



The e-Principles of Design for Human Engagement

Principles are broad guidelines that can be applied to numerous situations in multiple ways. They hold an intention around the quality of human engagement. We believe that principles help us to create the intentional parameters that enable the conditions for transformational change. They are in service to the vision, guide the mission and help to align actions and behaviors of human engagement. As designers, we trust that a few principles guide the intentional trajectory of human engagement. AND...we are making explicit much of the tacit wisdom and implicit “rules of thumb” that we have encountered in the practice of transformational change in human systems. Our hope is that these will shed light on your work in the world.

1. **Empathy** in Design is to connect before content – build relations to hold the field.

Empathy is about building rapport and mutuality. Imagine you are about to design a conversation for a group of stakeholders with diverse perspectives around a potentially charged issue of common interest. Building the relational field of who is in the room, and why this issue matters to them, what they value about the issue creates the scaffolding to explore the different perspectives and potentially from the onset begin the process of finding common ground around shared values. What do you suppose might happen if we did not build this field of human relationship?

2. **Elegance** in Design is complex in nature yet simple in execution.

Elegant design has layers of discrete, step by step processes that build upon each other in ways that expand our capacity to hold more conceptually and increases the prospect of appropriate behavior to take action. The risk is that when things are too complicated people tend to become confused, loose interest and disengage from the process. Keep it simple; build gradient! What are the minimum required components to enable people to engage with complex matters so they don't get lost...they are able to maintain meaning and relevance at each point along the way?

3. **Embodiment** in Design explores other ways of knowing—body, mind, heart and spirit

Embodiment happens when you learn through experience. Let's imagine for a moment that you've been taking Spanish lessons once a week for 6 weeks. You have a sense of the sounds, pronunciation, some vocabulary and rudimentary grammar. Now imagine that instead you are in a Latin

American country for a month-long experience which includes course work, living with a family, volunteering in a community project in a small village. Consider the differences in your learning and embodying the language. We are sensing beings. In our designs for human engagement, the more we invite people to experience learning from and with each other through a variety of modalities (sensory, somatic, emotional, play, metaphor, sound, art) the greater the potential for embodying learning. Consider adult learning principles represented in this Chinese proverb: **Tell me and I forget...show me and I may remember...involve me and I will understand**

4. **Energetic** in Design is to go slow to go fast—the tension between intention, attention and integration.

Energetic in design would be very different in how it's experienced by differing cultural groups – “being” cultures as different from the “doing” cultures. In our Western culture we learn early on to be action oriented, to be reactive. “Don't just stand there, do something! Or “Doing anything is better than doing nothing!” This is often a premature action without a clear intention and perspective on the presenting conditions. Going slow to go fast is building the gradient of WHAT (intention) we are wanting to do in relation to where we are currently situated so as to be able to choose effective strategies (the HOW) for taking appropriate action.

5. **Emergence** in Design enables learning from whatever happens—having the courage to take the risk in ambiguity.

Emergence is often experienced as unpredictable, unexpected, messy or chaotic—all those things you never imagined could happen! No matter how well you design a process for a group of people to work through an issue or explore something of importance, something unexpected will



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very likely come up. This is your dance with emergence—*like dancing on marbles*. This is an in-the-moment opportunity to focus your creative energy on the original intention, take a “read” on what’s happening in the group, while accessing your intuition, past experience, and current reservoir of tools/approaches. This requires you to stay open, centered and be curious...trusting you have the capacity to pull the bunny out of the hat!

6. **Evolution in Design** is creating the conditions to enhance human potential and raise consciousness

Evolution=shift =transformation

Our assumptions as designers and as leaders:

- People want and can get better at something
- When we are better people we make better things, deliver better services, we can be high performing!
- When we are able to see more of the bigger picture, we are more able to understand our role, responsabilize ourselves and take action around our impact.
- When we want to do something better or do more of it, then we have to stretch our learning edges.
- Readiness: To evolve or shift (behavior, learning, perspective, awareness) we have to recognize where we are, how we got here, where we want to be—seeing our potential and becoming aware of possibilities—and we must be able to see ourselves in the picture.
- We can always get better....! Well there’s no guarantee!

7. **Excursion in Design** navigates the journey and multiple realities-zooming in and zooming out-in the shift moving from current to desired state

Excursion implies movement from current to a desired state, from one reality to another, looking at the forest through the trees, the big picture and the details...gaining perspective from multiple viewpoints. What does this make possible? It increases choice, resources, possibilities for navigating the terrain and perspective on current state with respect to desired state. What might be possible in human engagement if we designed for opening people’s hearts and minds to new ways of seeing the world?

Consider your own energetic when getting ready for a trip to a country you’ve never visited before. How do you go about designing your experience? Do you research the culture, the landscape, language, history, and the protocols of being in that country? This is a zooming in and out to get an even larger perspective to navigate your journey and to be as open to a new reality as well as your own, from your cultural point of view.

8. **Expansion in Design** accounts for multiple dimensions in scope and scale; the behaviour of the whole is more than the sum of the parts

Expansion is the ability to flex to different scope (what are we doing together?) and scale (who all must be engaged?). This capacity requires flexibility in time—more people, more time; greater complexity— the more context setting prior to engagement and always, follow up on progress, insights, learning and implementation. Expansion also requires the ability to design with approaches that easily accommodate a maximum mix of engagement forums – large group, small team, dyads, and individual work.

9. **Effectiveness in Design** is utilizing the output data and dynamics from any engagement process as input for determining the next piece of work.

Effectiveness in design means a developmental sequencing where each activity, each exploration, learning and meaning-making generates the context and content for the next process. The outcome for any one segment of intentional human engagement process (a group check-in, an interview, a reflection, a café conversation, idea generation and so on), becomes the information upon which you design conditions for the next segment of work. Each segment or activity of the human engagement process depends upon the one before in a “string of pearls” which is intended to move people progressively towards a particular outcome.



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10. *Efficiency in Design is meeting people where they are at –Match, Pace, Co-Lead –towards wherever they want to go*

Efficiency means being able to quickly tap into what has heart and meaning for people. Have you ever asked a question of a group of people that was simply too big for them to get their arms around? For example, I asked a group of students, what was their ‘life’s calling’ as a prompt to their large group discussion. They looked at each other then looked at me like a group of deer in the bright headlights with no clue as to what they should do or how they should start. Quickly reframing the question to “what is the impact you wish to make in the world” and breaking students into small groups enabled them to dig into this conversation. I tapped into what had heart and meaning for them, with a question that was a smaller scale, using language that they could relate to and created a less vulnerable environment, the safety of smaller groups for shared reflection. This is what we call “chunking down” (to smaller elements) and “chunking up” (to larger perspective).

11. *Economy in Design is doing more with less – use a few “tools” in a variety of blended ways and increase versatility*

Economy means blending processes and approaches that best fit the unique human engagement circumstances using and adapting a few versatile tools for multiple purposes. This requires one knows the most appropriate set of circumstances for any particular tool, process or approach. Doing more with less suggests we design with processes and approaches that can translate across multiple situations and contexts with small adaptations. An analogy might be a formula in math. The formula doesn’t change; it’s the values or circumstances that you plug into the formula that shifts the outcome. With repetition and adaptation of the tool in a variety of situations, it becomes very ‘user friendly’ yet innovative in response to the unique circumstances.

12. *Experimentation in Design enables recursive learning and prototyping for innovation*

Experimentation means we test new ideas, new ways of being and doing in the world. Intentional design creates the conditions for people to explore, discover, and build upon their learning. If we are designing for something, the assumption is that we’re designing to help bring about something different...something new.

- In the **Being** world we are trying on new behaviours or ways of being.
- In the **Doing** world, we are piloting a new approach, system, or practice.

13. *Ethics in Design allow a practitioner to recognize and hold the inherent tension between their morals as a person and how those can influence their design decisions when practicing.*

Ethics are principle-based reference points whereas morals are individually held beliefs based on commonly acceptable behaviours in how people conduct themselves in relationships and society. As a practitioner engaging human systems, it is important to be aware of our own moralistic motivators in relation to the ethics of standards of good practice and in correlation with the ethics and culture of the human system we are entering.

In the absence of this recognition, a practitioner may likely default to exclusively referencing their moral standards. The risk is having a design that does not fit the people, their current circumstances, culture, and that matches where they are ready to go next.