Innovation by Design

mindsets and methods

Innovation by Design is a Hennepin County creative problem-solving approach based in human-centered design and design-thinking principles. It starts with the people you're serving and ends with a service that is specifically tested and designed for them. Innovation by Design is guided by the mindsets of empathy, optimism, and experiment.

The mindset of empathy is put into practice by first identifying the needs of our end-users. The end-user is the person at the end of the service or the person receiving the product. The end-user could be a client, patron, resident or customer. Understanding the root cause of the need or issue happens by immersing ourselves in the end-user experience through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, observation or other forms of direct engagement. Other stakeholders are also engaged in this part of the process. When practicing empathy, hearing from the end-user and others involved in the service is essential. Empathy mapping is used to help us understand what our end-user says, does, thinks, and feels to gain deeper insights into their needs.

The optimism mindset is practiced by synthesizing what we learned during the empathy phase. Finding themes in the data or affinity mapping their experiences are ways to more fully understand the end-user experience. Everything learned feeds into brainstorming ideas for new or improved services.. When brainstorming we pull a diverse, multi-disciplinary team, including our end-users, together to build off of each other's ideas and discover new and innovative concepts. There are no wrong answers when brainstorming, all ideas are tested or expanded.

The experiment mindset begins by prototyping ideas. Prototypes can include story boards, role play and creating models with other materials to convey a concept or idea. Prototypes are low cost and can be made quickly to convey ideas to end-users and stakeholders to get their reactions. Sometimes prototypes fail at this point and that's okay; we learn from the failures and keep iterating. We iterate our prototypes until we find a desirable, feasible and viable solution to move forward to pilot or implementation. The solution is put into a project plan, implemented, measured or evaluated, and adjusted as needed.

Empathy
- People are the center of our work
- I am not my end user
- Immerse yourself
- A chance to be other

Optimism
- Embrace fear
- There's no wrong answer
- We're all creative
- Failure is okay
- Take baby steps
- Try to get away with something
- Believe is possible

Experiment
- Keep it simple
- Take risks
- Fail faster, succeed sooner
- Test ideas
- Experiment to learn
- Gain validation from user