Using hypotheses to hold together your learning, thinking and making

Interaction 20, Milan
Friday 7 February 2020
The public sector can become something recognisably, radically better, and we’re here to help make it happen.

dxw helps create public services that improve people’s lives. We influence government policy from the outside.

We work with the public sector to research, design, build and operate services that make life better for people.

Technology is just one of the answers. We support strategy, planning, process and organisational culture too.
Hypothesis

Because [research findings] we believe [improvement idea] will achieve [desired outcome] measured by [performance indicator]
Hypotheses can be the glue that holds together our learning, thinking and making
Good hypotheses depend on several other practices

Practices that organisations can be struggling to do well
If you want to introduce hypotheses you need to get those other practices working well first
Problem

Work starts without clear, agreed outcomes
Hypothesis
Because [research findings] we believe [improvement idea] will achieve [desired outcome] measured by [performance indicator]
Example brief

We need an online portal for people to fill in feedback surveys
Solution

Ask questions in a structured way to reshape poorly defined briefs into clear and valuable outcomes
Example outcome

More and better feedback that we can use to improve our services
Possible performance indicators

Proportion of users giving feedback
Proportion of feedback that’s useful to improve services
Problem

Outcomes are too big for any practical hypothesis
Here and now

?  

Long term outcome
Solution

Break down the long term outcome into a number of achievable and measurable short term outcomes
Here and now

Short term outcome

Long term outcome

Short term outcome

Short term outcome
Example long term outcome

More and better feedback that we can use to improve our services
Possible short term outcome

Make it easier to give feedback so fewer people dropout
Theory of change

“... description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen ...”

www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/
Theory of Change Basics
A PRIMER ON THEORY OF CHANGE

Dana H. Taplin, Ph.D.
Hélène Clark, Ph.D.

March 2012

FACILITATOR’S SOURCE BOOK
SOURCE BOOK FOR FACILITATORS
LEADING THEORY OF CHANGE
DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Dana H. Taplin, Ph.D.
Muzamer Basic

March 2012
Problem

Most user research is rapid usability testing
Hypothesis

Because [research findings], we believe [improvement idea] will achieve [desired outcome] measured by [performance indicator].
Research findings
Distilled statements of the important things we've learned
Research findings (insights)

“... a provocative statement of truth about human behavior ...”

“.. ‘big rocks’ of innovation: statements about the future to hang your design hat on.”

Jon Kolko, Trusting the Design Process
www.jonkolko.com/writingProcess.php
Solution

Agree the most important things the team needs to learn, then look for the simplest ways to get good answers.
Might be

Starting usability test sessions with more open interviews
Visiting your users’ homes and workplaces to run tests in context
Erika Hall
abookapart.com/products/
Stephanie Marsh
koganpage.com
Problem

Weak analysis means research produces observations not findings
What did we see?

What does that mean for us?

What do we do next?

Observations

Findings

Decisions and actions
Solution

Researchers run good, regular analysis sessions with the team that produce useful findings.
Examples

People are motivated to give feedback to improve the service
The current registration step is a significant barrier
It’s important to everyone that feedback is from real users
Other services have good lightweight authentication
We have good contact details for users
Why is collaborative analysis so important?

Vita Mangan
dxw.com/blog

Unseen research is wasted research – Gregg Bernstein

Analysis which turns research data into valuable findings a team can act on, is the most important part of what we do as user researchers. But tends to be the least visible and least understood.

You can have well designed research questions, conduct lots of research, and do it well. But without enough and proper analysis, you won’t see the impact you’re hoping for. That detailed research report or slick journey map might just end up collecting ‘digital dust’.

At dxw digital, we believe that research is a team sport. And co-analysis is a big part of that.
Problem

Only one idea allowed (and no failures)
Hypothesis
Because [research findings] we believe [improvement idea] will achieve [desired outcome] measured by [performance indicator]
Solution
Open up some space to create and try out lots of improvement ideas
Opportunity solution tree

Teresa Torres
producttalk.org
Example opportunity

Replace the problematic registration with a lighter weight authentication
Possible improvement ideas

Generate and send a unique code in the feedback invitation

Confirm contact details and check against records
All the ingredients for a good hypothesis
Example long term outcome

More and better feedback that we can use to improve our services
Possible hypothesis

It’s important to everyone that feedback is from real users but the current registration step is a significant barrier.

We believe that replacing the problematic registration step with a simple confirmation of contact details will make it easier for people to give us feedback.

Which we’ll measure by the numbers of dropouts in the feedback process.
Theory of change for introducing hypotheses
Before adopting hypotheses ...

Does work start with clear and valuable outcomes?
Are outcomes an actionable size?
Are teams producing solid and useful research findings?
Do teams have the space to create and try out different improvement ideas?
Thanks!

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