Aspects of knowledge and cooperation in design

Design activities are in a majority of cases an activity involving multiple actors with different backgrounds, perspectives and goals for participating in the design. My research aim is to focus on aspects of how design methods and designers knowledge and perspectives affect the actual design outcome.

The main material of analysis will be from the experience of the DLK-project, A project with the aim to support local union representatives with support for their union assignment. We organised 21 video recorded participatory design meetings with participants from local unions. Based on the wide focus (design groups in general rather than this group only) it would be good to receive guidance for how and where additional empirical material could be sought.

My research interest concerns a focus on the relation between peoples' knowledge, views, goals, methods for design and the characteristics of the actual design outcome. Methods for design will affect design outcome and so will the way people use or interpret methods. Perspectives seem to be a central component since they affect the selection and interpretation of methods and also affect what our goals in design is. What is it that we are trying to create? By what criteria do we judge it to be a successful design? How is intended users' viewed and how is users' knowledge used when design is created? Perspectives are also very much inherent in the methods we are using.

In design groups, it is necessary for the members to create some shared understanding of the goals with the design. This understanding is also modified as the design activities progress. I am interested in how that understanding is formed and modified and also what role a common vocabulary plays in the cooperation in the group.

Design group members leaving the group will likely remove some perspective from the group and new members entering the group will do so without the shared understanding formed in the group. How does that affect group cooperation?

Design group members will have to formulate their understanding in a way that is understandable by the rest of the group to be able to communicate it. The group will also to some extent need to formulate their understanding (in some kind of design rationale) for external persons in order to make the design understandable since the design in itself does not carry that knowledge. What is believed to be necessary to communicate for external parties? External parties may for instance be implementers, technical writers, designers in later phases and users.

To be able to perform a design, the group members will need to have some incentive for working in a common direction. Different participants will due to conflicting interests however have incentives for acting against the official direction of the design group or at least to affect the design in a way that is beneficial to that individual. I am also interested in how these conflicting interests and power struggles affect design work and design outcome and how problems due to that can be prevented.

Design methods as well as observations are theory laden and are part of a design culture that carries knowledge of what a good design process looks like. The characteristics of a design method may not be obvious to design group members, especially in participatory design.

What kind of problems are focused by different participants in a design group. What methods or tools for solving current problems are proposed by different participants. What methods for design are favoured by different members? What aspects of the final system is focused by different participants. Problems in There are How does the purpose of the design affect .
How does the group handle complexity in the design work?

Questions:
Theories? What are the suitable theories for analysing group interaction, perspectives, knowledge and design outcome. Distributed cognition, Activity theory Transaction analysis?

What possibilities of collecting empirical knowledge to base the analysis on is there? I am interested in professional design groups with more experience of design.