

## THE SERVICE DESIGN MINDSET

First and foremost, service design is a mindset<sup>43</sup> researchers and others can adopt to help them better understand how users perceive services. It requires that researchers break out of their usual mode of thinking to see services with a fresh eye and a new perspective on user needs and expectations. Approaching any research problem with an open mind and a willingness to learn and see the larger picture opens up possibilities to evolve and learn with users. Service design is more than just implementing a few tools, gathering insights, and synthesizing the data. It requires that you alter your perspective and embrace empathy in order to get closer to users and an authentic understanding of their perspective on the library and its services.

Service design includes a robust set of tools. Some tools (such as design ethnography) have a foundation in traditional anthropological methods. Other tools (customer journey mapping, blueprinting, and prototyping) draw from the user experience professional's toolkit to help with visualizing the steps required to perform a task. It also includes more traditional tools (like journaling) to help us better understand users in their own words. Finally, it draws from the performing arts by using scenarios to help stage a scene to get a reaction and plan for the actual performance of services.

With a fresh perspective and a series of tools, we are ready to approach the research challenges that lay ahead. Let's take a closer look at the mindset required for service design.

## ELEMENTS OF THE SERVICE DESIGN MINDSET

**Co-Creating**

Service exchanges are co-productions. When a provider and a user of a service interact to complete a task, they have co-produced an experience and performed something akin to a piece of theater. In service design, we measure and observe current exchanges and work closely with current internal and external stakeholders to co-design services. Co-creation happens when service providers and users work together to better understand needs and expectations<sup>44</sup> to refine, revise, or create new services.

In any service design project, the research team will work closely with a group of users on a variety of exercises and in discussion sessions to uncover motivations and expectations behind user actions. Co-creation is not limited to testing actual users; it is a necessary mindset of service design because it requires the research team to trust that the user knows best how they want services delivered. We must view services through their eyes, which can only be done by working closely with them to determine which services should be offered and how we should offer them.

**Making the Intangible Tangible**

Service design “deconstruct[s] service processes into single touchpoints and interactions.”<sup>45</sup> In doing so, the research team can identify the various tasks, departments, choices, feelings, and internal and external processes involved in the completion of a task. Services normally involve a request and an exchange, which can be verbal or physical, followed by the production of evidence. For example, a receipt or e-mail documenting that a transaction occurred may provide evidence of the transaction. While the request and exchange are not invisible, most of the steps involved happen in the user’s mind as they journey to complete a task. Analyzing the user journey to find the intangible steps and then making them visible provides a picture of how truly integrated the library is.

We can make the invisible steps tangible by creating such dynamic visualizations as a customer journey map or blueprint, or through staging scenarios. Another reason to make tasks tangible is to pinpoint and investigate touchpoints, which “occur any time a user uses or interacts with your product or service.”<sup>46</sup> Examples include the website, help desks, tables and chairs, virtual chat, e-mail, public computers, and so on. Identifying touchpoints and the steps involved in completing a process can help you identify potential trouble spots.

### **Confirming with Evidence**

Too often in librarianship we base our decisions on our own biases and assumptions about users.<sup>47</sup> Adopting the mindset and using the tools of service design provides a powerful method for either confirming or disabusing notions you may have of your users. Gathering evidence and insights to inform decision-making ensures that services fit with not only what users say they want, but also what they actually do.

Another common decision-making error is relying on national trends or returning from a conference and basing decisions on what worked in a different library. It is important to keep up to date on trends and library literature, but outside trends should always be only one part of the internal decision-making process. Because each library is a unique ecology with its own set of users set within a larger environment (city, state, college, university, etc.), user behavior has to be studied and understood for that specific place. While ideas from other libraries may inspire you, it is important to make sure those ideas are a good fit for your user group.

### **Focusing on User Needs and Expectations**

At its heart, librarianship is a service industry dedicated to serving users. The focus of service design is on user needs, but also user expectations. User expectations are based on previous experiences with similar services<sup>48</sup> that they've encountered in their daily lives. People tend to group or cluster similar experiences together to form an internal expectation.<sup>49</sup> Understanding how and what people think about your services and where they see similarities with other services can help you understand current needs and expectations.

A common example is the functionality of websites. Using websites to find people, things, and services has become daily practice for most Americans. Because users understand the basics of how websites should function, they can get frustrated when one does not meet their expectations. If menus don't work the way they do on other sites or if the site is too slow or cluttered, they may suspect something is broken or think poorly of the library. A common and related example from academic libraries is how difficult it is for many students and faculty to maneuver from article citations indexed in the catalog or a database to the full text of the article in another database. This process usually takes several clicks, leaving users with the perception that it is easier to use Google Scholar and other sources on the open web because the full text is either there or it's not. While librarians know that subscription databases and open web sources are not the same, users don't understand the difference, so they assign a value based on what they perceive as a less positive experience.

In the first example, the library is in a position to meet expectations by improving the website. The second example is more complicated because we often have little control about how the databases work and interact with one another, but one solution might be to give feedback on the steps as the user proceeds through them. While we can't always meet expectations due to outside factors, we can adapt the system to make the process less onerous or provide clear communication about it.

### **Thinking Holistically**

Thinking holistically is the ability to see the highly integrated and coupled library system for what it is. The library is a group of tightly coupled systems working together to perform services. To operate holistically, it is important to keep the bigger picture in mind when designing services. While it might be impossible to think of every single aspect of a service, the research team has to strive toward that goal by considering the larger context and ecology in which a service exists and operates.<sup>50</sup> Knowing the impact that changes to a service can have on both user and staff provider experience is important. When we think holistically, we quickly realize that “each and every action contributes to the total experience,”<sup>51</sup> and as von Humboldt realized when looking at nature, “no single fact can be considered in isolation.”<sup>52</sup> What works for the natural world works for the built environment.

### **Having Empathy**

The goal of empathy is to “feel what it’s like to be another person” through “acquiring [the] feelings”<sup>53</sup> of another person. Employing empathy allows us to “observe the world in minute detail,”<sup>54</sup> but efforts to do so may be nearly impossible, because who can actually feel like someone they aren’t? At the very least, by adopting an empathetic mindset when studying and designing services, we can approximate a user’s world<sup>55</sup> to “see the world as [they] do.”<sup>56</sup> Tripp observed that, “with empathy, you can start with what’s needed by your customers and figure out a way to serve them.”<sup>57</sup>

The service design process puts the user in the center and works outward from there. Without a sense of empathy with their journey and behavior, we could never learn what we might be doing wrong or how to better meet their expectations and needs. It is crucial to take care of all aspects of the experience, or “there is a danger that many parts of the service experience will ‘just happen’ . . . [and] this isn’t good enough.”<sup>58</sup> Using empathy will help you remember the purpose of the service design project and get you to think outside of your box and attend to all parts of the user’s experience. While empathy is a well-known tool for service design veterans, it takes a great deal

of effort to care about the actual user journey and understand the hurdles they face. Remembering to care and empathize is key to any team's efforts.

### **Being Open-minded and Not a Devil's Advocate**

Service design is an exploratory process that requires participating members to have an open mind and a willingness to learn. To have a truly open mind, the research team should be optimistic about the project and feel that what they are doing will lead to important new insights and improved services that will add value to the library. As part of the service design process, you will work closely with a user working group and other library colleagues. It is important that the process does not get bogged down with negativity or that ideas don't get shot down with that ubiquitous statement "we've tried that before."

It is essential to create a safe space for everyone involved with your service design project, that includes both staff and user participants. The best ideas are often borne from ideas that may sound crazy at first. Invoking the devil's advocate can be the death knell of innovation because it shoots people and ideas down too early in the process. While the devil's advocate can be a powerful analytical tool, it is too often used to ridicule and belittle new ideas. When playing the devil's advocate, the speaker gets to hide behind a shield of negativity and essentially dismantle ideas before they have a chance to be fully vetted, considered, and confirmed, or disconfirmed with evidence. Focusing on problems too early in the process can hinder any possible innovation.<sup>59</sup> Our goal in service design is not only to understand how services are used, but also to create new services or refine current ones. We can only do that by confirming with evidence and looking at all possibilities for solutions, no matter how crazy they may seem at first. To make service design work, the team needs to trust the process and the insights gathered by observing and interacting with actual users, and that other members are willing to learn and be open to new ideas. Great solutions come from allowing each idea their time in the sun. This is not to say that members of the research team can't disagree. By all means, have healthy discussions full of debate. But keep the devil's advocate out of early discussions. Let the evidence and insight talk. If you listen, you may hear a solution worth taking up.

### **Being Willing to Evolve**

The line "I knew everything once and now I know it all again"<sup>60</sup> sums up a willingness to be wrong and a willingness to evolve and learn. Before starting any service design project, the research team has to feel comfortable with the idea of possibly being wrong. Being wrong is nothing to feel bad about.



On the contrary, it should be quite empowering because it demonstrates a willingness and ability to learn and truly be user-centered.

Going back to the idea of “knowing our users” can lead to trouble. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking you can’t be wrong if you believe you know your users and their behavior better than they know it themselves. This is what Madsbjerg and Rasmussen call “default thinking.”<sup>61</sup> Allowing ourselves to be wrong and accepting that maybe we don’t know everything is acceptable and an essential part of the process. And just like us, users are constantly evolving, becoming a bit of a moving target. In chapter 1, we discuss inherited ecology. While the library building may not change, it is the role and duty of the library staff to adapt the space and services to meet current needs and expectations.

Existing users may change because of new cultural norms or changing technology, or from moving into new life phases. We also gain new users from younger generations or different cultures. Both existing and new users bring their own beliefs and expectations with them, so what we once knew may no longer hold true, and things that used to work may no longer be functional. Responding to these changes provides opportunities to learn more about the people we serve and an avenue to finding new ways to deliver the value that only a library and a librarian can offer.