



the incubator hub by Healthy Teen Network

How to Identify Themes and Develop Insight Statements

A Tip Sheet for the Define Phase of Human-Centered Design

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The goal of the Define phase, as part of a human-centered design approach, is to articulate the challenge you want to address and to identify the oppressive systems and power structures that contribute to the challenge.

Synthesis / Identifying Themes

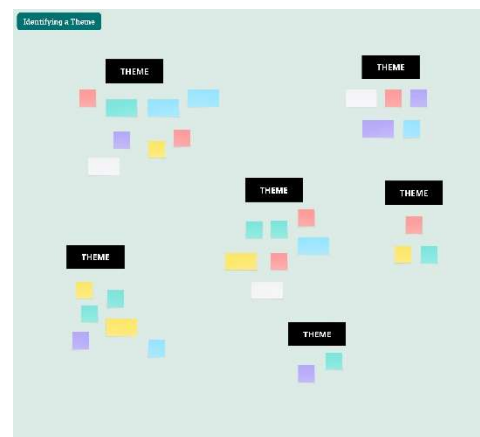
Synthesis is a key part of the Define phase. During the Empathize phase, teams have gathered information and conducted interviews. Synthesis is the process of organizing and analyzing this information to uncover patterns and connections that reveal meaningful insights about the people you are designing with or for. It's the process of understanding the raw data you've collected and organizing it into actionable ideas that will inform your design decisions.

Synthesis helps to uncover:

- Patterns + themes
- Who benefits + who is excluded
- Biases + assumptions
- Potential root causes
- Hypotheses to explore or test
- Insights on how to move forward

Colorful stickies represent observations from Empathize activities that are being clustered and organized.

The black stickies are labels that represent emerging themes or patterns.



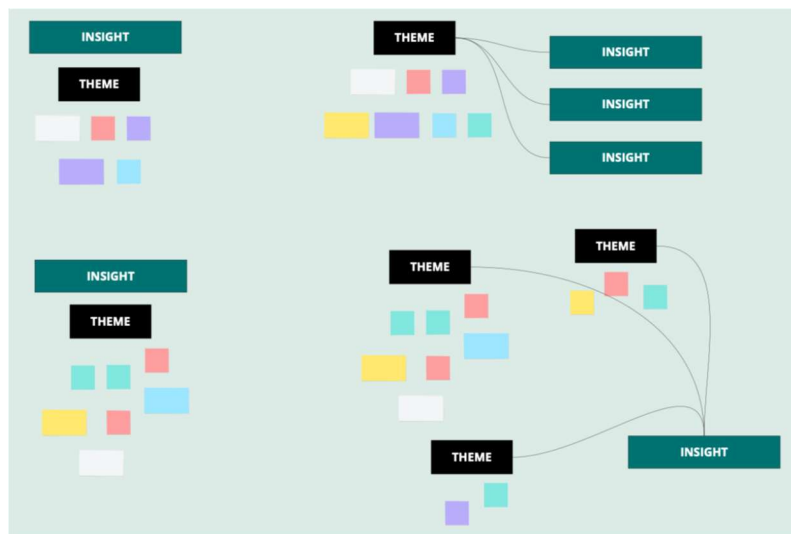
Insight Development

Human-centered design is all about understanding and collaborating with people. A crucial part of this process is insight development. It is when you connect the dots and uncover an “aha!” moment that has the potential to shape decisions and push ideas forward into reality.

What is an Insight?

An insight statement frames a deep understanding of people's behaviors, needs, or motivations. It bridges the gap between raw data, context, and actionable strategies.

Insights are more than just observations or data points. They're not just what you see on the surface, but what lies underneath. They uncover the 'why' behind what people do or feel. It's not just knowing what someone struggles with, but understanding why that struggle exists and how it impacts their lives. Insights are the bridges between piles of data—sticky notes, interview transcripts, survey responses—and actionable strategies that make a real difference in people's lives. Insights can help us to challenge conventional wisdom, translate stories into overarching truths, and help us frame challenges differently.



The image illustrates themes (in combination or pulled apart) laddering up to insights.



A Great Insight is:

1. Well-informed

It is informed by multiple data points—including secondary research, lived experience, and subject matter expertise.

2. Surprising

A great insight is surprising and challenges assumptions or reveals something that isn't immediately obvious. Surprising insights inspire fresh thinking and prevent reliance on outdated or incorrect beliefs.

3. Sticky

A great insight is sticky and memorable and resonates deeply with the audience. It is crafted in a way that makes it easy to recall and share with others. Sticky insights often evoke emotion, use vivid language, or tell a compelling story.

4. Actionable

A great insight is actionable and provides a clear direction for innovation. Does it help people understand why it matters? Does it capture a tension or a shift that needs to happen? Does it connect to project impact objectives and learning aims?

Constructing an Insight Statement

Healthy Teen Network has put together a “Mad Lib” to help structure insight statements into something more actionable. Insight statements are made up of:

- **Audience:** Who are you designing for? Be specific (e.g., young people, LGBTQ+ youth, parents, healthcare workers).
- **Action/behavior/feeling:** What did you observe, hear, or learn about their actions, behaviors, or feelings? Describe what they do, feel, or experience.
- **Aim, need, underlying reason/motivation:** Why do they act, behave, or feel this way? Get to the emotional or practical root cause.
- **Implication, obstacle, friction, or opportunity:** What does this mean for your design challenge? What opportunity does this reveal?



Insight Structure

_____ (audience) _____
_____ (action, behavior, feeling)
because _____ (aim, need,
motivation), but _____

(implication, obstacle, friction, or opportunity).

Example:

Young people _____ (audience) turn to social media for
health information _____ (action, behavior, feeling)
because it feels relatable and accessible _____ (aim, need,
motivation), but the lack of credible, engaging content from trusted
sources leaves them vulnerable to misinformation and unmet educational needs.

(implication, obstacle, friction, or opportunity).

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