

Human Centered Design at Hartford Public Library

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Last October Library CEO Bridget Quinn-Carey sent four HPL managers to Chicago to attend a conference on Human Centered Design.

We learned a great deal but most importantly the resounding message was libraries have evolved into more than a building that places books on shelves. This conference reminded me of the awesome outreach Hartford Public Library has provided for many years.

Libraries are redefining themselves as places that are specifically designed to accommodate the needs of the customers in an intentional way.

This concept is called Human Centered Design. It is a creative approach to problem solving in real time for real people. The process involves designing public library space to suit the needs of the people.

This process allows creative ideas to flow from both staff and the public. It is a guaranteed way to build empathy for all people and improve patron service delivery as well.



Human-centered design consists of three phases: Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation.

Phase I Inspiration:

Staff develops a relationship with customers to understand what their specific needs are. This usually happens during the workday from open until closing. Other interactions like checking materials in or out for the patron

or helping to locate materials can spark up a conversation to improve our services.

Phase II Ideation:

The feedback from staff and patrons is critical. This is how a prototype for a new service is developed.

Many ideas are generated during this process. This is important because it allows the voice of the patron to be heard. This ultimately will determine how services can be improved or provided by the library staff.

Phase III Implementation:

During this phase, the ideas come to life. The success of the service depends on how the service is introduced to the public and how well they react to it. This helps the library to test ideas and resources in an inexpensive way. It also helps the patrons to consistently advocate for new and improved library services.

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One year after our trip to Chicago Public Library, HPL embarked on Human Centered Design by redesigning the Central Library.

We took a huge step and removed the gigantic service desk and redesigned the main floor.

HPL staff now use portable computer terminals that can be used on the public service floor to assist patrons.

We balanced the way our space would be used by carefully creating floor plans that were reviewed and tweaked by several departments. Relocating the Job and Career Service area, provided space for the public copier, fax machine and scanner to be accessible to the public.

Furniture was placed near the windows for readers to enjoy natural light. Tables were placed in the public space for chess and checkers games to be used by the public.

The success of our new design was confirmed when HPL collaborated with Chicago Public Library and hosted a Human Centered Design Workshop in Hartford in October.

Library colleagues on a national level experienced a successful example of Human Centered Design in “A Place Like No Other”, Hartford Public Library.