Acquiring Information from Linkography in Protocol Studies of Designing

Jeff WT Kan and John S Gero

Key Centre of Design Computing and Cognition
Faculty of Architecture
The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia
Email address: {kwaitak,john}@arch.usyd.edu.au

Abstract

This paper proposes methods to acquire information from linkography in protocol studies. The paper commences with an introduction of linkography together with its use and then presents two cases of collaborative designing. A qualitative analysis of these cases and their linkographs are presented. Two different strategies to abstract information from the linkographs are described: one based on clustering and the other based on Shannon's entropy. The abstracted information is interpreted and mapped to the qualitative analysis. The result is promising, cluster analysis is able to group the linkograph into meaningful clusters, entropy measures the opportunities for idea development of a team and can also reflect the opportunistic contributions of individual participants.

The motivation of this exploration is to find a quantitative method to compare the cognitive aspects of team designing processes. Increasingly designers work across geographically distant locations, groupware and collaborative software have been developed to support temporally and geographically dispersed work teams. However, despite these developments, face-to-face interaction remains one of the most important elements in developing ideas (Salter and Gann 2002). Bly and Minneman (1990) together with other studies (Gabriel 2000; Vera et al. 1998) suggested that with the introduction of technology, designers will adapt their activities accordingly. These studies on team designing were mostly done at a macroscopic level and were not able to differentiate microscopic design activities. In order to develop tools that support the process of distant collaboration, a closer look at how design teams engage in designing is required as we currently have insufficient knowledge about these activities.

Studies (Cross and Cross 1995; Gabriel 2000; Olson and Olson 2000; Oslon et al. 1992; Zolin et al. 2004) show that there is a multiplicity of factors that contribute or affect team designing. Some of them are: role and relationship, trust, social skills, common ground, organizational context, and socio-technical conditions. Most of these factors are underpinned by communication, either verbal or non-verbal, with or without technological mediation. We use linkography to re-represent the communication content and then abstract information out of the linkograph by statistical analysis and method derived from information theory.

Linkography and its Use

Linkography is a technique used in protocol analysis to study designer's cognitive activities. It was first introduced to protocol analysis by Goldschmidt (1990) to assess design productivity of an individual designer. In this technique the design process is decomposed by parsing the recorded design protocol into small units called "design moves". Goldschmidt defines a design move as: "a step, an act, an operation, which transforms the design situation relative to the state in which it was prior to that move" (Goldschmidt 1995), or "an act of reasoning that presents a coherent proposition pertaining to an entity that is being designed" (Goldschmidt 1992). A linkograph is then constructed by discerning the relationships among the moves to form links. It can be seen as a graphical representation of a design session that traces the associations of every design move. The design process can then be looked at in terms of the patterns in the linkograph which display the structure of design reasoning. Three distinct patterns had been identified: *chunk*, a group of moves that are almost exclusively linked among themselves; *web*, a large number of links among a relatively small number of moves; and *sawtooth track*, a special sequence of linked moves. Goldschmidt also identified two types of links: *backlinks* and *forelinks*. Backlinks are links of moves that connect to previous moves and forelinks are links of moves that connect to subsequent moves. Conceptually they are very different: "backlinks record the path that led to a move's generation, while forelinks bear evidence to its contribution to the production of further moves" (Goldschmidt 1995). *Link index* and *critical moves* were devised as indicators of design productivity. Link index is the ratio between the number of links and the number of moves, and critical moves are design moves that are rich in links, they can be either forelinks, backlinks, or both. In her exposition, design productivity is positively related to the link index and critical moves, that is, a higher value of link index and critical moves indicates a more productive design

process. Goldschmidt (1995) extended the use of linkography to compare individual design processes with team design processes.

To give an example of linkography, Table 1 is a transcript extracted from a computer mediated collaboration (NetMeeting) design session. In this session an Architect (A) was collaborating with a Landscaper (L) to design an art gallery in a harbour front triangular site with level changes. The design session was recorded and each utterance from the designers was transcribed and tagged sequentially as a design move, A01 is the first move by the architect and L01 is the first move by the landscaper in this extracted protocol. Utterances with more than one intention are divided into small units of design moves such as in A02 and A03. A02 was a confirmation of L02's response while in A03 the Architect was starting another theme. Links can be established among those moves by posing one question: is move *N* related to other moves from *1* to *N-1*? The links are represented by joining the moves with lines and dots; moves are also represented by dots. For example L01, *"for the gallery spaces",* was a response to A01, *"the north is up the page, so the best sun is down the page"*, therefore A01 and L01 are linked. However, when the Architect asked the Landscaper whether she saw his mouse in A03, this move was not related to any earlier moves so there was no link between A03 and the previous moves, by iterating the same process through all the moves, the linkograph in Figure 1 can be constructed.

Table 1. Extract from the transcript at the early stage of the session

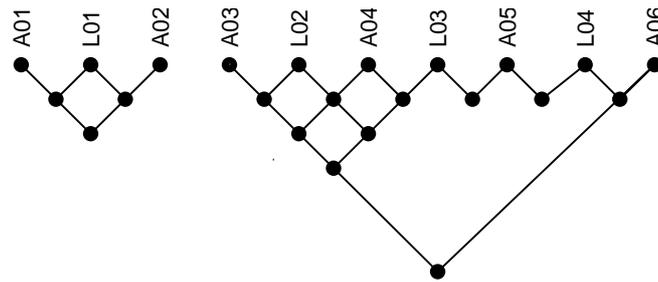| A01	The north is up the page, so the best sun is down the page
L01	for the gallery space
A02	Yeah, yeah
A03	So can you see my mouse, my pointer
L02	Can I see your mouse?
A04	My pointer
L03	Yeah well I can see a pointer…is that mine?
A05	That's yours but you don't see me moving it
L04	No
A06	Ok that mean I've to draw

Figure 1. A linkograph with the corresponding transcript in Table 1.

There are two advantages in using linkography for studying design protocols. First, it is scalable in two dimensions, 1) this method is not tied to the number of designers being studies. Goldschmidt (1995) used linkography to compare the process of three designers with the process of a single designer, and 2) the length of the linkograph can be in accordance with any prescribed duration. In our two case studies it was according to the first sheet of their drawing. Second, it is flexible, the design moves and how the design moves are linked can be coded separately depending on the focus of the study (Dorst 2004; Kan and Gero 2004; Van-der-Lugt 2003). Again these studies are either done qualitatively or at the macroscopic level.

Design Moves, Idea generation, and the Progress of Designing

What is an idea? How to define the boundary of an idea? Idea generation and creativity share some common characteristics. Finke et al (1992) considered creativity not as a single unitary process but a product of many types of mental processes collectively setting the stage for creative insight and discovery. We consider design moves as the externalization of the mental processes. The collective moves can be seen as the clustering of interaction among ideas. The progress of a design session can be observed through the analysis of linkographs. Linkography has been used for investigating the structure of design idea generation processes and for comparing design productivity (Goldschmidt 1990; Goldschmidt 1992; Goldschmidt 1995). Van der Lugt (2003) not only extended Goldschmidt's linkography to trace the design idea generation process but also empirically verified the correlation between creative qualities of ideas and the well-integratedness of those ideas. He extended linkography with link types: supplementary, modification, or tangential links corresponding to small alterations, same direction, or different direction associations respectively. He found that a well-integrated creative process has a large network of links, a low level of self-links, and a balance of link types. Dorst (2003) traced

linking behaviour of designers with regard to design problems and design solutions to reveal the reflective practice of designers.

With an understanding of the construction of a linkograph, one is able to comment on the design process without studying the design protocol. Designers who start the design process with exploring different options and then select one to develop, will produce a very different linkograph compared to designers using a holistic approach without exploring different options. However, the interpretations of a linkograph lack objectivity. There are different levels of subjectivity: determining the moves (segmentation), judging the links among moves (coding), and interpreting the meaning of the resulting linkograph (analysis). Most design protocol studies rely on inter-coder arbitration (McNeil et at 1998), to ensure protocols are objectively segmented and coded. Van der Lugt (2000) has attempted to strive for reliability in linking by introducing a series of indicators for links. The interpretation of linkograph is usually narrated with the aid of link index and critical moves. In this paper we concern the interpretations of linkograph and consider the possibility of using objective methods to acquire information from the linkograph. We shall start with two case studies.

Case Studies

Two pilot cases were conducted to investigate the kinds of information that can be abstracted from linkographs other than link index and critical moves. Case data was obtained from the CRC for Construction Innovation project titled: Team Collaboration in High Bandwidth Virtual Environments. This section depicts the two design sessions together with the qualitative analyses of the sessions. Both cases involved design teams collaborating over an architectural project under different conditions.

Case I: Face-to-face Design Session

Case I was an in-situ design session carried out in a Sydney architects' office. Two architects, one more senior than the other, were involved in the design of a commercial building in Canberra city centre. This design session occurred after a review and planning session subsequent to a client meeting. In this session the designers revisited the relationship between vertical circulation and the void areas so as to satisfy the client's preference. The raw data was a video recording of the session. Figure 2 is one image from this session and Figure 3 is the first sheet of drawing that they produced in this session, which will be analysed in this paper.
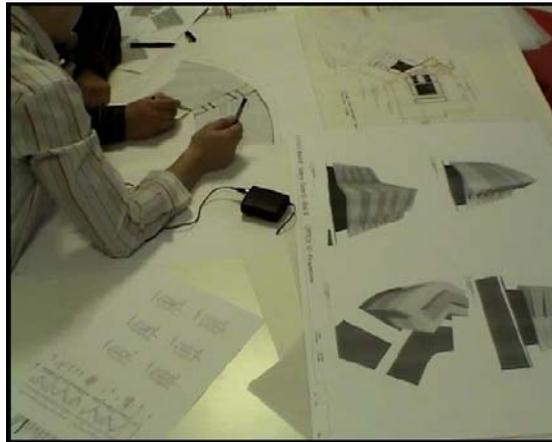
Figure 2. Face-to-face session, Senior Architect starts drawing the core and the bridges after 4 minutes.
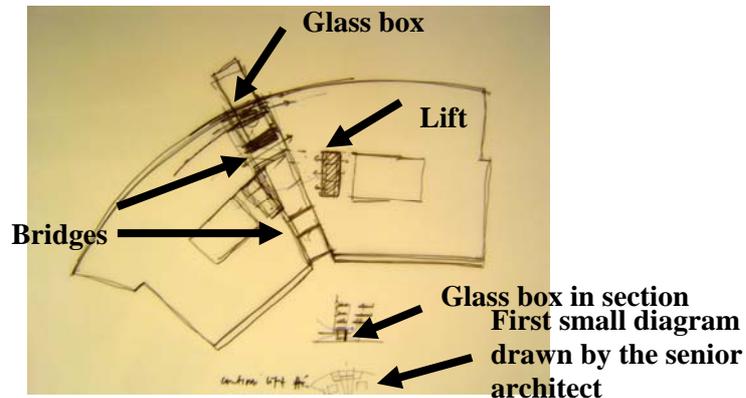

Figure 3. The first sheet of drawing the architects produced in the first 10.5 minutes with annotation added; this sheet was mostly drawn by the Senior Architect, the other Architect had a small diagram on another sheet.

Qualitative Analysis of the Face-to-face Session

In this session the architects were refining the design after the client's feedback. During the first 10.5 minutes of the session, the designers frequently used drawing and gesturing to communicate without explicit verbalizing, and nearly all verbalisations were accompanied by non-verbal actions; they referred to materials from previous designs; they drew different types of diagrams, sometimes separately; and they referred back and forth to the main plan drawing. Design actions were occurring in parallel, sometimes when the Senior Architect was working on the large drawing the Architect would draw on another sheet of paper or retrieve older drawings. There were interruptions like setting up of the microphone for recording at the beginning and a phone call for about a minute towards the end. The leadership role was clear, the Senior Architect controlled and led the session. The session

started with the Architect suggesting a few possible solutions or moves related to the previous session but the Senior Architect insisted on not jumping to a conclusion and started revisiting the issues and the client's preference by drawing a small plan at the bottom of the sheet. He then traced over the position of the bridges which he regarded as important. Then they discussed the relationship among the lift, void, bridges, and lobby. After about 6 minutes the Senior Architect discovered another problem with the setback of columns. They explored the position of the glass box and its relationship with other levels by drawing a small section with the setback of columns. The designers were dealing more with the structural or formal aspects of the design in this session – where things should be and how they related to each other so as to satisfy the client.

Case II: NetMeeting Design Session

Case II was an in-vitro session which simulated distant collaboration of two designers, an Architect and a Landscaper, with the use of computer-mediated tools. Tangible interfaces, Smartboard and Mimio, together with Microsoft NetMeeting were used in this experiment. NetMeeting contains a shared whiteboard and a video conferencing tool. The designers were asked to design an art gallery in a harbour front triangular site with level changes. Both their displays and actions were recorded as shown in Figure 4. Figure 5 is the first sheet that they produced which will be studied and compared in this paper; annotation is added to show the meaning of the drawing.

Figure 4 Case II, NetMeeting session, the designers translating the issues into drawing at the beginning of the session
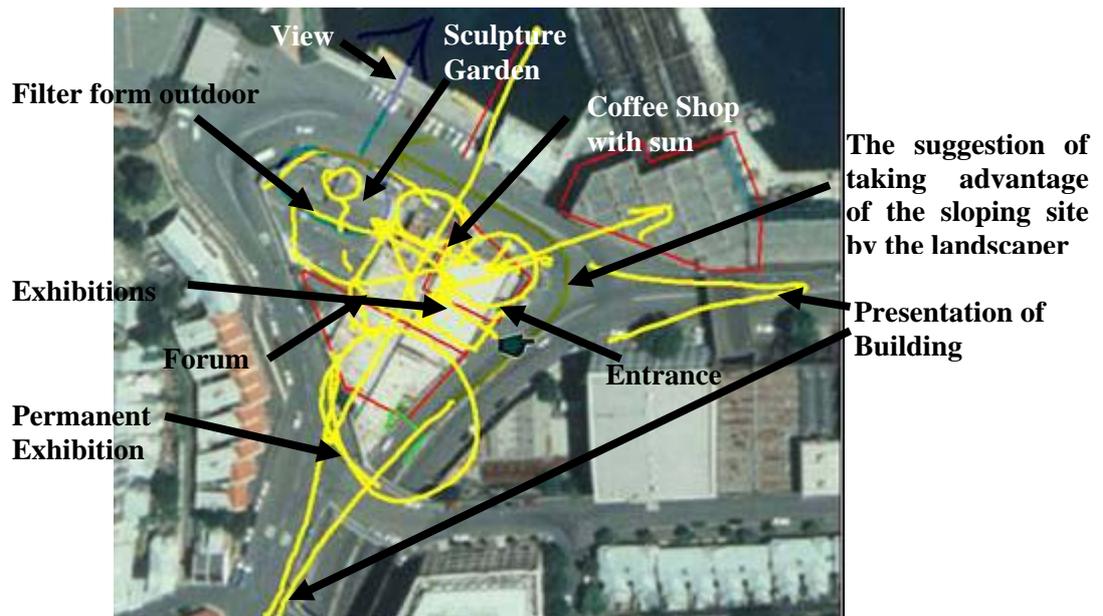
Figure 5 The first sheet of the NetMeeting session, mostly drawn by the Architect

Qualitative Analysis of the NetMeeting Session

In this session the designers were given a new design task, so they were focusing more on the functional or conceptual aspect of the design with time spent on studying the brief. The Architect started the session by trying to figure out the scale of the site in relationship to the brief. He complained that there was nothing there to scale with, and he could only do a mockup. The Landscaper proposed to work out only the appropriate relationship of functional space and its approximate sizes. The Architect then started reading the brief aloud with his added interpretation. Following that the Architect clarified with his partner if she could see his pointer and started drawing. He started drawing, proposing the main exhibition area on the south side of the site. The Landscaper noticed that there was a level change in the site and suggested taking advantage of that. Reacting to the suggestion the Architect proposed the location of the central courtyard, entrance, and connectivity. Then within the last 1.5 minutes the Architect produced all the rest of the design in the first sheet with the contribution of the Landscaper, that included the exhibition areas, the coffee shop with northern sun, the sculpture garden with a view, and the forum. Figure 5 is the capture of the first page from the screen and the annotation was added by consulting the protocol. Overall we can observe that the Architect took the leadership role in this sessions and did most of the drawing .

In the NetMeeting session interactions were more sequential and consisted of more affirmations compared to the face-to-face session and there was not much gesturing. There

were more interactions among ideas, drawings, gestures, and verbal communications in the face-to-face session.

Linkography of the Two Sessions

98 moves were made in the first 10.5 minutes, with 299 links, to produce the first ==sheet== of drawing in the face-to-face session. ==Out of these 98 moves, the Architect contributed 38 moves and the Senior Architect contributed 60 moves.== In the NetMeeting sessions they took 6.5 minutes to produce the first ==sheet==, with 97 moves and 277 links. ==The Landscaper contributed 37 moves and the Architect contributed 60 moves.== Figures 6 and 7 show the linkographs of the two sessions. ==The critical moves with more than five links (CM^5) are indicated by: ">" for forelinks and "<" for backlinks.==

We can observe from the linkographs that in the face-to-face session links are more intense over the whole session whereas in the NetMeeting session links are dense towards the end of the session. There is an obvious chunk at the beginning of the NetMeeting session, but not in the face-to-face session. Overall the linkograph of the face-to-face session is more integrated than the NetMeeting session.
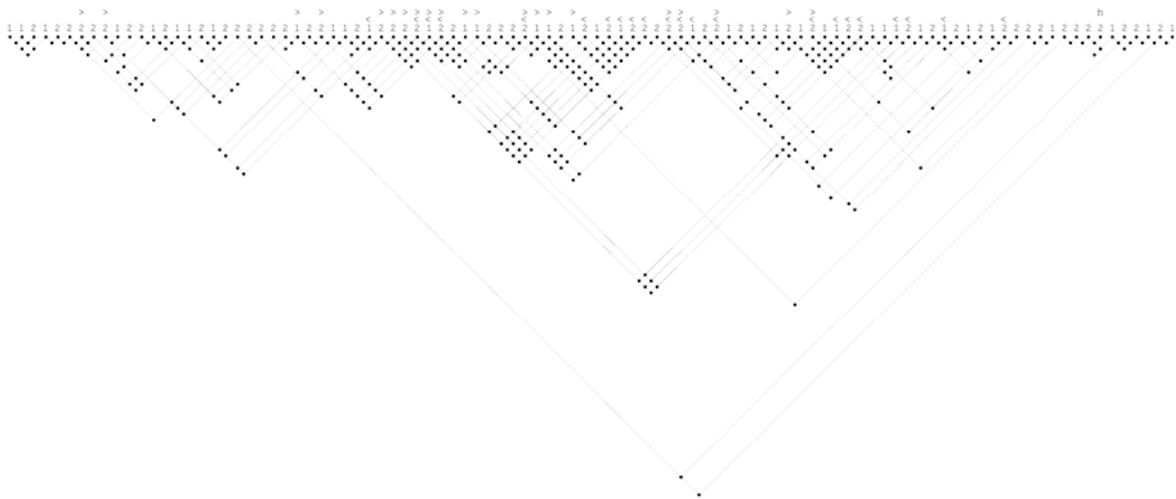

==Figure 6. The linkograph of the first 10.5 minutes of the face-to-face session with "1" represents the Architect and "2"represents the Senior Architect.==
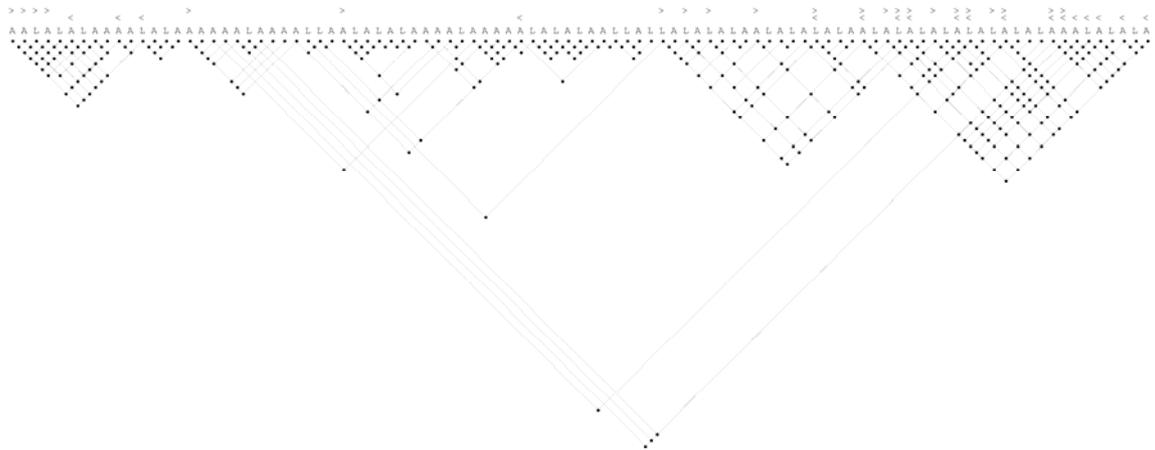
Figure 7. The linkograph of the first 6.5 minutes of NetMeeting session with "A" represents the architect and "L" represents the landscaper.

The link index of the face-to-face and the NetMeeting sessions are 3.05 and 2.88 respectively. Tables 2 and 4 record the critical moves and their percentages over the total number of moves (%CM) of the face-to-face session and the NetMeeting session respectively. The face-to-face session has a total of 43.9 percentage of critical moves with more than five links ($\%CM^5$) which is a bit higher than the NetMeeting session which has a total of 41.2 $\%CM^5$. From these figures the face-to-face session seem to be more productive than the NetMeeting session. However the NetMeeting session has a reasonably higher $\%CM^7$ than the face-to-face session, 28.9 against 20.4. Tables 3 and 5 show the break down of critical moves by individuals of the two sessions; the critical moves percentage of the total number of moves is in bracket. These correspond well to our analysis of the leadership role with the leaders possess not only more moves but also higher %CM.

Table 2. Critical moves with more than 5, 6, and 7 links of the face-to-face session

	CM^5 ($\%CM^5$)	CM^6 ($\%CM^6$)	CM^7 ($\%CM^7$)
Forelinks	21 (21.4)	17 (17.3)	13 (13.3)
Backlinks	22 (22.4)	15 (15.3)	7 (7.1)
Total	43 (43.9)	32 (32.7)	20 (20.4)

Table 3. Critical moves by individuals in the face-to-face session, with A and SA represent the architect and SA respectively. The value inside the brackets shows the critical move percentage of total moves.

	CM^5		CM^6		CM^7	
	A (%)	SA (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Forelinks	7 (18.5)	14 (23.3)	6 (15.8)	11 (18.3)	4 (10.5)	9 (15.0)
Backlinks	7 (18.5)	15 (25.0)	5 (13.2)	10 (16.7)	1 (2.6)	7 (11.7)
Total	14 (36.8)	29 (48.3)	11 (28.9)	21 (35.0)	5 (13.2)	16 (26.7)

Table 4. Critical moves with more than 5, 6, and 7 links of the NetMeeting session

	CM^5 (%CM^5)	CM^6 (%CM^6)	CM^7 (%CM^7)
Forelinks	22 (22.7)	17 (17.5)	14 (14.4)
Backlinks	18 (18.6)	16 (16.5)	14 (14.4)
Total	40 (41.2)	33 (34.0)	28 (28.9)

Table 5. Critical moves by individuals in the NetMeeting session, with L and A represent the landscaper and architect respectively. The value inside the brackets shows the critical move percentage of total moves.

	CM^5		CM^6		CM^7	
	L (%)	A (%)	L (%)	A (%)	L (%)	A (%)
Forelinks	8 (21.6)	14 (23.3)	6 (16.2)	11 (18.3)	5 (13.5)	9 (15.0)
Backlinks	5 (13.4)	13 (21.7)	4 (10.8)	12 (20.0)	4 (10.8)	10 (16.7)
Total	13 (35.1)	27 (45.0)	10 (27.0)	23 (38.3)	9 (24.3)	19 (31.7)

Statistical Description of Linkography

If we take away all the linking lines in the linkograph in Figure 1 and only consider the nodes but not the moves, we will get nodes in a two dimension space, Figure 8. Treating each node as a point in the X-Y plane we can statistically describe a linkograph in terms of the total number of nodes, the mean values of X and Y – that is the centroid or the average position of all the nodes, and the deviations in the X and Y axes.
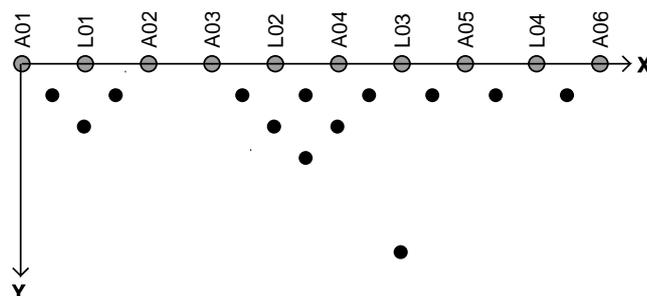
Figure 8. Reducing the graphical links to nodes in a 2 D space

The total number of nodes indicates the level of saturation of a linkograph. Normalizing this number against the number of moves will be the link index as described by Goldschmidt (1995). Adding all the node's X coordinate and divide it by the total number of nodes will give the mean value of X, which is the average location of the nodes in the x-axis. A higher mean value of X implies that more nodes appear at the end of a session and a lower value suggests that more nodes are present in the beginning of the session. In the same way, by adding up the node's Y coordinate and divide it by the total number of nodes will give the mean value of Y, which is the average location of the nodes in the y-axis. A higher mean value of Y indicates longer linking lengths. However, the mean values do not include the dispersion of the distribution, therefore, we need to measure the standard deviations which suggest how concentrated the nodes are clustering around the means. The lower the value the closer those node are toward the mean. Tables 6 and 7 relate the appearance of linkographs, with the same number of nodes as figure 1, to the statistical values. The figures in the two tables are exaggerated for illustration and may look unrealistic.

Table 6. The shape of a linkograph, with the same number of nodes, in relation to mean and standard deviation of X. A higher value of X-mean signifies there are more activities at the end of the session.
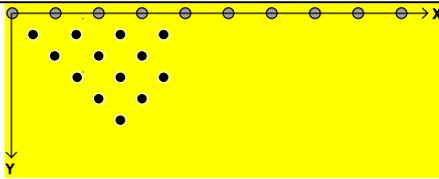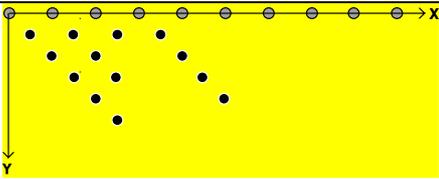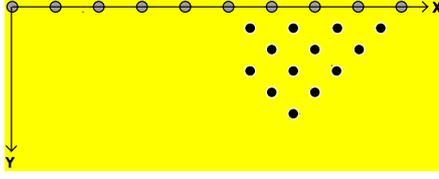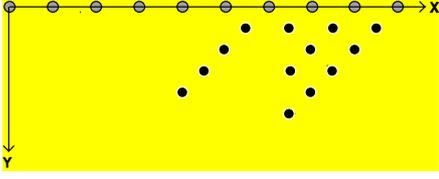
X Axis	Small standard deviation	Large standard deviation
Small mean		
Large mean		

Table 7. The shape of a linkograph, with the same number of nodes, in relation to mean and standard deviation of Y. A lower value of Y-mean indicates shorter linking distance.

Y Axis	Small standard deviation	Large standard deviation

Small mean		
Large mean		
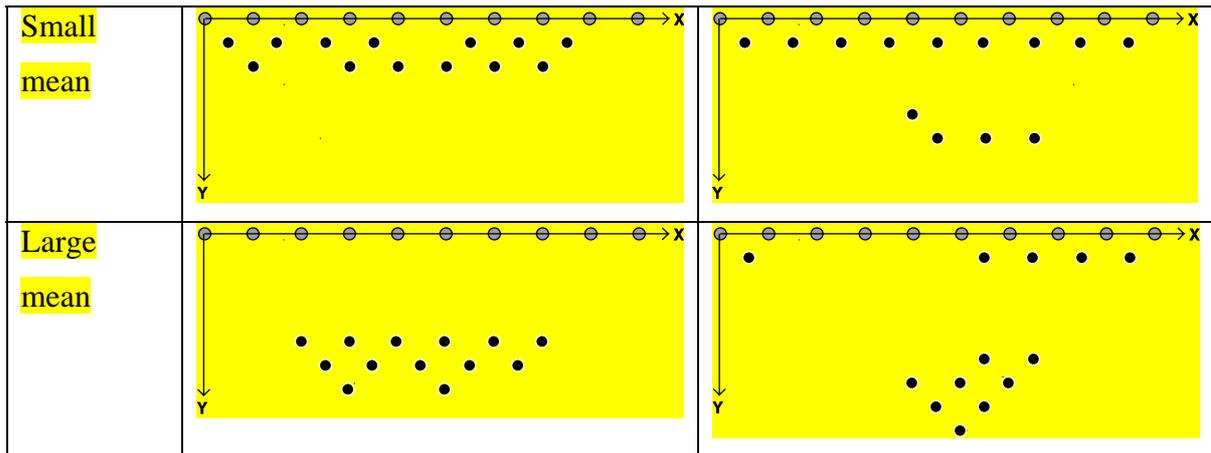
Face-to-face and NetMeeting Session

Tables 8 and 9 show the statistical descriptions of the linkographs, in reference to the position of links, for the face-to-face and NetMeeting session respectively. Figures 9 (a) and 9 (b) are the corresponding scatter plots.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the face-to-face Session with 299 links.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	σ
X location	1.50	97.50	48.23	21.81
Y location	0.50	38.50	3.97	5.10

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the NetMeeting Session with 279 links

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	σ
X location	1.50	96.50	57.83	29.85
Y location	0.5	34.50	3.60	4.61

The normalized saturation (link index) of the face-to-face and the NetMeeting sessions are 3.05 and 2.88 respectively. According to Goldschmidt the face-to-face session has a more productive design process because the face-to-face session has a slighter higher link index.
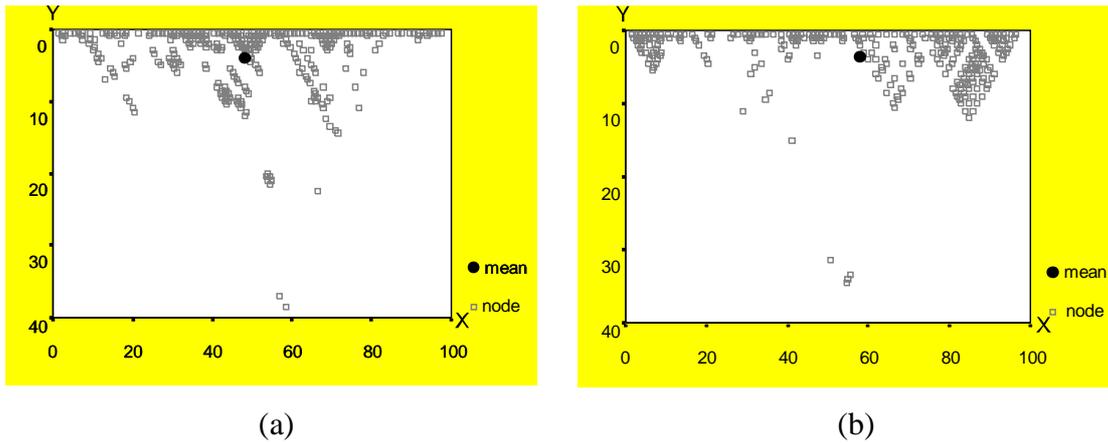
Figure 9. (a) Scatter plot of the face-to-face Session, (b) scatter plot of the NetMeeting session

The NetMeeting session has a higher X mean and a higher standard deviation than the face-to-face session. This indicates, in general, that the links in the NetMeeting session are distributed more towards the end of the session compared to the face-to-face session. This corresponds to the qualitative analysis of the NetMeeting session, where we see numerous actions occurring in the last 1.5 minutes. The NetMeeting session also has a higher standard deviation indicating that the nodes are more dispersed than the face-to-face session. This also make sense because at the beginning of the NetMeeting session the designers were trying to figure out how to scale in the shared whiteboard which formed a separate chunk at the beginning whereas in the face-to-face session we do not observe this kind of separated chunk.

For the mean values of Y, the face-to-face session has a higher value suggesting that the face-to-face session has links that are further apart, that is, longer links than the NetMeeting session. Also, the face-to-face session has a higher standard deviation which suggests more mixture of long and short links. This agrees with our qualitative analysis since in the face-to-face session, the designers referred to and traced over their drawing a lot causing these long links.

Cluster Analysis of Linkography

As we can see in Tables 2, 3, and in Figure 9 the nodes in a linkograph may form clusters. In this section we explore the use of cluster analysis with the two case studies.

TwoStep Cluster

SPSS TwoStep Cluster algorithm is used in this study. This algorithm can handle both continuous and categorical variables. In the first step of this procedure, the records are pre-clustered into many small sub-clusters according to the selected criteria. Then, the algorithm clusters the sub-clusters created in the pre-cluster step into the desired number of clusters. If the desired number of clusters is unknown, it automatically finds the appropriate number of clusters according to the criteria. In this study the X and Y variables were treated as continues and Euclidean distance was used to compute the distance among clusters. Akaike's information criterion (Akaike 1973), based on maximum likelihood principle, was used for determining the number of clusters. Tables 6 and 7 show the result and Figures 10 and 12 are the scatter plots of Case I (face-to-face) and Case II (NetMeeeting) respectively.

Case I: Face-to-face

Table 6. Centroids of the Case I (face-to-face) clusters

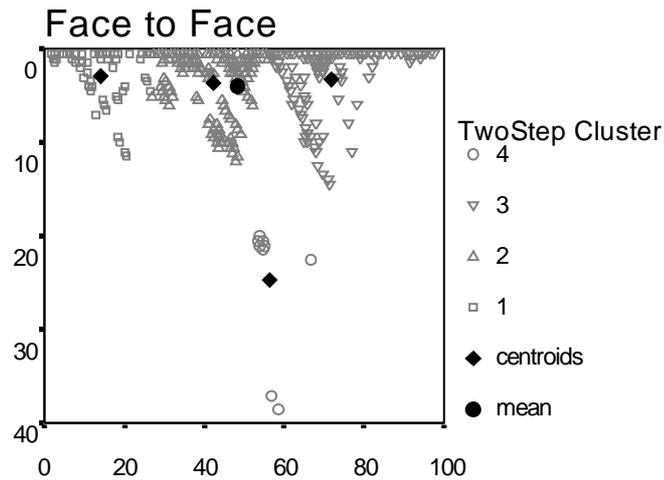| Cluster	X		Y	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	14.18	6.97	2.82	2.95
2	42.50	7.42	3.56	3.29
3	71.67	10.11	3.27	3.72
4	56.39	4.12	24.72	7.43
Combined	48.23	21.81	3.97	5.10

Figure 10. Scatter plot of the clusters of Case I, face-to-face session.

Result and Discussions

Figure 11 shows the variations within clusters, showing that Cluster 4 is different. In Figure 10, Cluster 4 seems to be the outlier, in statistic term. Neglecting this cluster <mark>for this moment</mark>, Clusters 1, 2 and 3 map well with the qualitative analysis. In Cluster 1 the two designers were discussing issues arising from the previous meeting. In Cluster 2 the Senior Architect started drawing and they were considering the behavioural impact of moving the lift, void, and bridge. In Cluster 3 the Senior Architect realized another issue induced by the setting back of columns. Cluster 4, being the <mark>statistical</mark> outlier, groups those links that are far apart which link Cluster 3 with Cluster 2 and Cluster 1. In this particular case, the links were formed either because the participants were tracing over or referring to depictions that they drew earlier or when they were concerned with the symmetrical axis of the building.
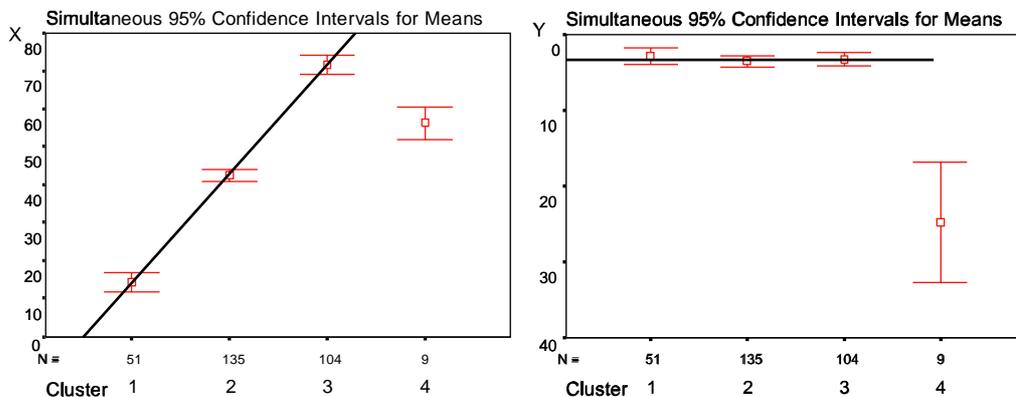

Figure 11. Within cluster variation for the face-to-face session

Case II: NetMeeting

Table 7. Centroids of the Case II (NetMeeting) clusters

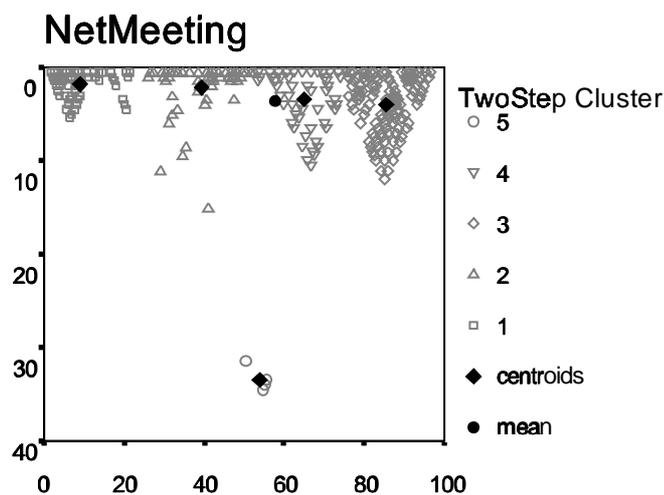| Cluster	X		Y	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	9.04	5.77	1.87	1.43
2	39.40	7.38	2.12	2.97
3	85.61	5.06	4.09	3.00
4	65.13	5.65	3.51	2.98
5	53.88	2.29	33.38	1.31
Combined	57.83	29.85	3.60	4.61

Figure 12. Scatter plot of the clustered of Case II, NetMeeting session.

Result and Discussions

Again, neglecting the statistical outlier, Cluster 5, the other clusters reflect the themes of the protocol. Readers should note that the cluster numbers here do not reflect the time sequence, the time sequence would be Cluster 1, Cluster 2, Cluster 4, and then Cluster 3. In Cluster 1 they were discussing constraints imposed by NetMeeting – how to scale without references. Cluster 2 began with the Architect reading from the brief and continued with the concerns regarding the functional spaces and their relationship. In Cluster 4 the Landscaper introduced another idea suggesting they take advantage of the level changes in the site which lead to further development by the Architect in Cluster 3. Cluster 5, the

statistical outlier, contains the links between this development and the functions in Cluster 2. The Architect was referring to his interpretation of the brief when proposing the location of these functional space. Figure 13 shows the variations within clusters. The mean value of Y slightly increases towards the end of the session indicating that links are getting longer.
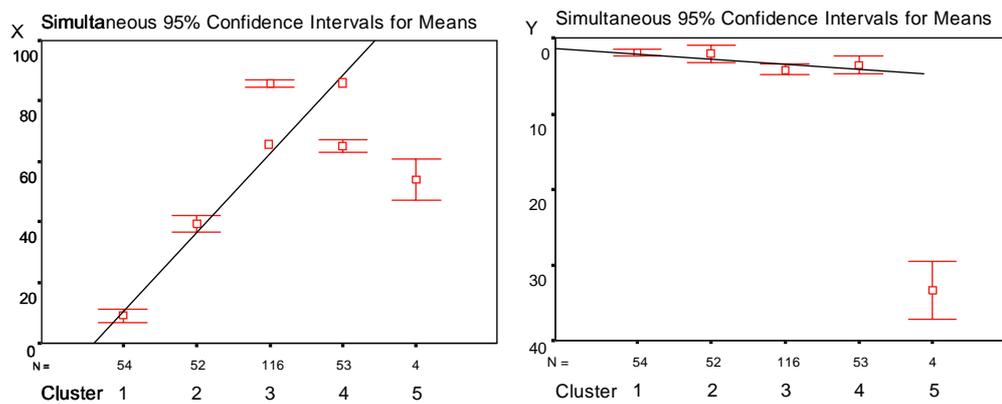

Figure 13. Within cluster variation for the NetMeeting session, squares were added to represent the clusters in the correct time sequence.

Using Entropy to Interpret Linkographs

In Shannon's (1948) information theory, the amount of information carried by a message or symbol is based on the probability of its outcome. If there is only one possible outcome, then there is no additional information because the outcome is known. Information can then be defined in relation to the surprise it produces or the decrease in uncertainty. Given that event E1 has a lower probability than event E2, you would be more surprised if E1 had occurred, hence you get more information. For example, I randomly pick 13 cards out of a standard 52 card pack; you will be very surprised if I tell you I get a full suit of spade. By this unitary communication you know all the cards I am holding. Using this relation of probability of outcome and its information carried, Shannon devised an information-generating function h(p) such that:

h(p) is continuous for $0 <= p <= 1$,

h(pi) = infinity if pi = 0,

h(pi) = 0 if pi = 1,

h(pi) > h(pj) if pj > pi ,

h(pi) + h(pj) = h(pi * pj) if the two states are independent.

Where p is the probability, pi is the probability of state i, and pj is the probability of state j

It was proved that the only function that satisfies the above five properties is

$$h(p) = - \log_b(p) \tag{1}$$

The entropy H, the average information per symbol in a set of symbols with *a priori* probabilities, is expressed in formula 2:

$$H = p1*h(p1) + p2*h(p2) + \dots + pN*h(pN) \tag{2}$$

Where $p_1, \dots p_N$ are probabilities corresponding to $S_1, \dots S_N$ states

Substitute formula 1 into formula 2 we get:

$$H = - \sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i \log_b(p_i) \quad \text{with} \quad \sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i = 1 \tag{3}$$

In this study we shall count entropy in rows of forelinks, backlinks, and link distance that will be denoted as "horizonlinks", according to the ON/OFF of a link, Figure 14. The reason for measuring forelink and backlink entropy is because of their conceptual differences as described in the previous section. Here we introduce another link type called *horizonlink*. Horizonlink is not a link itself but it bears the notion of length of the links which is a measure of time (separation) between links. We can view it as a measure of the distances of the links. In figure 14 (c), we can observe there are *n-1* rows in a *n* moves linkograph. Let *n-i* denotes the rows, the links in rows with small *i* indicate distance between moves are close, we label them as short links. This kind of moves will likely reside in working memory and we refer this to the cohesiveness of ideas. However, if the ideas are too cohesive, it might implies fixation and lack of innovation. The links in the rows with big *i* connect moves that are far apart; we call them long links. These moves may not be in the working memory, we consider those as incubated moves. Long links are comparatively rare and may signify reflection in action. Our assumption of a good design process contains unsaturated short links plus a number of long links.
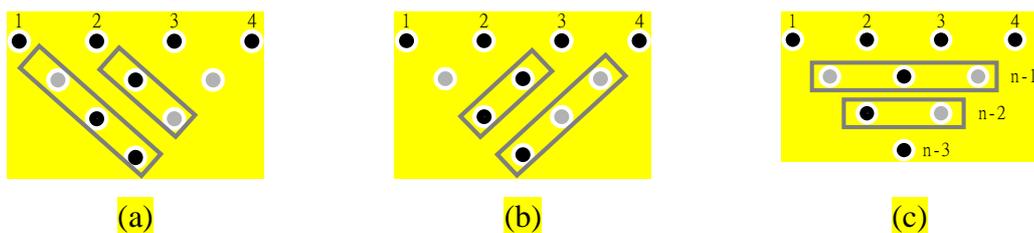

Figure 14. (a) Measuring entropy of forelinks of each row, (b) measuring entropy of backlinks of each row, and (c) measuring entropy of horizonlinks.

Following Shannon's theory, formula (1), in each rows H becomes:

$-p(\text{ON})\text{Log}(p(\text{ON})) - p(\text{OFF})\text{Log}(p(\text{OFF}))$ where $p(\text{ON}) + p(\text{OFF}) = 1$ (3)

The maximum entropy (most random) of each row occurs when the ON/OFF of the links are most unpredictable, that is, half of the row are linked and half of it are un-linked. Figure 15 plots the value of H against formula (3).

The graph in Figure 15 is symmetrical, the slope of the graph decreases sharply as the probability moves away from 0 and 1. This indicates that when the links move away from determinate values of 0 and 1 (all un-linked and all linked) the H value increases rapidly. In principle this is different from Goldschmidt (1995) interpretation of productivity where more critical moves (moves with more than a designated number of links) and a high value of link index, disregarding the total number of possible links, are valued as more productive. However, Kan and Gero (2005) argue that a fully saturated linkograph indicates no diversification of ideas, hence less opportunity for quality outcomes. This graph shows that when $p(1)$ is between {0.35, 0.65}, H is over 0.93, that is, if the links in a row are between 35% and 65% it will produce a very positive value (rich design process). If the links are less then 5% or over 95%, it will produce a very low H value (below 0.29).
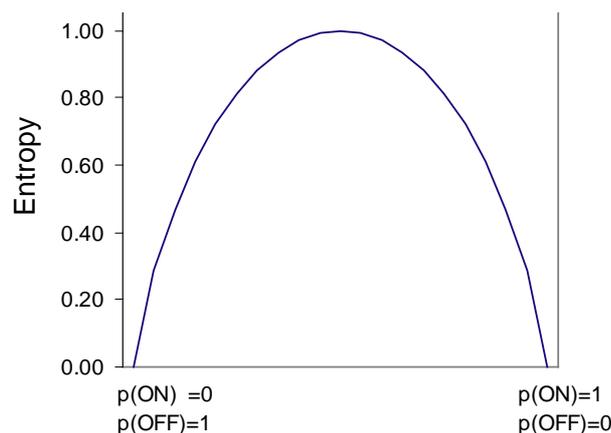

Figure 15. Maximum entropy when $p(\text{ON})=p(\text{OFF})=0.5$

In practice it is unlikely to have a fully saturated linkograph that has more than 7 moves. This also depends on the length of an episode; figure 16 illustrates a typical linkograph in relation to the saturation of links; there are more *n* to *n-1* links than *n* to *n - i* links. The

reason for that is that people try to maintain a coherence of conversation/thought (Grice 1975; Pavitt and Johnson 1999) and people have limited short-term memory (Miller 1956).
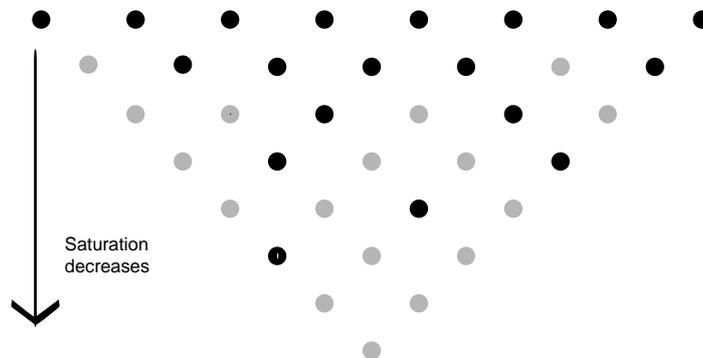

Figure 16 Typical distribution of links in a linkography of a design process

If we follow Miller's "magic number seven plus or minus two", any row in a linkograph will seldom have more than 9 links. Taking the 35% linkage as denominator, therefore, any rows with row length of more than 26 moves will not have a high H value.

The hypothesis is that a higher entropy implies a process with more opportunities for idea development.

Hypothetical Cases

Four hypothetical design scenarios with only five moves or four stages are used to examine these concepts further. Table 8 shows some possible linkographs together with interpretation of the design process they reflect. Tables 9, 10, and 11 are the entropy, using formula (3), of the forelinks, backlinks, and horizonlinks respectively. Table 12 is the cumulative entropy which maps well onto our understanding of those scenarios – Cases 1 and 2 receive zero entropy as they represent low opportunity for idea development, Case 3 has an entropy lower than Case 4 as Case 4 has a better integration among the moves.

Table 8. Some possible linkographs of five design moves and their interpretations.

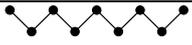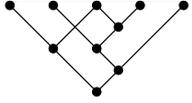| Case 1		Five moves are totally unrelated, indicating no converging ideas, hence very low opportunity for idea development.
Case 2		All moves are interconnected; this shows that this is a totally integrated process with no diversification, hinting that a pre-mature crystallization or fixation of one idea may have occurred, therefore there is a very

		low opportunity for novel idea.
Case 3		Moves are related only to directly preceding moves. This indicates the process is progressing but not developing; indicating some opportunities for idea development.
Case 4		Moves are inter-related but not totally connected, indicating that there are lots of opportunities for good ideas with development.

Table 9. Entropy of forelinks

	Forelink Entropy				
	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4	**Total**
Case 1	0	0	0	0	**0**
Case 2	0	0	0	0	**0**
Case 3	0.811	0.918	1.000	0	**2.730**
Case 4	1.000	0.918	1.000	0	**2.918**

Table 10. Entropy of backlinks

	Backlink Entropy				
	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4	Move 5	**Total**
Case 1	0	0	0	0	**0**
Case 2	0	0	0	0	**0**
Case 3	0	1.000	0.918	0.811	**2.730**
Case 4	0	1.000	0.918	1.000	**2.918**

Table 11. Entropy horizonlinks

	Horizonlink Entropy			
	n-1	n-2	n-3	**Total**
Case 1	0	0	0	**0**
Case 2	0	0	0	**0**
Case 3	0	0	0	**0**
Case 4	0.811	0.918	1.000	**2.730**

Table 12. Cumulative entropy of each case

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
0	**0**	**5.459**	**8.566**

Table 13 shows the link index and the critical moves (CM) of the four hypothetical cases. There is no link in case 1 so it does not have CM and has zero link index. Case 3 and 4 also do not have CM; Case 4 has a higher link index than Case 3 which indicates a better integration of ideas. For Case 2, it has the highest link index and CMs, so it should be the most productive scenario. However as explained in Table 8, this might not be the most desirable scenario.

Table 13 Link index and critical moves of the four cases

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Link Index	0	2	0.8	1
CM[3]	0	2	0	0
CM[4]	0	2	0	0

Entropy of Face-to-face and NetMeeting Sessions

Tables 14 and 15 show the entropy of the face-to-face and NetMeeting sessions respectively. Forelinks can be seen as initiations and backlinks as responses. So a higher H value of forelinks signifies higher opportunity in initiating design moves, and a higher H value of backlinks denotes higher opportunity in building upon previous design moves. The horizonlink entropy indicates the opportunity according to the length of the links, high values usually indicate a mixture of long and short links which suggests the cohesiveness and incubativeness of ideas. In the face-to-face session the backlink entropy is slightly higher than the forelink entropy which might indicate higher opportunity of building upon than initiating moves. The NetMeeting session scored the opposite, which might indicate the initiation opportunity is higher than the response opportunity. These results tentatively match our qualitative analyses of both sessions. In the face-to-face session the designers were at the stage of refining the design, referring to what is already there, whereas in the NetMeeting session they started from the beginning, initiating new ideas. However, the difference in entropies are too small to be conclusive. Both sessions have similar horizonlink entropy. Overall, the face-to-face session has a higher entropy in all three areas implying the opportunities are higher in all areas. This concurs with the link index study.

Table 14. Entropy of face-to-face session

Forelinks total H	Backlinks total H	horizonlinks total H	Cumulative Total
34.171	36.693	12.244	**83.109**

Table 15. Entropy of the NetMeeting session

Forelinks total H	Backlinks total H	horizonlinks total H	Cumulative Total
27.865	26.922	11.477	**66.264**

Role and Participation of Individual

Table 16 and Table 17 are the forelinks and backlinks entropy contributions by different participants. In both sessions the leaders scored higher than their partners in both forelinks and backlinks entropy. There are two factors that contribute to this: the number of moves and the entropy per move. From our qualitative analysis we know the leaders did most of the drawing, hence contribute more moves. The leaders also have a higher entropy per move except for the forelinks of the Landscaper. This is due to the Landscaper's contribution of a new idea – taking advantage of level changes which is an opportunistic initiation. The individuals' entropy scores faithfully reflect their opportunistic contributions. This contrasts the CM study in Tables 3 and 5 which show that the leaders in both sessions have higher %CM in both forlinks and backlinks.

Table 16. Forelink and backlink entropy by the Senior Architect and the Architect in the face-to-face session

	Moves	Forelink H		Backlink H	
Senior Architect	60	21.661	0.361 per move	22.846	0.381 per move
Architect	38	12.511	0.329 per move	13.847	0.364 per move

Table 17. Forelink and backlink entropy by the architect and the landscaper in the NetMeeting session

	Moves	Forelink H		Backlink H	

Architect	60	16.582	0.276 per move	17.930	0.299 per move
Landscaper	37	11.283	0.305 per move	8.988	0.243 per move

Conclusion

In this study we explored design sessions where designers were working together on the same artefacts simultaneously. We proposed methods to acquire information from linkographs and tested them with two cases. Standard descriptive statistics were able to describe the shape of a linkograph and in our case study they were able to pick up some of the differences in the design processes such as the lengths of the links and the position of intensive activities.

The preliminary results using clustering and entropy were promising. We were able to map the clusters onto the actual design activities, and hence were able to label the semantics of a cluster. The statistic outliers contained long links that connect other clusters.

Traditional study of linkographs used link index and critical moves to benchmark the productivity of a design session. We put forward that link index might bias toward saturated linkographs. Usually, this would not create any problems as most of the linkographs with reasonable moves would have relatively sparse links. Entropy, based on the information theory, captured another aspect of the linkograph which it biased toward half saturated linkographs. In the two case studies, the total cumulative entropies agreed with the link index with a different magnitude. We anticipated that entropy measures the idea development opportunities: Forelink entropy measures the idea generation opportunities in terms of new creations or initiations. Backlink entropy measures the opportunities according to enhancements or responses. Horizonlink entropy measures the opportunities relating to cohesiveness and incubation. The difference between forelink and backlink entropies in both sessions were to small to draw solid conclusion. In the study of individuals entropy contribution, it seems to reflect the opportunistic contributions of individual participants which is not shown in the critical moves analysis.

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