

## CHAPTER 1



# Insurance Is a Service, Not a Product

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Insurance rarely comes to mind as an industry that provides a rewarding customer experience. The only time people find out whether their insurance company is actually any good is when they are at their most distressed and vulnerable. When they find out their insurance is awful, there is nothing they can do about it. They are at the mercy of small print they either did not read or did not understand, and they may end up spending hours on the telephone or filling out more paperwork. There should be insurance against mistreatment by insurance companies.

For many insurance companies and the people working for them, the lofty goal is to be the least awful with the minimum effort possible. The insurance market has ended up in a race to the bottom, competing only on price because customers do not understand their complex policies, hence the proliferation of insurance price-comparison websites.

Part of the problem is that insurance is complicated, involves multiple stakeholders and channels, and is a classic example of a service that is often sold as a product. The mix of complexity, human experience, multiple stakeholders, and delivery channels, combined with customer dissatisfaction with an industry stuck in its ways, makes insurance a perfect candidate for disruptive service design.

In 2009, Norway's largest general insurer, Gjensidige (pronounced *yen-SEE-dig-ah*), decided they had had enough of competing in this toxic marketplace on the same level as their competitors. As a financial group with a 150-year history, Gjensidige had a solid position in the market, but they had a strong drive to improve the quality of service they were offering their customers. CEO Helge Leiro Baastad decided that customer orientation should be a main strategic focus and a key competitive advantage for the firm.

A major challenge was a structural one. Gjensidige was organized as a chain of activities from product development to sales, with expert staff working in silos. This industrial model made it difficult to orient the silos to work together to deliver a unified experience to customers. Because Baastad wanted the change to be driven from the heart of the business, he asked marketing director Hans Hanevold and brand director Kim Wikan Barth to leave their jobs for two years to run a company-wide change program called "Extreme Customer Orientation." Both Hanevold and Barth had long track records with the company, enjoyed the respect of their colleagues, and knew how to engage the organization.

Hanevold and Barth began by identifying change agents in every business unit within the company. The underlying principle was that customer orientation should be grown from the inside out rather than being driven by outside consultants, and that the activities should be funded by the business units themselves. To support these activities, they created a company-wide training program, then set about identifying what ultimately amounted to

183 concrete actions to improve customer experience. For some projects, the business units required specialist expertise to fulfil their ambitions, and service designers were hired to help design a better service experience.

Gjensidige embraced service design as a way to help bridge the gaps across the silos and develop their services in more customer-oriented ways. Service design methods helped them create a complete and shared picture of what really provides value to the customer, as well as processes to join up the experiences.

As a lead-up to their change program, Gjensidige employed service designers to challenge their thinking about what the ideal insurance service would look like. The initial task was very broad—Gjensidige wanted to find out about people’s behaviors, motivations, and relationships to insurance. It was important, however, not only to understand the mindset of Gjensidige’s customers, but also of staff.

The actuaries—the mathematicians and financial wizards who come up with the complex “products” on which insurance is based—belonged to the Product Group. The name of this department was a clue to the shift that was required in the company’s internal culture. What the company is really selling is a service. Customers cannot hold insurance in their hands, and their experience of their insurance policy is made up of the service interactions they have with the company. When customers buy a physical product, they can inspect it for build quality, flaws, or damage. It is much harder to do that with services, especially ones that are essentially a contract based on the chance of a future event, such as insurance. Many people buying insurance do not really know what they are buying, and only find out what is covered at the worst possible moment—when disaster strikes. This is not the time to begin haggling over contract details.

## Consumer Insights

The approach taken in the Gjensidige project is an example of classic service design—insights research, workshops, service blueprinting, service proposition development, concept sketches and presentations, experience prototyping, testing, and delivery. A fairly small sample of users was involved in the research, but the research went deep. The design team visited and spoke to three people working in Gjensidige’s call centers and offices, as well as six customers, to look at both the delivery side and the recipient side of the service. To people used to working with larger data samples, nine people might not sound like enough, but Gjensidige already had a great deal of quantitative information. This information didn’t have the detail of the qualitative research needed for an innovation project, however. Quantitative methods are good for creating knowledge and understanding the field, but they are not very useful for translating knowledge into action and helping

organizations do something with it. Qualitative studies are very good at bridging this gap.

Five different areas were researched with the participants: insurance in general, social aspects, choices, contact, and tools for staff. What Gjensidige and the service design team discovered were some important differences between what people say and what they do. Some of the insights that were uncovered are described below. Many are questions and needs, and one can see how this kind of research immediately gets the problem-solving juices flowing.

### Trust

Insurance is built on trust. When customers pay their premiums, they trust that they will get value for money—and that the insurance company will still exist when they need it. But trust is very fragile. It takes some time to build up and is quickly broken. All the small glitches in delivery—letters sent to the wrong address, billing errors, problems with communication, customers having to repeat details multiple times—damage people’s trust in an insurance company. They wonder whether similar chaos happens behind the scenes. Fixing the small glitches can have a big impact on the level of trust.

### Comparison and Purchasing Criteria

People say they make insurance purchasing decisions based on quality, but they find it hard to do this in reality. It is very difficult to compare what is inside different insurance policies and make a rational choice. People feel that insurance is not very transparent, especially with regards to quality, so it is easier to compare on price, because money is a fixed variable. This means designers cannot simply trust what customers say they want, but have to work smartly around price and quality issues.

Of course there is room for quality in the market, but with online price-comparison engines, the quality aspect of insurance has completely dropped out of the conversation with customers and all that is left is price. For customers, quality means, “Am I covered? Do I get a rental car when my car is being repaired? Am I actually covered for the things I think should be covered?”

With most other services and products, customers can easily see the differences between the premium version and something cheaper, but not with insurance. Customers are really asking what quality *means*—that is, the difference between the premium and budget products. This raises many other questions, such as what is actually covered and when, how much are the out-of-pocket expenses, and so on. It soon becomes complicated.

As with much service design, the challenge is to make the invisible visible, or to make the *right things* visible and get rid of the noise in the rest of the offering. In the Gjensidige project, then, one of the key challenges was to develop a service proposition that eliminated price as the key deciding factor.

## Expectations

People expect an insurance payout when something happens, and they expect help. This is another issue related to quality. Customers who buy a cheap insurance product get money but will not get much help, whereas Gjensidige has a very good system for taking care of people when something happens. For example, when customers have damage to a car, they just take it in for evaluation and Gjensidige issues a rental car and takes care of everything else. This fact needed to be made visible as part of the service proposition.

## Employment and Public Benefits

Gjensidige believe they provide all the insurance people might need, but in Norway many people are also covered by some kind of insurance from their employer or union. It is very difficult for people to tell whether they are covered because there is no way for them to see all of this information in one view, all in one place. The challenge is to achieve this in a transparent and trustworthy way for customers.

## Social and Cultural Interactions

Many invisible social touchpoints affect the entire service experience. The police, for example, might give insurance advice by saying, “Oh, your cell phone was stolen? Don’t even bother contacting your insurance company.” Customers who contact Gjensidige do in fact receive a new phone, but people tend to trust that the police are knowledgeable about such issues.

The researchers discovered that many different people were giving advice about insurance who should not be. For example, friends and family were frequently believed to be the best source of insurance advice. People trust their father to give them good advice about an insurance policy more than they trust an insurance agent. (By “agent” here, we mean a representative of Gjensidige because there is very little in the way of an insurance brokerage market in Norway.)

The challenge, then, is how to work together with all of these invisible touchpoints. Insurance originally dates back to a time when people in a small community would pool their money to pay for an accident, such as someone’s barn burning down. This stimulated thinking about bringing back this social aspect, because insurance had evolved from a collective effort into these machines that customers don’t trust.

## Choice

From an insurance specialist point of view, the more options you have the better you will be covered. Covering certain items, such as a new bike, but not others, such as an old PC, allows people to have insurance tailored to their needs.

At the same time, customers want simplicity. The paradox discovered in the insights research was that customers want very simple products, but they want to *feel* like they are making a choice from an array of complex products. The underlying need here is that they do not want to have to choose from lots of options, but they want the *experience* of having made their own choice.

## Documents

When it comes to reading insurance papers, one of the typical quotes from interviewees was, “I just can’t do it.” This connects back to the issue of trust. On the one hand, customers do not read the details of their insurance policies, which means they blindly trust the insurance company to be right. On the other hand, customers do not trust the insurance company because they do not know the details of their policies.

Insurance companies produce enormously long documents, which is the main reason customers do not read them. Customers were saying, “Can’t we have just one document and could it be on one page?” but what people actually wanted and needed was a “What if?” structure they could study—one to explain that if *this* happens, the customer will *get that* from the insurance company.

Customers also had no idea where they kept their insurance papers. They know the papers are important and some people *said* they had them securely filed away, but when researchers asked to see them, the papers were in a complete mess. Interviewees would say, “Yes, they’re just over here,” but it would turn out to be a policy from two years ago and the latest one was still in a pile of papers somewhere. This means that customers have no clue about what they are insured for or what they are even paying.

Another reason people did not know what was in their documents is that most of the text is written by lawyers in “legalese.” Over the years, more and more text had been added to these documents without much serious thought about what was still needed. To counter this, Gjensidige reduced the size of their insurance policy documents by 50% to 60% just by taking out extraneous words and simplifying the language as much as legally possible. It took a team of four people a year and a half to do this, but they have done a brilliant job. Gjensidige also gained a small side benefit from reduced printing costs, but the big benefit has been in customer experience.

## Company Insights

### Filling In the Gaps in Public Benefits

In Norway, people assume that if something bad happens to them, they will be covered by the state, but they have no clue about what actually would be covered and what they should cover themselves. Customers need this

information and they need people to talk to who can give them good advice, not just salespeople who are more interested in selling an insurance product than in what customers need.

As in many organizations, the underlying issue is hard targets for sales quotas and organizational structures that actually discourage customer service representatives from taking proper care of people. Gjensidige needed to change the way they measure performance internally so that the benefit could be experienced externally, which meant an internal culture change. Since this change was implemented, everyone's primary measure is customer satisfaction on an individual basis. Customer-facing staff at Gjensidige get daily reports on their own customer satisfaction scores. The main data is gathered by sending customers an e-mail asking if they want to rate their experience after every customer contact by telephone or at a branch office. This feedback is added to a mix of other metrics to make up a comprehensive customer experience measurement system.

### Being Personal

When it comes to customer relations, people see straight through things that are meant to be personal but actually are not. Humans are so well attuned to interpersonal interactions that communications such as "personalized" form letters can come across as almost creepy. Worse still, these kinds of faux personal communications are prone to simple glitches, such as old data or typos, leading to personalized life insurance letters being sent to dead relatives, or Mr. Jones being addressed as "Dear Mrs. Jones." There is only one type of personal, and it is to be genuinely personal. For that to happen, of course, the company culture must be one that encourages it and one in which employees feel happy working. Grumpy, stressed people have grumpy, stressed interactions.

### Consistent Communication Channels

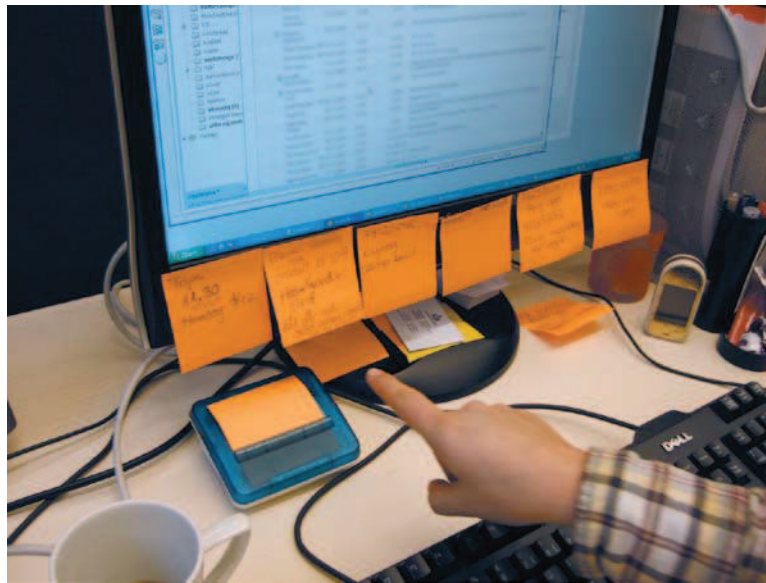
Respondents wanted Gjensidige to stay on their channel, meaning that if they telephoned, they wanted the company to call them back, not send an e-mail or a letter. If they sent an e-mail, they wanted an e-mail back. Gjensidige made the strategic decision to keep all of their channels open, which is more costly because it is more complicated to manage, but the company believes it is worth the expense because it creates a better customer experience.

### Language

Laypeople (customers) really do not understand the language of insurance. A lot of people thought a "premium" was actually a prize, for example. As such, Gjensidige needed to be careful that the insurance language that is clear to them actually means the same thing to their customers across all communication channels.

### Formalizing Personal Routines

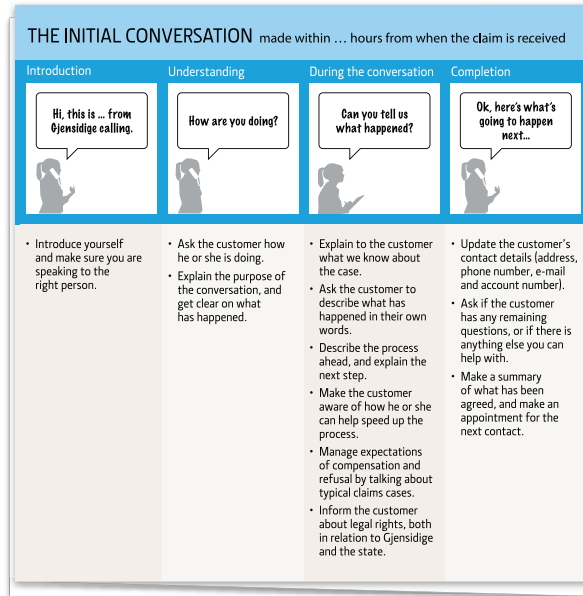
When researchers visited Gjensidige's offices to interview staff, they saw a lot of sticky notes on salespeople's desks and on their computers (Figure 1.1). Many people had created their own routines for more efficiently dealing with customers. The insight here was that some of the processes developed "on the shop floor" could be adopted and integrated into Gjensidige's systems as standard approaches.



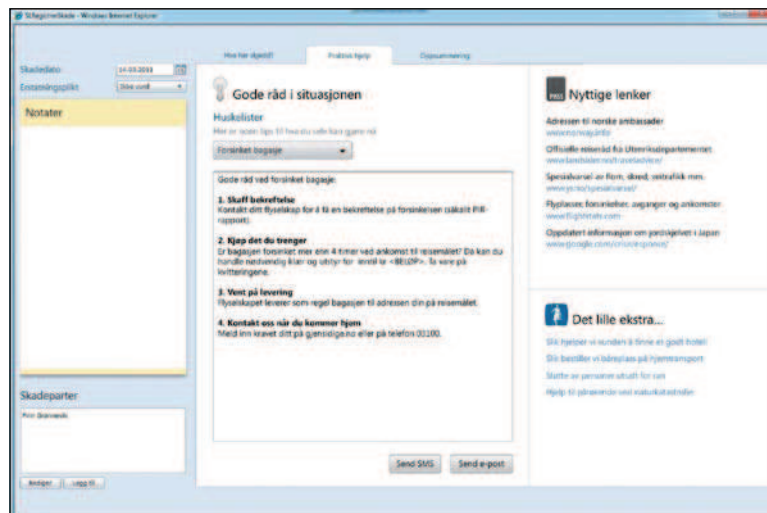
**FIGURE 1.1**  
Sales staff build their own routines to make their process more efficient.

Redesigned processes deeply founded on insight from customers and staff were initially implemented as paper-based routines to avoid waiting for enterprise software to be developed (Figure 1.2). Later, these new routines were built into Gjensidige's new customer relations management (CRM) system (Figure 1.3).





**FIGURE 1.2**  
Paper-based routines were a quick fix for sales staff.



**FIGURE 1.3**  
The new routines were added to the CRM system. A field for customer-specific notes (on the left) functions like a sticky note.

## Simplifying IT Infrastructure

All of a customer's details are entered into Gjensidige's S2000 mainframe system, which crunches through the numbers and risk analysis in the actuarial tables to produce an insurance offer. Management said that it was the most brilliant system in the insurance industry in Norway. S2000 is very flexible, which means salespeople can manipulate more parameters than Gjensidige's competitors, but salespeople did not see an advantage in this flexibility. It was too hidden, and in their conversations with customers, the salespeople realized they did not need this flexibility.

Such a flexible system also has the overhead of being more complicated. For instance, a customer could not have a house and a car bundled up in one insurance product. This made it more difficult to create a joined-up experience for the customer.

## Putting Insights into Practice

One of the things that hampers product innovation in insurance is the time delay. Organizations only find out whether an innovation will make or lose them money after they see the level of claims, which can take several years. Thus, the insurance industry traditionally is conservative about innovation. The customer insights gathered by the design team helped inspire confidence in bringing new ideas to market.

Using the material from the insights research, Gjensidige ran co-design workshops with different groups within the company and generated 97 ideas, five of which were chosen for further development. Finally, the team came up with one new service proposition.

Gjensidige had about a dozen products for everything to do with people, from individuals to families. From an insurance point of view, this meant that they had a fantastic array of tailor-made products for different eventualities. From a customer point of view, this meant that people felt like they were faced with impossible life insurance choices, such as gambling whether they would die of cancer or in a car accident, because nobody could afford to buy all of the policies and be 100% covered. Customers faced the same dilemma when choosing which possessions to insure—the dog or the laptop?

The breakthrough concept for Gjensidige was to go from offering 50 products to just two: one to cover the individual and his or her family, and one to cover everything they own. From an insurance point of view, this was very radical, but in an example of the value of the expertise that exists inside organizations, the basic idea came from Gunnar Kvan, a very experienced Gjensidige actuary, during a series of design workshops. He suggested that

it was possible to think about the company's offerings in a dramatically different way. He had been working on this idea for five years, but had not been able to get people to see his point. He had no way of expressing his view in terms of what it would mean as an experience for customers, but he knew the financial algorithms could be modeled differently. The design team sat down with him and went through how such a service could be put together. It would require hard-core mathematical engineering in a huge spreadsheet running in the background to make it happen.

## Experience Prototyping the Service

Anders Kjeseth Valdernesnes, the design team's Microsoft Excel maestro, built a prototype of the product in Excel, which had all the tools required to handle the actuarial tables and live information visualization. Rather than spending a week or two designing and coding a Web prototype with a functioning back-end database, Anders did it in two days and designed it to look like a website so that it could be tested with customers (Figure 1.4).



FIGURE 1.4

An experience prototype of the insurance website built in Excel so that the real data could be used when testing with customers.

With this prototype, Gjensidige were able to carry out experience prototype testing with customers discussing and buying insurance, a salesperson selling insurance, and someone trying to make a claim. They tested what it was like for customers to try to buy the services face to face and what it was like for the sales staff. They also tested this process over the phone and observed the process from both sides of the call. To test the claims process, they went through the material with someone who had just had an accident. Actual staff and actual customers took part, and even though they knew they were taking part in testing, the conversations they had were very real. Through this process, the project team learned a lot about what needed to be done to shape, explain, and sell the new service proposition.

It was clear from the prototyping that the new approach changed the conversation from being about buying products to one about service. It meant that customers considered what they could afford on a monthly basis, taking into account what they earned, what was in their “rainy day” savings account, and what they would need in the event of a tragedy. They were able to see the difference their decisions about excess and payout levels made to their premiums, and the conversation was much more open, with the customers in control.

A series of touchpoints were prototyped—the one-page contract, informational leaflets, fake advertisements in a financial newspaper and a tabloid newspaper (Figure 1.5), and the bill customers would receive at the end—so that a broad range of the service experience could be tested.

**FIGURE 1.5**  
Creating fake newspaper ads—one for a financial broadsheet, the other for a tabloid—helped the team understand how the marketing of the service would feel in different contexts.

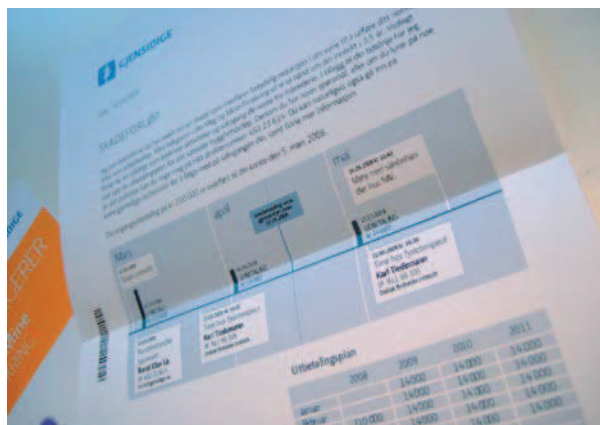


The one-page contract prototype was a good example of the difference between what people say and what they do (Figure 1.6). Many interviewees said that they did not read long contracts and thus did not know what was in them, leading to a lack of trust in the insurance company. They suggested that a one-page contract would be much friendlier. During prototyping, however, it turned out that customers did not trust a one-page contract either, fearing that too much important detail was hidden from them, as their previous policies had been about 40 pages. Gjensidige ended up creating contracts with around 5 to 10 pages.

Prototypes were also made of the claim process confirmation documents. Traditionally, customers simply received a letter stating, “We have received your claim,” which left them uncertain about how the claims process was handled within the company. The redesigned confirmation shows the customer how the process unfolds over time and helps to manage their expectations (Figure 1.7). This way they know when to be patient and let the process take its course, and when they have cause to follow up.



**FIGURE 1.6**  
A prototype of the one-page contract so many interviewees claimed they would prefer. Evidence showed that they did not trust it.



**FIGURE 1.7**  
A prototype of a redesigned claim confirmation. This document manages customer expectations by illustrating how the process unfolds over time.

Lastly, the team prototyped an offer sent out in the mail after a sales call or meeting (Figure 1.8). The insights research showed that this was one of the most crucial touchpoint failures, and the company did not realize the potential of improving it. Previously, customers had an interaction with a salesperson in which they talked through a complicated policy, then would go home and explain it to their partners, but could not remember the details well enough to explain it. Because they could no longer understand it, customers could not make a decision. Redesigning this touchpoint helped people make a decision at home, and the company avoided losing customers because of this hidden problem. This is a good example of how services are created and experienced by interactions between people, often in a completely different context than the usual customer-provider paradigm.



**FIGURE 1.8**  
A prototype of the mailed offer, which is an important touchpoint for customers. This document serves as the focal point for discussion and making a decision. This prototype shows an offer that could be revised by customers before the contract is signed.

## The End Is Just the Beginning

The value of gaining real insights from all stakeholders—customers, staff, and management—is only half of the story. Translating these insights into a clear service proposition, and experience prototyping the key touchpoints, are essential. This process allowed for feedback not only on the design of the physical touchpoints themselves but also on the entire service proposition and experience. For the designers and for Gjensidige, it was important to know

how something so radical would be perceived in the marketplace. The prototypes were created to test unknowns—for example, Was this a low-end or a high-end offering? The two types of newspaper advertisements helped reveal how the marketing of the service would feel in those different contexts.

Services are usually complex and expensive to roll out. In this case, such a radical change to Gjensidige's offering was not just radical for them, but for the whole industry. It was also clear that it would take a lot of explaining to introduce the concept to their existing, loyal customers. In fact, having only two types of insurance turned out to be too radical even for Gjensidige and the way the entire industry works. This ending might have taken the wind out of the sails of this story, but there is an important innovation lesson to take away from it.

Thinking through radical ideas and prototyping the experience of them helped mature the cultural mindset within the company, and many of the insights have fed into Gjensidige becoming a totally service-oriented company. The Extreme Customer Orientation team acted as champion for the customer experience and the internal changes that needed to happen to deliver it well. A company-wide framework for customer orientation called the "Gjensidige Experience" was implemented. Management understands that this will be a key competitive advantage in the future, building on their vision that "we shall know the customer the best and care the most."

Gjensidige made extraordinary efforts to simplify their insurance policies. They have worked hard to explain the claims process better and have developed a Web-based claims-mapping tool. Pricing has been worked out differently and is now fed into their online calculators. Although the big idea was not used as a whole, many of the small elements have now fed into the company in very concrete ways. Having the big idea helps bundle together lots of smaller, disparate innovations that would not otherwise have seen the light of day. It also helps challenge organizational traditions that may be holding back innovation.

Finally, mapping out the big idea in detail gives organizations an overview of problems and opportunities all in one place, which helps them make strategic decisions about what to deal with when, how those decisions relate to other parts of their business, and how to scale their service innovation up or down according to budgets and resources.

Gjensidige's 183 activities is a very large number of improvements. Some were small; others were large undertakings rolled out over several years. The bottom line is important, of course, but it is not the sole focus. The change process required top-level leadership in all aspects of the business, from committing to quality in their computer systems by removing glitches, to simplifying their products and language, focusing on the service experience as well as internal funding, and paying attention to branding, education, and measurement.

For example, 130 Gjensidige managers, including the CEO, gathered their own insights by calling 1,000 customers (Figure 1.9). They loved it, because they realized they had not spoken to customers in years and it was often these interactions that had sparked their interest in the business in the first place. Managers were deeply familiar with their statistics about customer satisfaction, as well as the challenges that needed to be addressed. But it made a real difference to experience for themselves how many customers said they really liked Gjensidige, and to feel people's emotions firsthand when they talked about things that didn't work out as they should have. The symbolism of this is important. When a CEO sits down to talk to customers to find out what they think, it sends an important signal to the rest of the organization and the industry.



**FIGURE 1.9**  
Gjensidige CEO Helge Leiro Baastad and 130 of his managers spend a day calling 1,000 random customers to hear what they really think about the company. (Courtesy of Gjensidige)

The results of these kinds of company-wide changes take time to surface. Two and a half years after starting this process, Gjensidige have seen a dramatic rise in their position on the Norwegian National Customer Satisfaction Barometer and have won the two biggest customer satisfaction awards. They have consistently beaten market expectations with their financial results and can prove that they provide their services more efficiently than their peers in Europe and the United States. Still, according to Baastad, the business case for customer orientation should not be seen in isolation. It is a natural part of the bigger story of developing a modern and efficient insurance company that brings real value to employees, shareholders, and customers.



## CHAPTER 2



# The Nature of Service Design

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**L**ike most modern design disciplines, service design can be traced back to the tradition of industrial design, a field defined during the 1920s by a close-knit community of American designers that included Raymond Loewy, Walter Dorwin Teague, Norman Bel Geddes, and Henry Dreyfuss. In Europe, The Bauhaus was central to the birth of industrial design.

What all of these designers had in common was a drive to use new industrial technology to improve people's standard of living. During and after World War I, people were horrified to see the devastation caused by the industrialization of warfare. There was also a great need to restore and improve the material standard of living in Europe and the United States.

On an ideological level, the first generation of industrial designers strove to turn industrialization into a force for good. They focused their talents on figuring out how to use industrial technology to satisfy the fundamental human needs of the day. They explored how industry could create products in more efficient ways, what would make them more useful for people, and how products could contribute to optimism about the future. They created well-designed furniture that was inexpensive enough for the middle class to buy to modernize their homes, and white goods that enabled women to escape some of the drudgery of housework, freeing them to take jobs outside of the home. Cars and trains enabled people to expand their range of travel for work and pleasure.

In the 20th century, the design profession made a huge contribution to the improvement of the standard of living in the developed world. Today, however, this standard of living has reached its natural plateau. We are saturated with material wealth, and our consumption of products is threatening our very existence rather than being a resource for good living.

On the ideological level, our fundamental human needs have also changed. The great challenges facing developed societies today are about sustaining good health, reducing energy and resource consumption, and developing leaner transportation solutions and more resilient financial systems.

The 1920s generation of industrial designers strove to humanize the technology of their day and meet the fundamental material needs of their generation. Service design grows out of a digitally native generation professionally bred on network thinking. Our focus has moved from efficient production to lean consumption, and the value set has moved from standard of living to quality of life.

## Why Do Services Need Designing?

As designers, when we build services based on genuine insight into the people who will use them, we can be confident that we will deliver real value. When we make smart use of networks of technology and people, we can simplify complex services and make them more powerful for the customer.

When we build resilience into the design, services will adapt better to change and perform longer for the user. When we apply design consistency to all elements of a service, the human experience will be fulfilling and satisfying. When we measure service performance in the right way, we can prove that service design results in more effective employment of resources—human, capital, and natural.

It would appear easy to study how people experience a service, determine which parts of the delivery are not joined up, and make them all perform well together. In reality, some of the best organizations in the world struggle mightily to design good service experiences.

To explain why companies find it so difficult to design services well, we need to study the nature of services and the way they are delivered.

## How Services Differ from Products

The challenge we found when we moved our attention from designing products to designing services was that services are entirely different animals than products. Applying the same mindset to designing a service as to the design of a product can lead to customer-hostile rather than user-friendly results.

Products are discrete objects and, because of this, the companies that make, market, and sell products tend to be separated into departments that specialize in one function and have a vertical chain of command—they operate in *silos* (Figure 2.1).



**FIGURE 2.1**  
Where is the customer in this picture? Staff working in silos tend to focus on the efficiency of their step in the value chain rather than the quality of the complete customer experience.

## Orange

Two days after setting up our service design consultancy, we received a call from executives at mobile operator Orange with an offer for the kind of project we had dreamed about for several years in our earlier jobs in Web consultancies. Could we help them make the service experience a strategic factor in their development of new services?

At that time, Orange had achieved huge success in the UK market through a strong focus on making mobile telephony clear, simple, and desirable for their customers. Still, they recognized that they lacked tools and processes to make the customer experience drive new service development. Their branding wasn't connected to the services they launched. The website was a marketing channel that didn't help existing customers get more value out of their accounts. Innovation was technology driven rather than customer oriented.

In fact, Orange were organized like a product factory out of the last century, not a modern, market-defining service provider. The company's experts were lodged in silos, and the only people who could see the whole picture of their offering were their customers.

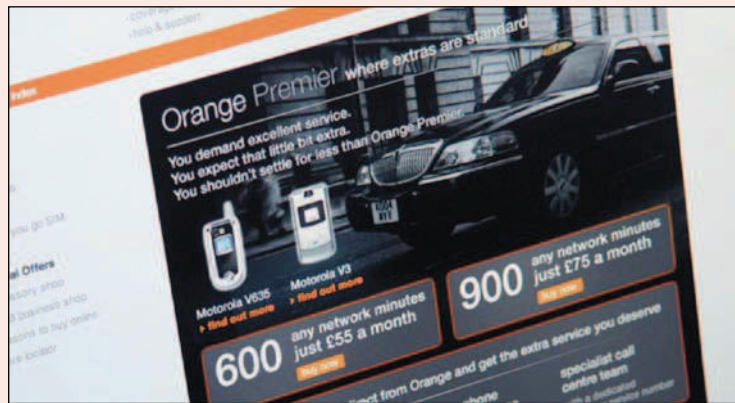
To face this challenge, Orange needed to introduce a design approach that bridged silos and channels. They also needed to introduce the service experience earlier in their strategic thinking so that a vision for the service experience could impact technical and business decisions rather than the other way around. One of the problems with thinking about service experiences at the business level is that it is difficult for people to imagine what something as intangible as a new mobile phone plan would look and feel like. Spreadsheets are a poor medium for conveying human experiences.

To tackle this problem, we created a project called "Tangible Evidence from the Future" and designed the experience of 12 new service propositions ranging from new ways to organize call centers to self-service, online plans. Several of the concepts went to market, including a proposal to change Orange stores from vendors of other brands' phones to places where people could get help with using their mobile services. Another proposition that went to market as "Orange Premier"

was a high-end mobile phone plan for people who wanted a unique experience and exceptional service (Figure 2.2).

Orange Premier was a success in the market and introduced a way for Orange to use design as the starting point for business development. We have worked with Orange for the past 10 years to improve their service experience across the board, in projects ranging from innovation strategy to fixing problems with call center delivery.

Our first project with Orange confirmed our thinking that the use of design in this context needed to be reframed from an activity focused on the delivery of products, paper, and interfaces to a process that enables all aspects of a service to play together in a unified experience. We realized that a new landscape was about to open up and that we had to examine how the preconditions for design were changing.



**FIGURE 2.2**

When we showed Orange how customers could experience a “luxury” account, they decided to launch a proposition with unparalleled attention to the quality of design and customer service.

When companies that sell services are structured in silos, however, problems often arise that affect customer experience. Customers are promised a new mobile phone plan through a website only to find that the assistant in the store knows nothing about it or is not allowed to sell it for the online price. Patients in hospitals are kept in the dark about why they have been waiting for hours, or receive contradictory information during one of the most emotionally difficult times of their lives. *The division of the silos makes sense to the business units, but makes no sense to the customer, who sees the entire offering as one experience.* This problem is something we will return to frequently throughout the book as we look at how to turn this around, quite literally.

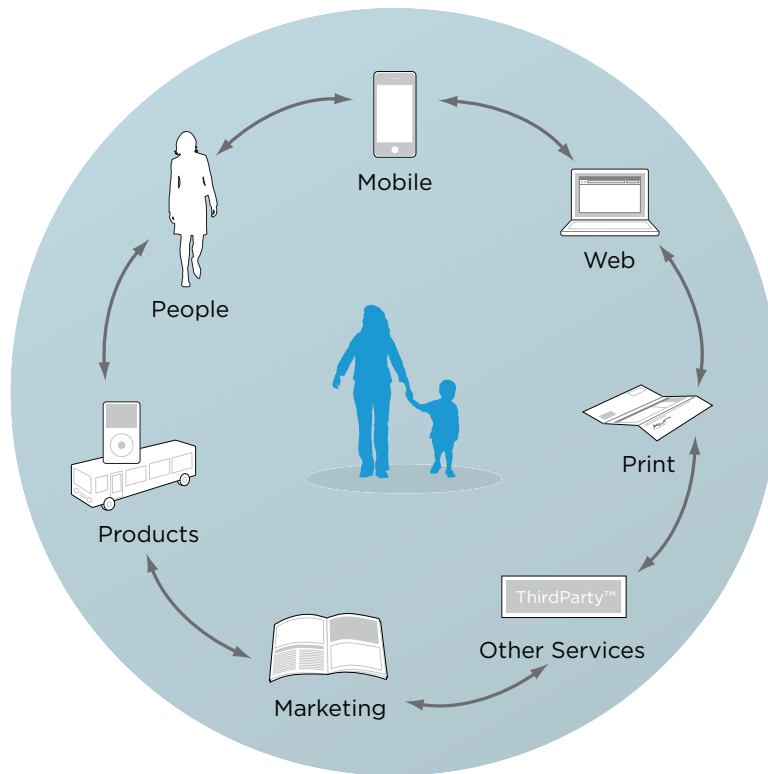
Many service companies think they are selling products. The finance sector is a classic example of this mindset, but insurance policies and bank accounts are services with multiple touchpoints of interaction, not products. When something goes wrong, policy holders want the financial compensation, of course, but the difference in value is whether they have an understanding person on the other end of the phone seamlessly guiding them through the claims process versus being sent an unintelligible 20-page form and then having to wait weeks for their money. Many organizations are starting to examine their customer service offering and the value it can bring. This provides great opportunities for service designers.

## Services Created in Silos Are Experienced in Bits

The challenge for many service providers is that they are organized in ways that actually prevent them from delivering good service experiences. Often, each bit of the service is well designed, but the service itself hasn't been designed. The problem is that customers don't just care about individual touchpoints. They experience services in totality and base their judgment on how well everything works together to provide them with value (Figure 2.3).

Another complicating factor is that quality can vary dramatically from one service touchpoint to another. If the people who develop online banking don't harmonize quality and coordinate routines with the people who manage the bank's call center, customers are bound to experience disappointment.

The industrial legacy of treating services like products means that services often underperform and disappoint because they cannot be fixed in the same way as problems with products. Services are about interactions between people, and their motivations and behaviors. Marketers and designers often talk of products having personalities, but an iPhone or a Volkswagen doesn't wake up with a hangover, worry about paying the rent, or care who is using them. People do, which is why understanding people is at the heart of service design.



**FIGURE 2.3**  
 The service experience is made up of the customer's interactions with many touchpoints, and service quality can be defined by how well the touchpoints work together for the customer.

## Services Are Co-produced by People

A fundamental characteristic of services is that they create value only when we use them. A bus service can't get people from point A to point B unless they know where to get on and off. Online banking only provides value when customers virtually enter the bank's machine room through an online banking interface and conduct their own transactions. An empty seat on the train has no value once it has left the station. Even at the dentist's office, nothing will happen unless the patient opens her mouth and tells the dentist where it hurts.

Product-oriented organizations often fail to see the potential of using their customers to make a service more effective. If customers are well informed about bus routes and schedules, they are more likely to get more efficiently from A to B and more inclined to use the bus, reducing their carbon footprint and easing congested roads. If an online bank is well designed, customers don't need to spend time and money in a bank building. Services are co-produced between the provider and users. (We should note that this is not the same as *co-design*, which has customers or users take part in the design process before or after the launch of a product or service.)

On one end of the service spectrum we see network services, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, that would be useless if people didn't commit millions of hours to produce the content and activity that give these social networks their value. On the other end of the scale, services such as health-care are most sustainable if fewer people use them. The best way to ensure that hospitals are efficient is for people to "co-produce" their health by keeping themselves in good shape and so they don't need treatment. The biggest missed opportunity in development is that organizations don't think about their customers as valuable, productive assets in the delivery of a service, but as anonymous consumers of products.

## A New Technological Landscape: The Network

It is no coincidence that service design has been born as a field of design practice during the last decade. Twenty years ago, the design of services tended to be about hotels and hamburgers. Today, digital platforms are critical to running a business, large or small. The digital landscape of the information age has created radical enablers for new types of service delivery.

Modern service delivery is entirely dependent on digital platforms. Hospitals and banks can't run without immediate electronic access to detailed records, airlines can't sell cheap tickets without algorithms that constantly balance supply and demand, and most people can't do much without the Internet or cell phones. Twenty years ago, cell phones were futuristic gadgets reserved for Wall Street traders and generals; today many people can't even imagine meeting up in a city without a cell phone.

The combination of enterprise systems that store and link vast amounts of data with mass-consumer access to data through the Web and mobile telephony is transforming the way people live their daily lives. At the same time, the quality of service often suffers due to the complexity of linking these systems together in a way that makes sense to customers. This combination of opportunities and problems is the reason why service design has emerged as a specific design approach.



## Streetcar—Enabling Co-production

One example of a service that builds on the active participation of its customers to make the service work better is the car-sharing club, which can be found in cities around the world. Car-sharing pioneer Streetcar launched in 2004, but the customer experience needed to be radically improved if Streetcar was to realize its full potential. To persuade people to switch to this new way of using a car, the customer experience had to be better than buying and owning a car. We suggested to Streetcar that the service experience should feel as satisfying as the click of a Volkswagen door—a consistent, solid, and pleasant experience that gives assurance the whole thing is carefully designed (Figure 2.4). This idea may sound trivial, but it is something that the Volkswagen product designers and engineers understand and spend a significant amount of time, money, and effort on.



**FIGURE 2.4**  
Streetcar's multiple touchpoints were designed as a holistic, satisfying experience.

*sidebar continues on next page*

## Streetcar—Enabling Co-production (continued)

We set about creating a customer experience that would enable Streetcar to overcome their key barriers to growth—lack of comprehension, access, and usability. These were systematically resolved by analyzing the customer journey from first awareness of the brand to regular usage (Figure 2.5).

We were able to identify where customers dropped out of the sign-up process or needed expensive customer support. The service is now clearly communicated as a four-step process: (1) book, (2) unlock, (3) enter PIN, and (4) drive (Figure 2.6). Customers find joining easy with a quick call to Streetcar and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, and the online booking engine was rebuilt to make it simple to use.

In essence, Streetcar builds on collaboration among the provider, the city, and the customer to make it work. Streetcar provides technology that enables people to rent cars for as little as half an hour. The City of London provides convenient parking spots to make the cars more accessible. Customers refuel the cars, keep them clean, and park them where other customers can find them.

Many organizations struggle to utilize the excellent resource that their customers provide. Most customers have a keen interest in getting as much as possible out of the services they use, and by enabling users to step in and co-produce, providers can create win-win solutions.



**FIGURE 2.5**  
Analyzing the customer journey enabled Streetcar to see where customers dropped out of the sign-up process or found the service frustrating.



**FIGURE 2.6**  
The Streetcar service redesign was communicated as a simple four-step process to ensure that new customers immediately understood the service proposition and how it works.



## The Service Economy

In developed nations, around 75% of the economy is in the service sector, and this is where most new jobs are created. In Germany, known for its export prowess, the industrial industries dropped 140,000 jobs in 2010 while the service sector added 330,000 jobs, and private nursing services generate more revenue than the entire German automobile industry.<sup>1</sup> To an increasing degree, we also see that the design of services is becoming a key competitive advantage. Physical elements and technology can easily be copied, but service experiences are rooted in company culture and are much harder to replicate. People choose to use the services that they feel give them the best experience for their money, whether they fly low-cost airlines or spend their money on a first-class experience.

Just as industrial design fueled the introduction of new products to the masses in the industrial economy, good service design is key to the successful introduction of new technologies. Design of new models each year became the recipe for maintaining the success of established products. In the service economy, services can be redesigned on a continuing basis to keep a competitive edge in the market.

Some of the greatest opportunities are found where a business model can be changed from a product model to a service model. A case in point is car sharing, where the business model has changed from selling the car as a product to offering access to the service of mobility.

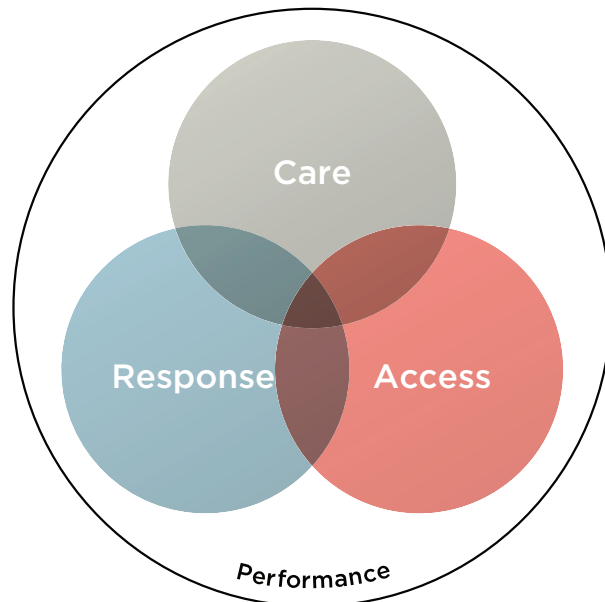
## Core Service Values

One way to understand services better—and what makes them different from products—is to examine what it is that people get from services.

There are many breakdowns of the characteristics of services, some of which we will look at later in the measurement chapter. We have been developing a simple way to understand the generic types of value that services deliver to customers by cataloguing every service we have become aware of and then grouping them in relation to three core values: care, access, and response (Figure 2.7). Most services provide customers with at least one of these or, often, a mix of all three.

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<sup>1</sup> Olaf Gersemann, "Die neue deutsche Arroganz," *Welt am Sonntag*, January 9, 2011, [www.welt.de/print/wams/wirtschaft/article12055689/Die-neue-deutsche-Arroganz.html](http://www.welt.de/print/wams/wirtschaft/article12055689/Die-neue-deutsche-Arroganz.html).



**FIGURE 2.7**  
Core service offerings can be grouped into three primary spheres: care, response, and access.

### Services That Care for People or Things

Healthcare is the most obvious case of a service focused on care, but many maintenance services also have care as the core value. A famous example of a care service is the Rolls Royce aviation engine service that monitors aircraft engines in flight and has spare parts ready to be fitted as needed when a plane lands, anywhere in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Care for an object—a car, an air-conditioning system, a wool coat—is provided by auto mechanics, HVAC technicians, or dry cleaners. Care for a person is provided by a wide range of services, from nurseries to nursing homes. Accountants, lawyers, and therapists provide care for money, freedom, and happiness.

<sup>2</sup> “Why Rolls-Royce Is One British Manufacturer Flying High in a Downturn,” *Design Council Magazine* 6 (Summer 2009): 46–47, [www.designcouncil.org.uk/Case-studies/DCM-case-studies/Rolls-Royce/](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/Case-studies/DCM-case-studies/Rolls-Royce/); and Irene C. L. Ng, Glenn Parry, Laura A. Smith, Roger Maull, and Gerard Briscoe, “Transitioning from a Goods-Dominant to a Service-Dominant Logic: Visualising the Value Proposition of Rolls-Royce,” *Journal of Service Management* 3, forthcoming. Interim location: WMG Service Systems Research Group Working Paper Series, #05/12, ISSN 2049-4297.

### Services That Provide Access to People or Things

Many services enable people to use something, or a part of something, temporarily. A railway service provides a seat on a train for a specific journey. A school might offer a child a place in a classroom from the age of 5 to 11. A cinema provides access to a giant screen, a comfy seat, and 90-plus minutes of entertainment. Generally, the services for which access is the primary value are services that give people access to large, complex, or expensive things that they could not obtain on their own.

Other kinds of access services are those that give access to infrastructure over many years. Utilities, such as water, gas, and electricity, are ubiquitous examples in the developed world. The Internet is, of course, a relatively new infrastructure that enables a whole new generation of services that provides access to information, digital media, and technology on a shared basis. Spotify provides access to a huge music library. Google provides access to an enormous database of searches. Facebook provides access to billions of personal pages. In this sense, we can view the Internet as a kind of meta-service, because it enables the provision of many other subservices, which is why so many people insist that no single entity “owns” it.

These services provide individuals with access to large infrastructures that are used in conjunction with many other people. They don’t end up owning anything that they can take away and store or give to someone else, apart from the experience they had.

These services are often a fundamental part of people’s lives that are typically noticed only when they are disrupted, such as when the daily commuter train is canceled, or when schools are closed due to heavy snow. People expect the infrastructure to always be there for them. As individuals, we understand that we all have our own experiences of the specific access we have to this infrastructure—this is the service layer that enables us to access our bit of the larger whole.

### Services That Provide a Response from People or Things

The third category is services that respond to people’s (often unforeseen) needs. These services are usually a mix of people and things that are able to assist us: an ambulance rushing to an accident, a teacher helping a child with a math problem, or a store assistant finding a customer a pair of jeans with the right fit. Sometimes these “response” services are anticipated and people buy the right to them in advance through insurance policies, social welfare, or simply by their choice of brand experience.

In many respects, response is the default understanding of what service is—think of a waiter responding to a request for a glass of water, for example. Service is someone doing what he or she has been asked to do. In this sense, response services are fundamentally different from products in that they are not predesigned but created in the moment in reaction to a request.

The three core service values overlap in many instances. An insurance service offers both access to a financial-risk-offsetting infrastructure and a response to a specific issue when a client calls with a claim. A healthcare service provides care on a personal level, but also access to a hospital facility if necessary. It will also transport a patient there in an ambulance if necessary. It is not so much that any one service fits only in one category, but more that the service has different core values at different times.

## Making the Invisible Visible

The above examples may well sound obvious. Most people recognize services when they see and experience them, but it is useful to describe and analyze them in this way precisely because services like these are so ubiquitous. It is this very ubiquity that leads them to being taken for granted by both users and providers alike. Thus, they become almost invisible elements of life.

Utilities such as water and electricity are excellent examples of these kinds of services. It is only when there is a power cut or a burst water main that people realize just how dependent they are on these utilities and first start to think about the service infrastructure that is required to provide them. It is because many services are almost invisible that nobody takes care to design them. This is not a conversation we would have if we were talking about a car or a smartphone because the design of these products is quite literally close to the surface and makes up a large proportion of the decision to buy or use them.

As a result, service designers frequently need to make the invisible visible by showing customers what has gone on behind the scenes, showing staff what is happening in the lives of customers, and showing everyone the resource usage that is hidden away. Many of these aspects become part of the business and marketing case for the service (the service proposition).

## The Performance of Service

The three core service value categories—care, access, and response—define types of value that services provide to people. Seen in a purely task-fulfilling way, the actual outcome of many services is the same. Renting a car is a good example. Customers can get a car from any car rental company (they hope). Companies may compete on price, and that price may raise or lower

expectations of what car and service we might get, but generally prices are similar across the board. The point of difference for any specific service is how it is delivered. We think of this as the performance of the service.

“Performance” is a helpful word, because it means two things: performance as experience and performance as value.

### Performance as Experience

Performance, as we understand the word from music or theater, means the style or the way in which the service is delivered. This performance makes up the immediate experiences that service users have, and it is what people often refer to when they describe the service as “good.” What they mean is that they liked the way they were treated or the way the service provider performed their tasks. Generally, this is in reference to service staff, such as the front-desk clerk in a hotel or a call center employee.

It is useful to take this concept of performance and expand it from the individual to the overall performance of the entire service organization. If we use a musical metaphor to compare the service to an orchestra or a rock band, we can think of quality of performance in terms of how well all the musicians came together to deliver the music. Music is an interesting metaphor in this regard, because in a band or an orchestra, each musician must play to the best of his or her abilities, yet at the same time play in harmony and keep time with the others. Things can quickly go awry if each musician simultaneously tries to play as a soloist.

We can go a step further to include the qualities that the venue or the support staff brought to the experience. Was the lighting good, and was the sound engineering supporting the experience? This kind of performance is where a service can have its own style—think of an airline such as Virgin, which have gone to great lengths to make the experience of a very rigid flight process different from their competitors by styling the manner, dress, and actions of their inflight team, their digital and print communication, and a host of other touchpoints.

This “experience” aspect of performance is the delivery of the service to the service user on the “front stage.” The idea of a music ensemble, harmonious across all aspects of the performance, is critical to services and a concept we will return to when we start examining how to align the complexity of touchpoints that make up service experiences.



## Performance as Value

The other meaning of the word “performance,” equally useful to service design, is service performance as a measure of value. How well is the service performing? This measure is both outward and inward facing. Outward-facing value measurement asks how well the service is achieving the results promised to the service users. For example, how often does a hip operation result in a 100% recovery? Inward-facing value measurement examines how well the service is performing for the organization. For example, how cost effectively is it delivering hip operations?

This kind of performance is how businesses usually see their activities. Hence, services that we design and they provide will be evaluated in hard performance metrics. Service designers need to design for this aspect of a service as much as for the customer experience.

This value aspect of performance is the “backstage” measure of the service by the business—all the things that happen behind the scenes that help create or run the service experience for customers but that they don’t see. This provides a challenge for service designers. We need to be able to measure the cold, hard metrics of the business as well as make the case for measuring the soft and fuzzy aspects of people’s experiences. This challenge is discussed in Chapter 8.

## Unite the Experience

We doubt we have to preach the value of design to readers of this book, but we all have to make the business case to clients. In our experience, the design approaches described here can be quick, inexpensive, and effective ways to create service experiences that delight customers. Most services involve implementing a complex and usually expensive infrastructure, and our ability to develop quick, cheap prototypes of both products and services early in their development can save organizations enormous amounts of money in sunk investment that may later turn out not to work. Service design aims to unite the experience.

Now, let’s look at how.

## Summary

- Economies in developed countries have shifted from industrial manufacture to services. The problem is that many companies offering services still think about them with an industrial mindset and try to manage and market services like products.
- A common management approach is to divide an organization into departments, or *silos*. This may lead to each part of the service being well designed, but the real problem is that the entire service has not been designed as a coherent whole. The customer who experiences the whole also experiences the gaps between the touchpoints.
- Many organizations are organized in ways that actually prevent them from delivering good service experiences. The challenge is to redesign both the service and also the culture of the organization.

## CHAPTER 3



# Understanding People and Relationships

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## People Are the Heart of Services

Despite the ability of new technologies to automate and augment people's daily lives, people remain at the heart of services. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, a service has no or little intrinsic value until the moment of its use or consumption—services or experiences cannot be stored in a warehouse. But “use” and “consume” are product mindset words and we need to use different language for services. People don't “use” a healthcare professional or a lawyer, and they don't consume a train journey or a stay at a hotel. Instead, people enter into a relationship with professionals and service providers, and their interactions are an act of co-producing the service experience. Thus, we need to think in terms of designing for relationships and experiences that evolve and change over time, rather than just in terms of short moments of consumption or usage.

In the age of self-service Web booking and mobile applications, interpersonal experiences would seem to be on the way out, but services comprise interactions among people, technology, and processes. When these are industrialized and institutionalized, as often happens when organizations grow, they need rehumanization to work properly and connect back to people's human experience of the service. Even human-to-human interactions need this kind of design attention when they are mediated by technology, such as call center interactions or even forms.<sup>1</sup>

It is essential to understand that services are, at the very least, relationships between providers and customers, and more generally, that they are highly complicated networks of relationships between people inside and outside the service organization. The staff who interact with customers are also users and providers of internal services. Most people have tales to tell of how inflexible their IT departments are or how other company policies curb their ability to innovate or provide the service they know their customers want. IT staff respond with stories of how other staff—their “customers”—sap their time with questions and problems that are blindingly obvious (to them). When frontline staff are let down by internal systems and procedures, they become disempowered and inflexible. This is passed down the line and leads to poor customer experiences and service failures.

Industrialization did not just lead to industrial product thinking. We argue that the industrial mode has also led to the stereotypical “faceless corporations” that are often the subject of frustration and poor experiences for service users, because the industrial mindset is usually all about *efficiencies* and economies of scale rather than *effectiveness* of the delivered service. Some customer–provider relationships can end up being toxic and

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke Wroblewski's excellent book, *Web Form Design*, for an insightful analysis of forms as conversations: [www.rosenfeldmedia.com/books/webforms/](http://www.rosenfeldmedia.com/books/webforms/).

combative, and as the history of human warfare shows us, people tend to dehumanize the enemy.

All decisions in an organization stem from people, and in some form or another, other people interact with them and are affected by them. We are more often aware of this with government policy decisions, but the human outcome is frequently overlooked when business discussions include terms such as “consumers” or “target groups,” or worse, simply focus on numbers on a spreadsheet.

This industrial mode is inefficient and ineffective for services. As soon as we forget that people—living, feeling, emotive human beings—are involved throughout the entire chain of events, not just at the moment of use by the customer, things go wrong. Organizations can end up being aggressive, manipulative, and aloof, and customers may feel that the only channel available to them for venting their frustration is an unfortunate, underpaid call center employee, who is also bound by rules and regulations and may have had a pretty bad day herself.

The successful businesses and public services of the future will foster a more equal and reciprocal relationship with their customers, one that recognizes the customer as a co-producer of the service.

One of the tools we cover in Chapter 8 simply asks, “How likely is it that you would recommend our company to a friend or colleague?” while another measures the gaps between people’s expectations and experiences. It is noticeable here that the main things we are trying to measure are people’s relationships to the service and to each other, not efficiency metrics. Services usually involve staff to deliver them, but many are really platforms for creating interactions between other service users. Social networks are, of course, the most high-profile example of this, but some services, such as eBay, are a mix of the two. Issues such as trust, credibility, empathy, and tone of voice are important for many services to thrive. Understanding not just people as individuals but also the relationships they have to others is essential to understanding how a service might operate.

A good example of this relationship building is Zopa, a peer-to-peer lending service that has dramatically altered the customer relationship mode of a financial service. By giving people the ability to network, and by gaining insights into their needs, motivations, and feelings, Zopa is not just another lending and borrowing service. It is a social community with a sense of reciprocal responsibility, something that has certainly been long absent in the mainstream banking world (see Chapter 6 for more on Zopa).

To put people at the heart of services, we need to know who they are. We need to listen to them and obtain accurate information that helps us give them what they need, when they need it. We start by gathering insights.

## Insights versus Numbers

Service design draws upon the user- and human-centered design traditions as well as the social sciences to form the basis of our work gathering insights into the experiences, desires, motivations, and needs of the people who use and provide services.

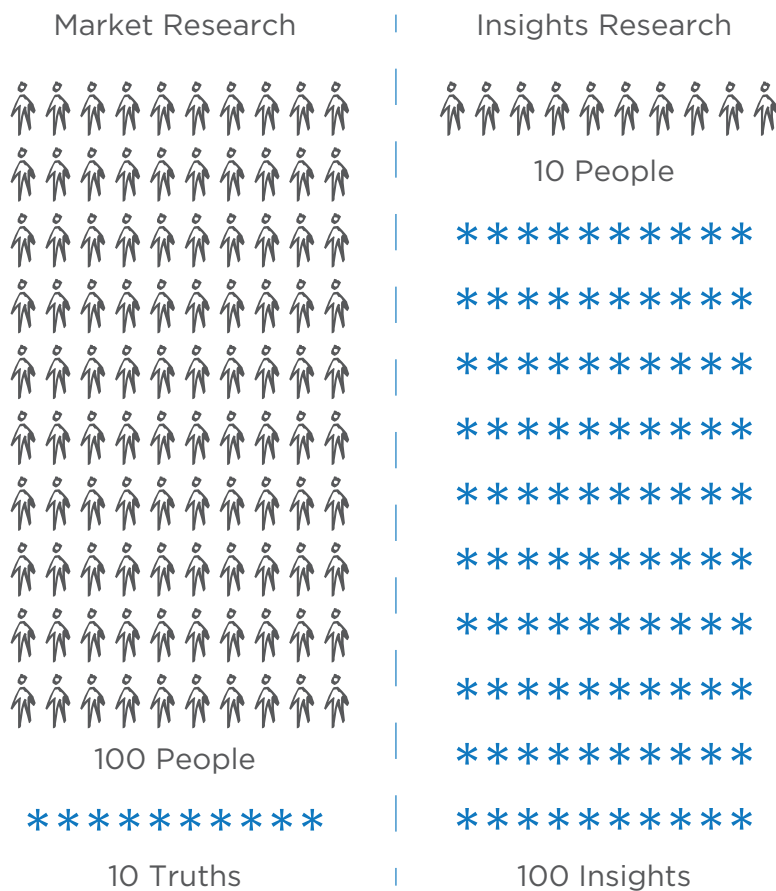
Although the business press makes a lot of noise about “putting customers first,” being “customer centered,” and having “a customer focus,” few organizations employ this form of knowledge with the same rigor that they employ accounting and law. The latter are usually legally mandated for organizations, of course, but developing and maintaining a deep understanding of the people for whom an organization exists to provide value is just as important for the ongoing relevance and survival of a business. Service design is not simply something to add on top of a business proposition after all the numbers have been crunched; it is fundamental to the entire organization and its offerings, and can create a paradigm shift in corporate culture and thinking to one of sustained value and innovation.

All types of organizations have the potential to personalize services and create huge benefits for themselves and their customers. From personalized learning in education to insurance quotes tailored to a policy holder’s driving style, personalization is a powerful concept. Shifting attention from the masses to the individual enables radical new opportunities, and because of this fact, service design places more emphasis on qualitative over quantitative research methods.

Service design involves research across all the stakeholders of a project—from the managing director to the end user, and from frontline staff to third-party suppliers. Of course, other disciplines focus on detailed knowledge of customers as a business advantage. The most notable is marketing, and indeed, “insight” is a term widely used in marketing. We are not suggesting that service design is an alternative to marketing, and we acknowledge that service design draws upon a number of disciplines for some of its methods and approaches, but we want to explore how the specific emphasis on design creates value in the experience of services, service propositions, and touchpoints.

Marketing excels in understanding markets and how to reach them through the classic four Ps: price, promotion, product, and place. We are focusing on the fifth P, people, and how we work with people to inform the design of a service.

Market research is typically quantitative and prefers large numbers of respondents. This research can yield some “truths” that are statistically significant and correct, such as the percentage of people who use a certain kind of service (Figure 3.1). This background information can be useful, but discovering through quantitative research that 70% of people do not ride a bicycle (to use a fictional statistic as an example) does not give us any hints about *why* they do not ride bicycles. Statistics are not very actionable for designers—we need to know the underlying reasons.



**FIGURE 3.1**  
 One is not better than the other, but for our purposes, qualitative research yields more useful insights that we can use as a basis for design than quantitative research’s “truths” do.

Qualitative research helps designers dive deeper to understand the chaos and emotions that make us human and behave in seemingly illogical ways. We are interested in people's needs, behaviors, and motivations because these can form the basis of design problems that we try to tackle as designers.

Maybe the non-cyclists in our example prefer the car or bus, or maybe they do not cycle because their city has inadequate bike lanes and the risk of an accident overrides their desire to cycle. If we only work with the statistics, we might assume that the bicycle market is only 30% and decide that it makes more sense to concentrate our efforts on designing better cars and buses. Of course, this choice would likely lead to even fewer bicycle lanes and fewer cyclists. Knowing people's *motivations* for *not* riding bicycles, and understanding the behaviors of those who do, means we might instead focus our design effort on rethinking traffic zoning and bicycle services, as the city of Copenhagen has been doing with great success.<sup>2</sup>

### Using Insights to Drive Innovation

Service design and innovation go hand in hand. Much of the work involves shifting clients from an industrial mindset to thinking in a service paradigm. This may mean spending a lot of time helping clients develop an internal culture that will serve them well when it comes to facing future challenges.

Service designers employ the same tools and methods whether they are engaged in innovation work or improvement work, but the purpose of insights is different in each case. By innovation, we mean introducing a new service to a market, or even developing a new market. In this mode, the primary concern is to reduce risk by making sure that the value proposition is viable. The purpose of the research is to generate insight about needs and behaviors that can lay a solid foundation for a productive project and robust ideas, and to confirm these by prototyping early and often to test them out.

Innovation work can be excitingly blue sky and often requires thinking outside of the current norms, but the danger is that it can become distant from people's real needs and problems. We are still waiting for our flying cars and jet packs, and this is probably a good thing because both would most likely result in enormous carbon footprints and crazy sky traffic. If people are asked to dream up their ideal fantasy of transport, they would likely say they would love a flying car or a *Star Trek* transporter. Beyond fulfilling childhood fantasies, however, the underlying *need* of these suggestions is simply an efficient and engaging transportation experience, or even avoiding travel altogether. Innovation brainstorming can easily end up being

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.copenhagenize.com](http://www.copenhagenize.com), and City of Copenhagen, "Copenhagen—The City of Cyclists," [www.kk.dk/sitecore/content/Subsites/CityOfCopenhagen/SubsiteFrontpage/LivingInCopenhagen/CityAndTraffic/CityOfCyclists.aspx](http://www.kk.dk/sitecore/content/Subsites/CityOfCopenhagen/SubsiteFrontpage/LivingInCopenhagen/CityAndTraffic/CityOfCyclists.aspx).



driven by technological or marketing fantasies. By asking people about their everyday experiences and observing what they do, how they behave, and what their motivations are, we can ground the innovation process with insights into people's actual lives.

In the end, insights that drive innovation confidently answer the question: "Will our offering make sense in the context of people's lives, and will they find it valuable?"

Many service design projects are about improving an existing service, and here the insights research focus is slightly different. If a service already has many customers, and competitors have entered the market, one can assume that people understand how the service is used and that it is of value. In these cases, the focus is on discovering points of failure in the service (known in service design jargon simply as "fail points") and opportunities for enhancing the experience. This focus means that we can narrow the research scope and look less at unfulfilled needs and more at usage in context. It also means that operational data become a valuable resource and that customer-facing staff are a gold mine for insights. Staff usually can identify most of the problems customers face with a service, although it can be more difficult for them to pinpoint the opportunities for thinking outside the box. When time is short and a service improvement project has a limited budget, it is often a good idea to prioritize the research time with staff and data to dig quickly into the detail that is needed to design great services.

Obviously, these two areas overlap. Improvement may happen through small innovations, or a blue-sky innovation idea may be scaled back and the principles applied to an existing service or touchpoint as an improvement. What changes is the focus of what we are trying get out of the insights research. In either case, the focus is always on people.

### Designing with People, Not for Them

People are part of the delivery of services in a way they are not with products. Consumers probably do not know who designed or built their car, for example, but they will have some contact with the person they speak with at a call center or with the nurse who admits them into an emergency ward. We need to design service elements as much for the person who delivers service as we do for the customer.

Service design is about designing *with* people and not just *for* them, and it is here that it differs from classic user-centered design and much of marketing. "People" does not just mean customers or users, it also means the people working to provide the service, often called frontline, front-of-house, or customer-facing staff. Their experience, both in terms of their knowledge and their engagement in the job, is important to the ongoing success of a service for two key reasons.

## HourSchool: Engaging Stakeholders in Service Design

*by Christina Tran and Jon Kolko*

HourSchool is a peer-to-peer learning platform that helps people become teachers. We partnered with Green Doors, a permanent supportive housing community in Austin, Texas, to co-design a peer education program. Green Doors provides housing to more than 300 residents annually, and offers supportive services for those placed in residence. Based on our common values, we committed to creating a strengths-based approach to increase participation and leadership among community residents. HourSchool staff had seen the transformative power of teaching and knew what it took to build a website platform that encouraged peer learning. However, with a community whose main communication channels were offline, a new program needed to be co-designed as a comprehensive service. We needed buy-in, ownership, and engagement throughout the process from all stakeholders—administrative staff, community managers, and residents—so the program would fit into their lives and thrive beyond our involvement.

Using service design as an approach highlighted all the moving parts that needed to work together as a peer education program. As we started to create a service blueprint that outlined key touchpoints, artifacts, and backstage actions, we immediately saw the importance of the community manager's role. Not only would she be spearheading the logistical efforts to organize events, she would also be the one training residents in how they could interact with the service (through templates, requests, and meetings with her). Furthermore, we needed to empower her with the tools to continue making decisions and adjustments to the service blueprint as the program continued to evolve after we left.

From the beginning, we had planned a pilot prototype of the program with multiple rounds of reflection, iteration, and adjustment, so the residents could give feedback and co-create the service along the way. To connect with the community and to start building trust early on, we met casually but continually with people outside of formal research and design sessions. Some of our most valuable insights and design work ended up happening at monthly Resident Council meetings—community meetings where hot issues, such as laundry room complaints or new playground rules, were discussed.

Here are some examples of how showing up to those meetings influenced our service design:

- **Change in perception:** Near the beginning of the process, we introduced an activity about the residents' perception of "classes." We were able to unearth their prejudices about classes as boring lectures and helped them to dream of learning that was social, personalized, and fun. Together we defined event categories of "Lessons," "Demos," and "Socials" and agreed to start planning these for the community. Because they helped to define the language and framework for the new program, residents began to feel ownership in the program rather than like recipients of someone else's ideas.
- **Continuing insights:** We were able to synthesize new insights beyond an initial research phase. The things we heard at the meetings (e.g., computer lab hours were inconsistent) evolved our service blueprint during our working sessions with the community manager (sign-up sheets needed to go to residents as much as we wanted residents to come to the sign-up sheets we posted in the computer lab).
- **Empathy:** We got to know people's names, and people got to know ours. During the meetings, we saw firsthand the complexity of people's lives and the number of things competing for their attention. We were continually reminded that our peer education program was just one slice of the larger pie. This drove us to make our service as relevant as possible by aligning it with people's goals (both staff and residents) and by connecting our program to other parts of the system in meaningful ways.

Over time, the meetings themselves became a touchpoint in our peer education program because of their consistency in community life. Announcing new classes, soliciting requests, and recruiting volunteer organizers are now standing agenda items. In the end, one of the most rewarding benefits of attending the monthly meetings was witnessing the changes firsthand as components of our peer education program took root. As people shared fun stories from attending classes, the meetings became a place where residents could inspire and encourage each other to take the leap, reach for a goal, and support each other along the way.

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*Jon Kolko is the founder and director of the Austin Center for Design, a progressive educational institution teaching interaction design and social entrepreneurship. His most recent book is Wicked Problems: Problems Worth Solving (Austin Center for Design, 2012).*

First, in very simple terms, happy staff equals happy customers, so their inclusion in the design of services ensures that providing the service will be a positive experience. Staff who are involved in the creation and improvement of service not only feel more engaged but through learning about the complex ecology of the service they provide and how to make use of innovation tools and methods, they are also able to continually improve the service themselves.<sup>3</sup> Service innovation should have a life span beyond the length of time the service designers are involved in the project. This means recognizing that other stakeholders may engage in many of the activities of service design as part of a continual process of change.

Second, along with customers, frontline staff are often the real experts. They provide insights into the potential for service design that are frequently as valuable to the project as insights from customers, and they can provide a perspective on the day-to-day experiences that managers and marketing people may never experience.

### Working across Time and Multiple Touchpoints

For designers who come from a discipline that already uses human-centered design methods, much of this material will be familiar. Understanding people and their daily lives and needs provides the central insights on which many design projects are built (in an ideal world). The difference between service design and product or UX design, for example, is that the number of stakeholders we are designing for is usually larger, the number and range of touchpoints broader, and all of these interact over time.

#### *Segmentation by Journey Stage versus Target Groups*

In our definition of service design, we talk about experiences that happen over time. It is relatively simple to gain insight about an experience that happens in a short amount of time, such as an online purchase or a patient's consultation with a doctor, but how do we gain insight into experiences that change and evolve over years or even decades?

In product design or marketing research, we would typically segment the market and interview people in different age, socioeconomic, or behavioral groups. In services, a more useful way to engage with people is by looking at *different stages of their relationship with the service*. This strategy allows us to research the different journeys people might take through a service and how they transition through the various touchpoints.

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<sup>3</sup> This alignment of employee and customer satisfaction is known as the "satisfaction mirror"; see J. L. Heskett, W. E. Sasser, and L. A. Schlesinger, *The Service Profit Chain*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 1997).

### *Researching across Multiple Touchpoints*

Unlike many products or screen-based interfaces, services do not lend themselves to lab testing. For a start, services usually involve large infrastructures, and it would be difficult to test a complete train journey without a rail network infrastructure, although we can prototype elements of it. More important, people interact with services through different channels in different situations that often include interactions with other people. Context is critical to gathering insights into people's interactions with touchpoints, and a lab is not a context in which this can happen (unless the project involves scientists).

For example, one day a customer might buy a train ticket online, another day from a counter in the station, and the next day from a ticket machine or on the train. In addition, the ticket-purchasing experience is closely connected to pricing, route, and departure information, the signage in a station, how staff deal with questions, and the quality of the train ride itself. Third-party services that connect to the train ride also play important roles, such as buses and taxis, credit cards, maps, cleaning services, and the café where travelers can comfortably wait and grab a bite to eat.

From a service point of view, we are really after understanding how different touchpoints work together to form a complete experience. Therefore, try to do research with people in the situations where they use the service. Study how people use a service at home, on the road, and at work, and then connect the dots.

In addition to looking for latent and explicit needs and desires, as is commonly done in most design projects, also look closely for service-specific insights. Look for touchpoints that may be missing but are needed to create a good experience, or touchpoints that are superfluous. Look for situations in which the service could play a more valuable role, or instances when it is smart to keep people from noticing that it is there.

What is most important to look for is variation in quality between the touchpoints and the gap between expectations and experiences. When people get what they expect, they feel that the quality is right. Whether it is a premium or a low-cost service, a minimal gap between expectation and experience means greater customer satisfaction.

All of this can be much more difficult than it sounds and can get very complex very quickly. There are natural and economic limits to what we are able to influence, and if we try to track every touchpoint, we will end up trying to re-create the world. A car-sharing experience might happen in the context of a city, so we might want to look at parking spaces, which means we end up dealing with city government, and before long we are wrestling with the entire country's traffic infrastructure policy. Thus, it is important to

be strategic and decide on the scope of your insights research. The grumpy café owner in the train station is probably not a touchpoint that we can work on if our client is the rail company, although we might try to find out why the owner is so grumpy and ruins travelers' days (perhaps the rent the rail company charges him is too high). On the other hand, he might have wonderful insights into travelers' confusions because he gets asked where the station exit is several times a day.

## Summary

- People are part of the delivery of services in a way they are not with products. The value of a service is closely linked to the quality of relationships between providers and customers, as well as the networks of relationships between people inside and outside the service organization.
- We need to design service elements as much for the person who delivers the service as for the customer. This means designing *with* people and not just *for* them.
- To design for people, we need insights into people's needs, motivations, and behaviors. Qualitative research can usually provide the data for these insights better than quantitative research.
- It is important to research people's activities and interactions across all the touchpoint channels as well as the segments of their journey through the service.

## CHAPTER 4



# Turning Research into Insight and Action

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**T**he process of gathering insights draws on a range of research methodologies, specifically design, usability, and ethnographic methods. Those familiar with UX design, human-centered design, and product and social design projects will be familiar with many of these methods. This chapter describes how these methods are used in the context of service design as well as why and when we use them.

Most designers work in commercial contexts in which budgets and time are generally pressured. Although it is important to try to bring as much rigor to your research process as possible—not least because it helps prove the business case for it—the goal is not necessarily published research. The goal is usable insight that will improve the quality of the service design projects you are working on. It is essential to realize that any insight is better than none and that insight can become addictive. Once your colleagues and clients have a taste, they will come back for more to validate or prototype your initial assumptions.

So where do you start? The answer is, as ever, “It depends.” Instead of preaching an ideal process that you are unlikely to have the chance to fully execute, the following approaches and examples are grouped into realistic levels and scenarios. This framework will help you think about how to generate insights that will fit the current needs of your team and the business, and it is a good starting point for those new to service design.

## Levels of Insights

Regardless of the arguments you make for its power to generate insights, research is often time consuming and thus expensive. Convincing a new client to commit to a large research budget up front and trust that you will come up with something useful may be a stretch. The process is always the age-old trade-off between time, money, and quality. A useful way to think about this is to have a menu of low, middle, and high levels of detail (and effort) to draw from as the situation requires.

### Low—What They Say

The low granularity of analysis is basically a summary of what a small sample of around four or five research participants say in relatively short depth interviews (say, 45 minutes), and does not include any other activities, such as in-person observation, workshops, site visits, or testing. Costs include recruitment expenses and any participant incentive. This level of research is unlikely to include a travel budget, so the interviews may need to be conducted in the local area or by telephone or e-mail.

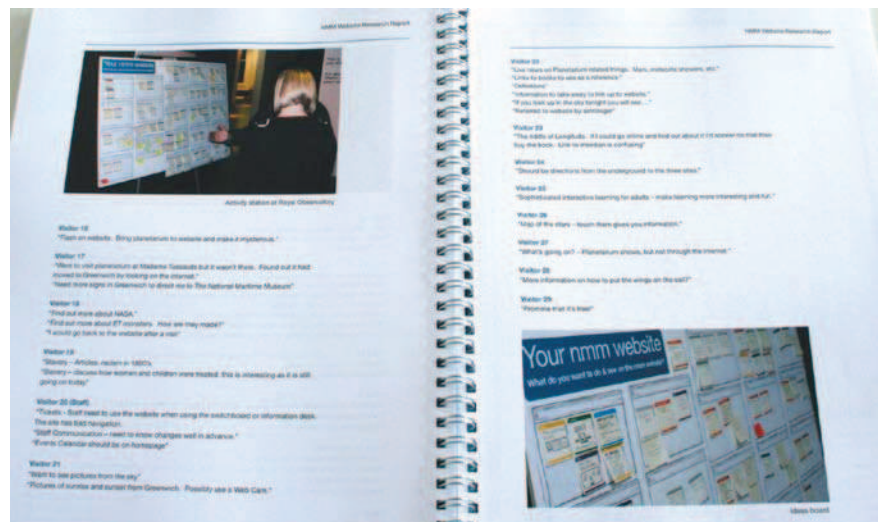
The output produced for the client is a brief executive summary and the top five observations from the depth interviews delivered as a PDF document or in a short presentation. The observations provide some possible quick wins for the client.



## Middle—What We Saw

The middle level of analysis provides deeper and more crafted insights based on research with around 10 participants. This deeper level may be of benefit to clients who require the research to have some long-term value beyond a specific project or who need to share it with a bigger group within the company.

The output provides top insights plus a summary, but is more in-depth than the low level of analysis (Figure 4.1). This middle level also prioritizes issues for the project, which are produced from an internal workshop with the client that is conducted by the service design agency. The insights findings may be presented as a written report, presentation slides, a blog, or summary boards (see “Collating and Presenting Your Insights” below for more details).



**FIGURE 4.1**  
An example of a middle-level insights report.

## High—What It Means

A highly detailed level of analysis requires more depth interviews and a combination of other insights techniques to generate the data. The analysis in this level is much deeper and more systematic, and includes more about what the insights mean strategically for the industry and the client’s project, along with suggested recommendations and solutions for the client. The output can also be more varied, including those from the low and middle variants, but may extend to a short video or a workshop with the client and/or other stakeholders to share and build on the insights gained through the initial research.

## Insights-Gathering Methods

Many of the insights-gathering methods described in this section are drawn from ethnography, but it is important to note that, although we are using ethnographic methods and techniques, we are not doing proper ethnography in its own right. Ethnography is a term that has had some use and abuse by designers over the past few years in the sense of “Yeah, we did some ethnography and then got on with the design work.” Ethnography has a history, approach, and rigor that is much more loosely interpreted for design research, and when we borrow its methodology, we should be respectful of how and why it was developed in the first place—to understand and document the knowledge, relationships, and beliefs of social or cultural groups, often through long-term participant observation of a year or more. Of course, the ideal scenario is to hire a trained ethnographer to work with the design researchers and design team.

Although the following methods are commonly used by those working on service design projects, this list is not exhaustive. Any methods that help you understand people’s motivations and behaviors more deeply, including those methods you may already be using in interaction or UX work, will contribute to a service design project.

### Depth Interviews

Depth interviews are long, in-context interviews that tend to be fairly open in their structure. They are an inspiring and productive way of generating insights into an individual’s perceptions, behaviors, and needs. They are also good for uncovering values, opinions, explicit and latent information, interactions, and idea inspiration. These interviews are usually guided by a theme, and they provide an opportunity to explore relevant issues in depth with participants, query and verify what they say, and achieve consensus on what they mean. The results of depth interviews compare very favorably with those from focus groups and are less expensive to undertake. Angus Jenkinson, director of the Centre for Integrated Marketing at the University of Bedfordshire Business School, argues that focus groups are structurally problematic because each member gets only a few minutes to speak and even these short interactions are influenced by social pressures. In contrast, in-depth interviews offer deeper insights and are better value for the money.<sup>1</sup>

Interviews are the most efficient way to engage with people in their own context and allow them to explain how they see things. This means using a number of techniques to make interviews as engaging, informal, and as interactive as possible through drawing and other creative activities. An engaging interview is the key to a productive rapport.

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<sup>1</sup> See Angus Jenkinson, “Austerity Marketing and Fat Insights,” July 25, 2008, [www.stepping-stones.org/Blog/?p=3](http://www.stepping-stones.org/Blog/?p=3).

Meet participants in their own homes or places of work to bring ethnographic context to the interview (Figure 4.2). If you want to learn about how people carry out their activities in the workplace, for example, interviewing them at home will be of limited use. When in the context of their workplace, however, many visual prompts will be present that can help direct the conversation, and you can take photographs or film the things the participant is talking about. Workplace interviews have some limitations, however, which are discussed in “Business-to-Business Depth Interviews” below.



**FIGURE 4.2**  
A depth interview in the participant’s home environment.

Encourage other members of the design team to attend and engage so they can share the experience of meeting users and discovering insights. Occasionally, you may want to ask clients to attend the interviews, too, but this can be a double-edged sword. Clients will obtain a greater understanding of the methods and project results, and they are often energized and excited when hearing this feedback firsthand, but they need to be prepared to remain passive. Some clients can manage this, but others want to jump in and correct a participant’s misunderstanding of their brand or product, which closes down the participant’s range of responses very quickly and skews the outcome of the interview. In some cases, even the presence of a person representing the company can close down participants’ responses, but it might equally give frustrated users a sense of being heard and encourage them to open up and vent about all of the things that have annoyed them. However, interviewees should never be corrected about something they are explaining, even if they are completely wrong. Instead, ask them how or why they know what they are saying; it will reveal a lot more.

The way participants tell their own stories provides researchers with a rich resource for identifying how they perceive and articulate the subject. Priorities and embellishments are helpful indicators of what is valuable to them, so rather than impose structure, use a loose interview guide to ensure you cover the themes and material you need, and then coax out detail and verify that you have understood their perspective. Depth interviews differ from other methods because they allow the time to uncover this level of detail. They may range from around 45 minutes (probably the shortest usable time, unless you have only a tiny window of time with an expert or top manager) to two or three hours, especially if you are asking someone to show you around his or her home or workplace.

### Variations on the Depth Interview

Two other types of depth interview are focused more on specific questions than the open interviews described above: consumer interviews in pairs and business-to-business (B2B) interviews. They differ slightly in terms of what you are trying or able to discover and in terms of the interpersonal dynamics and structure.

#### *Interviewing Consumers in Pairs*

For some people, a one-to-one interview can feel imposing and exposing, although a good interviewer should be able to put them at ease quickly. In one-to-one situations, consumers in particular may say what they think you want to hear. For this reason, we find consumer research interviews conducted with couples or pairs of friends can be more useful than interviews with individuals because the subjects feed off each other's answers and build on them. If they know each other well, they are likely to feel more comfortable and give genuine answers. We have found that pairs provide the most truthful feedback, and of course, you get two people's opinions in the same time it takes to interview one person. In this respect, pairs represent the best value for the client.

One thing to be careful of is when one person puts opinions in the mouth of the other. This usually happens with couples in long-term relationships more than with friends. A husband might explain to the interviewer that his wife hates a particular TV show or that she knows nothing about how their home entertainment equipment is set up, for example. The dynamics of the relationship might mean that she does not contradict this statement during the interview, even if it is not true. Even if it *is* true, if it is part of the research topic, you will want to find out *why* she does not like a particular show. Perhaps the reason is that her husband always complains loudly when it is on, and it has nothing to do with the show itself. On the other hand, the wife might also contradict her husband by revealing that he has no idea how the home entertainment system works either. We have experienced this kind of "he said/she said" thing in more than one interview over the years.

As Ben Scales from the Association for Qualitative Research says, “Friendship or family cells provide a natural form of censorship. After all, it’s hard to exaggerate about your behavior when you’ve got someone sitting next to you who knows you well.”<sup>2</sup>

Children or teenagers tend to feel uncomfortable when interviewed on their own (and conducting such interviews may be considered inappropriate in some cultures and contexts), so you are better off interviewing them in pairs. Be aware, however, that they will almost certainly try to impress each other, especially at certain ages (teenage boys, for example).<sup>3</sup>

### *Business-to-Business Depth Interviews*

One-to-one depth interviews are best used in B2B situations or when interviewing client stakeholders. You may be interviewing business customers or suppliers of your client. In a one-to-one context, they are more likely to tell you things about their company that they might not say in front of their colleagues or superiors. Also, B2B interviews can be difficult to set up if more than one person is involved because their schedules may conflict with each other’s and with yours.

Interviewing or observing people at their place of work is useful, especially if you are interested in the workplace context and their workflow, but if you are asking people to talk openly about their feelings about their job, then B2B interviews may be better conducted in a neutral environment, such as a coffee shop. People may not be comfortable talking about work in their home, and they may not be as open and honest if interviewed in the workplace.

Sometimes you have no choice about where or with whom you conduct interviews. Some insight from an interview conducted in less than optimal conditions is usually better than none at all, unless it really appears to be contradictory or the conditions have skewed the responses too much. In the end, field researchers cannot avoid these elements, just as they cannot completely jettison their own cultural baggage and interpretations. Most people think they can be objective, but this is an illusion. Sometimes you just do not develop a rapport with interviewees or their views are so different from yours that it is hard not to react negatively, even if only through unconscious body language. Due to a last-minute scheduling change, Andy once found himself interviewing a group of lawyers from an oil exploration company about hydrogen fuel cell transportation options for the future. Needless to say, the atmosphere was not particularly open and jovial. The best that you can do in these situations is to be aware of these influences and

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Scales, “Creative Elevation,” Association for Qualitative Research, 2008, [www.aqr.org.uk/inbrief/document.shtml?doc=ben.scales.14-01-2008.elevation](http://www.aqr.org.uk/inbrief/document.shtml?doc=ben.scales.14-01-2008.elevation).

<sup>3</sup> See Kay Tisdall, John Davis, and Michael Gallagher, *Researching with Children and Young People: Research Design, Methods and Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2009) for a good reference guide in this area.

take them into account when making interpretations of the transcripts and other data, or to simply thank the interviewees and end the interviews early.

### Preparing for Interviews

Indi Young's *Mental Models* has a very good section on setting up interviews, with detailed advice about working out who to recruit and dealing with research participant recruitment agencies.<sup>4</sup> Below is a general overview of the process that we usually follow.

- **Recruit:** This step can take two to three weeks, so it should be started early. If possible, use a recruitment company to do the hard work of recruiting interviewees. This may seem expensive but saves a lot of time. You need to be as clear as possible with the recruiters about who you need. More unusual participants (such as farriers or specific medical patients) may need to be sourced with the client's help. You can also use your own (real or virtual) social networks to interview friends of friends. This can help create an instant level of trust with someone who is still essentially a stranger.
- **Research:** You may not know much about the topic you are interviewing on. If this is the case, you may need to research the area, but don't spend too much time on it. Sometimes it is best to be a little naïve because it prevents you from making assumptions; otherwise, you will have to learn to ask deliberately naïve questions.
- **Plan the topics:** When you have found out more, construct a prompt card. This should be a list of topics you want to cover during the interview, not a strict list of specific questions. The interview should be a conversation, not an interrogation.
- **Design the tools:** Design appropriate paper activities to make the interview more engaging and interactive (see "Probes and Tools" below).
- **Prepare:** Think through the details of going out to do the depth interviews (see "Practicalities of Conducting Insights Research" below).

### Participant Observation

Participant observation, or shadowing, provides rich, in-depth, and accurate insights into how people use products, processes, and procedures. It is very useful for understanding context, behavior, motivations, interactions, and the reality of what people do, rather than what they say they do. It gives good depth and insight into latent needs—the things people actually need, but perhaps do not know that they need because they are so used to their old routine.

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<sup>4</sup> Indi Young, *Mental Models: Aligning Design Strategy with Human Behavior* (New York: Rosenfeld Media, 2008), [www.rosenfeldmedia.com/books/mental-models/](http://www.rosenfeldmedia.com/books/mental-models/).

Observation is usually quite time consuming in comparison to other insights methods and can be difficult to arrange because someone must be prepared to have you accompany them for a few hours or a full day. In some situations, such as shadowing someone trying to find their way around a public transit system, this method is not too invasive. In workplace situations, it can be trickier because a sales representative may not want you sitting there while he or she is in a meeting with a customer, or people may be uncomfortable discussing confidential information in front of you, even if you have signed a nondisclosure agreement.

Short observations are a useful starting point when the team is not familiar with the area being researched. They give you a sense of the atmosphere and environment in which people are carrying out activities (e.g., buying, selling, giving a diagnosis, receiving treatment). They can also give you a good sense of activity flows (e.g., new patients' names are written on the whiteboard and entered into the computer, and a blue file is used to mark their nonemergency status). Longer, in-depth observations can be used to uncover fresh insights into even familiar activities. Sometimes the fact that a task is very commonly carried out can blind people to the opportunities for improvement.

It is essential with this type of research to carry out the observations in the participant's natural environment, such as an office, home, or in the context of an activity, such as trying to find the right train across town (Figure 4.3). Otherwise, you will have nothing to observe, or you will be observing tasks out of their usual context.



**FIGURE 4.3**  
Participant observation on Norway's transport system.

The goals of participant observation depend on who the participant is, whether a customer or a business. Observing customers means observing people in their everyday lives. This method is useful when working with customers to uncover how they use and engage with products and services. Observing the participant in a professional role is often done when working with clients to help uncover how their internal procedures can be improved.

When observing, there are two approaches you can take: the fly-on-the-wall method in which you just observe and pretend not to be there, or a more active approach in which you interact with users by asking them questions about what they are doing. People do all sorts of strange and wonderful things when they work or use something, and they often have developed their own workarounds for problems with a system, service, or interface. Even if you think you can see their rationale, it helps to act a little naïve and ask them to explain what they are doing and why.

### *Preparing for Participant Observation*

Here are some steps to follow when planning participant observations.

- **Recruit:** Arranging these sessions can be tricky because you are intruding into someone's life and workflow. You don't want to get in the way or miss anything, so good planning is essential and you need to be sure to find the best candidate in the organization for your research goals.
- **Set expectations:** Make sure you understand what the client wants from the insights activity so that you are aware of what to look out for when observing. This understanding will also help with analysis. Create a list of questions that you want answered to serve as a guide for what to watch for. At the same time, it is important to remain open to whatever presents itself during the observation period. You don't want to miss something interesting because you have your nose buried in your notes.
- **Design the tools:** To record the activity, you may want to create some paper activities for you or the participant to complete (discussed in "Probes and Tools" below).
- **Prepare:** Each observation activity is unique, so preparation is important. Think about what you should wear and how you will record what you observe. Decide how much time you will need to spend in observation to obtain the information you require.





**FIGURE 4.4**  
Becoming the user or a member of the client's staff for a day is an enlightening way to gain user insights. Don't forget to dress the part as Natalie McGhee and Sean Miller have done here.

### Participation—Becoming the User

Participation is a very involved but enlightening way to gain user insights. It is not just a way to study or document the user's lifestyle or occupation, but allows you to become part of the user group you are researching (Figure 4.4).

Participation can provide researchers with a unique, firsthand understanding of the way users feel and behave, and it is an excellent strategy for developing empathy and asking questions clients might not think of. Researchers can experience things for themselves that may be hard for someone to describe to them.

We encourage clients to try the participation technique of becoming their own customers. This helps them empathize with their customers and allows them to uncover insights and ideas for improvement for themselves, not just hear it secondhand from us. For many clients, this activity can be quite daunting, but it can also be an exciting and engaging experience for them. The client-as-customer approach can also be done with the service safari described below.

Participation activities can be as simple as being a mystery shopper or as complex as getting a job with the client to experience being a new employee. When it is not possible to literally become your users—because they have a disability, for example—you can simulate the experience. To feel what it is like to use a service’s touchpoints as an elderly person, you could wear an “aging suit” made up of heavy gloves to simulate stiffness and loss of dexterity in the hands, a helmet/visor to limit vision, and other elements to restrict movement.<sup>5</sup> You can spend the day in a wheelchair to see what it is like to go shopping or use public transportation.<sup>6</sup>

### *Preparing for Participation*

Here are a few specific tips to bear in mind when planning to use the participation method.

- **Be open:** You may have to do things you haven’t done before; it is important to be open and embrace them. You want to avoid distracting the people you are studying by having them look after you.
- **Be organized:** Good planning is essential. You are about to wade into someone else’s workspace and workflow. You are also likely to be representing your client to the public or your client’s customers. Treat what you are doing with the same respect you would show any real job. Some things will happen spontaneously, so have everything you need to document the situation at hand.
- **Document:** Choose the most suitable method for recording the task you are carrying out. Do not insist on sticking a camera in someone’s face when discreet note taking would be more appropriate.

### *Service Safaris*

A service safari gives participants—usually members of the project team from the client side—firsthand experience of other (sometimes seemingly unrelated) services (Figure 4.5). Participants use these other services for a few hours or even a day. Some of the services to be explored should be outside the client’s own industry, which enables participants to be more objective about how the services they experience are delivered. This experience may provide ideas that they can transfer back to their own business.

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<sup>5</sup> To simulate aging, MIT’s AgeLab developed a complex suit called AGNES (Age Gain Now Empathy System); see <http://agelab.mit.edu/agnes-age-gain-now-empathy-system>.

<sup>6</sup> David McQuillen told a great story about the power of his team’s “immersion” approach in his presentation at euroGel 2006, when he was Director of Customer Experience at Credit Suisse. The video is available at <http://vimeo.com/3720227>.



**FIGURE 4.5**  
 A service safari allows you or your client to experience being a customer of another service and try out a range of different experiences, both good and bad.

A service safari can help stimulate clients to enlarge, shift, and reframe the way they think about serving their customers because they are seeing themselves as the service user instead of the service provider. This empathy for their customers will help innovate fresh ideas. It is an excellent technique to use when redesigning an existing service and can prove valuable when designing a new service because it helps inspire new service ideas.

Service safaris are usually best used in conjunction with a workshop or sketching session. This helps clients translate what they have learned from the safari into ideas for their business and provides inspiring material to kick off those sessions. It can be a great icebreaker for teams just starting to get to grips with service design.

### *Preparing for a Service Safari*

Planning a service safari can be time consuming. Here are some points to consider.

- **Budget:** Service safaris can be expensive, so it is important to agree on a budget with the client before organizing anything.
- **Research:** Choose the services you want the clients to experience. We usually go for a mix of services that we think will be really good or really bad (but these can be surprising).
- **Plan:** After deciding which services the clients should try, you may need to book these activities. Draw up a clear schedule of what each client will do on the safari. Participants should be provided with the money needed to pay for the activities on their service safari, and they should be sent out on their own (individually or in groups), but not with members of the service design team.
- **Prepare the tools:** Each group on the safari should be provided with tools to document each service, typically a camera and a journal, perhaps one prepared ahead of time with pointers on what to look out for or with a specific structure for notes.
- **Debrief:** When the participants come back from the safari, they should present their findings and create a list of good and bad aspects of the services. This can be the first activity of a workshop.

### **User Workshops**

Focus groups can be full of people telling you what they think you want to hear or who are influenced by others in the group, so you might prefer to do co-design user workshops. Encourage pairs of friends to attend, as they are likely to be more comfortable with this dynamic and more truthful in their answers. These kinds of workshops are a great way to quickly produce large numbers of insights and ideas.

Use probe-like tasks (see “Probes and Tools” below) in these workshops to warm up participants and start generating useful discussion (Figure 4.6). These tasks can help less dominant participants, who may not be comfortable speaking in front of a group, express themselves through another medium. Encourage participants to develop their own ideas, and use sketching or collage making to help people get out of their normal, verbal mode of thinking.



**FIGURE 4.6**  
User workshops are a good alternative to focus groups.

#### *Preparing for a User Workshop*

When planning to conduct a user workshop, here are a few tips to consider.

- **Recruit:** It can take two to three weeks to set up a workshop, so recruit early. You should try to recruit friendship pairs or couples rather than individuals. Groups of 4 to 16 people are ideal for a user workshop.
- **Prepare the venue:** Arrange a suitable venue for the workshop that is large and comfortable enough for everyone to work on the activities. Sometimes participant recruiters can assist with finding a suitable space. Arrange for food and beverages, if required. Offering food before a workshop is scheduled to begin can help get participants there on time. If the venue has little wall area, you may want to take along some foam-core or display boards to use as temporary post-up spaces.
- **Create a schedule:** Draw up a realistic timetable of what will be done and when. You will almost certainly run out of time for all the things you have planned, at least the first few times you conduct a workshop. Be prepared to skip over some activities and be clear about which ones are more important than others. It is useful to have a backup plan, just in case.
- **Design the tools:** Spend some time designing the tools required to engage people in the activities. Make sure you have enough copies of any worksheets, as well as plenty of pens, pencils, markers, glue sticks, scissors, sticky notes, masking tape, and any other tools you might need, such as building blocks or modeling clay.

- **Document:** The client may want documentation of the workshop. Video is sometimes requested, but usually photos and the materials produced in the workshop are enough. If you do need to film the workshop and you are the facilitator, ask someone else from your team to do the recording. You will not have time to attend to this task properly *and* facilitate well. A simple approach is to set up a camera on a tripod in one place and just record any presentations given by the groups.

## Probes and Tools

Probes and tools are useful aids for the insights research approaches described above. Using only verbal inputs during interviews or workshops can be limiting. Some people can describe or envisage their world, thoughts, feelings, and relationships better through images, diagrams, sketches, and activities.



**FIGURE 4.7**  
Depth interview probes from a project for the National Maritime Museum.

Probes are task-based insights activities that are good for generating insights with minimum influence from the researcher and bringing out views in quieter participants (Figure 4.7). These are more formally called *cultural probes*, as developed by Bill Gaver of the Royal College of Art.<sup>7</sup>

Probes can be used during an interview session to engage participants, or they can be left with interviewees to complete over time. Sometimes it is useful to leave a probe task with users to gain insight into other parts of their lives or to record an event that happens over time and cannot be studied in an interview situation.

<sup>7</sup> See Bill Gaver, Tony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti, “Design: Cultural Probes,” *interactions* 6, no. 1 (1999): 21–29.

### Preparing Probes and Tools

Probes can be personalized according to the client's requirements. Probes can take some time to define, so it is best to look at what has already been done for inspiration. Below are some examples of what we have developed and used in the past, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. Plenty of examples of cultural probes and other interview aids can be found online and in the literature. Consider them as tools for your research toolbox and add to your collection as you come across or develop more over the years. Roberta Tassi's Service Design Tools website ([www.servicedesigntools.org](http://www.servicedesigntools.org)) is a great place to share them, too.

The tools that you use most frequently for interviews and workshops can be assembled in travel kits ahead of time. If you replenish the kits after each session, you will have everything you need for the next session and be less likely to forget something important.

### Events Timelines and Journey Maps

Timelines are used to record an event or journey experienced by a person or group over time. You can set it up as a simple continuum with the present day in the middle and a certain amount of time—weeks, months, years—on either side, depending on your goal. For example, you could ask people to map their vacation travel over a period of 10 years to get a sense of their changing lifestyles (Figure 4.8), or ask people to map their health over time. Asking participants to look back over time usually helps them make more realistic predictions about their future needs and wishes, and it can help them highlight present needs and worries. This can be done with individuals on a single sheet of paper (a prepared template is helpful), but you can also create one as a group using sticky notes on the wall, allowing you to gather insights into the history of a group or organization as well as where they want to head in the future.

#### Events Timeline/Journey Map

**Travel Timeline** Record travel/holidays. Where did you go? Why did you go? What were the highlights? What were the problems?



**FIGURE 4.8**

A timeline for mapping tourism experiences over a 10-year period.

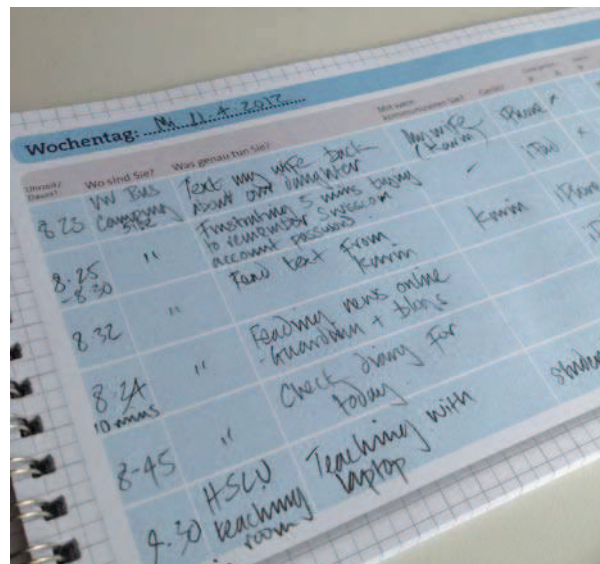
### Diaries

Diaries are used to ask people to document an event or period of time. These can be done in paper format, as voice recordings, or as a video diary. You can also ask people to include photographs alongside their writing. Diaries often reveal more intimate thoughts and feelings about people's lives—more than they might tell you in an interview. A student of Andy's had great success with diaries in a project about the loved ones of dementia sufferers. Although it was too upsetting to talk about in an interview, one participant wrote down some very moving insights in her diary about her and her husband's social life as his signs of Alzheimer's disease started to show. The downside of this kind of self-documentation is that you only get what participants want you to see or what they think is important, and unless you interview them again later, you cannot ask follow-up questions about specific points.

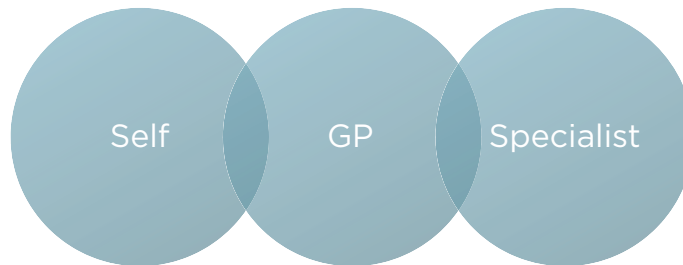
Diaries can take structured or open forms. You can put together a list of things you want people to self-document, such as writing down the time and details of their usage of a mobile device (Figure 4.9). Or you can leave them to write what they want in a blank notebook. The structured form helps you compare and collate the data, but the open form gives you more qualitative personal detail (that will probably be more work to analyze).

If you have the time and budget, it is helpful to put together a custom diary for participants. It can be as simple as applying a sticker to an off-the-shelf notebook, or creating a spiral-bound booklet made up of templates you have printed out. Your effort in putting together attractive, professional materials will be recognized by participants, and they will likely take your project more seriously.

**FIGURE 4.9**  
People often reveal more intimate thoughts and feelings about their lives in diaries than they would give in interviews. This structured diary, for a research project by Swisscom, is a record of the participant's mobile device usage.







**FIGURE 4.10**  
Venn diagrams are a useful way of getting people to visually group together activities or behaviors. This one asks participants to assign healthcare issues to themselves, their general practitioner (GP), or a specialist in order to understand how people relate to health services.

#### *Venn Diagrams*

Venn diagrams are a useful tool in interviews and workshops because they can be adapted to many different subjects. They are a way of getting people to visually group together activities or behaviors (Figure 4.10). For example, you can use Venn diagrams to ask what participants do or do not feel comfortable doing on the Internet, who they go to for healthcare advice, or what information should be on various sections of a website.

You can either bring a template prepared in advance or simply draw one on a blank sheet of paper; one advantage is that no graphic design skills are needed to create them. If you create a large one to hang on the wall, a group of people can post items within the circles on sticky notes. This exercise promotes discussion and allows participants to move items around.

With Venn diagrams, you must have sets that make sense to overlap with each other, otherwise the middle section will never get filled in. The overlapping area often reveals the sweet spot of the project's focus.

#### *Brand Sheets*

A brand sheet is a simple tool and it is one that is always worth having in your bag or on your laptop for interviews. It is simply a sheet of logos of different products and services (Figure 4.11). The idea is to uncover what brands people use, the choices they make, and why. Sometimes people forget about all the goods and services they use or how they feel about them. They might use some brands only a few times a year, whereas others are so ubiquitous that people do not give them any thought. Visual material, such as logos or key brand touchpoints (listing magazines they read, websites they use, shops they visit, and so on), act as discussion prompts and generate great insights. You can bet that at least one of the logos will prompt a rant or a customer experience story from each participant.



**FIGURE 4.11**  
A brand sheet can help elicit responses about people's relationships to the more abstract services they may use.

*Probe Cameras*

A disposable camera is an essential part of a cultural probe kit (Figure 4.12). A camera can be given to a user with a list of instructions about what to photograph, sometimes with a request to write accompanying notes. If you create a custom cardboard wrapper with instructions printed on the back, participants will not have to fiddle around with an extra sheet of paper. The instructions may ask the participants to photograph their desk, their home, recycling bins, someone they admire, their last meal, the last item they purchased, and so on.



**FIGURE 4.12**  
Disposable cameras with custom covers ready to be sent out to participants in a research project.

Camera probes, like diaries, are useful because people will photograph intimate things or activities that they might not have let an interviewer photograph. Cameras can also be very useful when it is not cost effective to send a researcher to do observations. You can send out a kit to the participants instead.

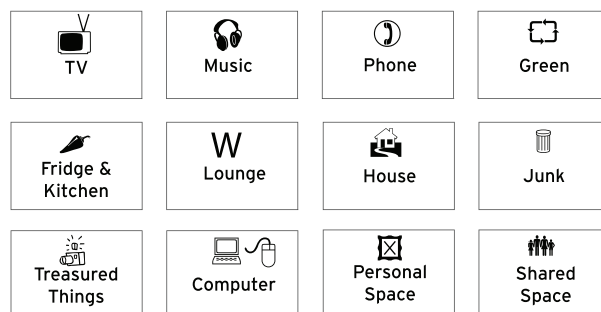
If participants need to return the cameras by mail, don't forget to provide a stamped and addressed envelope. If you don't want to wait for the disposable cameras to be developed, you can provide a set of cheap digital cameras or ask people to use their mobile phones.

Given the ubiquity of smartphones, most of which have good cameras, you can simply ask people to take a series of photos with their phones and e-mail them to you or post them online. The advantage is that you can ask a lot of people to take part via e-mail. The disadvantage is that it is less structured (the photos might be posted in any order, whereas a film camera has a fixed sequence) and it is easy for people to forget or only do half of the task. Most people like to have a special object in their hands and will make more of an effort if you have done so from your side by providing the camera.

### Photograph Lists

Photograph lists are often used when going on insights interviews (Figure 4.13). It is always good to take pictures of interviewees and their homes or environment to create context when writing up and presenting interviews. When you sit down together to go over a neutral list, people are more comfortable saying what they do and do not want you to photograph. It is easier to gain permission to take photographs of things this way because people are social animals and tend to want to help a researcher fulfil a task they have been set by someone else. If you just ask for permission verbally, you are more likely to be perceived as just being personally nosey.

## Photography

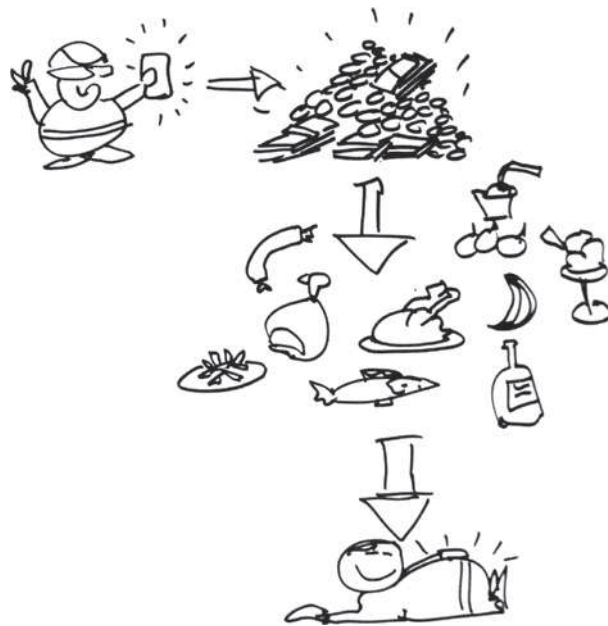


**FIGURE 4.13**  
Showing participants a list of items you would like to photograph gives them the opportunity to state up front what they are comfortable with, and makes it seem less like you are just being nosey.

### Visual Interpretations

Sometimes participants can be more expressive when drawing a visual interpretation of something than they can be with words (Figure 4.14). The fact that drawing is trickier for some also helps participants get out of their normal verbal arguments and routines. This technique is great for young children and for getting participants to express their emotions. It is important to make sure people do not feel pressure to “draw well” and that they understand any kinds of doodles or style are more than okay. The drawings can make excellent artifacts when presenting the results of your research.

**FIGURE 4.14**  
Drawings and doodles allow participants to be more expressive than they might be with words. This participant—Samuel Frei, a former student of Andy’s—was particularly good at sketching the way he thought about his bank card, but even simple, rough sketches can get the point across.



### Item Labels

Participants can be given tags or labels with instructions to use them to point out objects within their homes that have particular attributes, such as “most treasured” or “impulse purchase.” You can even provide first-, second-, and third-prize rosettes and ask people to rank objects in their home according to particular criteria (Figure 4.15). The idea behind all of these labels is to start a conversation about why an object is thought of in a particular way. You will soon find that participants start telling stories about their possessions and, through this process, their personal values and beliefs will become apparent.



**FIGURE 4.15**  
Asking participants to attach tags or labels to items that are important to them can stimulate conversation. This participant gave his computer monitor a “1st Place” rosette. (Photograph by Lea Tschudi)

### Practicalities of Conducting Insights Research

None of the methods described above is particularly difficult, but when people first start doing this kind of research, they are tempted to try them all at once. If you fall into this trap, you will get in a muddle and end up with a massive load of data that probably lacks focus.

Methods are tools and, like any other tool, sometimes it is the right one for the job and sometimes not. If you are not getting the kind of insights you need, try a different approach. Sometimes you might find that the “wrong” tool borrowed from another discipline works really well, rather like using a screwdriver to open a can of paint. You should be able to back up your research, but don’t become a method fundamentalist. In the end, it is the results that you get and how rigorous and actionable they are that matter, not whether you used method A versus method B.

This kind of field research requires practice. If you have never done it before, you will make mistakes. There is a lot more to think about and a lot more multitasking required than most people who have never done it imagine. Try lining up less “important” interviews earlier on, such as people not really in

your target group or friends who would not mind repeating the interview if necessary. This helps you practice your interview routine before you get to the CEO or the expert who only has a 30-minute time window for you.

Here are some more tips to help things run smoothly.

### *Be Prepared*

Know what you want to find out, but don't be afraid of going a little off track if the subject goes in an interesting direction. Have some questions to ask, but not hundreds. Have areas and themes you want to cover and use these to direct the conversation. An interview should not be an interrogation, but it can quickly turn into one if you are nervous. The solution for being nervous? Be prepared.

### *Getting There*

Make sure you know exactly where you are going. Get a map of the local area (or get your smartphone loaded up with a map or navigation app). Have a contact number for the person you are visiting and have your phone fully charged and in silent mode. Make sure you are on time. If you are going to be late, let the interviewee know. Meet the cultural expectations for punctuality. For example, in Britain and the United States, arriving too early can be worse than arriving late. In Germany and Switzerland, five minutes early is considered almost too late.

### *Identify Yourself*

Introduce yourself when you arrive, and give the participant your business card as proof that you are who you say you are. If you are a student, take a letter from your institution signed by your lecturer. Business cards are so cheap to digitally print these days, however, it is worth having some printed up with your name and contact details. The participant should also be given your contact details because he or she may have the right to withdraw information at any time. Before you start the interview, briefly describe your organization, the general subject and purpose of the interview, and what you will be doing with the data you collect.

### *Taking Pictures*

The process of photography can spark new conversations that might not have happened just by asking questions. Taking panoramas of rooms can help record many things you might miss in single shots. It can be helpful to ask participants to point out interesting things you should photograph. The things they see as important or valued can provide insights in themselves.

The kind of camera you use can be important. If it is too big and professional looking, it can be intimidating for participants. A combination of small but high-quality digital cameras and mobile phone cameras are usually fine

(smartphone cameras can be high quality, but often fail in poor lighting). It is important to tell people why you are taking photos and how they will be used. If participants prefer that you not photograph something, don't push them. Tell them you understand, but try to keep a mental image instead and then write it down immediately after the visit while it is still fresh in your mind.

### *Materials*

Bringing materials with you for users to fill in or discuss can really help get the conversation going. If you give participants a simple paper task, it can work not only as a record for you to keep and refer to but also as an icebreaker. As participants engage in the task, they might ask questions that lead to new and interesting topics.

Keep the materials fairly low key. Sketches of a website can lead to much more open comments than having perfect printouts of mockup screens, for example. When people see a mock-up printout, they will often assume the design is set in stone, whereas a sketch is obviously a work in progress and elicits more constructive criticism.

When making materials for people to use after a visit, such as a probe camera or a diary, it is again important to get the right balance between professional and handmade. If something is too perfect, participants will not want to spoil it. If it is too generic (such as a store-bought blank notebook), they may ignore it.

### *Dress Appropriately*

"Dressing down" can be even more important than "dressing up." When visiting people in their homes, you probably do not want to wear a suit. This level of formality can keep people from feeling at ease and affect the way they respond to your questions. Likewise, scruffy jeans and T-shirts don't work well when interviewing bank managers at their workplace.

We find that the office-casual approach works well for home visits, and we keep our suits and ties for the formal visits. At the risk of sounding like your mother, home visits also require decent socks! You may be asked to remove your shoes when entering someone's home, and holes in your socks are not a good start to an interview.

If you are shadowing someone in their job, it is best to dress as they would (Figure 4.16). If you are researching within an organization that has some kind of uniform, it might be appropriate to wear the uniform. Whether you can do this or not is a decision that must be made by the organization you are working with, but can really help the other uniformed workers relate to you. It shows that you have made an effort to literally step into their shoes. Remember, though, that you are now representing your client's company, especially if you are in a customer-facing environment, so take it seriously.

A customer will not know that you are not a member of the staff and may ask you for help. If it is something more than asking directions to the restroom, you may want to explain that you are just there to do some research and politely point them in the direction of a real staff member.

**FIGURE 4.16**  
Ben dressed in scrubs for some insights research at a hospital. A participating researcher needs to wear the right clothes to fit in.



#### *Release Forms*

Make sure the participant has signed the release form that you have prepared in advance. Typically, you should do this at the start of the interview, but it pays to double-check at the end; and in some spontaneous interview research (such as at an event where you want to capture immediate reactions), you might only be able to do it afterward. The release is a contract between your agency and the participant stating that the participant has given consent for his or her opinions to be used. It should also state how you intend to use the interview material and the level of confidentiality. You should take two copies of this document to the interview, one for the participant to keep and one to retain for your records.

#### *Incentives*

Depending on the subject of the research, incentives might be appropriate. For some projects, such as those involving health issues or the local community, people may be willing to help for free. For other, more commercial projects, an incentive can help ensure that participants feel committed to taking the interview seriously. The incentive might be cash, a voucher, or other benefit. Make sure you get participants to sign something to say they have received their incentive (this can be part of the release form).



### Thank People

It is important to properly thank people at the end of the visit and to convey just how valuable their contribution is to the project. Many people will wonder why you are so interested in their lives. They may think they have been telling you banal facts, so telling them just how interesting and useful their input has been will end the session on a good note.

## Collating and Presenting Your Insights

In Chapter 5, we look at mapping out a service ecology and the process of service design blueprinting in detail, which is how we start to visualize and understand the complexity of a service and make sense of our data. The insights we have gathered flow into this process, but first we need to synthesize the data that we have collected into a form that can be presented and discussed.<sup>8</sup>

The different forms we can use are relatively standard in design. They range from sticky notes, whiteboard sketches, and printouts on the wall to digital tools and more formal presentation forms. Below are three approaches to working with the results of insights research that we find useful.

### Insights Blogs

A blog is essential for larger insights research projects and for when a client needs insights feedback quickly. It provides a complete record of interviews or other insights research that can easily be accessed and digested by the client. A blog allows the project to be shared with the entire company, promoting longevity (Figure 4.17). Blogs also prove useful as archives and can usually be exported in a number of common formats if they need to be taken offline.

Blogs can be set up quickly on intranet or extranet servers, and are easily updated by multiple researchers. This is especially useful on projects with nationwide or international scope, with researchers collecting data independently from remote locations. You can even set up a template so they have a standard form to use for writing and uploading their data, which helps bring some conformity to the qualitative data and makes it easier to compare.

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<sup>8</sup> An excellent treatise on the subject is Jon Kolko's *Exposing the Magic of Design: A Practitioner's Guide to the Methods and Theory of Synthesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).



**FIGURE 4.17**  
An insights blog is a useful way to collate, present, and share data.

### Insights Boards

Insights boards can be used to present insights based on real people who have been interviewed as an alternative to using fabricated personas. It is important to include photographs on each board to help people relate to the participant.

The boards should be able to be read at three levels: a headline quote, a series of key insights (backed up with quotes), and a larger paragraph of narrative text (Figure 4.18). Boards are often used to present insights in a client workshop as a way to get people thinking about improvements and innovations. Incidentally, insights blogs often use a similar format, with headline quote, key insights, and text, but more detail can be included in the blog entries than will fit onto a physical board. On the other hand, physical boards are more useful in a workshop than a digital version on a projector, which can only display one image at a time. Boards can all remain on display for inspiration and reference.



**FIGURE 4.18**  
Insights can be printed on large boards for presentation of the research insights or for inspiration in a workshop setting.

### Client Workshops

Presenting insights in a workshop environment is a good way to help clients understand the results. Together you can discover needs and opportunities and use these insights as inspiration to help generate ideas, usually in the form of sketches. This shows the value of this kind of research to the client and involves them in the design process early on, which should make it easier to explain your design solutions later on in the project.

The ideal client workshop size is 6 to 12 people. Bigger numbers do not necessarily mean better ideas and can sometimes degenerate into factions or leave certain participants isolated. On the other hand, a project might require bringing different groups of people together, which will mean your workshop might be bigger than this. In that case you will need to mix the groups to avoid factions and also have more moderators and helpers there to guide the individual groups (Figure 4.19). In some cases, you might have clients and customers in a mixed workshop to explore how to improve services or to test out some new propositions or prototypes.



**FIGURE 4.19**  
Client workshops help people discover needs, opportunities, and new ideas. This is a large workshop with moderated mixed groups of different stakeholders.

Our advice for preparing user workshops also goes for preparing client workshops. It may not always be possible, but try to find a venue outside of the client's offices. People are often able to think more creatively when they are not in their usual work environment. Be well prepared! The stakes are somewhat higher with client workshops, because you are on display, but this means you also have an opportunity to show clients what you do and get them involved—something that many designers in other disciplines never get the chance to do.

## Summary

If service design is about people and relationships, then we need to find out what makes people tick. Insights research methods in service design draw heavily on those from ethnography, sociology, and human-centered design. There are others, however, that are service-design specific. The level of detail that you can go into will depend on your budget, but the three levels of low (what they say), middle (what we saw), and high (what it means) is a good way to orient your work. You will need to present your research and insights clearly to either the rest of the design team or to your clients. This kind of research can involve a steep learning curve if you have never done it before, but is usually extremely engaging. The key is to be prepared.

### Insights Research Checklist

Things to take with you:

- Notebook and pens
- Camera or camera phone
- Dictaphone or video camera
- Release form/receipt
- Business card, as proof of identity
- Incentive payment
- Interview topic guide

Things to remember:

- Do you have a list of the key topics you want to cover?
- Are your phone and camera fully charged?
- Do you know exactly where you are going?
- Have you worked out how you will get there and back?
- Do you have a contact number for the person you are meeting?  
Do they know you are coming?
- Does someone else know where you are going?
- Are you dressed appropriately?

*Summary continues on next page*

## Summary (continued)

These questions will help you get a feel for the participant's background and help you think outside of your topic when you want to get a sense of the person's general motivations and opinions:

- Tell me about your family.
- Tell me about your job.
- What did you do last weekend?
- What did you do yesterday?
- What did you have for dinner last night?
- Who did you talk with yesterday?