Pink Papers

Going Deep with Discovery and Design

What We Make It™

Going Deep with Discovery and Design

In today's economic and technological context, there are a variety of factors which may influence a business' decisions to invest in robust and expert-led User Experience research, or UX research. UX research is the process of understanding users' behaviours, needs, and preferences to inform the design of user-friendly and effective digital products or services.

Many agencies are decreasing their UX research budgets and increasingly adopting "democratized" UX research practices. This means they are integrating the discovery and analysis of user personas, behaviours, motivations and preferences into the workflows of marketers, developers, and designers rather than dedicating a trained individual or team to systematically approach the UX research process.

While there are benefits in having non-specialized staff also conducting UX research — such as an increased diversity of insights, collaboration, and faster iteration in the design process — it also has drawbacks which can lead to poorly designed products and services. It can also create unnecessary risk in product development and implementation. This is particularly important when we are designing public digital services.

In this What We Make It Pink Paper, we explain what we mean by deep discovery and design, how it generates comprehensive insights into users and their experiences, leading to truly human-centred service design.

"Experts were once amateurs who kept practicing."

– Amit Kalantri

Truly Human-Centred Service Design

The ability to understand users' needs, preferences, and behaviours is paramount to creating products and services that truly resonate with their intended audience. Deep discovery and design serves as the cornerstone of the service design process, providing invaluable insights that drive informed decision-making, enhance user satisfaction, and ultimately contribute to the success of a product or service.

Generally speaking, our service design process at What We Make It encompasses a holistic and strategic approach to designing and delivering services that meet user needs while aligning with clients' objectives. It goes beyond mere functionality to consider the entire user journey, encompassing interactions, touchpoints, and emotions. Within this design process, UX research plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the client and their service users, uncovering the insights necessary to create meaningful and impactful experiences. In the context of public government services, this type of intentional approach to service design also helps to increase

the diversity, equity, and inclusion of all users, creating the opportunity for transformative design and innovation.

Deep discovery and design provides a critical and comprehensive understanding of user behaviour, motivations, wants, and needs, and any pain points or access challenges they face. Deep discovery can also uncover unmet user needs and identify opportunities for innovation, ensure the usability and user-friendliness of services, and foster a culture of user-centricity and evidence-based decision-making.

Deep discovery and design taken together helps ensure that the resulting services are tailored to address real-world needs and challenges, that services are intuitive, efficient, and enjoyable — ultimately leading to increased user satisfaction, loyalty, and adoption. This method also empowers designers and stakeholders to make informed choices, enhancing the likelihood of developing successful and impactful services.

"Design is really an act of communication, which means having a deep understanding of the person with whom the designer is communicating."

— **Donald A. Norman**

Exploring the Deep

① Surface Discovery

Discovery that stays on the surface is not without value, but the insights it can generate will only go so far. On the surface, we can easily observe users' demographics and behaviour. We can segment them into personas, ask them their needs, and chart their journeys through any given digital service. For simple projects with a consistent user base, this can sometimes suffice to design a digital service that will do what it needs to.

Discovery that stays on the surface is typically not conducted in a systematic way. It is usually based on small samples of users and relies too heavily on assumptions or internal opinions about user backgrounds and preferences. This can result in the production of data that is inconsistent, and insights typically biased towards the assumptions of the designers, with no reliable means to validate findings.

Further, discovery that stays on the surface mostly happens when short-term gains are prioritized over long-term investments. That is, when budget and time constraints are a factor, and an agency does not have dedicated expertise to conduct the research process or facilitate it across the team. While there can be viable reasons for taking this approach when dealing with a very niche user base, it should never be used during the design of public services.

Below the surface are users' motivations, desires, quirks, fears, anxieties, and day-to-day realities. Here we can find the individual factors in a user's personality; we can gain a deeper understanding of their preferences, intended purpose for using a digital service as well as their economic means for engaging with said service. Put simply, the methods used for discovery that go below the surface are largely qualitative and participatory. Insights cannot be gleaned from survey results alone and require contextual probing.

When investigating below the surface, users come to the table with service designers to collaborate and generate ideas, explore design concepts together, and co-design solutions. Here we encourage participants to contribute their perspectives, insights, and creative ideas. Below the surface, we can foster a sense of ownership and involvement in the research process. This not only enriches the research process but also ensures that the resulting designs and solutions are more aligned with the needs, preferences, and aspirations of different user communities.

Below the surface we find out about the user experience, their jobs-to-be-done, the updates they need, and/or the challenges they face when engaging with a productor service.
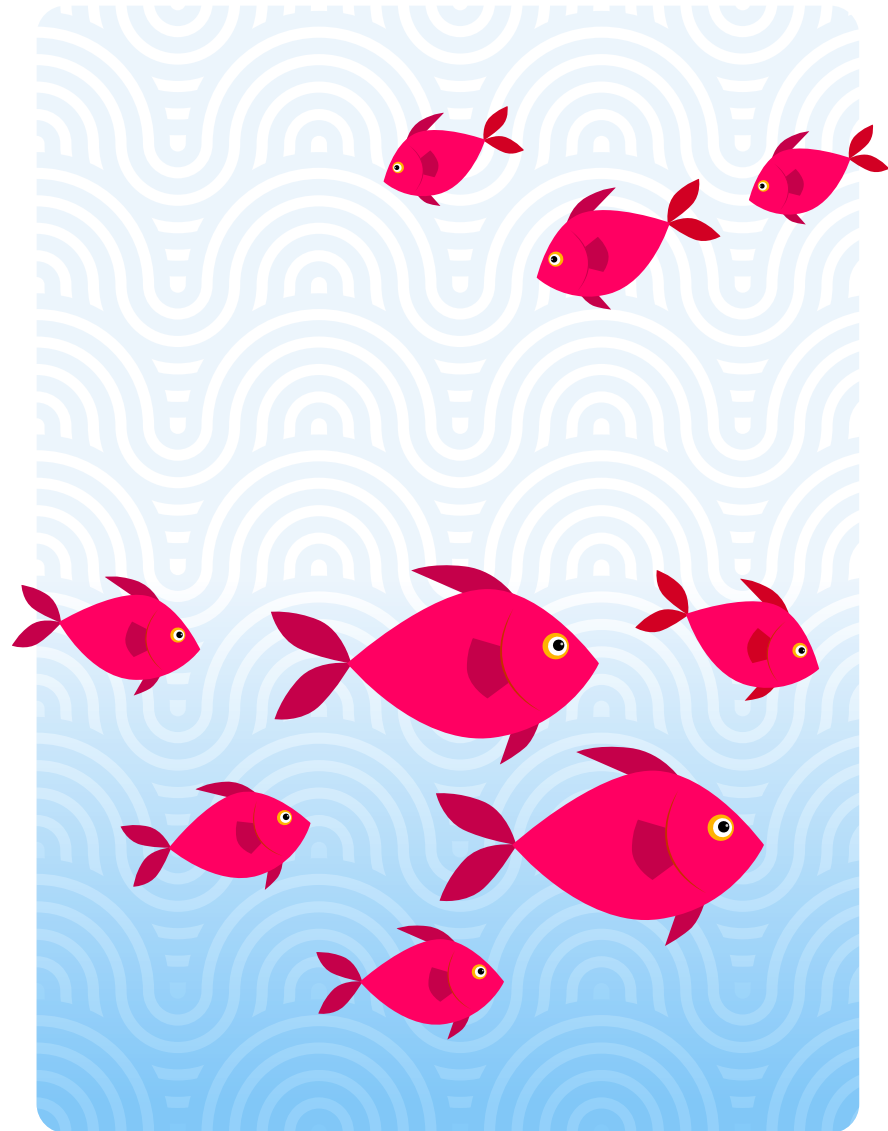
Discovery and design that goes a little deeper focuses on users that face barriers to access a digital public service, considers the equity implications, and seeks opportunities to remove the barriers within the design itself. When we go a little deeper, we utilize a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) framework in planning, data collection and analysis, and design recommendations. Our sampling procedures are more deliberate, and must be representative of those who are typically excluded.

When we go a little deeper, we consider the intersectionality of sex and gender, age, racial diversity, neurodiversity, and socio-economic status, and the impacts these things can have on the user experience. This type of analysis aims to identify potential disparities among users based on language, cultural norms, literacy, technology access, biases, trust, and opportunities for improvement within the user experience.

The insights we gather when we go a little deeper with a GBA+ promote equity, diversity and inclusion in the service design. We can also use these insights to generate recommendations which address access barriers, and enhance the overall user experience for all users. These recommendations may include design changes, content and language modifications, feature enhancements, offline access points, or targeted marketing strategies that promote inclusivity.

Way Down Deep

When we go way down deep, this is where we look at the broader systems which the digital service is interacting with. We do this by integrating elements of systems theory, which is an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on understanding and analyzing complex systems made up of interconnected and interdependent components. This approach situates the user, and the product or service being developed, within the context of the socio-political, economic, and technological systems in which they are currently operating.

Discovery and design that go way down deep factors in the wider digital ecosystem that the product or service operates within and interacts with. By considering factors such as the norms and realities users are experiencing in social and cultural systems, researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of how users interact with products and services in the real world. This broader perspective enables the design of solutions that are tailored to specific contexts, increasing the likelihood of successful adoption and engagement across identity and socio-economic groups. This forward-thinking approach contributes to the long-term viability and relevance of the products and services being developed.

When we go way down deep, we draw upon methods and perspectives from various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and communications. Integrating these interdisciplinary insights into UX research enriches the understanding of user behaviour, enabling researchers to uncover

hidden patterns and connections. This interdisciplinary approach also helps to stimulate new ideas and perspectives, fostering innovation in the design process.

Finally, when we are way down deep, we minimize the possibility of "problem blindness," which is the inability to recognize or perceive a problem due to cognitive biases, lack of awareness, limited information, or preconceived notions. Problem blindness can hinder service design because if a problem is not acknowledged or recognized, it is unlikely to be addressed effectively in the design. In the context of UX research, problem blindness can occur when a design team overlooks or fails to recognize usability issues, access barriers, or unique user needs during the UX process and can result in a subpar user experience.
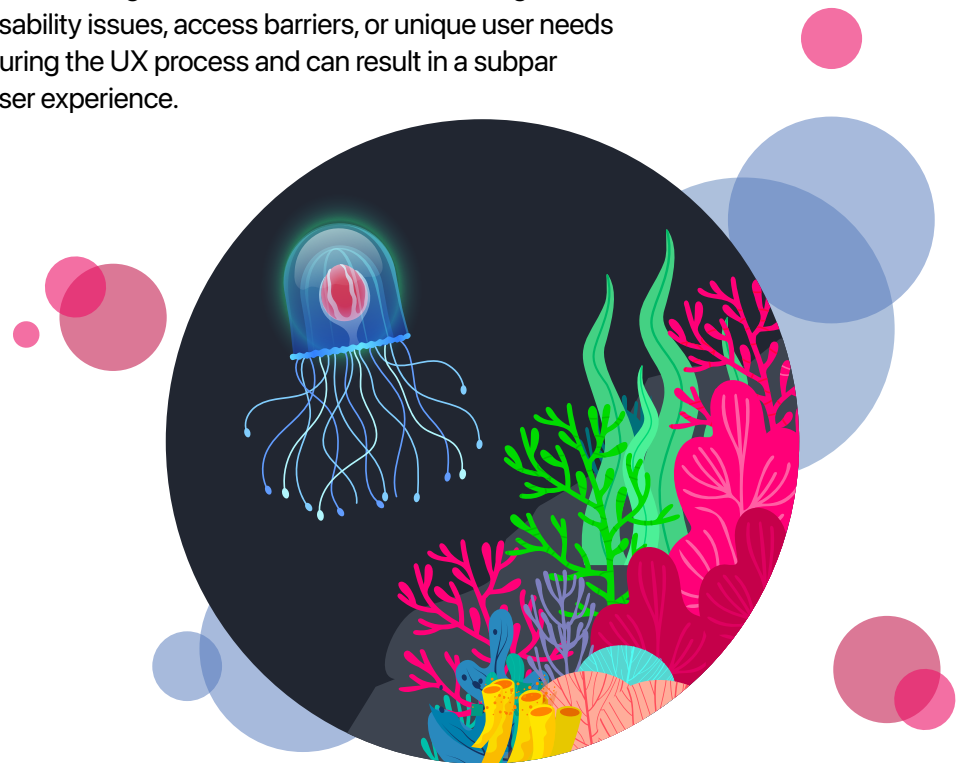
The Impacts
Deeper Discovery

The deeper you go with the discovery and design process, the more likely you will create a product or service that reduces barriers and challenges faced by users — regardless of their background or technical experience and literacy. So often these barriers and challenges are not identified until after development and deployment, requiring additional, and sometimes costly, changes in future iterations. When you go deep, you can ensure the consideration of equity, diversity and inclusion is built into your minimum viable product, rather than added as an afterthought.

By exploring users' offline experiences, challenges, and desires, service designers can create solutions that not only resonate with all users, but also represent and include them in a meaningful way. This leads to higher levels of user satisfaction, as the design solutions are tailored to meet their specific needs and expectations.

Going deep with discovery also ensures that usability is a primary consideration. By placing users at the centre of the design process, designers can gain insights into how people interact with products or services, identify usability issues, and make informed decisions to enhance the user experience. Usability improvements result in more intuitive, efficient, and user-friendly designs.

"**Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.**"

– Amit Kalantri

The Impacts
Deeper Design

When products or services are designed with a deep understanding of its users' needs and pain points, they are more likely to be embraced and adopted. By addressing user challenges and providing meaningful solutions upfront, our approach encourages users to engage with and integrate the product or service into their daily lives, leading to higher adoption rates and sustained engagement.

Additionally, going deep with discovery and design fosters empathy, since it necessitates considering users' emotions, motivations, values, experiences, and trust of digital public services. By understanding the whole user, designers can create solutions that evoke positive emotions of being seen, heard, and included. This resonance enhances user trust, satisfaction, and long-term engagement.

By involving users throughout the design cycle, we gather feedback, validate design choices, and refine solutions based on real-world user experiences. This iterative approach ensures that design solutions evolve and improve over time, adapting to the ever-changing user needs and respective social dynamics.

Finally, going deeper emphasizes ethical considerations in design. It does so not only by respecting user privacy and ensuring informed consent, but also by designing with inclusivity and accessibility in mind from the get-go. By prioritizing ethical principles, we can create products and services that respect user autonomy, promote inclusivity, and avoid potential harm.

"The people who **need design ingenuity the most,** the poorest 90% of the global population, have historically been deprived of it."

– **Donald A. Norman**

The Investment is Worth It

The ability to understand users' needs, preferences, and behaviours is paramount to creating products and services that truly resonate with their intended audience. Deep discovery and design serves as the cornerstone of the service design process, providing invaluable insights that drive informed decision-making, enhance user satisfaction, and ultimately contribute to the success of a product or service.

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Deep discovery and design taken together helps ensure that the resulting services are tailored to address real-world needs and challenges, that services are intuitive, efficient, and enjoyable — ultimately leading to increased user satisfaction, loyalty, and adoption. This method also empowers designers and stakeholders to make informed choices, enhancing the likelihood of developing successful and impactful services.

"Even the most complex problem is resolved in the end. Because if there's a question, there also is an answer."

– Kim Joon

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