

## Introduction – What This Experience Was About

### Welcome to Your Design Toolbox

Over the past several months, you've engaged in a **Human-Centered Design (HCD) experience** to explore how college leaders can better navigate employer engagement and U2B strategies.

Throughout this journey, you've explored:

- How design can **surface new insights and challenges** that might not be obvious at first glance.
- How to **prototype and test ideas** before committing to large-scale solutions.
- How a **structured but flexible approach** can help college leaders engage employers more effectively.

By going through this process, you haven't just learned about design—you've **practiced it firsthand**.

This toolbox is designed to help you:

- **Reflect on what you've learned** throughout this experience.
- **Find the language to describe your journey** to others.
- **Apply design tools and methods in your University-to-Business (U2B) work** moving forward to explore complex challenges, engage diverse perspectives, and drive outcomes.

Think of this as a resource—not just for remembering what we did, but for helping you **articulate and build on this work** in the future.

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### Why You Were Brought Together

As Peer Learning Leaders (PLLs), you were selected because of your expertise and lived experiences in employer engagement. But instead of just sharing best practices, you were invited to test and apply a new approach: **Human-Centered Design** as a tool to support college leaders navigating employer engagement. Rather than presenting pre-packaged solutions, this experience focused on **testing, adapting, and uncovering strategies** that reflect the realities of those closest to the challenges.

**Why?** Because employer engagement often struggles when:

- ✗ **Institutions assume** what employers need rather than co-designing solutions.
- ✗ **Colleges rely on pre-set models** instead of adapting strategies for different stakeholders.
- ✗ **Leaders focus on implementing solutions quickly** rather than first understanding the root problem.

**Human-Centered Design** helps shift this approach by focusing on:

- ✓ **Suspending assumptions** and deeply exploring challenges before jumping to solutions.
  - ✓ **Creating and testing ideas in real-world settings** before committing to large-scale efforts.
  - ✓ **Using iteration and feedback** to refine strategies rather than assuming a single right answer.
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## Meeting at the Intersection of HCD & U2B

Many of us are accustomed to **immediately seeking solutions** when a challenge arises. These sessions were intentionally different.

These sessions were about:

- **Understanding** the lived experiences and challenges of diverse college leaders engaging in University-to-Business (U2B) strategies.
- **Experimenting** with design tools to uncover insights that might not emerge in traditional planning.
- **Building comfort with iteration**, recognizing that all strategies need adjustment over time.

This approach allowed you to **step into the shoes** of different college leaders, **uncover** shared challenges, and **rethink** how employer engagement efforts are designed and supported.

HCD is especially valuable for **University-to-Business work** because:

- ✦ It **bridges the gap** between employer **needs** and higher education **realities**.
- ✦ It helps **shift the focus** from **transactional partnerships** to long-term collaboration.
- ✦ It allows colleges to **co-design solutions with employers** instead of assuming what they need.

The design tools you've used in these sessions can help you:

- **Facilitate complex conversations** that uncover real institutional challenges.
- Help college leaders **test ideas** before scaling them.
- Guide institutions to move away from **"plug-and-play" solutions** and toward strategies that fit their specific contexts.

By applying design thinking, we can make employer engagement more **dynamic, responsive, and sustainable** rather than forcing outdated models onto evolving workforce needs.

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## Key Takeaways from this Experience

As you prepare to share this experience with others, keep these core takeaways in mind:

- ✦ **From Solution-First Thinking → Problem Exploration**
  - Instead of assuming what employers or institutions need, we **took the time to investigate** the real challenges.
  - This helps avoid **misaligned efforts and ineffective strategies**.
- ✦ **Using Design Tools to Rethink Employer Engagement**


- Tools like **Problem Statement Builders, Journey Mapping, and Consensus Workshops** helped surface new insights and align different perspectives.
- Rather than jumping straight into solutions, we **focused on building shared understanding first**.

#### ✦ **Testing & Iterating Before Scaling Solutions**


- Many institutions invest in employer engagement strategies **without first testing if they truly meet employer needs**.
- HCD offers a **low-risk way to prototype** and refine ideas before committing institutional resources.

In addition, below is some language you may want to use to **frame your experience**:


#### **If asked about the purpose of the design sessions:**

 *“These sessions helped us rethink employer engagement by applying human-centered design. Instead of assuming solutions, we tested design tools to uncover real challenges and opportunities.”*

#### **If asked how this applies to U2B strategies:**

 *“Human-centered design helps college leaders co-create solutions with employers rather than designing in isolation. This approach ensures engagement efforts are actually relevant and sustainable.”*

#### **If asked what the biggest takeaway was:**

 *“One of the biggest shifts was learning to slow down before jumping to solutions. By deeply exploring the problem space first, we designed more thoughtful and effective strategies.”*

## **What to Do With This Toolbox Next**

Here are three ways to use this moving forward:

- **Train others** using one of the tools you practiced — try a Gallery Walk or Journey Mapping with your team or mentee.
- **Build your module** using these as a starting point — many tools can be adapted to different learning settings.
- **Guide a team conversation** using the U2B Hallmark Design Framework and the reflection questions provided.

*<INSERT The U2B Hallmark Design Framework Visual>*

*This toolbox is meant to evolve — as you continue, share what you adapt or create.*

## **Session-by-Session Breakdown**

### **KICK OFF - OCT 2024**

#### **1 Session Theme & Purpose**

The Kick-Off Session set the stage for your journey as Peer Learning Leaders (PLLs) by:

- Grounding you in human-centered design (HCD) as an approach for U2B stakeholder engagement.
- Introducing key design mindsets—shifting from solutions-first to deep exploration of challenges.
- Creating space for community-building to surface shared perspectives and set expectations.

## Design Approaches/Mindsets Introduced

Throughout the session, you were encouraged to:

- **Pause before problem-solving** → Take time to explore the problem space before assuming solutions.
- **Engage with multiple perspectives** → No single institution or employer has all the answers.
- **Get comfortable with ambiguity** → Design isn't about having the perfect answer upfront.

*From the session:*

*"We don't always slow down to ask what's really going on. We assume we know what the barriers are, but sometimes we're wrong."*

## 2 Tools & Approaches Used

### ◆ Focused Conversations

#### Why We Used It

A **Focused Conversation (ORID method)** helps structure discussions in a way that:

- Surfaces observations before jumping to conclusions.
- Encourages deeper thinking by moving from facts → reflections → insights → actions.
- Creates shared understanding among diverse perspectives.


#### How It Connects to U2B

Employer engagement requires **navigating multiple perspectives**. College leaders often assume what employers want, and employers assume what colleges can deliver. The Focused Conversation **helps uncover underlying needs** before designing solutions.

This supports the **Validate** tenet by helping surface employer expectations and stakeholder insights before jumping to conclusions. It also strengthens the **Anchor** tenet by building trust through reflective listening.

#### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** Aligning with employers and stakeholders on shared challenges.

 **In mentorship:** Helping mentees process challenges by guiding them through **reflective, structured conversations** instead of giving immediate answers.

### ◆ Community Circle

#### Why We Used It

The **Community Circle** created space for:

- Create a space for open sharing and relationship-building.

- Acknowledge different starting points in U2B work.
- Encourage reflective discussion on existing approaches to employer engagement.

### How It Connects to U2B


Employer engagement isn't just about **strategy**—it's about **building trust with stakeholders**. A community-centered approach helps:

- Foster meaningful dialogue between institutions and employers.
- Uncover hidden barriers to collaboration.
- Encourage transparency and shared ownership in decision-making.

This supports the **Anchor** tenet by fostering trust and mutual understanding between internal and external stakeholders. It can also support **Maintain** by reinforcing shared ownership over time.


### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When launching new employer partnerships, to create alignment early on.


 **In mentorship:** To help mentees reflect on their experiences and recognize they're not alone in their challenges.

## 3 Key Moments & Takeaways


**On shifting mindsets:**

 *"I realize now that we tend to approach employer engagement with a set model in mind, instead of designing around the actual needs of the institution and business."*

**On the importance of listening:**

 *"We assume we know what the barriers are, but if we don't pause to ask, we risk designing solutions that don't actually solve the problem."*

**On why design thinking feels different:**

 *"I'm used to solving problems quickly. It's uncomfortable to sit in the unknown, but I see how this approach helps us make better long-term decisions."*

By the end of the Kick-Off, you walked away with:

- ✓ A **clearer understanding of human-centered design** and its relevance to U2B.
- ✓ A **shift in perspective**—from problem-solving to **problem exploration**.
- ✓ The realization that **design is iterative**, and there is no single perfect solution.

 **Understand Phase** – Before solving a problem, you have to understand it deeply.

## FRAMING THE PROBLEM - NOV 2024

### 1 Session Theme & Purpose

The November session marked your entry into the **Understand phase** of the design process, where you explored what it means to define the *right* problem before moving toward solutions. Together we:

- Used collective reflection and structured dialogue to explore the complexity of U2B challenges
- Shared real experiences and surfaced patterns across diverse institutional contexts
- Practiced articulating a challenge in clear, testable language
- Began drafting problem statements grounded in lived experience

This session challenged you to name complexity, hold competing truths, and build your ability to guide others through problem definition — **not just for the sake of understanding**, but as a path to better strategy.

### Design Approaches/Mindsets Introduced

Throughout the session, you were encouraged to:

- **Interrogate assumptions** → Notice where default thinking may be misdirecting your problem framing
- **Hold competing truths** → Recognize that people across institutions experience challenges differently
- **Surface assumptions before solving** → Jumping to action too quickly risks designing the wrong thing.

*From the session:*

*“We all came in thinking we were solving the same problem, but after hearing each other, it was clear we weren’t even seeing the same thing.”*

## 2 Tools & Approaches Used

### ◆ Gallery Walk

#### Why We Used It


**Gallery Walks** allows for collective sensemaking - helps you understand how different stakeholders experience the same challenge, and to design with their realities in mind. To gather insights from people with direct experience of the challenge — helping participants visualize the broader landscape before narrowing in on the problem.


#### How It Connects to U2B

Too often, U2B efforts are built around a single institutional narrative. Gallery Walk helps college leaders and employers co-create strategy by starting with a shared understanding of the full challenge landscape. The Gallery Walk surfaces the complexity beneath those assumptions and brings to light the diversity of challenges experienced on the ground.

This supports the **Research** and **Validate** tenets by uncovering lived realities that might otherwise be overlooked.

#### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When launching a new partnership, use this with employers to identify disconnects in expectations or goals.

 **In mentorship:** To help mentees listen for themes across stakeholder conversations.

### ◆ Problem Statement Builder


## Why We Used It


To help reframe a complex or vague challenge into a focused, actionable problem statement — clarifying who is affected, what’s at stake, and what dynamics are involved.

## How It Connects to U2B

Clear problem framing makes co-design possible. This tool helps ensure that you and your employer partner are solving the same challenge — not talking past each other. This tool helps reframe vague challenges like “employers aren’t engaged” into actionable insights. Many U2B strategies fail because they solve for symptoms. This tool **helps surface deeper structural issues** that impact partnership quality and outcomes.


## When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** Before inviting an employer to co-create a solution, use this to make sure your framing is aligned and accurate.


 **In mentorship:** Support a mentee in naming the real partnership challenge so they can engage an employer in meaningful solution-building.

## 3 Key Moments & Takeaways


### On the role of clarity in partnership:

 *“You can’t invite someone into a solution if they don’t see the problem the way you do. This process made that clear.”*

### On collective meaning-making:

 *“The Gallery Walk helped me name tensions I’ve felt but didn’t know others shared. That was powerful.”*

### On the role of assumptions:

 *“This made me realize how often we inherit the problem without ever checking if it’s the right one.”*

*By the end of this session, you walked away with:*

- ✓ *Deeper awareness of how assumptions shape employer engagement strategy*
- ✓ *Tools to identify deeper system-level causes of U2B challenges before moving to solutions*
- ✓ *Clarity on how to lead others through problem framing — not just solution pitching*
- ✓ *Practice drafting problem statements grounded in real-world context*

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## IDENTIFYING MILESTONES - DEC 2024

### 1 Session Theme & Purpose

The session provided space to re-center the work around the real user (college leaders), revisit and refine your problem statements, and begin defining what “good design” would require — all critical before generating solutions. Together, you:

- Re-grounded in the project’s purpose and design scope — focused on supporting college leaders
- Revisited your problem statements through an equity lens using elements of the Problems with Problems framework
- Developed early design criteria to guide future ideation: what must be true to support the people most impacted

## Design Approaches/Mindsets Introduced

Throughout the session, you were encouraged to:

- **Stay rooted in your user** → Design for college leaders navigating U2B challenges, not for generalized institutional priorities
- **Interrogate your framing** → Ask hard questions about what’s implied in how problems are framed
- **Define what success requires** → Use lived experience to set meaningful criteria for what good design looks like

*From the session:*

*“It wasn’t until we revisited the problem that I realized how much of it was shaped by our own institutional lens.”*

## 2 Tools & Approaches Used

### ◆ Design Criteria Builder


#### Why We Used It


To help clarify what must be true for a solution to succeed — based on your understanding of the user, the challenge, and the surrounding system. This tool ensures that ideation is purposeful and values-driven.

#### How It Connects to U2B

Strong employer partnerships don’t emerge from generic offerings — they grow from shared priorities. Design criteria help you co-create *with* employers by identifying what matters most from both sides, enabling meaningful alignment.

#### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When co-designing a solution with an employer, use this to align on non-negotiables and shared outcomes before moving forward.

 **In mentorship:** To help a mentee clarify success criteria before engaging an employer in ideation or proposal development.

### ◆ Problems with Problems Framework (Equity Pause)


#### Why We Used It


To pause and assess your problem framing for harmful assumptions or gaps — such as blaming individuals, ignoring power, or skipping context.

## How It Connects to U2B

Employer engagement efforts can fail when they start from the wrong problem. This tool helps college leaders partner more effectively with employers by ensuring the problem is framed in a way that invites collaboration — not defensiveness or overreach.

## When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When preparing to present a challenge to an employer partner, use this to ensure your framing invites joint problem-solving.

 **In mentorship:** To coach a mentee through refining how they present a partnership opportunity, ensuring it's rooted in shared challenges — not assumptions.

## ◆ Preview: Journey Maps & Service Blueprints


### Why We Used It


To introduce possible structures for the ideation and prototyping work ahead. These tools help teams visualize systems, surface friction, and co-design experiences over time — but were not used in this session.

## How It Connects to U2B

Employers often struggle to see how their engagement fits into the learner journey or system. These tools can help co-create clarity and reveal touchpoints that matter most in a partnership.


## When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When working with an employer to identify where learners or systems are breaking down, and to map out a clearer shared path forward.


 **In mentorship:** To help a mentee visualize where in the system an employer is hitting barriers — and co-design solutions with them, not for them.

## 3 Key Moments & Takeaways


### On returning to the core user:

 *“I had to stop and ask — are we solving for what our mentees actually need, or just what we want to fix?”*

### On recognizing power in problem framing:

 *“Once we looked at the assumptions in our problem statement, it was clear we were over-simplifying. That pause helped.”*

### On defining meaningful criteria:

 *“It was tough to name what needs to be true, but that list gave us something to anchor future ideas to.”*

By the end of this session, you walked away with:

- ✓ A sharper understanding of who you're designing for — and why that matters
- ✓ Practice reflecting on your problem statement using equity-informed questions
- ✓ A draft set of design criteria to guide idea generation in future sessions

✓ A preview of tools that will support future co-design with employers

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💡 **Ideation Phase** – Before choosing a path, explore what’s possible.

## LIVING OUT THE HALLMARK - JAN 2025

### 1 Session Theme & Purpose

The January session was your intentional pivot into the **Ideate** phase, setting the stage for exploring what's possible by shifting into new perspectives. This was not yet about solving challenges directly, but about clearly imagining from multiple points of view—grounding you firmly in empathy and stakeholder realities before ideation. Together, you:

- Introduced and engaged deeply with three personas representing diverse college leader perspectives, informed by the Gallery Walk and your own lived experiences.
- Explored wins (success factors) and walls (barriers) that each persona encountered in relation to the five core U2B Hallmark tenets.
- Began clustering identified walls to surface clear, shared obstacles across the different personas—highlighting key opportunities for ideation.

### Design Approaches/Mindsets Introduced

Throughout the session, you were encouraged to:

- **Practice perspective-shifting** → See employer engagement through someone else’s role and priorities
- **Unearth assets and obstacles** → Consider what’s working and what’s in the way for each persona
- **Connect patterns to design opportunities** → Use the walls and wins to clarify where future interventions might live

*From the session:*

*“We’re so used to solving from our own lens. Putting on a new one showed me how different this work feels depending on where you sit.”*

### 2 Tools & Approaches Used

#### ◆ **Personas**


#### Why We Used It


**Personas** that are **validated by real people** - help you step into another's context, thinking, and motivations — allowing you to analyze a challenge from within a role, not just around it. Using personas grounds your imagination in real-life conditions and fosters empathy-driven ideas.

#### How It Connects to U2B

Strong employer engagement starts from genuinely understanding diverse stakeholders and their contexts. Personas create clarity around stakeholder realities, enabling colleges and employers to co-design around shared, not assumed, priorities.

### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When preparing to engage with employers, use personas to anticipate different stakeholder reactions, priorities, or barriers to alignment.

 **In mentorship:** To help them reflect on how their own lens may differ from a partner's — and how to navigate that constructively.

## ◆ Walls & Wins


### Why We Used It


To systematically capture and differentiate enabling conditions (wins) and barriers (walls) from each persona's vantage point, providing clear visibility into common challenges and opportunities.

### How It Connects to U2B

No strategy succeeds in isolation. Employers and institutions benefit from naming shared strengths and barriers openly. Walls & Wins mapping allows partners to co-identify obstacles and successes, leading to stronger, mutually beneficial strategies.

### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When debriefing with an employer, use this collaboratively to identify what's working and where friction lies.

 **In mentorship:** Help mentees map their experiences in partnership to recognize systemic walls and replicate their wins.

## ◆ Consensus Workshop


### Why We Used It


To help your group collectively organize and prioritize diverse insights into clear themes. This structured approach guides you through clustering multiple perspectives, ensuring everyone's voice shapes the final priorities.

### How It Connects to U2B

Strong employer engagement thrives on clear, shared priorities. Consensus Workshops create space for college leaders and employers to align meaningfully around common challenges and goals—ensuring strategies genuinely reflect joint understanding and buy-in.

### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When bringing employer partners together, use this method to co-identify common barriers or priorities, shaping future collaborative efforts clearly and transparently.

 **In mentorship:** When synthesizing multiple employer perspectives, helping them clarify and prioritize what matters most before moving to solutions.

## 3 Key Moments & Takeaways

### On stepping into a new lens:

👤: “I hadn’t thought about how much harder this work is when you don’t have direct access to decision-makers.”

### On recognizing shared barriers:

👤: “The walls showed up across every persona. That tells me it’s not just a ‘me’ issue — it’s structural.”

### On transferable insight:

👤: “We already have the solutions for some of these personas. We just haven’t connected the dots across roles.”

By the end of this session, you walked away with:

- ✓ Deepened empathy for diverse college leader experiences through persona exploration.
- ✓ Preparedness to ideate thoughtfully and inclusively, grounded in real stakeholder contexts.
- ✓ Tools to help others name their context and navigate systems

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## SOLVING FOR THE WALLS - FEB 2025

### 1 Session Theme & Purpose

The February session fully immersed you into the Ideate phase of the design process. This session wasn't about jumping directly into final solutions; rather, it was about intentionally creating space to imagine a broad range of possibilities based on the shared challenges and personas you clarified in January. Together, you:

- Defined what victory would look like in your ability to support mentees and peers navigating U2B challenges.
- Grounded yourself in the importance of ideation—highlighting why imagination and possibility should precede decision-making.
- Explored rapid ideation individually, refined ideas collectively in groups, and then prioritized your most promising concepts using a Priority Matrix.

### Design Approaches/Mindsets Introduced

Throughout the session, you were encouraged to:

- **Explore freely first** → Ideas must be generated without immediate judgment or constraints.
- **Design beyond assumptions** → Genuine innovation emerges when you push past habitual or comfortable ideas.
- **Connect patterns to design opportunities** → After generating possibilities, select paths forward that are meaningful, relevant, and feasible for your context.

*From the session:*

*“Rapid ideation was freeing—being asked to suspend judgment opened up new ideas I’d never considered.”*

### 2 Tools & Approaches Used

## ◆ Victory Circle

### Why We Used It


To collectively visualize and define what true success would feel, look, and sound like—creating shared alignment and intentionality before ideation begins. A **Victory Circle** helps teams:


- Align on **shared goals and motivations**, creating a collective sense of purpose.
- Serve as a standalone activity or **part of a larger process**, such as action planning, strategic visioning, or team alignment.
  - Current Reality Mapping → to acknowledge the present situation and consider who exactly plays a part in making the vision a reality.
  - Establish Shared Commitment → to align on concrete next steps. “*Look at the current reality, what are we willing to commit to?*”

### How It Connects to U2B

Employer engagement thrives when all stakeholders can articulate a shared vision of success. The **Victory Circle** provides space for colleges and employers to clearly imagine and articulate outcomes they want to achieve together, setting the foundation for co-design.

### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** When launching or reshaping a partnership, use this with employers to define shared success upfront, clarifying collective goals.

 **In mentorship:** Helping mentees reframe obstacles by starting with what’s possible instead of what’s broken.

## ◆ Rapid Ideation + Group Idea Expansion

### Why We Used It


To generate a high volume of creative ideas quickly, and then collaboratively refine and deepen these concepts—striking a balance between expansive imagination and thoughtful prioritization.


- Encourages **unfiltered idea generation** before group discussion; helping build momentum and creativity by reducing pressure to be “right” immediately.
- **Avoids groupthink** or defaulting to the loudest voices in the room; ensuring every idea—no matter how unconventional—gets space to surface.
- Allows for **refining and strengthening** ideas through collaboration - Group discussion helps filter, sharpen, and combine ideas into something stronger.

### How It Connects to U2B

Employer engagement is most effective when multiple perspectives are considered. Colleges and employers **often approach challenges differently**—this process helps surface all viewpoints before narrowing down solutions; encouraging stakeholders to challenge assumptions and expand their strategic options. This method can help support innovation in workforce development by generating a variety of potential models before refining.

### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** Encouraging divergent teams to brainstorm freely before aligning on final program structures.

 **In mentorship:** Helping mentees avoid getting stuck in assumptions by guiding them through structured ideation.

## ◆ **Priority Matrix**


### **Why We Used It**


To clearly and collectively prioritize ideas based on feasibility and potential impact—ensuring thoughtful selection of ideas worth exploring further.

### **How It Connects to U2B**

Employers appreciate clarity and strategic prioritization. This tool helps both sides transparently assess which co-designed ideas should move forward, based on shared criteria like feasibility, resources, and impact.


### **When You Might Use This in the Future**

 **In a U2B setting:** Use this with employers when deciding together which initiatives to pilot, scale, or pause, clearly demonstrating rationale behind shared strategic choices.


 **In mentorship:** Guide mentees through the process of prioritizing potential employer strategies, helping them clearly articulate decision-making criteria and build employer trust.

## **3 Key Moments & Takeaways**

### **On collaborative refinement:**

 *“Seeing everyone’s ideas side-by-side helped us spot strong connections we might have otherwise missed.”*

### **On intentional prioritization:**

 *“The Priority Matrix made it clear what ideas were both impactful and achievable—it was the clarity we needed.”*

*By the end of this session, you walked away with:*

- ✓ *A clearly defined, shared vision for successful mentorship and employer engagement.*
- ✓ *Experience rapidly generating and collaboratively refining innovative ideas.*
- ✓ *A set of strategically prioritized ideas ready for further exploration and prototyping.*

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 **Prototype Phase** – Validate what's possible before scaling what's promising.

## **WONDERFUL WORLD OF PROTOTYPING - MAR 2025**

### **1 Session Theme & Purpose**

The March session focused intentionally on the Prototype phase, transitioning from ideation into making your concepts actionable. You took your ideas from previous sessions and explored their feasibility and adaptability—moving beyond recommendations to practical steps. Together, you:

- Reflected on how prototypes help translate broad ideas into tangible, actionable strategies.
- Leveraged the Napkin Pitch tool to quickly and effectively pressure-test your ideas, ensuring your strategies could realistically be adopted within various contexts.
- Considered the accessibility and practical usability of your prototype, ensuring ideas would genuinely support future mentees and colleagues.

## Design Approaches/Mindsets Introduced

Throughout the session, you were encouraged to:

- **Prototype with intention** → Move from broad recommendations toward specific, actionable steps.
- **Test usability and accessibility** → Consider real-world constraints and ensure ideas can be practically implemented.

*From the session:*

*"Just because an idea feels great doesn't mean it's easily adoptable. We need to ask ourselves—can someone actually use this in their real context?"*

## 2 Tools & Approaches Used

### ◆ Napkin Pitch


#### Why We Used It


To quickly and effectively test your idea's viability, mapping the pathway from initial concept to practical outcome. This tool helps break down the core components of a complex idea into simple, communicable steps.

#### How It Connects to U2B

Employers and college leaders often face barriers due to the complexity and scale of initiatives. The Napkin Pitch allows both sides to quickly visualize how a strategy could unfold, highlighting key steps and lowering the barrier for initial engagement.

#### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** Use with employers to rapidly illustrate how a collaborative project could realistically come together, reducing initial hesitation and building buy-in.

 **In mentorship:** Guide mentees through creating their own Napkin Pitch to confidently present clear, actionable ideas to potential employer partners.

### ◆ Storyboard

#### Why We Used It

A storyboard helps teams:


- Visually map out a process step-by-step, making abstract concepts more concrete.
- Think through how an approach unfolds over time, focusing on key interactions and moments.
- Anticipate challenges and identify moments of adjustment before they happen.


#### How It Connects to U2B

Effective employer engagement doesn't happen in a single step—it's a **series of interactions**. Small steps build trust. A Storyboard helps college leaders plan out the experience of employer engagement—breaking it down into specific actions that make outreach feel achievable and co-creation more structured.

Storyboarding also makes invisible steps **visible**—ensuring mentees know **what to say, when to reach out, and what success might look like**.


### When You Might Use This in the Future

 **In a U2B setting:** Planning how an employer partnership unfolds—step by step—from first contact to sustained collaboration.


 **In mentorship:** Helping mentees turn broad engagement goals into realistic, confidence-building steps.

## 3 Key Moments & Takeaways


**On usability and accessibility:**

 *"It's critical we design something realistic for mentees. If they can't implement it easily, it's not really helpful."*

**On lowering the barrier:**

 *"Focusing on the Agile Olive Branch concept reminded me that engagement doesn't have to start big—it just has to start."*


**On embracing practical complexity:**

 *"The Napkin Pitch helped break our idea down into steps that are actually doable—not just aspirational."*

By the end of this session, you walked away with:

- ✓ Practice using quick prototyping tools like Napkin Pitch
- ✓ Increased confidence in guiding others toward practical employer engagement solutions

## Tools Introduced

 **Understand Tools:** Working in the *Understand* mode of design means that we're actively defining problems, learning about the experiences of people closest to these problems, and reflecting on how systems and environments have been designed to shape these experiences. Reflecting on our own relationship to these problems is critical.

### Focused Conversation

What: Method for facilitating dialogue that calls on a diverse range of thinking

Can also use in: Ideate (to structure brainstorming), Prototype (to gather feedback)

Designed by: ToPs Facilitation

Example of day-to-day use: Faculty meetings to discuss new curriculum changes

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Community Circle + Shared Goals**

What: The Circle process is a Western restorative justice adaptation inspired by different Indigenous Nations in North America. In these traditions, Circles are not a “technique” or a set of instructions—they are a way of being, based on deeply held cultural values and relationships.

Can also use in: Ideate (to co-create solutions)

Example of day-to-day use: Community and trust building during class or staff meetings

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Gallery Walk**

What: Method for sharing experiences and data to get a big-picture understanding of a problem

Can also use in: Ideate and Prototype (to share and get feedback on ideas)

Adapted by: the Lab

Example of day-to-day use: Analyzing assessment data with key stakeholders

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Problem Statement Builder**

What: Identify, interrogate, and understand the problem you’re working to address in any context

Can also use in: Ideate (return to and refine focus of the solution)

Designed by: the Lab, adapted from Equity Meets Design’s Problems with Problems framework

Examples of day-to-day use: Understanding barriers to program completion or achievement gaps

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Personas**

What: To understand how the design should adapt to the needs of different people


Adapted by: the Lab

Can also use in: Ideate (to focus solutions on the barriers the persona is going through),

Prototype (to test if the solution addresses the barriers the persona is going through)

Example of day-to-day use: Creating student profiles to understand diverse learning barriers and support needs

[Access the Tool](#)

 **Ideate Tools:** Ideating is about generating and building on solutions, including putting attention to what's already working. Working in the *Ideate* mode of design means that we're opening our minds to new possible futures as we brainstorm and build on ideas and inspiration from others with different experiences, perspectives, contexts.

### **Design Criteria**

What: To prioritize design decisions by identifying the most critical aspects that should be addressed to create a positive impact

Can also use in: Prototype (to evaluate solutions)

Designed by: the Lab

Examples of day-to-day use: Establishing guidelines for curriculum updates

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Consensus Workshop**


What: A collaborative process that helps groups synthesize diverse ideas and perspectives to identify common themes. Consensus Workshops can help you focus on patterns and connections rather than getting stuck in individual differences. It allows groups to find clarity in complexity.

Can also use in: Understand (to synthesize findings), Prototype (to find common themes or patterns with diverse solutions)

Designed by: ToPs Facilitation

Example of day-to-day use: Creating department-wide policies

[Access the Tool](#)

 **Prototype Tools:** Working in the *Prototype* mode of design means that we're creating testable versions of ideas and gathering feedback on these from key stakeholders, especially those most deeply impacted by the problem. This enables ongoing iteration toward innovation and transformation.

### **Journey Maps**

What: To identify barriers to success and gaps in a stakeholder's experience with a program, service, or system. By illuminating these pain points, we can proactively troubleshoot and ideate opportunities to best mediate those pain points so our stakeholders can meet their goals.

Can also use in: Understand (to map current state), Ideate (to envision future state)

Designed by: the Lab

Example of day-to-day use: Mapping student experience through a course

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Service Blueprint**

What: To visualize relationships between people, processes, and physical and digital touchpoints tied to a specific journey

Can also use in: Understand (to map current processes), Ideate (to plan new services)

Adapted by: The Lab

Example of day-to-day use: Designing student support services

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Storyboarding**

What: a method for sharing out an idea by visualizing the experience created by the product or service

Designed by: Nielsen Norman Group

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Napkin Pitch**

What: a method for sharing core parts of your idea with stakeholders

Designed by: Jeanne Liedtka

[Access the Tool](#)

## **Additional Tools Available**

### **Collective Future Visioning**

What: a method for collective visioning, brainstorming, and identifying what outcomes matter to different stakeholders

Designed by: Design Justice Network

[Access the Tool](#)

### **Design Approach Reflection Tool**

What: a tool for developing process, learning agenda, and evaluation metrics

Designed by: the Lab, adapted from work by Equity Meets Design and Creative Reaction Lab

[Access the Tool](#)