

Method 14: Defining design principles

Time involved	Using the method, 60 minutes
Associated capabilities	Understand value as created in practice Move between concepts and knowledge, and inside and outside organizations
Methods to use before or after this one	Method 4 Mapping the user experience Method 8 Problem/proposition definition

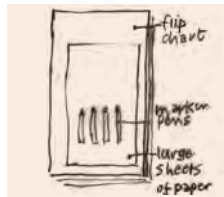
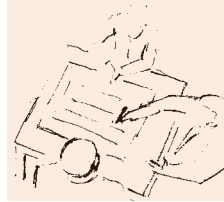
What you'll need

Blank sheets of paper, marker pens

A facilitator to guide the teams

A documenter to photograph the results

A flipchart



key question

'What principles should guide the approach taken to designing a new service?'

Purpose

This method helps a team capture the things that they think matter to the main actors involved in creating a new service, venture or product. It involves a group in collectively articulating the principles that will underpin its future design work, addressing the perspectives not just of users but of organizations and the communities they engage with.

Outcomes

Using the method results in a simple but powerful list that captures a team's current understanding of what will shape how actors co-create value within a new or emerging service ecosystem. It helps align different organizational functions and perspectives by making explicit the values embedded in a new service.

How to do it

Discuss principles. Ask people to share knowledge of design principles from other areas of their life and work. Examples you might consult include the UK Government Digital Service's design principles or the Android user experience design principles. Effective design principles are those that help focus the work of people designing innovative services. They should be simple, but one word is usually not enough. They should be oriented towards action. Use verbs such as "do this" or "don't do that", and objects making clear who or what is having something done to them, such as "do this to me".

Identify principles relating to experiences. Get people to share views as to the meanings and associations that exist for actors in the future ecosystem around a new service, product or venture.

Tip

Don't just focus on people's experiences, but do start there.

A common term that often crops up is making experiences “delightful” – but resist this. Instead, aim to generate concepts that are more nuanced and specific to the situation the service is addressing.

Identify principles relating to performance.

Discuss what is delivered or co-created with users and participants in a new ecosystem. A common term here is making services “useful”. Define in more detail how, when and why they are useful and productive, and when they achieve something meaningful for the actors involved.

Identify principles relating to resourcing. Invite participants to suggest principles that relate to usage and renewal of resources. An example that is frequently used here is to make services “usable” or “accessible” – but again, try to explore in more depth what these terms could mean in the context of the service you are discussing.

Combine. Select a maximum of ten principles generated from discussion across the three different areas.

Discuss. Would these principles be recognizable to current service users or customers? Are they embedded in how things currently are arranged or organized? Are any of the principles particularly distinctive? Would competitors, partners or collaborators produce the same list? Who else should be involved in refining the principles? Should the design principles be made public? Should the staff and organizations involved in creating a new service be held accountable for working towards delivering the principles? How could that work? What review processes and tasks should be set up to ensure that, as designing proceeds, these principles do shape what emerges?

Synthesize. Refine the list of principles on a flipchart.

Example

