Public Service Recognition Week 2019

Webinar Transcript – *Human-Centered Design 101* - May 9, 2019

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SLIDE 1:

Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us today. I'm Arianne Miller, Managing Director of The Lab at OPM, within the Center for Leadership Development, and I'll be presenting today's webinar, Human-Centered Design 101.

Our mission at the Center for Leadership Development is to develop visionary leaders to transform government. For over 50 years we have helped Government Agencies meet their workforce education and development needs through interagency classes, custom programs and online training solutions.

During Public service recognition week, we want to thank you for all that you do in service to our nation. Leadership skills, regardless of your position are more critical than ever. And we hope that you will gain useful insights into its presentation. A few administrative notes. First, there will be a Q&A session at the end of the webinar. So, please submit your questions using the box to the right of your screen. Second, there is a link for live captioning that can be found at the right of your screen. And lastly, the webinar will be recorded. In the recording will be emailed to registered participants later this week.

SLIDE 2:

As you know, the American people can count on the federal government every day. And the content we will cover today aligns with the President's Management Agenda's efforts to work more effectively and efficiently to serve all Americans. It also reflects initiatives found in the OPM strategic plan. We hope you'll be able to take information from this webinar back to your organization to help meet your mission demands and public expectations.

SLIDE 3:

I am going to start with a little bit of why we do what we do at the Lab – first with what I do, what I do in my role, and the ways that we work with different agencies to build capacity for human-centered design. Then a shared definition for human-centered design to give us a common understanding of what we are talking about here. Then, we'll talk a little bit about the "who" – "Who does this practice in government?"

SLIDE 4:

The Lab at OPM is a lab that practices and fosters innovation through human-centered design. Our goal is to teach human-centered design across the federal government and help deliver innovative solutions to address complex and cross-sector challenges. The lab has been around for seven years in some form or another, but we have evolved pretty continuously throughout the time. And we became a part of the center of development just over three years ago.

For those of you on the line who have met us at some point in the past, I think it is important to know that we have in fact changed quite a bit. I am excited to share with you kind of who we are now and the work we do. And for those of you who are new to the lab, we'll try to give you a sense of where we are and the complexity of the work we do, and where we're headed.

SLIDE 5:

Here is the “why.” The lab at OPM teaches human-centered design as s practice not because we think things should be pretty; not because we are focused on the aesthetic; but for very fundamental reasons important to our democracy. We believe that effective design of public service is in itself an essential public service. That the experience people have with the government, whether it is applying for an entitlement or a program –and the way that we engage with the public, in a moment of crisis or for just a little moment when services are delivered, are really, really critical. The government as an organization and a system understands the importance of creating a good experience, and how methods and tools and approaches can actually enable different behavior. That's why we do what we do. We believe fundamentally it is representative of the system to serve the American public, and it’s important for all of us to not only want to deliver better experiences, but to be equipped to do so.

So much of what we teach is founded on the idea that making something that is a good design “right,” in a broad sense. That doesn't just mean that we got the “right” idea and we made the “right thing.” But we identify the program that was missing, or that we made the form someone needed to reach a program. It has to be acceptable as well is available.

SLIDE 6:

So much of the work we are doing is identifying that we may not actually need something new, but we need the things there already working to be more accessible - better understood, easier to navigate, and a broader awareness. There are plenty of things that we also “need” that do need to be identified.

When we talk about something that is well-designed or has a good design, it is not just the thing itself that actually speaks to the need or want. But that it is also accessible to the people truly need it. It's important to note that so much of what we experience in what people think about government is the opposite of design. It’s not just the absence of something being available and accessible, but when something is not well-designed, it is not only unavailable or inaccessible, but it can also be really demoralizing.

This can happen when you experience something that really, obviously does not have your needs in mind, does not align with how you are trying to engage, that sends a signal that maybe the person who made that doesn't care too much about you. We can acknowledge that is not the intention. Good design is really important because we not only want to make things available and accessible, we want to ensure we are not sending a message to people that, as a system, we don't care about the needs. I have had the pleasure of meeting thousands of public servants in the years I have been doing this work, and every one of you has inspired me every day with your commitment to the work that you do. Good design is making sure that people have what they need – not only available, but accessible.

SLIDE 7:

The Lab as a program is capacity-building in nature. Everything that we do id to help build and foster the conditions for human-centered design in government, but also, the behavior - we're here to help bring in additional development, to bring in new skill sets. A lot of the work that we do is in the form of interdisciplinary teams. Our team members are working alongside our partners – they work in parallel with staff from the department or organization, sometimes in the early demonstration phase, sometimes in teaching.

We don't come in as a program and do “for” people. We do “with” them. That is an important part of our model. In order to solve any given challenge, the knowledge of the context is so critical, and we bring knowledge of design and design process into a combination of those two things. Being able to transfer skills and knowledgeability has the kind of long-term impact that we are really seeking to foster.

SLIDE 8:

In addition to agency partners, we also foster human-centered design through our open enrollment classes. That can be anywhere from 1 to 5 days. We are constantly developing new material based off that interdisciplinary work we are doing with our partners, as informed by what they seem to the think they need to know to carry the work forward. It is informed by the training our designers have received in their own practitioner lives in their own education. It is informed by what other design programs in the field are doing. But all of our classes are made and tailored for the federal audience. And they are made to be right-sized and experiential and interactive. Classes like mapping, and constructive critique, on how we get feedback. All of those things are we see as being really critical. We are also going to have a class on design for government, which is intended more for the audience of people have background in design, but are new to government space, and helping them understand the peculiarities of what it means to design in this space.

We teach like co-working and working through projects and interdisciplinary teams with our partners. We teach their classes. Certainly, many of our partnerships are a blend of both.

SLIDE 9:

A big part of our work is investment we make in the broader, federal community, and really trying to understand what some of the programs are? This is just one of several maps from one of many events where we try to capture a sense of all the different organizations and design innovation in the space, and identifying all the different domains in which they practice.

So much of our work is not about what we as a small team of about 20 people can do for the system. We are here to try to act as connective tissue to learn, with thousands and thousands of people who are also doing this work - to try to make that knowledge more available throughout the system. We work as direct deliverers of that support - enablers, but also as a program that is trying to make sure there is more information and knowledge available in that system.

SLIDE 10:

Human-centered design. What are we even saying here? Human-centered design is the discipline of navigating complex problems and creatively designing effective solutions to meet people's real needs, and real wants.

Whereas design in many spaces might be understood as more of the generation of novel ideas, or, new spaces, new possibilities, in the federal space in particular, design does not also focus very much on that part, but creatively designing effective solutions and ultimately implementing. When we think about how we practice human-centered design in the federal government space, we have a laser focus on the importance of implementation, and of understanding the various systems these designs will need to work their way through in order to become real for people - become available and become accessible. And that is where the knowledge of how you navigate into the space is a huge part of what we do and a core part of what we teach.

SLIDE 11:

It is important to note, along this idea, that while we are working alongside partners, we are also learning from them. We acknowledge that not all of us are designers, but all of us are designing

courses of action. If we had a more collective language, a broader sense of the same kind of method, then we would be able to work together more effectively toward the shared goals. Even as I think about my role as the managing director of the program, we have to acknowledge that we are asking everybody to be a part of delivering a better experience for the stakeholders. We also have to remember that we have to create a better experience for them, as employees.

I think an important note here, where sometimes you might hear the term user-centered design, we talked about human-centered design, because, really critically, we're thinking about and designing for and with all the people in that system. All the people, not just those delivering a service, and not just people who receive at the end - a very inclusive approach where we're constantly navigating a wide set of needs and figuring how to prioritize and sustain those.

SLIDE 12:

So, what does this mean for leadership? We know it can be very difficult in a system when there is so much complexity and so many moving parts. There's a grand scale to what we're all doing, so much of what we do when we teach design or methods is to help people manage ambiguity. We help people become comfortable with changing the idea of where you might think innovation is risk-seeking behavior, to think of it as a risk management.

Leaders also have to be able to understand their people in their unique in their own ways. We must look at the complexity of humans, what they bring to the table and learn how to manage and navigate to get the best out of them. A lot of the time design is talking to a lot of people about the things that they need and want, which is not always the same as designing the thing that they're asking for. So as leaders, we have to manage this idea of listening and taking in all sorts of different information. All sorts of energies. Things that people care quite a bit about, and still find a way to navigate that objectively in a way that is going to meet the biggest objective.

SLIDE 13:

So let's talk a bit about how conduct research and collect information. If you've come to our fundamental class in the last year or so in particular, we often hand out a worksheet that has 20 or more ways that people have expressed, "what is the design process?" This is just one we find is a helpful expression of the different phases of design work, the fact that it is iterative and cyclical in nature.

But there are different steps and elements to those phases. I think it's important to break a process down and to really think about where you are in that moment, whether that is seeking information in the discovery phase, and during outreach. It is critical to know that when we teach classes like a fundamentals of human-centered design, or design school, we are trying to make people very conscious of where are we in this process. This just gives you a sense that it doesn't just begin - it is not discovery, is not research, Is not just a good idea – it's the process of actually making, eventually measuring, and having a plan for signs of how you will know whether or not the plan that you have made is meeting the mark.

SLIDE 14:

There are many important parts of teaching design process at the foundational level, but problem framing, research, and prototype are the three that I'm going to go through now.

Problem framing is the most highly leveraged behavior that we can learn to improve. I learned this not just from working in government, but just from being a person, and working in a lot of different spaces, interacting with a lot of different people. As we think about problem framing, so often in life

experiences, they don't tell us what the problem is, the tell us the solution, and our job is to then solve for that.

We think about the experiences like students - the problems are in the book, and somewhere in that book are the answers, and our job is to go find them. Right? That's often how we learn. I think one of the biggest challenges in this phase as an adult, is people will often tell us they know what the problem is. But in fact, that is either not actually the problem at all, or it is only a small piece of a much bigger puzzle. And it's our responsibility as public servants to try to understand not just the problem that has been named, but the bigger one, and all the complexity of it so we can move forward.

SLIDE 15:

This is a tiny example. If someone says to you, "design a flower base for me." That is in fact, solution. That is an answer. I told you what it is. It conjures certain images in your mind. As a result, that really narrows the field of what you might make or draw or sketch, if I asked you to design a flower vase for me.

SLIDE 16:

It is very different if someone says, "here is what I am trying to accomplish. I'm trying to design a way to enjoy flowers in my home." Right? That's different. That has a different set of possibilities. It is both wider and narrower, because I clarified a very particular space "in my home." It also means it doesn't need to be a ceramic vessel. I just need a way to display flowers. Think about problem framing as a skill set about teaching different methods for crafting problems to invite a wider range of possibilities.

But every problem frame is also a prototype, because as you begin an effort, you are going to learn things that will also enable you to reimagine the problem you're solving. And you have to find a way to be adaptable to that and to get it to move forward.

SLIDE 17

If someone asked you a question like, "Can I accomplish extra? Can I do that?" There's a possibility of "no." And often, what they are asking for is big and complicated and a little bit scary, and means there's a much higher likelihood of "no." But that's because we're in a phase of trying to imagine just one possibility, instead of a whole lot of possibilities.

SLIDE 18:

How we frame that question is so important. When we have the word "how" at the beginning of the question, we are assuming and asserting that it is possible for something to be done. Some action that could be taken. We just have to figure out what it might be, right?

When we use the word "might," as opposed to "will" or "can," "might" invites open-ended possibilities. And it gives us a chance to think about a lot of different ways that could work, that might not work. In the early phases of generating, creating a problem frame that will generate new ideas, we want that to be open and inclusive.

And we use the word "we," as opposed to "me" or "you," because, "we" can do a lot more together than you are I can do alone.

SLIDE 19:

If we are structuring this question in a way to invite as many future possibilities, then "how might we" is an invitation for things that we could only do together, as opposed to things that you are I could do

alone. It might seem like a small difference, but what it does in terms of framing the opportunity for people who are participating in the design process is really powerful.

SLIDE 20:

Now, let's talk a little bit about design research. Having either already formed a question, or even figuring out the question we need to pursue, we use a variety of methodologies. Design research is intended to not replace quantitative information.

SLIDE 21:

This slide speaks to the difference between quantitative and qualitative, and not replacing the quantitative. This large data set. All the information we can collect either possibly or in different fashions about directly engaging with people. But it is information that is largely qualitative and complements the quantitative data that we want to understand things about how people experience something. How it makes them feel, what signals they're getting from it - as much as we want to know - how often are they successful in completing a task, how often are they able to find an answer they are seeking, how satisfied they are. We're doing design research. There are a few different approaches for looking for both quantitative and qualitative information, but we acknowledge those two things should be paired together.

SLIDE 22:

This is one way of thinking about what we are trying to do when we do this - a little bit poetic, but nice. We're looking to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. If I am going into an experience that I haven't had before, it's kind of foreign to me and I'm supposed to design for that person or that situation. I feel like I don't have a way to contribute. Because, I don't know a lot about them.

We often find that going to those situations with those individuals makes it analogous or relatable to us. Let me say making the strange familiar means actually going and engaging so we can start to make sense of the things that we do not know or can't relate to, while also learning about what we did not know about before.

The notion of making the familiar strange is one of the biggest challenges we see both in practice and in our teaching. Somebody might believe that simply because they have had an experience, because something is familiar to them, they already know everything about it. They already understand all there is to know about that situation, and therefore, they don't need to go into the research because they can tell you right now what they would do and what they would want because they already have this.

What we are doing in those situations is help them see that this thing they feel familiar with, that they have experienced at a certain way or have come to understand, has more than one way to understand it. There is more than one experience you might have with it, and in order to design, you will need that broader range of understanding.

We're kind of toggling between taking things that feel too distant from us to do anything about, and making them accessible for us as problem solvers. And also, questioning things that we think we already know and adding some more nuance to it. That is fundamentally because there is no single source of truth.

SLIDE 23:

This is a pretty famous quote from Margaret Mead. Anthropology is a field we draw from. Fundamentally what we know is that what people say and what they do, and what they would tell you that they do, are all different things.

Think about all of us when we talk to our doctor at our annual physical, what we disclosed about our choices around food and exercise and sleep and all that. Given the scale of the federal system, as public servants we are too often is often put in a position to make decisions about what we think people do based off the last time we had a chance to go out and have an experience. Maybe it has been too long or never. When we are designing, we have to take all the different information and bring it together in ways that we had not in fact designed, and feature those pieces as part of the puzzle.

SLIDE 24:

These are example images of how we often do this work. It's actually going and seeing people in their environment and how they interact with the system, or how they go about their work and try to collect information. We go through experiences with them and actually do something that they might be doing to see what it feels like. What is the experience? What is something that I am noticing that they forgot to tell me? Because again, it is familiar to them. We are standing by but also engaging in an interview.

SLIDE 25:

Last but not least, having, taking the time to really explore the problem itself, having taken the time to engage with our stakeholders, with the environment, with the thing we might be need to make, and trying to make sense of all is through prototyping.

Prototyping is not just about making something to test the functionality. It is also a way of making to learn more about what a person might want to do or might need. Prototyping is an important behavior, especially in the system as big as ours. Where it is really important is to test ideas, or a notion or idea about how things might work first, rather than spend millions or billions of dollars.

SLIDE 26:

In fact, we test and find out what else we can learn. We make small versions - pieces of that idea, and then, people interact with them. What you also do when you make a prototype is not just test whether or not it might work, but actually using it as a way to increase collaboration and get people to know each other and work together in new ways.

SLIDE 27:

It's also a way to make a concept more accessible and available, because it puts it in people's hands. If I can interact with them in order to test it earlier in the process, it creates a great opportunity for them to help you when you get implementation - help you identify not only the right way to get that out to the world for its original purpose, but maybe other places that could also be useful to people. It could have many forms of value, and we help people figure out "what does this really mean if I'm making a new industrial product?"

SLIDE 28:

When we talk about prototypes, we want to emphasize that it's not just "physical" things - it can be experiences, services, interactions, as well as digital products. The last note not just "does it work," but also, can it be measurable. I also need a way of understanding if it's meeting the intended purpose.

Prototyping, design research, and problem framing. Each of those are behaviors and tools that we teach, as well as things that we practice alongside our partners as a way teach and build this methodology in the federal system.

SLIDE 29:

I'd also like to highlight our last webinar for this week.

SLIDE 30:

On that note, I want thank you all for your time and attention, and for having the chance to share with you. I hope it was helpful, and that we will hear from some of you at the Lab at OPM in one of our classes. Have a wonderful day.