Ethical Design Thinking

About the Workshop

Ethical Design Thinking is a methodology that encourages designers to focus on human-oriented values throughout their design process. It consists of 5 exercises, created to bring together designers, researchers, engineers, PMs, and other stakeholders to discuss a shared ethical goal. The following exercises are adapted from various experts and ethicists from the University of Washington, IDEO, Google, and Time Well Spent. Ethical Design Thinking encourages designers to consider the greater impact of their designs.

Why Should I Use It?

Although we consider ourselves to be ethical people, many of us don't actively consider human-oriented values when creating products. As a result, we take shortcuts and we fail to see the physical, psychological, and emotional repercussions of our products. By placing values at the core of our products, we hope to provide designers with the tools to create a more ethical approach to design.

When Should I Use It?

These exercises are meant to work alongside your current design process, not in place of it! Adapt it to the current tools and methodologies that you or your company use. No matter the scale of your design goal, or whether you're a startup, agency, or product company, these workshops are meant to help you apply human-oriented values to your project. Now let's begin!

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What to Expect

How to Facilitate a Workshop

Reach Out

The following exercises work best in multi-disciplinary groups of 2-6. Reach out to multiple team members, from designers, engineers, researchers, PMs, and other stakeholders. Explain that you'd like to hold a workshop to discuss the impact of your upcoming project.

Take the Lead

As a facilitator, take the steps necessary to prepare yourself prior to holding the workshop. Explain to the group why you think this workshop is valuable. How might it affect your audience, your company, and the outcome of your product?

Document Your Process

Don't forget to document your answers along the way! Use the table on the last page of this booklet to document your group's answers for each exercise. Or click here to download a copy of the table on Google docs.

Prep Your Workspace

Each exercise requires no more than a pen and sticky notes. Find a workspace that works best for your group and gather whatever supplies you need. Print out each exercise for the group, use your laptop to project it on screen, or just use sticky notes and a whiteboard.

Set a Timer

This workshop takes approximately 45 minutes to complete. As the facilitator, it's your job to keep your group on track. Follow the suggested activity times on each exercise. Inform your group how much time is allotted and set a timer.

Next Steps

Once you've finished the workshop, discuss the next steps with your group. Have the results of this workshop changed the way you approach your Design Goal? Share your findings with other co-workers and members in your product teams.

Design Goal

Adapted from IDEO's Design Kit: The Human-Centered Design Toolkit (2015)

Getting the right frame on your design goal will get you off on the right foot, understand the problem you're focusing on, organize how you think about your solution, and help clarify where you should push your design. Framing your design challenge is more art than science, but there are a few key things to keep in mind.

Ask yourself:

- What is the problem I'm trying to solve?
- Who are you solving for, and why?
- Does my challenge drive toward ultimate impact?

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Design Goal

👥 1-4 People   ⏳ ~5 Minutes   ✏️ Sticky notes, Pens

Activities

1. Start by writing out your design goal, and then briefly discuss the following questions as a group: (5 mins)

   - What is the problem you're trying to solve?
   - Who are you solving for, and why?

   Your design goal should be short and easy to remember; a single sentence that conveys what you want to do and why.

Personal Values

Adapted from Joe Edelman–Designer, Sociologist, and Co-founder of Time Well Spent (2018)

What are values?
Joe Edelman (2018) defines values as "ideas that guide us in action." They're similar to plans, goals, intentions, and the like–all of which guide us in action. But unlike plans, goals, and intentions, which deal specifically with an outcome, values concern the manner of our actions and how we aim to approach things.

Personal Values vs. Product Values
In this methodology, we will be thinking of two kinds of values– those that are personal and those for our products. Personal Values refer to the greater life values that an individual or group might have and how they aspire to live their lives. Product Values refer specifically to a product, feature, or design solution, and the way in which they support or oppose a user's experience.

Personal Value	Achieved By...	Difficult Parts
Practicing work-life balance	- Setting boundaries - Better time management - Setting aside time for self-care	- Learning to say 'no' - Turning down opportunities - Finding a job that lets you have work-life balance - Process is time-consuming

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Personal Values

👥 1-4 People   ⌛ ~12 Minutes   ✏️ Sticky notes, Pens

Activities

1. As a group, reflect on your main target audience. Come up with a brief description of who this audience is. This could be characteristics, traits, or habits that are unique to your audience. (3 mins)

2. List out any personal values that your target audience might have. (3 mins)
    Ex. Practicing work-life balance.
    Reminder: Your target audience's personal values should exist separately from your product/solution.

3. With each personal value, list the ways your audience might go about achieving this. (3 mins)
    Ex. Setting boundaries, better time management, setting aside time for self-care.

4. List the difficult parts when it comes to achieving each personal value. What might be difficult about each value? Consider what risks might be associated, along with the barriers and challenges your audience might face. (3 mins)
    Ex. Learning to say 'no', turning down certain opportunities, finding a job that lets you have work-life balance, figuring out what works for you is often time-consuming.

Product Values

Adapted from Value-Sensitive Design by Batya Friedman, Peter H. Kahn, Jr. (2009)

Developed by Batya Friedman and Peter Kahn Jr. from the University of Washington, Value-Sensitive Design is an approach that takes human-oriented values into consideration when designing technology. With VSD, we can determine what kind of values we want reflected in our products. As activist and technologist Anil Dash explains, "the values we use when we create technology shape[s] the ways that communities and individuals use that technology" (2016).

Health ☐	Refers to a person's physical, psychological, and material state or well-being.
Ownership ☐	Refers to the right of possessing an object (or information), and the state and act that follow through this ownership.
Privacy ☐	Refers to the state of being free from the disturbance of others, the right to determine what information is being communicated to others.
Equality ☐	Refers to the equal treatment between individuals, groups, races, social classes, sexes, (dis)abilities, sexual orientations.
Trust ☐	Refers to the confidence placed in someone or something based on the reliability, truth, strength, skills, and ability to feel vulnerable.
Autonomy ☐	Refers to an individual's ability to decide, plan, and act in ways that they believe will help their to achieve their goals independently.
Transparency ☐	Refers to the openness and disclosure in agreement or permission granted between individuals or groups.
Responsibility ☐	Refers to the ability to act, make decisions, be responsible, and accountable for something.
Respect ☐	Refers to being mindful and treating people with politeness and consideration.
Identity ☐	Refers to people's understanding of who they are over time, embracing both progress and regress over time.
Safety ☐	Refers to a peaceful and composed psychological state.
Longevity ☐	Refers to sustaining ecosystems to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations.

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Product Values

👥 1-4 People   ⏳ ~10 Minutes   ✏️ Sticky notes, Pens

Activities

1. Using the list of product values provided, identify the 5 most important product values for your target audience. What product values are necessary to achieve the personal values of your user? (5 mins)

2. Write down what each value might mean to your user. Gather any important findings, insights, or observations among your team. (5 mins)

Values and Spaces

Adapted from Joe Edelman–Designer, Sociologist, and Co-founder of Time Well Spent (2018)

At this point, your team should have a design goal, an understanding of some of your user's personal values, and a list of your product's values. But how do you start applying these?

Imagine your designs as spaces for user's to practice their values. If we relate to social spaces in the world, we can learn more about how users strive towards these values in a non-digital space. For example, what spaces or environments make it easier to embrace our identity, or become autonomous? What about these spaces allow us to do so? Edelman explains that "every social system makes some values easier to practice, and other values harder" (2018).

Design Goal
Encouraging people to create and build healthy lifestyle habits.

Product Value	Easier In...	Things in Common
Identity	- At home - Community - A religious space - At school	- You trust those around you and feel comfortable with being vulnerable - Spaces where you're around people who might have the same values as you - Spaces where you've developed close relationships

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Values and Spaces

👥 1-4 People   ⏳ ~15 Minutes   ✏️ Sticky notes, Pens

Activities

1. Refer to the list of Product Values that you've chosen as a group in the previous exercise. With each Product Value: (10 mins)

    a. List the spaces where you might find it easier to practice said value.
    Ex. At home, in your community, in a religious space, at school.

    b. Using your list of spaces that are easier in, list what these spaces might have in common. What is it about these spaces that make it easier to practice that value?
    Ex. Spaces where you're around people who might have the same values as you, spaces that involve self-growth, reflection, and learning, you trust those around you and feel comfortable with being vulnerable.

2. With your group, discuss how you might apply these learnings to your product. (5 mins)

Reframing your Design Goal

Adapted from Tristan Harris—Ex-Google Design Ethicist and Co-Founder of
Time Well Spent (2014)

It's important to recognize that sometimes our products and platforms go against our own personal values. Having conflicting values between products and users can lead to harmful systems that disregard the potential societal effects. In order to change this, we need to be aware of the values we incorporate into our products.

Reflect on your initial design goal and see whether it needs to be reframed. Does it support or conflict with your list of personal and product values? With these considerations, we can learn to design with values in mind throughout the entire design process and help align teams and stakeholders.

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Reframing—Design Goal

👥 1-4 People   ⧗ ~5 Minutes   ✏️ Sticky notes, Pens

Activities

1. Compare your design goal with the list of personal and product values that your team's created. As a group, discuss the following: (5 mins)
   - Does your design goal help achieve or maintain these values?
   - Does your design goal conflict with these values?

2. If you feel that certain values aren't being reflected in your design goal and believe those values will be of importance moving forward, consider refining your design goal. Your values shouldn't feel forced—these values should be implied throughout your design goal. (Optional)

What's Next?

After Completing the Methodology

This methodology allows you to reflect on your design goal and become aware of the values you incorporate into your product. Share your results with your team or other stakeholders. Save a copy on your computer, print it out and leave it on your desk, write it on a whiteboard, hang it up on the wall, use it as a card—whatever works best for you! Thank you for practicing Ethical Design Thinking.

Additional Resources

Keeping values into consideration are just one step towards designing more ethically. Be sure to check out what other designers and companies are doing to contribute to this space:

→ Airbnb's Another Lens

→ Aral Balkan's Fighting for better Privacy

→ Artefact's Behaviour Change Cards

→ Emi Kolawole's Design For Worldview

→ Joe Edelman's How to Design Social Systems

→ McCombs School of Business' Ethics Unwrapped

→ Microsoft's Inclusive Design

→ Tristan Harris' Time Well Spent

→ Washington University's Value Sensitive Design

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Ethical Design Thinking Methodology

Design Goal		
Personal Value	**Achieved By...**	**Difficult Parts**
Product Value	**Easier In...**	**Things in Common**