

# HUMAN- CENTERED DESIGN

Get Started  
Tool Kit

by the caring folks at  stoked

# Human-centered design mindsets / behaviors



## focus on human values

The human is at the center of everything we do: how we frame problems, why we iterate or pivot solutions, and where we look for inspiration. By being wildly curious about this human's behaviors, emotions, and habits, we can uncover unmet needs that serve as the opportunity space for innovation and creativity.



## embrace experimentation

Despite common misconception, most innovation doesn't come from a stroke of genius or one grand idea, but instead from consistent iteration based on human needs. Experimentation means being open to being wrong—in fact seeking it—so you can move quickly to new solutions without wasting time, money, and team energy.



## bias toward action

Less planning, more trying! We bias toward action over permission so that we can show up with something we've learned vs. something we intend to do.



## show don't tell

Effective communication comes less from traditional sources like email and PowerPoint, which evoke critique, and more from inviting our audience to join us experientially. Whenever possible, we create shared visual assets or interactive probes to share our ideas in order to elicit a more collaborative and engaged response.



## radical collaboration

If we want to do something new, we can't just continue to work with the same people in the same way. Work with a diverse group of people and think creatively about how to involve multiple perspectives.



## mindful of process

Healthy team collaboration requires keen awareness of what stage of the process we are engaged in. Each stage requires us to show up with specific behaviors that help us be successful.

# 5

## Modes

Stages of the  
human-centered  
design process

1

Empathy

2

Define

3

Ideate

4

Prototype

5

Test

# Empathy

Every great idea starts with listening.



## Interview

- 01** Start with a curious mindset. Decide **what you want to learn** and identify **diverse participants** who will provide new information, be impacted by your work, or offer a fresh perspective.
- 02** Prep great questions. Your questions should be **open-ended**, **story-seeking**, and **human-centered**, not hypothetical.  
*Tell me about a time when...*  
*Tell me about the best/worst...*
- 03** Work with a partner to **make sure everything is captured** (name, photo, quotes). Seek stories that are surprising, contradictory, or reveal a person's deeper motivations.



## Extreme Users

Try looking past those participants that are easy to see to explore the edges of your audience. Focus on what makes them unique to understand how non-standard participants think about your challenge. Capture perspectives from opposite ends of the spectrum in order to identify tensions and contradictions between the two.



## Observation

- 01 Identify the environment where your challenge exists.** Determine specific people, processes, or tasks that you'd like to better understand.
- 02 Watch carefully and attentively** for emotional reactions to the environment, significant gaps in processes, missed opportunities, or abnormal behavior.
- 03** Use your observations to **form questions** and additional empathy probes.



## Analogous Learning

- 01 Identify products, services, or people that may correlate or contrast with your work.** For example, imagine you are working on a service that will help shorten wait times. Find other businesses that have waiting customers: drive-thrus, the DMV, or the airport can be great sparks to explore new ways of thinking!
- 02** Study these analogous situations through research, interviewing, or observation. Think about **what you can learn from them in unexpected ways**. For example, what made someone smile? What were the distinct pain points? What caused confusion?
- 03** Use these new areas of research to **expand how you think about your challenge**.

## Feeling stuck?

It's totally normal to struggle with empathy on a project that is near and dear to your heart. Here are a few things to think about when you get stuck...

Ask yourself, "how many days has it been since I talked with a participant?" The most common reason teams get stuck is because too much time has passed since last interacting with a user.

Your bias is likely to lead to more of the same. Do your best to remove it by working with new people and pushing yourself to be drawn to fresh information.

Stop looking for themes and start looking for outliers.

Build a comfort with silence, emotional reactions, and contradictions.

Don't forget to follow the stories that are interesting to you, even if they seem non-related.

# Define

Focus on what's important as a team to clarify the challenge.



## Unpacking

- 01** Dedicate time with your teammates (especially those who were not involved in empathy research) to **share everything you've learned**. On top of uncovering important insights, your focus should be managing team energy and cohesiveness.
- 02** Read your detailed notes to the team as if you were recapping an entire story or conversation. Encourage the team to **ask questions and make inferences**.
- 03** **Create a shared visual asset** by documenting notes individually on post-its, then using an empathy map to plot what your participant felt, thought, did, and said.



## Point of view Statement (POV)

- 01** A simple framework to use is:  
**We Met** *name, important descriptors*  
**We were Surprised to Learn** *an observation that was surprising / telling / insightful*  
**This Might Mean** *an inference; what might the above insight mean for their life?*  
**It would be Game Changing if** *what state of being would change their life?*
- 02** Frame each statement into a clear and descriptive sentence. A great POV allows others to **clearly picture your participant, understand the challenge** and **feel inspired to work on your project**.
- 03** Share your POV with others to verify that your intent is clear and motivating. Ensure that your game-changing statement will **help you ideate in the future**.



## Reframing a challenge

- 01** Considering your clearly defined POV, ask if you are on the same page regarding **what the challenge is really about?**
- 02** Identify what you thought the challenge was about before empathy and then **describe what the challenge is about now that you've engaged with participants**.  
For example...  
*We thought it was about access to healthcare, it's really about personal finances.*  
*We thought it was about lobby aesthetics, it's really about guest confusion.*
- 03** Socialize your reframe statement so that the larger team is aligned.

## Feeling stuck?

Creating a POV is a major focal point for your project that requires not only incredible soft skills (team and emotional alignment), but also analytical skills to identify the right insights and challenge.

Don't stress, you're incredible AND resourceful. Try this...

You might need to do more empathy work. Do you feel like you are reaching too far on an inference? The team can't agree? Go talk to more participants and dig a little deeper until it clicks.

Are you chasing the problem you think your boss wants you to solve vs. what the participant really needs? Be honest about it.

Is your game changing statement already a solution? Try asking the team "how do we want the participant to feel?" instead of "what does the participant need?"

# Ideate

You aren't here to do what's already been done.



## How might we (HMW)

- 01** Find inspiration from the game-changing note in your POV to help you think of a few *HMW* statements to serve as **sparks/ prompts for brainstorming**.
- 02** A good *HMW* should be **big enough that you can think beyond your participant** but not so much that you lose sight of their problems or hopes.  
*How might we empower John to create trust on his own?*  
*How might we recognize when trust is alive?*  
*How might we foster trust between neighbors?*
- 03** You should craft your *HMWs* before brainstorming either as a team or individually as the facilitator. Use these to **keep momentum and diversify your ideas**.



## Techniques

- 01 Introvert:** Take the first few minutes alone to spark ideas then share them together. After someone shares an idea, practice building on that idea by using "yes and."
- 02 Extrovert:** Have everyone stand and ideate together.
- 03 Analogous:** Brainstorm using other people, companies, and processes as inspiration.  
*Who else does something like this?*  
*How do they do it?*  
*How might we do it?*

## Brainstorming Rules

- 1** One conversation at a time
- 2** Quantity > Quality
- 3** No judgement! (of yourself or others)
- 4** Encourage wild ideas!
- 5** Be visual
- 6** Yes and...(build on the ideas of others)



## Idea selection

- 01** You have a ton of good / bad / crazy / gnarly ideas in front of you, now the goal is to pick an idea. A great first step: **vote!**
- 02** Give each team member stickers to individually select three contrasting viewpoints. For example: **delight, disrupt, succeed or head, heart, gut.**
- 03 Use the voting as a heat map of enthusiasm.** Move forward with one or more of the ideas. Select one that feels like a quick win and another that is further out. This helps teams create a more diverse portfolio of possibilities. Remember, this doesn't have to be final. You can always come back to your wall of ideas.

## Feeling stuck?

In ideation, you've got to break from the norm. Here are some ideas to shake up the team and get the momentum going that you need to dream up something special:

You've got to break the ice. Ask the team to play "yes and," rock, paper, scissors or brainstorm "fun ways to get kids to eat vegetables" before jumping into the project.

Preparation is everything. Get a room with lots of light, space, fun music, and the right materials. Make the team feel like they are about to do something totally different.

Add newbies, masters, and fun-loving weirdos to the mix. Radical collaboration can make a world of difference when it comes to generating fresh ideas.

Reminder: feasibility and viability are not invited to this party (yet)!

# Prototype

Get scrappy and make your ideas come to life.



Know what you want to learn

- 01** Ok, so you have an idea you want to go with... now what? Start by deciding what exactly you want to learn. **Remember, every prototype should have one clear goal.**
- 02** **Keep desirability front-and-center.** *"This prototype is about testing how useful our participant finds our service."* or *"We want to build a prototype that learns how quickly or slowly a participant connects to this idea."*
- 03** Knowing what you want to learn will help keep your prototype **simple** and let you know exactly what to be watching for during testing.



Prepare your idea

- 01** **Outline what your participant might be doing before, during, and after interacting with your solution.** Consider drawing a picture or creating a journey map to help make it come to life. This begins to paint the picture of how this idea will fit into their life.
- 02** **Identify which part of the experience is the unique innovation** you want to test first.
- 03** Now that you've identified exactly what you want to test, identify the **scene, props, and roles** you need to create to make the prototype feel real to a tester, or participant.



Your first prototype

- 01** Before you start building, **improvise your solution to life.** Cast your team members a role in the scene. Switch roles intermittently to see how others might play it out. Choose one person to be the Director role that is in charge of calling, "rewind", "fast forward", and "cut."
- 02** Now, you are ready to build! Grab some cardboard, duct tape, string, and scissors and **just start building the props you need to make the experience come to life.** Building a scrappy prototype allows your idea to evolve quickly because you can **iterate on the fly.**
- 03** Remember, your first prototype is a great one if it can answer one simple question: **Can our potential tester experience the prototype and give us meaningful feedback in return?**

## Feeling stuck?

The most common pitfall in prototyping is fear. Fear of putting something half-baked in front of important people. Fear of not capturing every aspect of your great idea. Fear of building something incomplete. Old behaviors love prototyping. Help fight them off by trying the following:

Stop talking about what it is. Move into action whether it be improvising or building.

Don't forget, you are building something for your tester to interact with, not just observe. Testers should be doing 80% of the talking. Have someone play the role of a tester while you are building it to be sure it is experiential.

Your idea can go in SO many different directions, but just start with one. What is the one thing you want to learn from your prototype? Does the experience test for that?

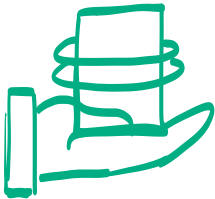
# Test

## Empathy with a prop.



Test prep

- 01 A great test first starts with great preparation. First, **identify who should test**. Are you trying to impact a specific group or demographic? Plan ahead to recruit them.
- 02 Once testers arrive, **make sure they know what to expect**. This includes the focus of the project, the nature of the prototype (low resolution), and the type of feedback you are looking for (brutally honest!).
- 03 Remember, a test is just another chance to empathize, so **put the human experience front-and-center**.



Active testing

- 01 Your primary goal during a test is to **fully listen to your participant**. Therefore, provide a brief introduction and **“hand over” your prototype**. That means emotionally and physically letting go of your idea and allowing them to experience it and react to it.
- 02 **Watch them interact with and react to your idea**. *What did their body language say? What tone did they use? Where were they most confused or excited about? Where was there tension? What did their posture or facial expression teach you?*
- 03 **Document their reactions** by capturing on a feedback grid (+) what worked, (-) what didn't work, (?) what questions they had and (!) any new ideas they shared. Create these four quadrants, capture your feedback on Post-Its and, fill your grid to quickly observe your feedback.



Debrief testing

- 01 **Test your solution a number of times before making modifications to your prototype**.
- 02 After this first round of testing, ask yourselves two things: **What is the most important thing we learned about our prototype? What is the most important thing we learned about our POV?**
- 03 Expect to find **clear and meaningful themes** to surface after about six tests.

## Feeling stuck?

One of the easiest things to fall into during testing is the excitement over having your ideas succeed. We want to get to a YES! so fast that we accidentally forget to listen with big, objective ears rather than only listening to what we want to hear.

Keep in mind when you're listening for the important difference between a simple satisfied "Sure, I liked it" and genuine delight in your tester.

Stay curious! During testing you're actually returning to empathy, only this time you have a prototype in front of your tester too. Stay excited and curious about what could be ahead of you! This "last" mode is often not actually the end.

Don't sell your prototype to your tester! Simply set it up and let them experience it fully.