

Designing With, not For:

Igniting Human-Centered Design to Reimagine Library Spaces

Sunday, September 28, 2025



Facilitators



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Director



iZone Helpers

AM Session

- Elijah Bader-Gregory
- Dheera Chintam
- Jake Gates
- Jeff Jones

PM Session

- Varuni Hazra
- Ashlee Huff
- Megan Wu

Slides template: Steven Rojas

Worksheets: Yuting Pu and Kristen Lee

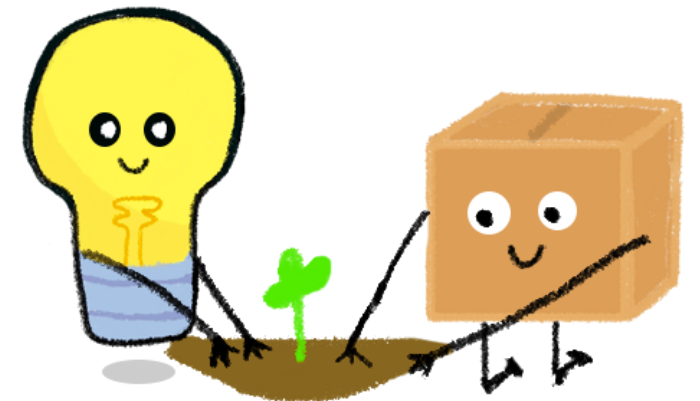
Video editing: Spencer Ahn (Studio X)

What is iZone?

Inquiry to Impact

A programming and services hub for innovators and changemakers looking to accelerate their positive impact on the world

Our approaches: Design-Thinking, Systems-Thinking, and Creative Problem-Solving (CPS)



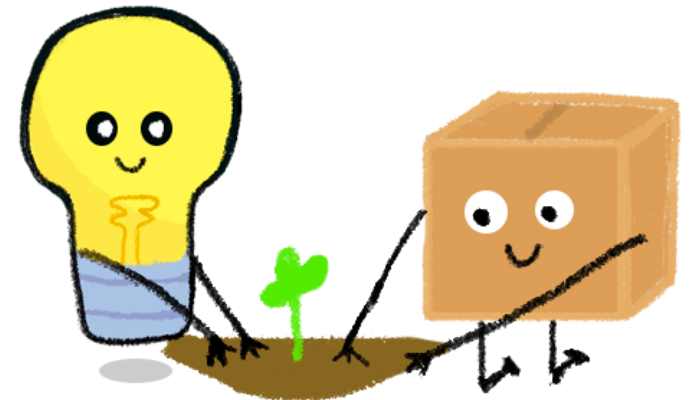
A few of our key values:

Play is powerful.

Play is innately human. It can facilitate a connection that makes people feel at ease with difficult tasks ahead.

We must stay beginners.

There is always more to learn and do. Intellectual curiosity is what allows us to stay open to all possibilities.



Plan for Today

Part 1

Overview of Human-Centered Design / *Kessler Forum*

Break

Part 2

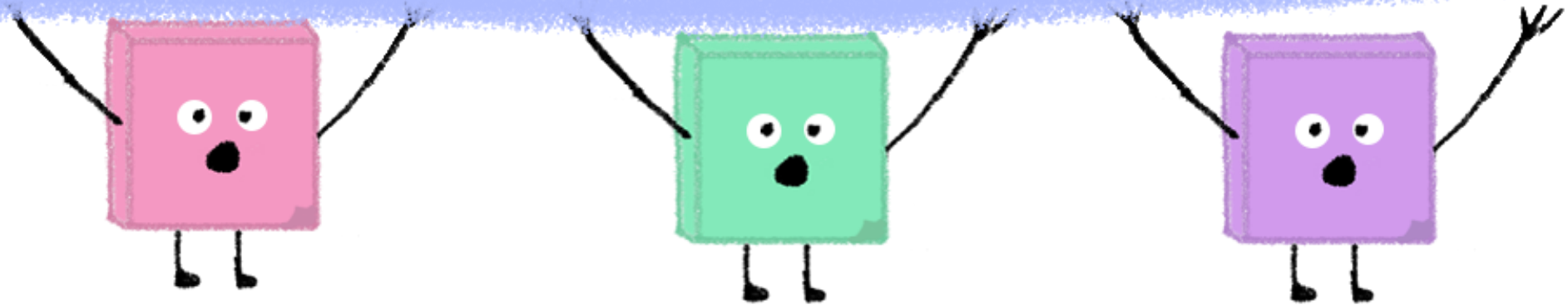
Walk through the steps of Design Thinking in small groups / *Round Tables*

Break

Part 3

Discussion of the pre-conference assignment and next steps / *Round Tables*

Warm Up Activity



Let's Brainstorm!



What might be all the ways to
improve the
pumping gas experience?

Rules of Brainstorming



- Defer judgment
- Seek novelty
- Build on other ideas
- Strive for quantity

What might be all the ways to improve the pumping gas experience?



How to brainstorm:

Say your idea out loud

Set a time and quota

3 minutes – 60 ideas!

The image features a white background with four abstract, textured purple brushstrokes in the corners. The top-left stroke is a curved line. The top-right stroke is a larger, more complex shape. The bottom-left stroke is a broad, wavy line. The bottom-right stroke is a curved line. In the center, the text "What is human-centered design?" is written in a bold, black, serif font, arranged in two lines.

**What is human-
centered design?**

Human-Centered Design

As defined by **IDEO**, a global design and innovation consultancy.

Human-Centered Design is about cultivating **deep empathy** with the people you're creating for and using this empathy to generate **innovative and useful new solutions**.

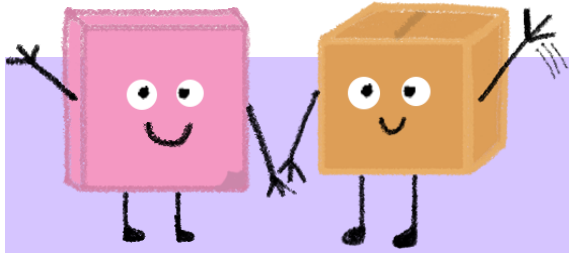
Design Thinking is a **model** we can use to practice human-centered design.



TLDR

Design Thinking enables us to
address the true needs of our users

Design Thinking Process

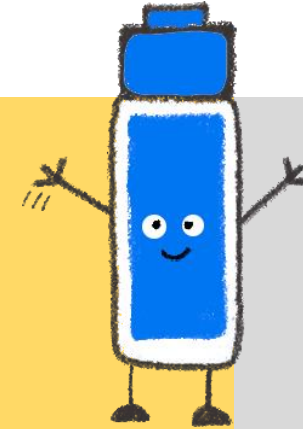


Build **empathy**
for users

Brainstorm
ideas and
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Create
prototypes
and **test** for
feedback



Improve the
prototype
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received





**Desire paths are
unmet user needs**

Image source: Alamy, via The Guardian (Bramley, 2018)

Design Thinking helps us meet needs



Image source: Ohio State University, Institutional Research and Planning





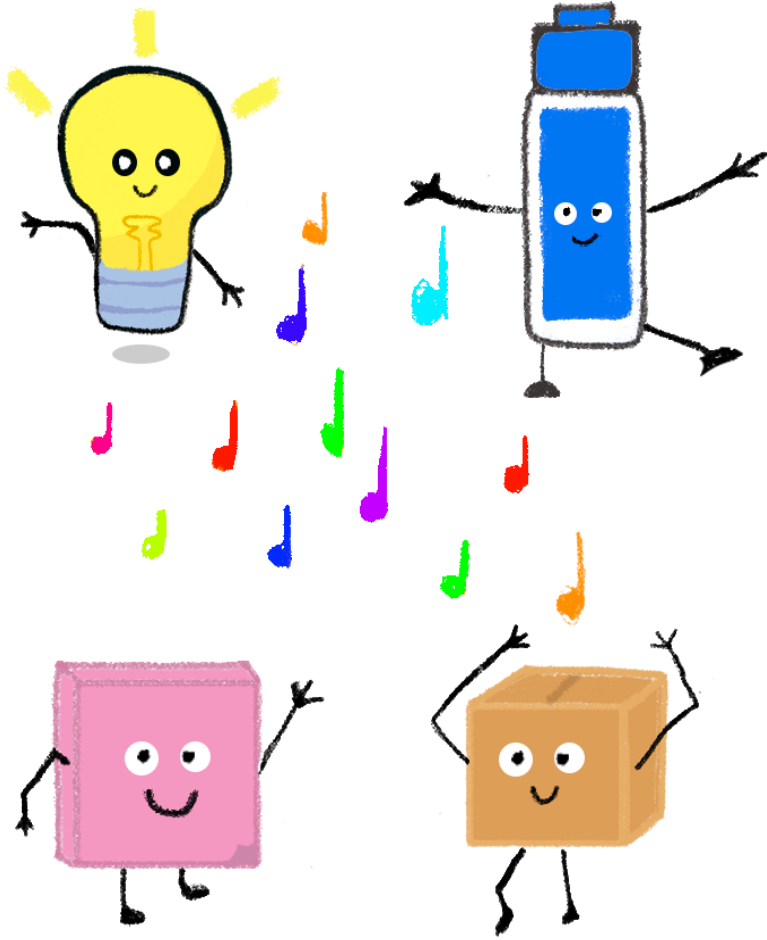
“Adventure Series” at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

Image source: Kelley & Kelley, 2013, Slate.com

Example: Kaboom Project

A sensory playspace and garden in Rochester's Arnett Neighborhood, across the Genesee River from the University of Rochester campus. Two Karp Library Fellows, Casey Ryu and Suzane Hoffman, conducted extensive community research and found significant need for an inclusive space where residents could engage with nature, play, and learn. iZone staff, community partners, including 540W Main and Adlai Stevenson Elementary School worked together for 2 months to build the space, which includes a butterfly garden and areas designed for both children and adults.





10-Minute Break
When you return,
find your assigned
table

Table Assignments (AM)

Table 1

- Scott Warren
- Terri Miller
- Meris Longmeier
- Dany Savard

Table 2

- Toni Anaya
- Kevin McCarty
- Claire Hoag
- Daniel Daily

Table 3

- Anne Osterman
- Lynne Serviss
- Robert Ross
- Michael Crumpton

Table 4

- Heidi Greenberg
- Melinda Dermody
- Amanda Welter
- Elisabeth M Long

Table 5

- Kelley Lawton
- Rachael Smith
- Jee Davis
- Kat Bell

Table 6

- Dana Alexandrescu
- Sarah Falls
- Calvert Wright
- Martha Kyrillidou

Table 7

- Daniel Dollar
- Christina Trunnell
- Jeanne Brooks
- Shali Zhang

Table 8

- Arianne Hartsell-Gundy
- Cheryl Gowing
- Claudette Cloutier
- Martha Diaz

Table 9

- Rodrigo Castro
- Noah Kelly
- Patrick Deaton
- Vicky Lebbin

Table 10

- Lila Andersen
- Kim Hansen
- Alexandra Roberts
- Melissa Gwilt

Table Assignments (PM)

Table 1

- Matthew Grebe
- Gili Meerovitch
- Paula Langsam
- Dave Luke

Table 2

- Sarah Nakashima
- Martha Kelehan
- Whitney Hilley
- Andrea Adams

Table 3

- Paula Martin
- Tommy Lavallée
- Michael Harris
- Corey Ha

Table 4

- Christy Groves
- Susan Garrison
- Jameca Dupree
- Jenne Jones

Table 5

- Kate Cunningham
- Kelly Miller-Martin
- Erica Hayes
- David Hansen

Table 6

- Natalie Bond
- Shawn Livingston
- Franses Rodriguez
- Michael Arndell

Table 7

- Jessica Martorano
- Sarah Patton
- Deirdre Scaggs
- Rebecca Budinger-Mulhearn

Table 8

- Chad Boeninger
- Jerry Stoddard
- Sharon Murphy
- Douglas Cramer

Table 9

- Eric Ensley
- Jean Thoulag
- Tim Capalbo

Meet your tablemates

Introduce yourselves

Who are you? Where are you from? Why did you register for this session?

What is your superpower?

What skill or strength do you bring to teams?

Who is your Captain for the day?

Who will make sure the team gains consensus and stays on track?

(5 min)

The image features a white background with four large, thick, purple brushstrokes in the corners, creating a frame-like effect. The strokes are textured and have a hand-painted appearance.

Prompt for Today

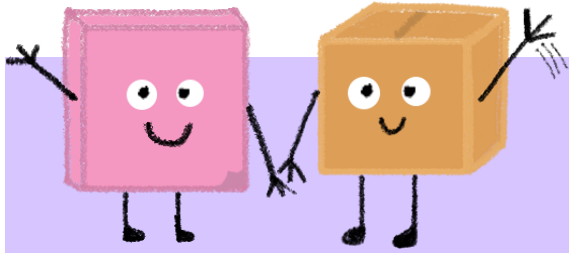
Remember to embrace **play**
and a **beginner's mindset!**

The image features four abstract, hand-drawn purple shapes in the corners, resembling ink splatters or brush strokes. They are positioned in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners, framing the central text.

Prompt for Today:

**Design the
ideal study space
for time travelers**

Design Thinking Process

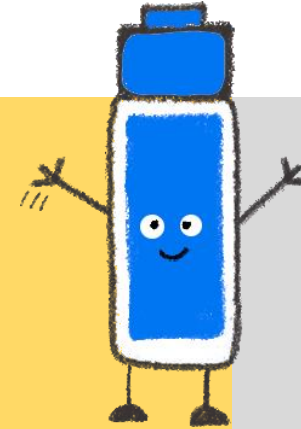


Build **empathy**
for users

Brainstorm
ideas and
narrow them
down into
solutions



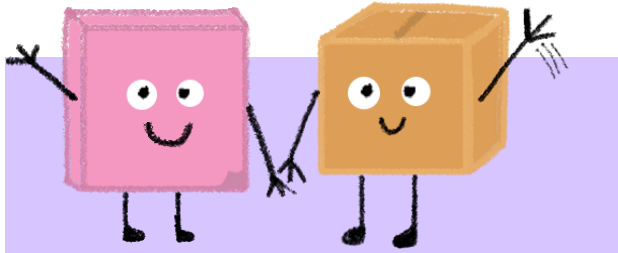
Create
prototypes
and **test** for
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Improve the
prototype
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received



What does it mean to build empathy?



Build **empathy**
for users

In Design Thinking, building empathy means developing a **deep understanding** of the users.

Who are your users?



Ways to Build Empathy

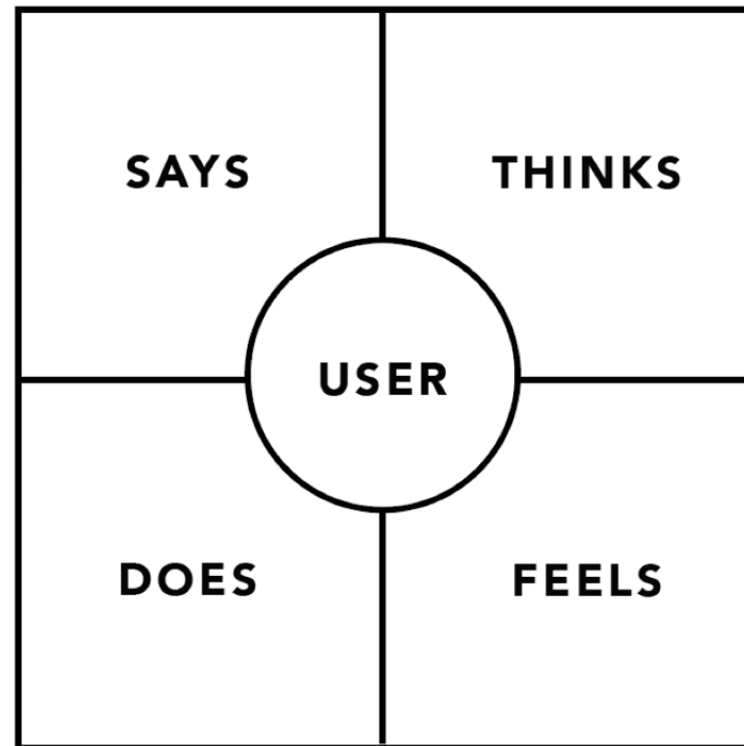


- Observation
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Walk-a-mile immersions
- Simulations
- **Interviews**



Empathy Maps

Empathy maps help us organize and make sense of what we've learned from building empathy





Build Empathy for Users

Step 1: As a team, read the empathy maps in front of you out loud

Step 2: Discuss the following things:

- What relationships are you seeing?
- Where are there areas of delight?
- Where are there areas of pain?

(5 min)

Insight Statements

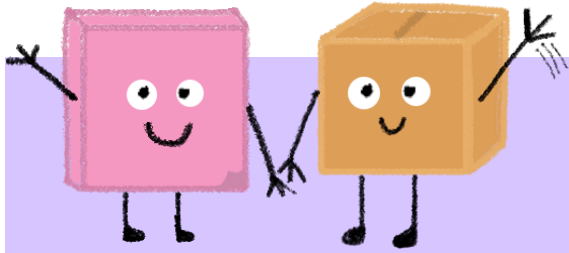


Complete these statements:

- It's interesting/surprising/telling that our users...
- One thing that seems important to our users is...
- I wonder if this means...

(5 min)

Design Thinking Process



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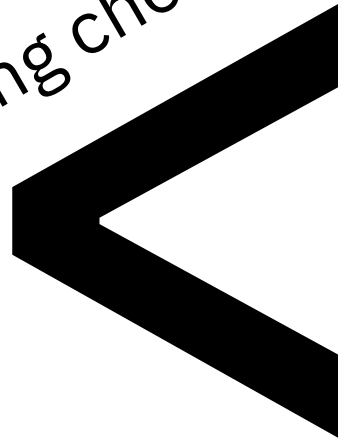


Divergent and Convergent Thinking

Brainstorm
ideas and
narrow them
down into
solutions



Creating choices



Making choices



How Might We (HMW) Statements

Brainstorm
ideas and
narrow them
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solutions



We always like to state challenges as **possibilities**. We can do this by phrasing our challenges starting with, “**How might we...**”

What makes a good HMW statement?

- It's not too broad or too narrow.
- It uses insights from research and interviews.
- It doesn't embed assumptions or pre-determined solutions.

How Might We (HMW) Statements

Brainstorm
ideas and
narrow them
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solutions



Too broad: How might we encourage more play in libraries on college campuses?

Too narrow: How might we encourage students to play more board games in Welles-Brown on Monday nights?

Just right: How might we introduce more play in library events for UR students who may not be experiencing it elsewhere?

How Might We (HMW) Statements

Brainstorm
ideas and
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solutions



With your team, **develop one HMW Statement** to use for brainstorming ideas.

How might we *(intended action)*
for *(target audience)* **so that**
(desired outcome)?

(5 min)

Brainstorming

Brainstorm
ideas and
narrow them
down into
solutions



Rules of brainstorming

- Defer judgment
- Seek novelty
- Build on ideas
- Strive for quantity

Use your insights from your empathy-building

Brainstorming tools:

- Stick 'em Up Brainstorming

Stick 'em Up Brainstorming

Brainstorm
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Brainstorm ways to tackle your HMW Statement

How it works:

- Write one idea per sticky note
- Say your idea out loud as you write it
- Embrace preferences!

Optional: Ask GenAI for help! Give it your HMW statement with a few of your insights and ask for **5** ideas.

(5 min)

Narrowing Down Ideas

Brainstorm
ideas and
narrow them
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solutions



Rules of converging

- Be affirmative
- Consider novelty
- Be deliberate (think about your user)
- Improve ideas
- Check your objectives

Convergent thinking tool:

- Mark the Hits

Mark the Hits

Brainstorm
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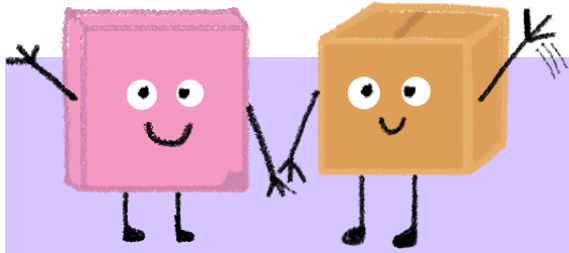


How it works:

- **Step 1:** Each person puts a dot on the ideas that stand out to them
- **Step 2:** Separate the sticky notes that have the most “hits.” Set the others aside.
- **Step 3:** Discuss the top ideas and narrow them down to one to build into a prototype.
You may combine and/or improve ideas!

(7 min)

Design Thinking Process

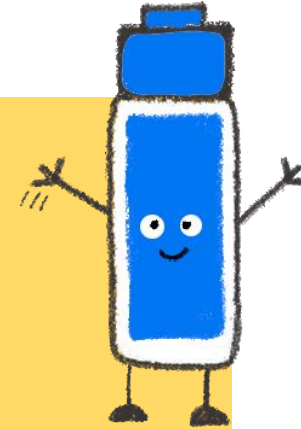


Build **empathy**
for users

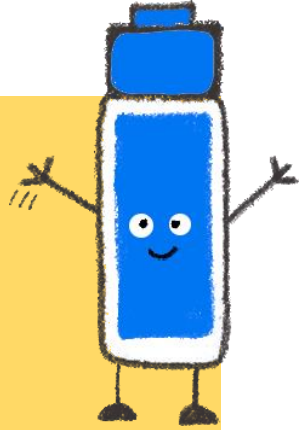
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Create
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Rapid Prototyping



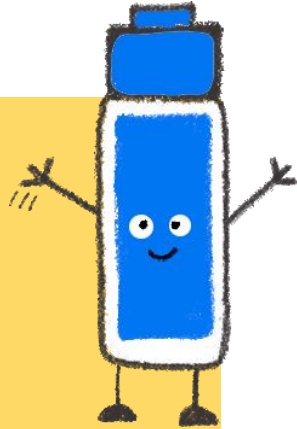
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Prototyping is the process of **making a mock-up** of an idea before the final design is created.

Why is it important?

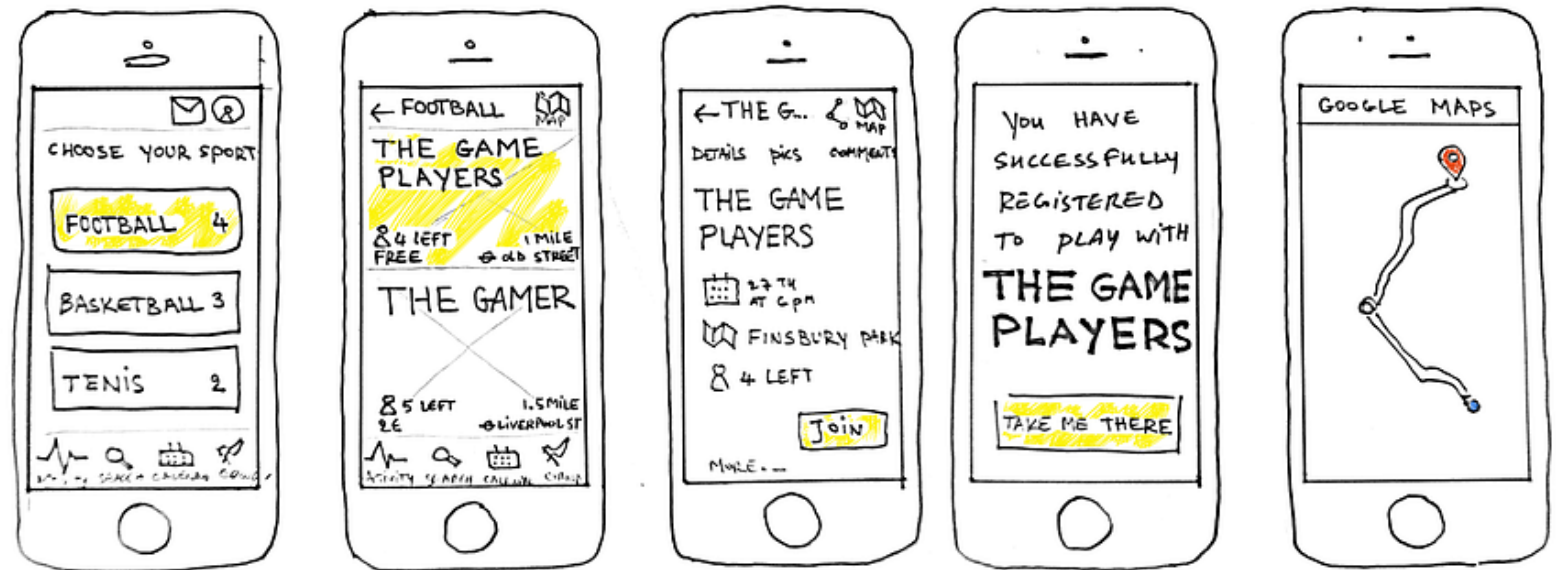
- It helps us **learn** quickly and **explore** possibilities.
- It is **efficient** and **inexpensive**.
- It allows us to derive deeper **empathy** and create better **solutions**.

Build a Rapid Prototype of Your Idea

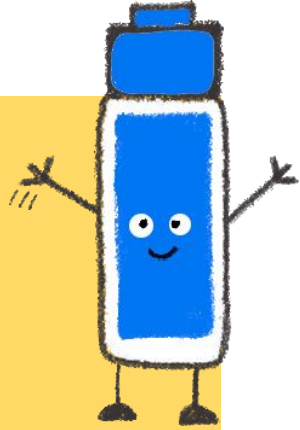


Create
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Think about the questions your idea raises.
Build a prototype that will help you answer those questions.



Build a Rapid Prototype of Your Idea



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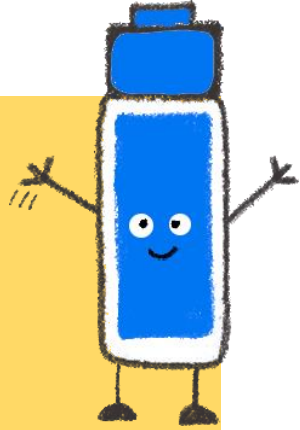
Think about the questions your idea raises.
Build a prototype that will help you answer those questions.

Criteria for your prototype:

- It is a clear expression of your idea.
- It is testable.

(15 min)

Build a Rapid Prototype of Your Idea



Create
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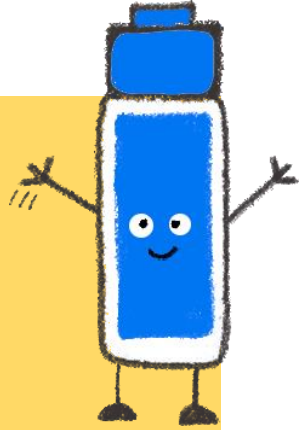
Think about the questions your idea raises.
Build a prototype that will help you answer those questions.

Criteria for your prototype:

- It is a clear expression of your idea.
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(15 min)

Test Your Prototype



Create
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Step 1: Share your prototype with the table next to you.

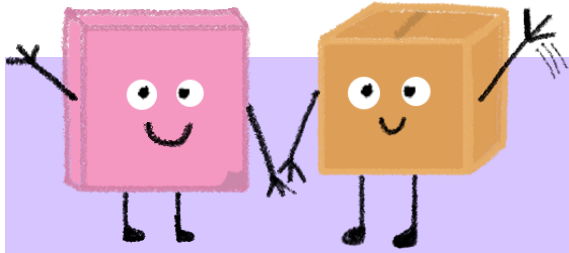
Step 2: Ask open-ended questions about your prototype:

- What excites you about this idea?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- What questions does this raise?

Take notes!

(15 min)

Design Thinking Process

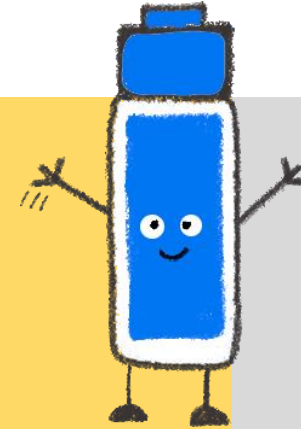


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Improve the
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Download Your Learnings

Improve the prototype based on the feedback received



Tips for compiling feedback

- Think about themes.
- Look for patterns.
- Break feedback into categories, such as challenges, strengths, questions, etc.

As a group, discuss **one thing you would change** about your prototype after your testing.

(3 min)

Iteration

Improve the prototype based on the feedback received

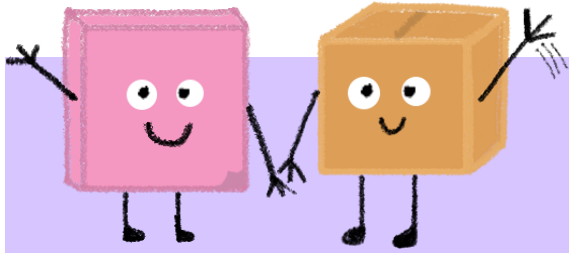


Design Thinking is **not always linear**.

We often need to **repeat steps** based on the feedback we receive.

- **Not addressing the right challenge?** Try creating a new HMW statement or building more empathy.
- **Not addressing the challenge in the best way?** Try generating more ideas

Design Thinking Process

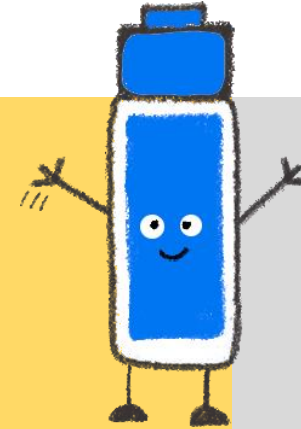


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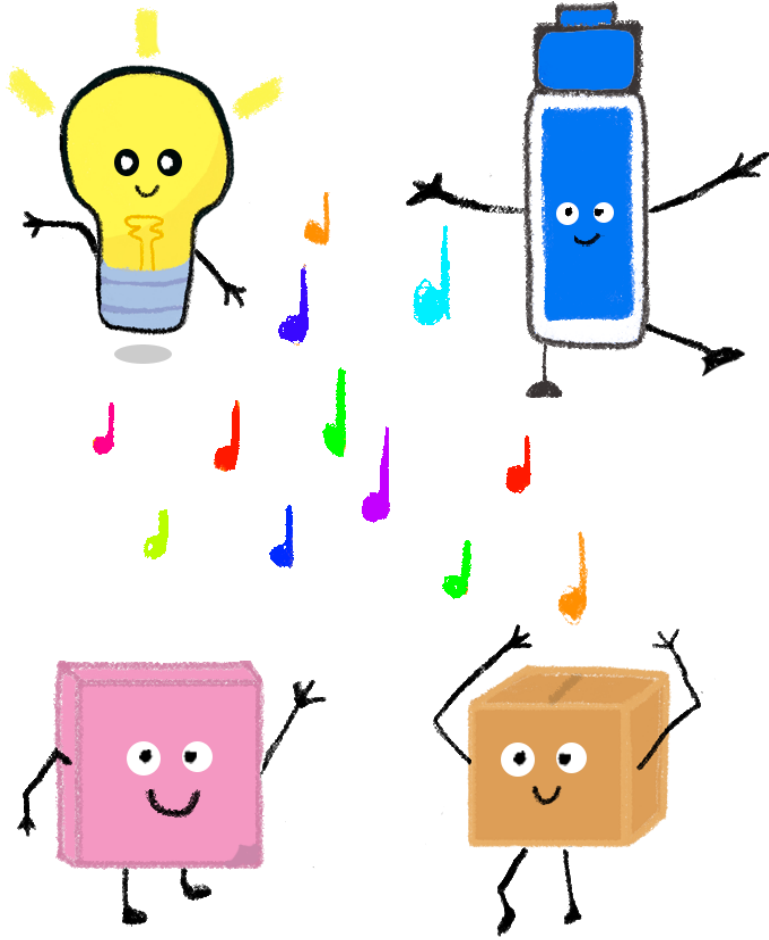


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Improve the
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10-Minute Break
Return to your
assigned table



Let's Reflect!

Discuss your pre-conference assignment

- Which library spaces did you choose to observe, and what stood out to you in your observations? *Think about picking **three** key observations to share.*
 - What themes or patterns do you notice across your observations?
- (15 min)
- Based on what you noticed, what “**How Might We...**” statements could capture opportunities for improvement or innovation in these spaces?

(5 min)



Reflection Questions

What projects or spaces exist at your home institution might benefit from a Design Thinking approach?

How could you build empathy for users in this space?

What potential challenges might you face, and how might you overcome them? (time, funding, institutional resistance, lack of data)

What's one thing you learned today about human-centered design that will shape how you approach space planning in the future?

(15 min)



Helpful Resources:

iZone Website

Library.Rochester.edu/spaces/izone

IDEO's *Design Thinking for Libraries: A Toolkit for Patron-Centered Design*

Designthinkingforlibraries.com

Stanford d.school Open Access Tools

DSchool.Stanford.edu/innovate/tools

Sources for today's presentation:

Bramley, E. V. (2018, October 5). *Desire paths: The illicit trails that defy the urban planners* [Image caption]. *The Guardian*. Photograph: Alamy. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/oct/05/desire-paths-the-illicit-trails-that-defy-the-urban-planners>

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IDEO. (2015). *Design thinking for libraries: A toolkit for patron-centered design* [Toolkit]. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. <http://designthinkingforlibraries.com/>

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Thank you!

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