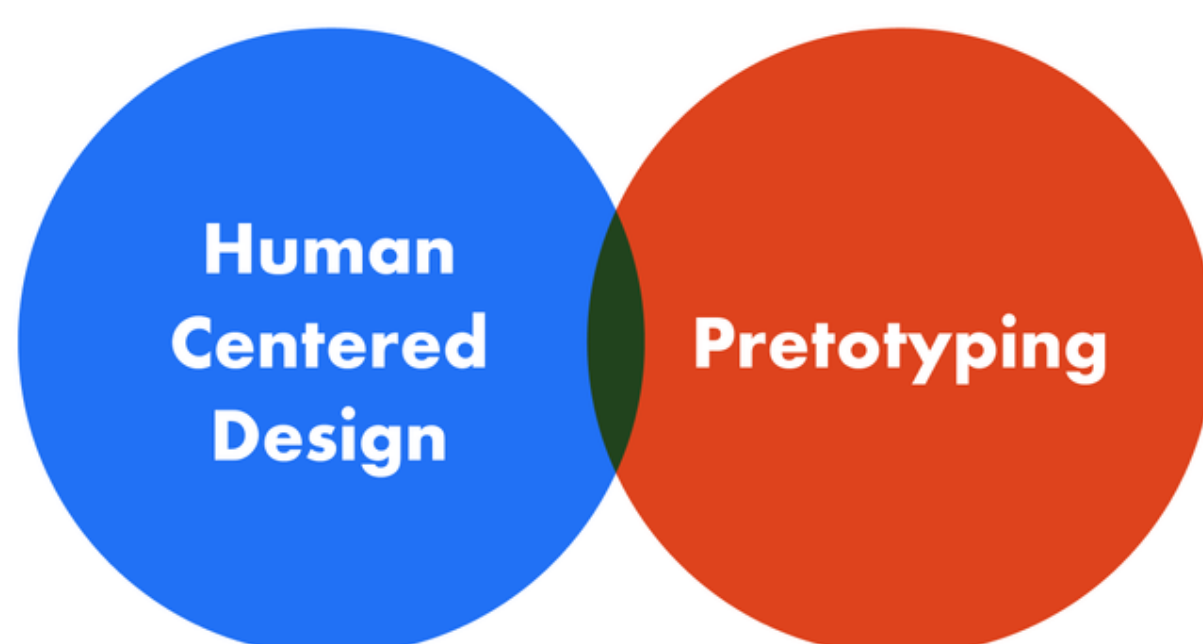


# Human-Centred Design x Pretotyping: prioritising data to find solutions



At first glance, pretotyping and human-centred design seem like strange bedfellows: pretotyping champions data over opinion, using experimentation to gather information that proves or disproves an idea. Human-centred design gathers stories, deliberately seeking out emotions and opinions in order to generate ideas for potential solutions. But like all the other methodologies in our ‘Pretotyping and...’ series, it’s not about replacing one with the other. Rather, pretotyping can be used in conjunction with human-centred design to improve and streamline your innovation process, putting both customers and data at the centre, and saving you time and money in the process.

Rather than assuming the innovators have all the answers, human-centred designers lead people through processes that intentionally marshal their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in order to generate ideas for potential solutions to the problems facing them. It’s a great way to democratise the design process, meet your audience where they are, in order to understand their pain points and help them articulate the issues they are facing in their own words.

In the innovation process, however, the problems start when emotions and opinions get involved in prioritising which solutions should be tackled first, without using any data to validate those ideas. That’s where pretotyping comes in.

Pretotyping strengthens the human centred-design process by providing a way to test and validate the ideas that come from fieldwork, in order to make informed, data-driven decisions about which solutions to build. Human-centred design skills are incredibly helpful when it comes to understanding customers’ problems and pain points from their own perspectives, but opinion and emotion alone is not enough to validate an idea.

By running prototypes, human-centred designers can quickly and reliably ascertain which ideas will work to address customers’ pain points, and which ones are simply a waste of time and money. By using both methodologies together, you end up with a more robust and rigorous process that ensures you are building the right ‘it’, which means you can solve your customers’ problems (and alleviate their pain) faster, and to a better standard.

Australian National University has worked to embed pretotyping alongside their human-centred design processes to improve the student experience at university. In order to understand the problems affecting students – particularly in the highly disruptive COVID-19 period – the team at ANU conducted one-on-one interviews with students and synthesised them into key insights and recommendations. But instead of pressing forward with the ideas generated through this process, they paused – and turned to pretotyping. They were able to develop problem statements (and fill in a lean canvas) in order to design prototypes that would help test and validate the ideas generated from interviews.

By conducting rapid experiments, innovation teams can generate data that will validate (or invalidate) ideas quickly and at a low cost. Then, they can move onto building solutions. The data generated by pretotyping also helps democratise the innovation process within companies: decisions are no longer made based on which story is the most emotive, but on the data that comes from rapid experimentation. This gives innovation teams the power to explain their decision-making to executives and advocate for the best ideas based on what the data tells them.

Pretotyping helps prevent innovation teams from ‘jumping forward’ and creating solutions based only on the thoughts, feelings and opinions recorded in the interviews conducted by human-centred designers. In any innovation process, there is often pressure to develop solutions quickly: pretotyping helps teams take a breath, and effectively validate and prioritise ideas, so that they can gather the data they need to know the idea will work, before sinking resources into a solution that no one will actually use. If anything, pretotyping helps human-centred design become even more human-centred, by finding which ideas will best serve the people at the centre of the problem – using data, not opinion.

