A Field Guide for People Centric Practices

Giles Lane

This booklet describes some principles for 'People-Centred Practices' – discussing tools and frameworks for designing and implementing projects from a people-centred perspective. It looks at practical methods for engaging people to understand their needs, desires, capacities and capabilities as a basis for developing projects and platforms that reflect ethical values and build trust and confidence in those who use or are affected by them.

There are a number of different terms for this approach – such as *user centred design* or *human centred design*. I prefer to think of this as a 'people centred practice' – not just a design pattern but something that can be adopted by anyone in any walk of life. It has much in common with other approaches such as the Whole Systems (Holistic) Approach, Design Thinking, Systems Thinking and Participatory Design etc. To my mind, it encompasses not just people, but the whole environment and ecosystems necessary for life.

Nolan Principles

These were adopted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 1995 and apply to all public office holders in the UK. I think they offer a useful ethical framework that is equally applicable to people centred practices:

1. Selflessness
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

2. Integrity
Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity
Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability
Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness
Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty
Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership
Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

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Often such approaches are conflated with ethics – and talk of **ethical design**. But what does that really mean?

Ethics – "Moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity." or " The moral correctness of specified conduct."(OED)

Morals – "Concerned with the principles of right and wrong behaviour."
and "Concerned with or derived from the code of behaviour that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society."
and "Holding or manifesting high principles for proper conduct." (OED)

Ethics has become a powerful trope in modern society, but there is often a danger that its principles – when applied to specific situations – become rigid and inflexible when they are *operationalised* as procedures for systems or institutions. At this point they can come to resemble checklists for mitigating liability.

At the heart of a people centred practice are *empathy*, *common sense*, *trust* and *agency*.

Empathy for others – for how they experience the world, not how you see it or would like it to be seen.

Common sense – being open and fluid in your processes and decision-making, not hide-bound to rules and procedures that have been operationalised for institutions or large systems.

Trust – building trust in others, demonstrating your trustworthiness and trusting yourself.

Agency – respecting the autonomy and agency of others to act for themselves.

Other critical factors are **Time, Environment**, **Context** and **Consequence**.

- **Learn** the lessons of experience over
  them
  your work and actions have affected
- **Respect** the reflections of others on how
- **Take Time** to reflect on your work
  affected by your work
  and other forms of life which may be
  from your actions: for people, planet
- **Consider** what consequences could arise
  trust in them through your actions
- **Trust** what others offer you and inspire
  and their experiences
- **Respond** to their concerns, their insights
  experiences and not just your own
- **Listen** to others, empathise with their

Some Principles for People Centred Practice:

Notes

I prefer to think in terms of ***ethos*** – this is not just your values but the ways in which which you go about your everyday life. Your ethos is the combination of your character, behaviour and the fundamental values that you ascribe to. It isn't just a code that you follow, but the way you follow it and how that is made manifest by your actions.

Ethos – "ethos denotes the disposition, character, or fundamental values particular to a specific person, people, corporation, culture, or movement."

My perspective is that it is worth defining and articulating your own ethos, but also the ethos of the group you belong to – whether that is a community of professionals, a corporation or other type of institution. This then becomes a guide for how to enact ethics in actual practice. Like common sense, it must be fluid and dynamic – not simply a check list or procedure to be run through.

Principles for Building Trust

I have adapted these from Baroness Onora O'Neill's 2002 BBC Reith Lectures:

Consider Wider Impacts
What are the risk factors for harms or increasing inequalities? How might systemic bias influence your decisions or be amplified by your solutions?

Lead with Purpose & Benefit
Put *social purpose* first:
What are the trade-offs and harms to others? Who will benefit and who might lose out?

Openness
Demonstrate your workings and provide actual evidence. Be clear about your claims to trustworthiness through transparency and "full fact" disclosure.

Involve People
Use people centric practices – ask questions, seek out issues and concerns that need addressed.

Welcome Warnings
Seek out warnings of problems or harms. Listen to dissenting voices and reward people who bring problems to attention. Anticipate problems in advance and resolve them quickly and responsibly. Learn lessons.

Embrace Responsibility
Be open and honest. Communicate with *authenticity* and offer *appropriate* solutions to issues that arise. Avoid cultures of blame.

Duties & Rights
Baroness O'Neill also talks of duty being the flipside of rights:

- what duties do you have as a practitioner?
- how do they impinge on, or support, the rights of others?
- how would you define your duty of care to those you are engaging in your practice?
- does this demonstrate good governance?

Practical Tools

Proboscis Method Stack
Creative engagement tools & methods
https://bookleteer.com/book.html?id=2065

IDEO Design Kit
Methods for human centred design
http://www.designkit.org/

Mozilla Open Innovation Toolkit
https://toolkit.mozilla.org/methods/

Nesta DIY Toolkit
Tools for social innovation
https://diytoolkit.org/

OECD Observatory for Public Sector Innovation
Toolkit navigator
https://oecd-opsi.org/toolkit-navigator/

UK Government 7 Principles of Public Life
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life

drudgery of obligation to a status quo. For the sake of human spirit I think this is neither sustainable nor resilient in the long term.

Obligation
To whom do I have (mutual or reciprocal) obligations and what are the nature of those obligations? Will my actions demonstrate how I enact those obligations or, if I avoid them?

Responsibility
What are my responsibilities to those with whom I have relationships? How do I balance my needs and any impact my actions may have on them?

Culpability
Am I willing to accept the consequences of my actions? Am I willing to amend my behaviour in future to reflect any detrimental impact of my actions on others?

The Precautionary Principle & Duty of Care

The *precautionary principle* is a widely accepted (yet frequently ignored) application of common sense in the face of uncertainty. It is a framework that aims to avoid actions that could harm environmental or human health in the future. It has been adopted into the United Nation's World Charter for Nature (1982); the Montreal Protocol on Health (1987); the Rio Declaration (1992); the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Rio+20 (2012). In 2000 the European Commission issued a Communication adopting the precautionary principle and indicating guidelines for its use. As of 2006 it has been adopted as a "general principle of EU law".

The *Wingspread Consensus Statement* (1998) says, "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically."

A *duty of care* is a legal obligation which requires an individual, business or institution to adhere to a standard of reasonable care in preventing harm coming to others through their actions. Duty of care is often equated with the concept of the *social contract* – the implicit responsibilities of individuals towards others within society.

In the UK, the *Health & Safety Act* (1974) established extensive duties of care on employers and others – to conduct due diligence in mitigating any potential harm to employees or the public through their activities, services or products.

Both the precautionary principle and duty of care could be considered as fundamental concepts of an ethos of people centric practice. They are forward-looking, caring and situated approaches to devising solutions and causing change that seek to balance gains against costs. They offer particular remedy against biases which unbalance change that favours privilege over vulnerability.

My Personal Values

Passion
It is important to me to work with people who are passionate and care deeply about what they are doing, why they are doing it and how they go about it. It is the lifeblood of a team's commitment to a project, practice or idea and without it there is often no bigger vision or aspiration.

Intensity
I find that the most satisfying work is produced at a high level of intensity. Not constant, but following cycles and rhythms within the natural flow of a project's development and the broader patterns of life that surround us. The ebb and flow of such work cycles naturally generates, as well as consumes, energy – much as we find in physical exercise.

Intimacy
I judge the richness of my life not in the material things which surround me but in the nourishment I get from close acquaintance and shared bonds with other people. These connections are vital to feeling that I am part of the world and of various communities. It is through other people that I discover new things, new joys and pleasures; and share the things I value and cherish with others. Working together to define a project, identifying problems or issues to be addressed creates extraordinary opportunities for people to open up and create common feeling across social and cultural divides. Without some degree of intimacy with one's colleagues we are often mired in isolation and loneliness, even in the midst of others.

Pleasure
What kinds of pleasure will flow from this endeavour: the pleasures of association with old or new colleagues; of new skills acquired; of ideas challenged or evolved; of successful reception of outcomes and outputs; of new directions indicated or taken; of abstract thoughts made manifest and shared? Without some sense of pleasure in and from work it soon degenerates into a self-perpetuating