Choose the context

circling around your research

In short

In this working method, you discuss the various contexts in which the research project could take place. The background of everyone involved is considered in these contexts.

Outcome

A shared view of the background (discipline) of everyone involved and the environment in which the various actors feel at home within the collaboration.

Approach

This working method takes place in three steps:

1. Print the context sheets and ensure that everyone has multiple figures to position themselves with. Also provide figures for actors who are not present in the meeting but do participate in the project. Explain the three contexts in short:
   a. The theoretical context is a context in which work takes place on the basis of theory, on the basis of knowledge previously acquired (outside of the project) and in a controlled environment, e.g. a laboratory or a living lab.
   b. The conceptual context is a context in which different actors collectively think up, develop, test or further an idea, concept, prototype or product in a delineated environment, e.g. a brainstorm space or pilot environment in an organisation.
   c. The practice context is the context in which the practice and/or the living environment of end users is explored from the inside out, in which a prototype is used and tested and in which implementation ultimately takes place; the 'real' world.
2. Ask each participant to individually position themselves – one by one – in the three different contexts. If someone feels at home in multiple contexts, several figures can be used for the same person. This can be made visible by each time using the same figure colour when using blocks or by writing a name on the figure when using the printables.
3. Discuss whether there is a preference for a specific context, why that preference exists, and what this means for the collaboration.

Example

This is a fictional example based on an existing project.

Behavioural scientists, physiotherapists and human movement scientists work together on a project aimed at improving exercise for elderly residents living in a care home. In this example, physiotherapists and human movement scientists place themselves in the theoretical context and the conceptual context. They indicate that they find it important to measure the exercise and are in need of measurement instruments for pedal exercisers. Pedal exercisers are already present in the care homes involved, but are not yet used by the physiotherapists due to a lack of measurement instruments. In this project, physiotherapists want to create a lab setting in a care home in order to be able to employ a verified measurement instrument – originally for elliptical trainers – for the pedal exercisers. The behavioural scientists place themselves in the practice context. They indicate that they find it important to observe why residents exercise, or refuse to, before considering a solution. After all those present have placed themselves in the contexts, it becomes clear that physiotherapists and human movement scientists and behavioural scientists have a different view on the project because they are used to a different way of working based on their

discipline and background.

Tips for the manager

It may be the case that the contexts proposed are too abstract; you can translate the contexts so that they fit those at the table better. E.g. ‘knowing’, ‘making’ and ‘doing’, or ‘knowledge’, ‘ideas’ and ‘my life’.

Bases

We distinguish between three research contexts: ‘the theoretical context’, ‘the conceptual context’ and ‘the practice context’. The contexts are based on the work of Dalsgaard and Dinder (2014), who distinguish between ‘theory’, ‘bridging concepts’ and ‘real-life practice’ as forms of intermediary knowledge bridging between theory and practice, and Hevner (2007) who distinguishes between the knowledge basis (theoretic context), the design cycle that iterates between research processes and the core activities of building and evaluating the design artifacts (conceptual context), and environment (practice context).

Materials

- Downloadable print (A3)
- scissors
- pen
- tape

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

CREATING

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

EXPLORING

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

DELIVERING

CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

CREATING

CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

EXPLORING

CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

DELIVERING

PRACTICE CONTEXT

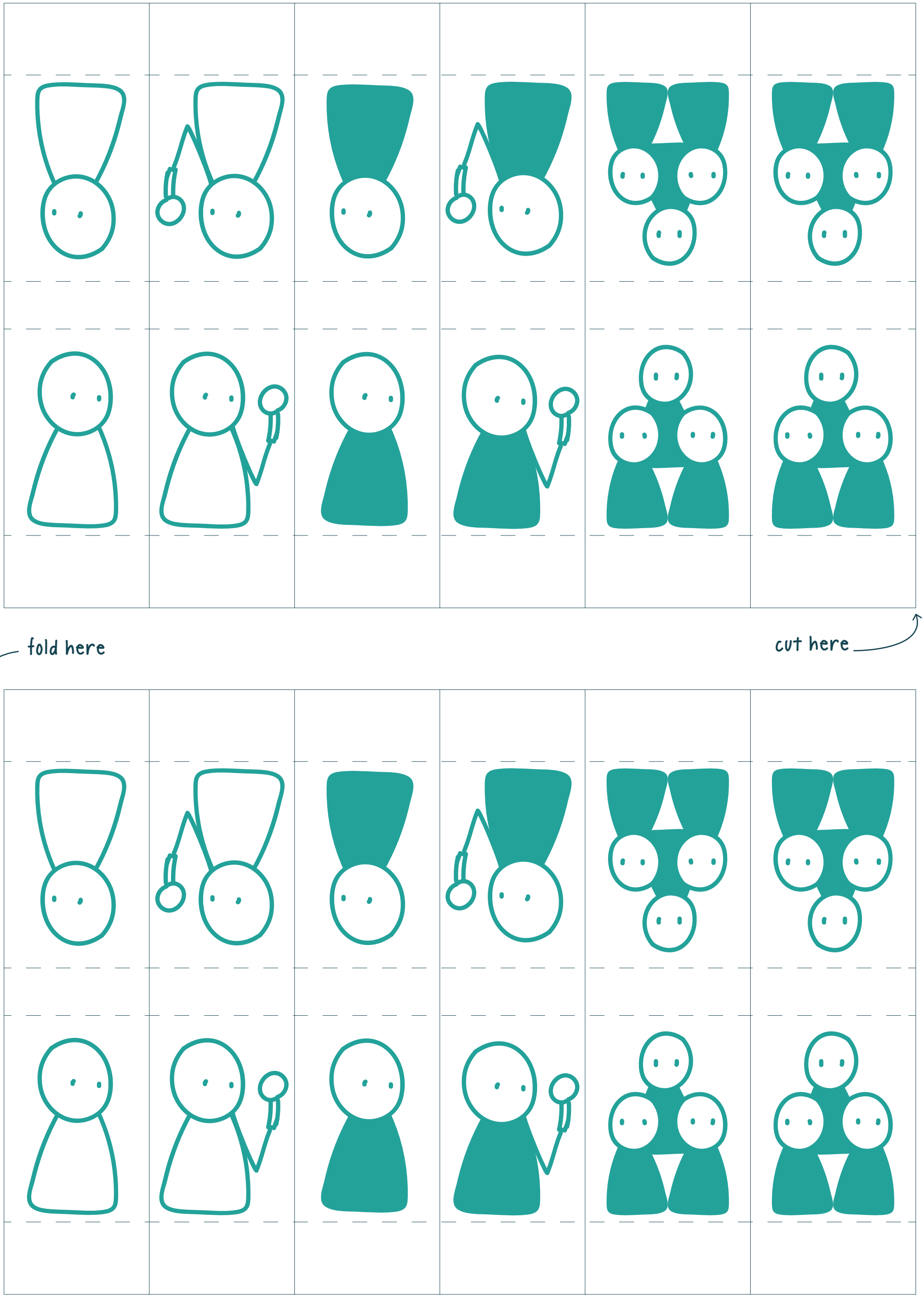
CREATING

PRACTICE CONTEXT

EXPLORING

PRACTICE CONTEXT

DELIVERING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