Taking a co-design workshop online

Chapter 14

Taking our interactive co-design workshop online

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Liberty is an independent civil liberties organisation which was founded in 1934 and is currently the largest in the UK. They came to us with a challenge: to identify how information design might help to make their web-based legal information and advice more accessible, useful, and understandable. In this chapter we explain how we are responding to that challenge by taking a user-centered approach.

We focus on a preliminary workshop. We share our approach to planning the workshop and the materials generated; and the tools used to help those new to using co-design methods in a legal capacity. The project is still ongoing at the time of writing, so we share our plans for the outcomes of the workshop and the future direction of the project; and we place special emphasis on the adaptations we have made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legal information at Liberty

Liberty use a variety of methods to champion anyone whose rights come under threat, from Gypsy and Traveller communities to Government whistle-blowers. Here we focus on two ways that Liberty provide information. Firstly, they produce a series of highly accessible text-based online advice guides, provided as web pages on their website, which Liberty draft with the occasional assistance of lawyers at Reed Smith and a professional copywriter. The guides traditionally focus on the topics of police, protest, and privacy rights. For example, when in 2020-2021 the state sought to use a series of rapidly changing regulations to control the behaviour of the population in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Liberty responded with guides on topics such as ‘What powers do the police have under the Coronavirus Act 2020?’ and ‘What if I’m arrested at a protest during the coronavirus lockdown?’. Secondly, Liberty provide responses to direct queries made by

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the public. Liberty's Advice and Information team receives queries from the public via a webform, which collects necessary contact details, a description of their query, whether there is a deadline, and whether they are represented by a lawyer. Liberty aim to respond within six weeks, a target which gives an indication of the complexity, range and volume of queries that they receive. For example, in 2020, Liberty received 2,135 queries. They also receive a large number of requests for legal representation or help with legal topics that Liberty cannot assist with, this can amount to fewer than 20% of all enquiries being provided with information and advice.

Together with Liberty we decided to focus on two of their core topic areas of expertise: police complaints and stop and search. We also decided to focus on a third area, immigration, specifically because it is a topic on which Liberty do not offer advice, instead they signpost to other advice services. This afforded us the opportunity to reflect on how the design of information within Liberty's online guides could equip the public with more relevant and timely advice, and signpost them to relevant external information. It is hoped that improvements could lead to Liberty receiving fewer queries, meaning Liberty advisors can spend more time on complex queries less likely to be resolved by written information alone.

A user-centered design approach

We take a user-centered design approach that focusses on users and their needs throughout each phase of the design process. We loosely base our process on the Double Diamond model[1] that includes a 'challenge', and then iterative phases of discovery, definition, development, and finally delivery of an outcome (Figure 14.1). In this first phase of the design process we look to *understand* or *discover* the user—in this case, those who go to the Liberty website for help; and then the next phase is to *define* the problem we are trying to solve—in this case, how might we make law within the Liberty materials more understandable? As the Double Diamond illustrates, this involves both divergent and convergent thinking.

[Figure 14.1: A diagram of our design process loosely based on the Double Diamond model. This chapter focusses on the 'kick-off workshop' and 'workshop evaluation' phases of the project.]

Within this iterative process we organise co-design activities, whereby solutions evolve from collaboration among stakeholders. Using co-design activities can be found across

research projects focussed on improving information provided to the public.[2] Noël et al. summarise a co-design process as 'a process of engagement, participation and collaboration'[3] and it is in this spirit that we approach the organisation of our co-design activities for this project.

Co-design activities tend to involve all stakeholders who are involved with the final outcome of a project from those who design a product to the end-users. We recognise that early involvement of users in identifying problems and priorities is considered an 'active' involvement of users[4]; the importance of 'elevating lived experience' and seeing those users as 'trustworthy and competent interpreters of their own lives'[5] is crucial. Indeed, research using co-design methods emphasise a perspective of 'designing with' users who are active partners in a project.[6]

Ideally, we would have included some of Liberty's clients in the first workshop; however, two factors limited this. Firstly, Liberty differ from many other front-facing legal advice agencies in the access to justice sector, in that there is rarely a recurrent relationship with clients. A question is asked by a client, Liberty may or may not be able to assist (depending on the area of law) and a response will be provided accordingly. However, even when they can provide some legal advice in response to an inquirer, this will be provided on a one-off basis and usually that client will go onto their next steps elsewhere. Secondly, given the civil liberties focus of Liberty's enquiries, there is also a risk that unlike the majority of the population, people seeking Liberty's advice often feel limited in how they can interact with services – even those that are there to offer independent help. For example, someone seeking immigration information may not be comfortable identifying themselves within a group setting. Likewise, Liberty staff are aware that some clients may have mental health concerns. This is sometimes the case with queries around surveillance and intrusion by the state.

These factors led us to involve empathic design for our first kick-off co-design workshop, whereby Liberty staff who encounter clients seeking human rights information act as 'user researchers'.[7] In this way Liberty staff provide insights from their experiences informing and advising the public on these topics. Insights such as how people say they are feeling or the difficulties they face. These insights informed the next phases of our project whereby we plan ro organise co-design workshops with end-users during the 'define' and 'develop' phases of our project. The approach for our kick-off workshop acknowledges that using co-design methods with users who might have concerns about interacting with

services as described above might be ethically inappropriate[8], and indeed might be the best option where access to end-users is limited. This approach – combining activities that involve both empathic design and co-design methods with users 'expert(s) of his/her experience'[9] – advocates a flexible approach to project design whereby resources and contexts may impact plans.

The workshop

The main aim of the kick-off workshop was to gather insights that would shape the next steps of our project. It was anticipated that these would include considering a range of appropriate visual means for compiling, sharing, and presenting information to users to help inform them of their rights.

It was planned around established methods used in user-centered design: empathy maps, personas, and user journeys. These would help us gather valuable insights about users such as how information is sought, accessed and used when people confront a legal issue.

Empathy maps are a way of brainstorming how a particular group of people experience a problem. Workshop participants create a 'picture reflecting the thoughts, feelings and emotions about the problem'[10], giving a creative space for the team to focus on what the distinct group are saying, seeing, hearing and thinking. Using an empathy map within our workshop served as a great entry point for the Liberty team, many being new to the process of designing. We also believed the maps would form a rich resource to feed into persona creation: the next method used.

Personas are 'archetypal individuals'[11] constructed during a design process. The act of forming these characters and their narrative is extremely valuable in itself, but then using them within the workshop enabled stakeholders to reflect on how they would likely perceive different experiences and subsequently act. Personas can also be a powerful tool for engaging stakeholders outside of the design process; in the 'Design the Law Nepal' project, Emily worked with colleagues Mara Malagodi and Sabrina Germain alongside the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD)[12], using design to ensure that legal practitioners did not lose sight of the challenges existing for citizens around their reproductive rights. You can see some of the personas created in the 'Design the Law Nepal' workshops for this project at tl;dr[13], the less textual legal gallery.

Journey maps were the final method used in our kick-off workshop, and they followed on from the personas. Here we asked participants to adopt one of the personas and create a journey map, showing how a person might navigate from A (the point at which the legal problem arises) to B (where they reach a conclusion/possible solution), with all the steps in between.

These activities are extremely interactive; normally taking place via the use of copious pieces of paper, sticky notes, pens and with walls to stick large pieces of paper on in order to collaborate. However, in 2020 Covid-19 put a stop to this tangible experience. So, we headed online. But how?

Adapting to online

In a co-design workshop format, the emphasis is very much on collaboration: everyone in the room (whether physical or virtual breakout) is invited to dig deep within experiences to gain an understanding of user needs, before considering the kind of information materials that might support these needs. Co-design workshops are generally buzzy places to be – lots of ideas flying around and participants sharing thoughts both orally and in scribbles on paper or post-it notes.

In order adapt this process from a physical to a virtual space, we needed the following:

- online spaces for breakout groups
- a large area on screen that worked like a physical wall
- digital sticky notes
- ways to collaborate together to develop empathy maps, personas, and journey maps

How did we do it?

Our breakout groups became Zoom groups

We used the Zoom platform because of the breakout room facility. We needed to split our Liberty colleagues into three groups in order to enable each group to focus on one context each (immigration, stop and search, police complaints), and to be in small enough groups to get the most out of the activities we had devised for them.

Our physical wall became a Padlet Wall and sticky notes became digital Padlet posts

The functionality of sticky notes was a must-have. We looked at a number of options for this, (including Miro and Invision) but in the end went for the simplicity of Padlet's posts functionality. We did not want participants to feel swamped by a big product with lots of extra features. Padlet offers online 'walls' where groups can easily post their contributions on digital posts (that look like sticky notes) and then move them about on screen. It is not just textual either; participants can post images, links, videos, documents and even voice recordings. The 'walls' come in different kinds to suit the activity you have planned. A *Canvas* allows you to post anywhere and drag posts into your own arrangement, whereas the standard *Wall* format stacks content in a brick-like layout. There are *Maps* and *Timeline* options and then *Shelf*, *Stream* and *Grid*, which all order content slightly differently again. We'll talk about our choice of walls below.

Our empathy map became a Padlet Canvas

The *Canvas* format on Padlet allows participants complete freedom to move digital posts around; we wanted them to be able to add in their thoughts freely, organising them around the four categories we had set: 'think and feel', 'seeing', 'hearing' and 'say and do'.

Pontis[14] lists examples of questions for each of the categories to help prompt ideas. For *think and feel,* in our workshop participants would be defining what people might be thinking, how they feel and how they deal with those feelings. For *seeing*, the prompt might be what did the person see or notice? What were they watching or reading? For *hearing* it is determining what they might hear from others (friends, family, colleagues) and for *say and do*, what people might say, to the extent of specific phrases, expressions being of interest. Additionally they would map what people do, what they enjoy doing, what behaviours might be evident whilst experiencing such circumstances.

We asked Liberty staff to consider these four categories in terms of their experiences talking with people who were facing either stop and search, immigration, or a police complaints issue, and to assign each thought to one of these contexts. Some thoughts applied to all three. The Liberty staff really threw themselves into this, getting into the mindset of their users. You can see a sample of posts in Table 1 below.

	Think and feel	**Seeing**	**Hearing**	**Say and Do**
Stop and search	Embarrassed Angry Violated	The police are racist They just want an excuse to criminalise my community	This just happens	Trying to find a way to stop unfair treatment Don't know where else to turn
Immigration	Hopeless Confused Thought we'd be safe here	They don't want me in the UK If I do anything wrong I'll be deported	You don't belong Nothing is certain	Avoid the authorities Don't know who to trust
Police complaints	Victimised Frustration Outraged	The police can't protect me	Don't bother They put hoops for you to jump through, hoping you'll get bored of trying…	Want justice for the wrong they have experienced No point reporting, police won't do anything

Table 14.1: Selected contributions to the empathy map:

Our Personas became Padlet Shelves

The *Shelf* format on Padlet organises content into columns, enabling participants to organise content in a structured way. This was useful for our kick-off workshop to enable participants to organise their thoughts under key headings associated with developing a persona.[15] Figure 14.2 illustrates a *Shelf* developed for the context of immigration. One *Shelf* was set up for each context and participants were grouped into three, with each group completing a Persona for their assigned context.

[Figure 14.2: Extract from Persona seeking immigration information and advice. The boxes at the top indicate the headings underneath which are responses from the workshop participants.]

Our journey maps became Padlet Timelines

As with the personas above, our participants worked within a context. They had to plot out a likely path that the persona (created on their Padlet Shelf) might take within their given context – essentially taking them from the moment they start to encounter difficulties right through to the end result. The *Timeline* wall provided a format whereby each step along this 'user journey' is plotted out as a digital post – steps can represent moments such as an event, an action taken or contact with a person or organisation. Pontis categorises these as touchpoints, pain points and magic points, where the latter are 'parts of an experience or design that work well for a persona'[16]. In Figure 14.3 you can see an extract from the journey map developed by the team working with the immigration persona. We can see lots of touchpoints (the individual talking to friends, a family support worker, an immigration lawyer…), as well as some pain points (an ineffective lawyer, money wasted…). There is potentially a magic point where Liberty's referral information on other organisations have given some hope and positive direction.

[Figure 14.3: Extract of journey map for someone seeking immigration information and advice. Participants add key touch points along the *Timeline*.]

Evaluation

After the kick-off workshop we evaluated the workshop insights interpreting this qualitative data that had been generated by Liberty staff. Throughout this 'workshop evaluation' phase (Figure 14.1) we:

- evaluated the insights gathered in the empathy map, personas, and journey maps
- reviewed existing Liberty advice materials
- developed possible routes to take the project forward

The two of us collaborated online using Invision. The functionality and flexibility of organising content that InVision provides, although deemed less suitable for a workshop, was suitable for our online collaboration of organising and interpreting workshop insights The platform offers collaborators an 'endless digital whiteboard' where content (digital sticky notes etc.) can be organised and re-arranged freely. This suited our method of interpreting the data that firstly took the form of rearranging the empathy map responses into themes (this is akin to using affinity diagrams).[17]. From the evaluation of the empathy map, two kinds of statements really stood out and enabled us to pinpoint recommendations at an early stage and develop themes.

'No-one understands what I'm going through…'

These kinds of statements made us realise how important it was to strip away the layers involved with accessing information, potentially connecting a person who has already experienced a particular situation with the person going through it now. Potential solutons to this could be through producing scenario-based stories using text and image. It was clear that any images we incorporated into the information materials had to portray emotion. We also realised how central to our development that information displayed acknowledgement, and indeed validation, of how difficult situations might be for people experiencing the three situations. Consequently, information would need to offer a combination of empathy, straightforward action and signposting.

'[Feelings of]… frustration, desperation, mistrust…'

What these kinds of statement signified was a need for materials to generate a feeling of safety and reassurance. There has to be a real focus on ensuring that users feel there is a human behind the information given, even though it is presented through text and image rather than through one-to-one conversation. For now we are yet to decide how this might be achieved but early thoughts include ideas such as hand-drawn illustrations being a more successful format than computer generated imagery, potentially indicating more care had been taken over the portrayal of actors within any given situation. Outcomes such as these would need to be considered and co-designed with end-users.

We then interpreted the personas and journey maps for each context. Many responses in these activities mapped on to the statements above, strengthening the sense that these are key aspects to address in our outcomes. For the personas and journey maps we scanned the responses for aspects that indicated challenges or issues that the information materials might need to address. For example, a pain point in the persona for someone seeking immigration might be 'fear of authorities', which indicates that the language on a website needs to be mindful of using words such as 'authority' (see the Propositions sections below for overviews of our evaluation of each context).

From all three activities in the workshop, three themes emerged that seemed crucial when considering our strategy for the information materials we would develop:

- connecting experiences
- providing empathy
- showing the human behind the information

Throughout our 'workshop evaluation' phase (see Figure 14.1) we kept these three themes in mind, as well as the importance of using key design principles and solutions such as:

- clear signposting to information
- use of explainers for official terms
- use of plain language

For each context we generated propositions about the kinds of information materials, and ways of presenting the information, that might address the information seeking circumstances raised in the workshop. These are explored in the following sections.

Propositions for stop and search information

Findings from the activities in this first workshop around the stop and search context were varied. Key points that came through included the following:

'On the spot' or in-transit information > the information needed would most likely arise shortly after the stop and search procedure had been carried out, with the person on foot, in a car, or on public transport. Thinking about the materials we will develop, this implies that any information solution needs to be easily accessible from a mobile device.

Pain points might vary > despite the observation above regarding the need for urgent 'at-the-time' information, we acknowledged that there will be additional needs for access to more detailed content after the stop and search event, perhaps when discussing the events with family and friends. There would be different priorities in these materials; the first scenario needing practical explainers that are easily understood when faced with a stop and search event, the second has more scope for aspects such as long-term consequences and links to police complaints procedure or support groups.

People might not know others who have gone through a stop and search experience > there may be a need for seeing other people's experiences. The use of stories from those who have experienced stop and search may help connect experiences and see different sides to a situation.

Feelings > these are likely to be varied; covering the full spectrum from embarrassment to anger and outrage.

Racism > Views emerged that there could be a feeling of inevitability to being stopped if you fitted a particular profile, and that the police are looking for an excuse to criminalise the black community. It follows that many may want to find a way to counteract unjust treatment, in which case strong signposting to the police complaints process would be essential.

Media coverage > linked to the issue above would be the dominance of press in the media on the topic of stop and search. We wonder if there is a need for clearer signposting to proven facts and statistics from organisations like StopWatch[18].

From these insights, potential areas to develop could be information materials that:

- support 'it's happening' (on the spot) scenario;
- support 'it's happened' (after the stop and search) event;
- include 'stories' from lived experiences.

Additionally, we could plan workshops to co-design the above materials with community groups who support young people who have or might experience stop and search.

Propositions for immigration information

As we noted above, one of the crucial aspects of the information that needs to delivered by Liberty, is when the organisation is unable to help. This is why we have included

immigration as one of the three areas to be covered; Liberty cannot help with immigration enquiries, they can only signpost. We needed to think carefully about how we would set the user's expectations – as Downe says in their insightful book about service design, '…knowing what to expect helps people to plan and take control of their situation. It gives them power…'[19]. The existing information guide that Liberty provide signposts users to other organisations who may be better placed to help them, but the language feels negative because there are no explanations for *why* Liberty can not help. It feels like a brush-off. Liberty do not want their users to feel fobbed off, and nor do they want to cause extra anxiety. Here are our more detailed reflections from the workshop insights:

Digital exclusion > users in this category are more likely to have limited access to digital platforms, which prioritises the need for reduced complexity in both the technical solution.

Information overload > people needing help around immigration may be undergoing quite high levels of stress and consequently, exhaustion. This, combined with the issues around the complexity of information and the fact that the immigration rules change frequently, is likely to make users feel they are drowning in information. To help with this, it is important to be clear at the beginning of any information that Liberty will be signposting a person to another organisation. Yet, it seems important to integrate empathy into Liberty's information resource, acknowledging difficult situations, before going on to signpost to other organisations specialising in this area.

Language > in the current information provided by Liberty there is a reference to 'authorities' when referring on clients to other organisations. This kind of language may well scare such users off, who are likely to be fearful of authorities (as identified in the empathy map). We will need to be alert to the impact of certain vocabulary on this group, and use alternatives e.g. 'not-for-profit organisations', and give explainers of such terms where needed.

Feelings > again, these are likely to be diverse but there could certainly be feelings of uncertainty, fear for themselves and their families, of isolation, not-belonging, and the risk of deportation. They might be hearing the negative experiences of those around them and potentially hearing rumours and not knowing what to believe. We feel any future materials could acknowledge these emotions, again adding empathy to the information provided.

Extra materials > through the workshop we learned that Liberty send out a standard response and referral pack to all immigration enquiries. We hadn't seen this pack before

so this would be a vital follow-up post-workshop in order to ensure that any online solution also connected to this information and vice versa.

From these insights, potential areas to develop are:

- A review of immigration advice on Liberty web pages, in the referral pack, and the email that is sent to clients to establish where language needs to be reviewed
- Develop explainers where needed
- Development of images (possibly hand-drawn illustrations) that could integrate empathy and acknowledgement and complement existing text.

To achieve the work above we hope to work with a community group, who work with asylum seekers, and organise a co-design workshop with potential users and Liberty staff, to co-design materials.

Propositions for police complaints information

The main insights that we interpreted from the workshop relating to police complaints contexts were how people might be feeling when making a police complaint and the need for validation.

Feelings > for those seeking to pursue a complaint against the police, it is no surprise that feelings of outrage, victimisation and violation dominated throughout the insights from Liberty staff. A sense that clients may feel defensive and that they are victims of unjust or unfair treatment also came through in the workshop. The persona developed in the workshop was determined to try every angle to get justice, despite feeling the police were 'out to get me'. These insights from Liberty staff's experience of advising their clients imply much attention needs to be paid within the information solution to demonstrating how people can vocalise their points in the process, as well as incorporating information about why perceived 'hoops' are in place. There will be a need for greater transparency and potentially a place for scenarios to be used to clarify what actions amount to successful police complaints.

Acknowledgement and outcome > this seems key. There is an argument for the focus to be shifted and to helping others uphold their rights by making complaints, such as showing how it can ensure patterns of discriminatory policing are identified. This would imply individuals are carrying out a service to their communities by registering a

complaint, not just raising an individual grievance. We acknowledge that further understanding of the circumstances around police complaints is needed before recommendations for additional information and advice are possible. This will certainly be incorporated into a future workshop.

New information materials to develop include:

- Develop a visual explainer, such as a flow chart, to explain the police complaints process, providing more transparency on what happens throughout the process
- Include in the visual explainer how complaints are used after it has been closed.

Users who might make a police complaint might not be represented by a community group, such as stop and search or immigration contexts. Consequently, we plan to develop prototypes of a visual explainer, and then evaluate and co-design changes to these prototypes in a workshop with members of the public. We plan to work with Liberty to organise appropriate demographics of potential end users to co-design with.

Next steps

As we have acknowledged, our initial co-design workshop did not include end users. An aim of our next phase of the project involves co-design workshops with end users where we co-design and evaluate prototypes of information materials. We plan to approach community-led groups who work with people who are seeking immigration information or those who have experienced stop and search situations, and work with Liberty to organise appropriate demographics to evaluate information materials for police complaints contexts. We have a team of undergraduate graphic communication design students working with us to work on the following:

1. Development of new stop and search information materials
2. A review and development of existing online immigration materials
3. Development of a visual explainer for the police complaints process

In our future co-design workshops we plan for all participants to be co-designers: the end-users; Liberty staff; student designers; trained designers; and workshop facilitators. Whether these workshops are in person, or using our new online set-up, we are hoping to

provide useful information materials that can be easily accessed and used by the public.

Wish us luck!

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[1] Design Council, 'What is the framework for innovation?' (Design Council, 18 March 2015) www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/what-framework-innovation-design-councils-evolved-double-diamond accessed 13 July 2021

[2] Examples of research involving co-design activities include: Sue Walker, Manula Halai, Rachel Warner and Josefina Brova, 'Beat Bad Microbes: Raising public awareness of antibiotic resistance in Rwanda' 26:1 *Information Design Journal*; Mike Zender, William B. Brinkman, and Lea E. Widdice, 'Design + medical collaboration' in Alison Black, Paul Luna, Ole Lund, and Sue Walker (eds), *Information design research and practice* (Routledge 2017) 655–668

[3] Guillermina Noël, Thea Luig, Melanie Heatherington, and Denise Campbell-Scherer, 'Developing tools to support patients and healthcare providers when in conversation about obesity' (2018) 24:2 *Information Design Journal*, 134

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[5] Kelly Ann McKercher, *Beyond Sticky Notes. CoDesign for Real: Mindsets, Methods and Movements* (2020) 46

[6] Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, 'Probes, toolkits and prototypes: three approaches to making in codesigning' (2014) 10:1 *CoDesign*, 11

[7] Wina Smeenk, Janienke Stum and Berry Eggen, 'Empathic handover: how would you feel? Handing over dementia experiences and feelings in empathic co-design' (2018) 14:4 *CoDesign*, 261

[8] For more insight into why researching with marginalised groups, or those living with delicate circumstances may require an empathic approach, see Wina Smeenk, Janienke Stum and Berry Eggen, 'Empathic handover: how would you feel? Handing over dementia experiences and feelings in empathic co-design' (2018) 14:4 *CoDesign*, 260

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[10] Sheila Pontis, *Making sense of Field Research: A practical guide for information designers* (Routledge 2019) 154

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[13] Tl;dr https://tldr.legal/home.html

[14] Pontis, 156

[15] Sheila Pontis, *Making sense of field research: a practical guide for information designers* (Routledge 2019) 161

[16] Sheila Pontis, *Making sense of field research: a practical guide for information designers* (Routledge 2019) 166

[17] Sheila Pontis, *Making sense of field research: a practical guide for information designers* (Routledge 2019) 151

[18] StopWatch https://www.stop-watch.org/

[19] Lou Downe, *Good services: How to design services that work* (BIS Publishers 2020) 69