YOUR SPONSORING ORGANIZATION.



**DANIEL YOUNG**  
*spring 2012 fellow*

Ashoka is a global organization that supports social entrepreneurs — humanitarians who launch, build, and manage ventures for social change. The team I joined, Changemakers, runs an online platform for finding and funding promising social innovators through collaborative competitions.

In my view, Ashoka is like both a think tank and an incubator. Ashokans are always on the lookout for “the next big thing,” an insight that they can identify, leverage, and scale in order to cause social movements and initiatives to tip and cause a ripple effect.



ASHOKA GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS IN ARLINGTON, VA

## **WHAT WAS THEIR BIGGEST CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY?**

Changemakers was one of those potential next-big-thing bets that Ashoka was investing in. They saw that there was a growing number of innovators tackling local problems within their community. But these individual efforts were in danger of becoming splintered; going in separate directions; and thus wasting valuable human passion and talent.

The team was asking, what if social innovators world-wide could share their ideas while solving the problems of their own specific communities? In other words, here was Ashoka's bet: If we made "think global, act local" visible, we could better discover those insights that can unleash massive social change.

## **HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

It took me weeks to even grasp the problem Changemakers was attempting to solve. At first I took on small projects like video editing and screen designs in order to make myself immediately useful while opening up opportunities to talk to various stakeholders and learning about the organization.

Then, as I began to see the big picture, I began to ask: How could my design training contribute to Changemakers' vision? How could we design a system that would encourage innovators, funders, and champions to work together? What valuable social objects would each group be intrinsically motivated to share?

These questions took me deep into researching persuasion and gameful design, two emerging trends within User Experience and Interaction design. During my spare time, I devoured every book, every TED talk, every slideshare, and every blog article I could find.

In my last week, I was invited to a brown bag session to share my findings with the team: open APIs\* to separate content, context, and containers; an open architecture to allow partners, developers, and the open source community to co-create on their platform; a gameful engagement model, which outlines a strategy for identifying incentives, target behaviors, and metrics to make intentful community-building possible; and screen designs to show how the team could take some of these ideas forward.

The team appreciated my ideas and was asking for specific next steps. But regretfully my time had run out, knowing full well that the real work was still ahead.

\*Application programming interface (API) is a specification which allows software components to communicate with each other.

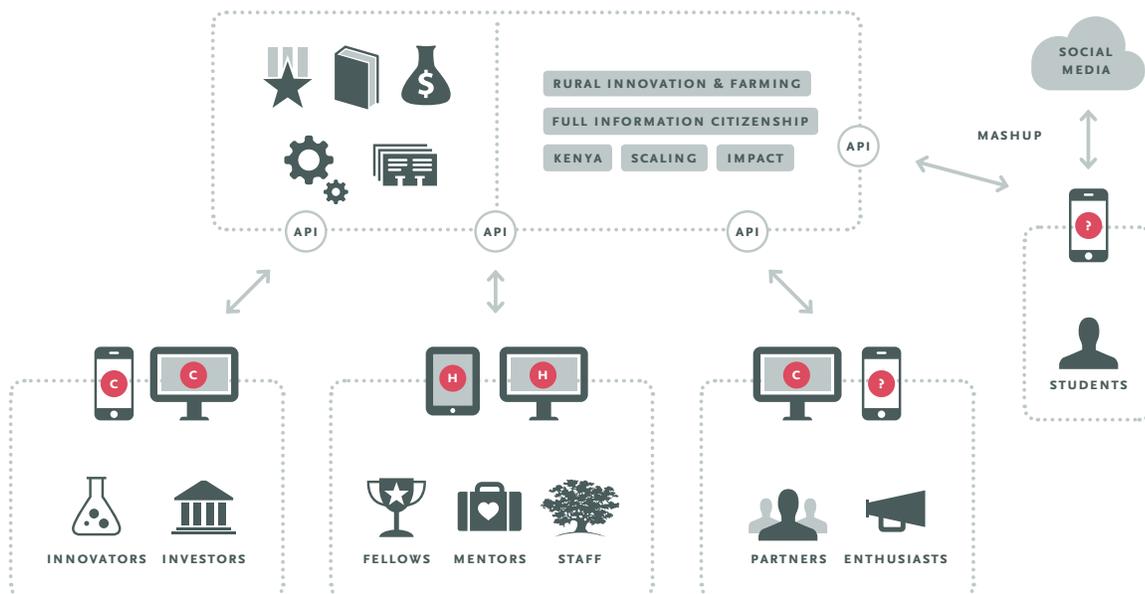
GROUPS WITHIN THE ASHOKA ECOSYSTEM



SHARABLE SOCIAL OBJECTS



POSSIBILITIES WITH THE OPEN API ARCHITECTURE



## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

That true changemaking is often frustratingly difficult. As designers, we often consider our work finished the moment we can articulate and mock-up some sort of solution for our clients. But our clients have to deal with the burden of executing and measuring the impact of those ideas.

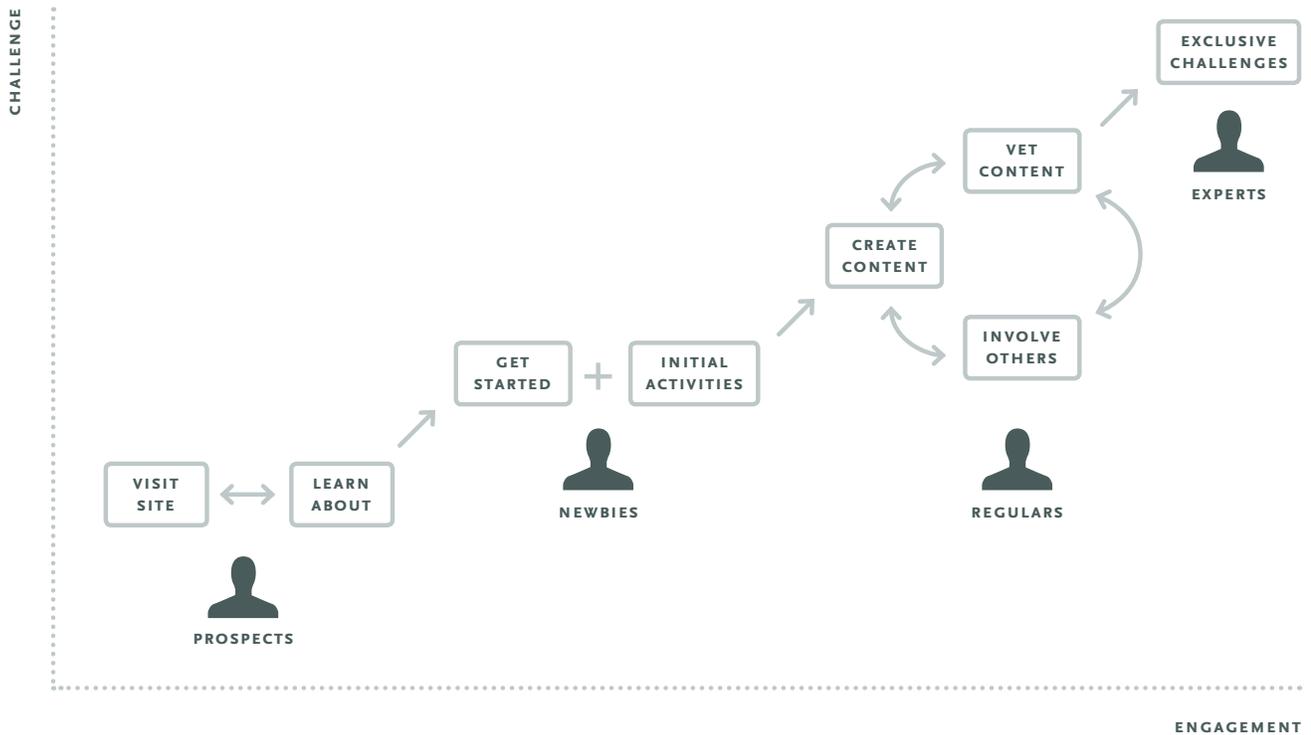
## HOW HAS THIS EXPERIENCE IMPACTED YOU?

I have come to see interaction design differently—that in the words of Frog Design's VP of Creative, Robert Fabricant, "behavior is our medium." The stuff that we typically make—screens, buttons, text, images—are mere artifacts whose purpose is to guide human behavior. This shift in perspective has caused me to become more interested in studying behavioral economics, persuasive technology, and user research.

## WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF EVERYTHING?

Synthesis — Making sense of and creating cohesion from listening to all the different perspectives. Many Ashokans were experts on specific subjects like grantmaking, trendspotting, or overthrowing governments. Design firms like Frog and Adaptive Path had also participated in shaping the direction of the platform. But when I came in, the team was still struggling with achieving massive user adoption.

ENGAGEMENT MODEL





MY WORKSTATION (TOP LEFT), BRAINSTORMING TOYS (BOTTOM LEFT), THE INTERN WALL (RIGHT)

**HOW DOES THE CREATIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT DIFFER FROM ART CENTER'S?**

Much more autonomy and much less structure. Since this experience, I have come to truly understand the value of all the process training that Art Center provided. Ashoka, in particular, had a strong anti cog-in-a-wheel mentality when it comes to human resources. I was told that Ashoka typically gives 3-4 months to new hires just to figure out what, where, and how they wish to contribute.

I was the only designer in the DC office. Since my program was only 14-weeks long, I had to become more self-reliant, compress my discovery process, and often relied on working through quick full iterations, a process I learned in Fridolin Beisert's wonderful *Creative Strategies* class.

**DESCRIBE A TYPICAL DAY.**

I come in the office between 8:30 to 9:30 (there were no strict hours, but this was the work culture I observed). First, I spend 2.5 hours refining screen designs based on feedback from yesterday's meeting. Then emails for the next 30 minutes.

At lunch, whenever the weather is nice enough to go outside, the team eats together in this public area just outside of the Rosslyn Metro station. At about 1 pm, I meet with

the partner team to get feedback on an animatic for a demo video of an upcoming feature. Then, a short 30 minutes of quiet brainstorming and thinking time.

From 3 to 5:30 pm, I'm on a Skype call to present screen designs with a business analyst in London and a technology director in Hawaii. After a round of feedback, we keep working on translating the next batch of requirements into wireframes and mockups. At about 4:30, we realize that there was an ambiguous requirement. So the product director in Seattle joins our call.

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I'm most proud of the working relationships that I fostered with the teams at Ashoka. As a designer, I was able to bring fresh perspective, create a learning environment, and play the role of a trusted advisor. Towards the last few weeks, I was often invited to brainstorming sessions where I championed the role of design and introduced design principles as means to better understand problems.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO FUTURE DESIGNMATTERS FELLOWS?

On of my instructors, Clane Graves, once shared with me that as designers, we need to continually expand our minds. Perhaps there is no better way to do this than by collaborating with the individuals and organizations who are tackling society's most pressing issues. This fellowship has provided me with an opportunity to do just that. I am certain that it will do the same for anyone with who truly wish to understand how design can play a larger role within society.



BRAINSTORMING SESSION TO MAP OUT TARGET BEHAVIORS

PLEASE SHARE WITH US SOME OF YOUR WORK.

**ASHOKAHUB**  
Email not displaying correctly? View it in your browser

**ACTIVITY SUMMARY for RURAL INNOVATION & FARMING**  
 WEEK of MARCH 12, 2012

**FIRST TIME LOGINS** VIEW REPORT

**10 + 3 + 4 = 17**  
FELLOWS STAFF ASN NEWLY JOINED

**YOUR COMMUNITY ON ASHOKAHUB** VIEW REPORT

48% ACTIVE 187 / 254 MEMBERS

**NEW ACTIVITIES** VIEW REPORT

**+8 +7 +3 +5**  
NEEDS OFFERS NEWS EVENTS

**TOTAL ACTIVITIES** VIEW REPORT

**28 27 13 15**  
NEEDS OFFERS NEWS EVENTS

**RESPONSES TO YOUR ACTIVITIES** VIEW REPORT

**12 29**  
COMMENTS FOLLOWS

**MESSAGES FROM YOUR COMMUNITY** VIEW REPORT

**29**  
MESSAGES

**AVERAGE PROFILE COMPLETION** VIEW REPORT

**63%**



GROWTH TRACKER

WEEKLY REPORTS FOR CURATORS

**changemakers** How do you accelerate your innovation?  
 Join a community of innovators. Connect & Collaborate.

**SHOWCASE YOUR INNOVATION** **LEARN MORE**

**LET'S HAVE: A BALL**  
 Let's Have A: Ball provides sports equipment to underprivileged children funded by sale of professionally signed, used sports equipment.

**LET'S HAVE: A BALL**  
 Health & Fitness » Sports  
 Let's Have A: Ball provides sports equipment to underprivileged children funded by the sale of professionally signed, used sports equipment.  
 AUG 28, 2011 87%

**FOUNTAIN OF HOPE**  
 Children & Youth » Girls' Development  
 Fountain of Hope Life Center provides sanitary towels to needy girls, orphaned girls, and widows in Kiambu County to combat HIV.  
 JAN 25, 2012 23%

**SAFE AGUA PERU**  
 Environment & Sustainability » Water  
 Safe Agua delivers sustainable and affordable clean water solutions to asentamientos (slums) in Peru to improve health and break the cycle of poverty.  
 SEP 9, 2010 70%

**Adam Miller** UNITED STATES  
**James Waruru** KENYA  
**Patrick Struebi** PERU  
**Jacqueline Cutts** UGANDA  
**Patrick Struebi** PERU  
**Chelsea Brown** UNITED KINGDOM

CHANGEMAKERS DISCOVERY MODULES

A SPECIAL THANKS TO

*Steve Kim*  
*Brian Boyd*  
*Mariana Amatullo*  
*Elisa Ruffino*  
*Stephanie Sigg*

AND



*changemakers*<sup>®</sup>