Human-Centered Design (HCD)

Definition

Human-centered design is about solving problems for (wait for it), humans. As [IDEO](#) puts it:

> It's a process that starts with the people you're designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs. Human–centered design is all about building a deep empathy with the people you're designing for; generating tons of ideas; building a bunch of prototypes; sharing what you've made with the people you're designing for; and eventually putting your innovative new solution out in the world.

Human-centered design consists of three phases. In the Inspiration Phase, you'll learn directly from the people you're designing for as you immerse yourself in their lives and come to deeply understand their needs. In the Ideation Phase, you'll make sense of what you learned, identify opportunities for design, and prototype possible solutions. And in the Implementation Phase, you'll bring your solution to life, and

eventually, to market. And you'll know that your solution will be a success because you've kept the very people you're looking to serve at the heart of the process.

Key resources

- Learn more about human-centered design at [IDEO](#)

Key terms

- **Design thinking:** A human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.

- **Frameworks:** Visual representations of a system used to highlight key relationships and develop strategy.

- **Prototype:** Quickly created representations of a product, program, or service to test a hypothesis or assumption about the usability and/or functionality of a feature or set of features.

History

Human-centered design was popularized in the 1990s by the Standford d.school and the design company IDEO. It was an evolution of participatory and cooperative design, which is built upon various disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and psychology. The [principles of human-centered design](#) are:

1. **Focus on human values.** Empathy for the people you are designing for and feedback from these users is fundamental to good design

2. **Craft clarity.** Produce a coherent vision out of messy problems. Frame it in a way to inspire others and to fuel ideation.

3. **Embrace experimentation.** Prototyping is not simply a way to validate your idea; it is an integral part of your innovation process. We build to think and learn.

4. **Be mindful of process.** Know where you are in the design process, what methods to use in that stage, and what your goals are.

5. **Bias toward action.** Design thinking is a misnomer; it is more about doing that thinking. Bias toward doing and making over thinking and meeting.

6. **Radical collaboration.** Bring together innovators with varied backgrounds and viewpoints. Enable breakthrough insights and solutions to emerge from the diversity.

Common questions about human-centered design

Q: What's the difference between design thinking and human-centered design?

A: Technically speaking, design thinking is simply thinking and creating like a designer, though it may or may not be centered on the people for whom you're designing since there are many design methodologies. However, in practice, we use the terms interchangeably and most people mean "human-centered design" when they say "design thinking" and mean "design thinking" when they say "human-centered design." We will use the terms interchangeably as well.

Deeper dive

- [A Brief History of Desgin Thinking: How Design Thinking Came to 'Be'](#)
- [IDEO's Design Kit](#))
- [David Kelly: Human Centered Design TED Talk](#)
- [Wired: Why Human-Centered Design Matters](#)
- [White House: Applying Human Centered Design to improve the National School Lunch Program.](#)