



UX eats culture for dinner

Andy Priestner, Chair, UX in Libraries





When we talk about ‘organisational culture’ – what do we mean/think of?

Hopefully: shared values, belief systems, supportive colleagues, morale

Or: all the stuff that stops change and innovation, the prevention of new ideas, and the combined forces of procedure, bureaucracy, closed minds, a lack of opportunity



‘Culture eats strategy for breakfast’

Peter Drucker (2006)

The most frequently repeated quote at our last conference (referenced by our keynote Anneli Friberg among others).

Message: Whatever UX strategies you might have, they are likely to be defeated or at the very least seriously challenged by the culture of your organisation.





Good news...

While culture might eat strategy for breakfast, I'm pretty certain that UX can eat culture for dinner...

You may lose a little confidence in my metaphor when I tell you that when I say 'UX can eat culture for dinner' I really mean:

UX can take culture out for dinner, show it a good time, and make it a much better person by the end of the evening.





Culture can be influenced

I'm not just playing with words in order to secure a snappy title for my opening address.

I firmly believe that by employing UX approaches, especially UX Design, we can actively shape and transform culture.

Culture is not constant, its ever-changing and it can be influenced.

I'm going to tell you 3 stories of my experiences at 3 different institutions to illustrate my point.



Example One: Stockholm





‘Welcome’ to the Swedish Defence University...

Hired to make the Swedish Defence University main reception building more welcoming.

So that was the brief, but very quickly I realised that the culture of the organisation was against me.

‘Welcome’ (välkommen) was definitely not the first word on the lips of the employees working in this building.



Fact File: Swedish Defence University

Specialist subjects: war, defence and military operations; community/civilian protection and security.

Building status: Low-level target.

Users: Staff and lecturers aside, army & navy officers attending training and civilian students.





4 nails in my 'more welcoming' coffin

1. Hardly any signs anywhere in the building
2. The colour palette was deliberately 'unwelcoming': 'we like frosty and cold blues and pinks, steel, you know'
3. Some initial interview research: 'Perhaps we could display more weaponry?'
4. A haunting sculpture known as 'the children' which could not be removed under **any** circumstances



TRUST THE PROCESS

> I knew the answers
would come from the
user data not from me





Attitudinal and behavioural research

Officers:

- said no change needed
- décor could be more militaristic
- strode around with purpose (confident behaviour)

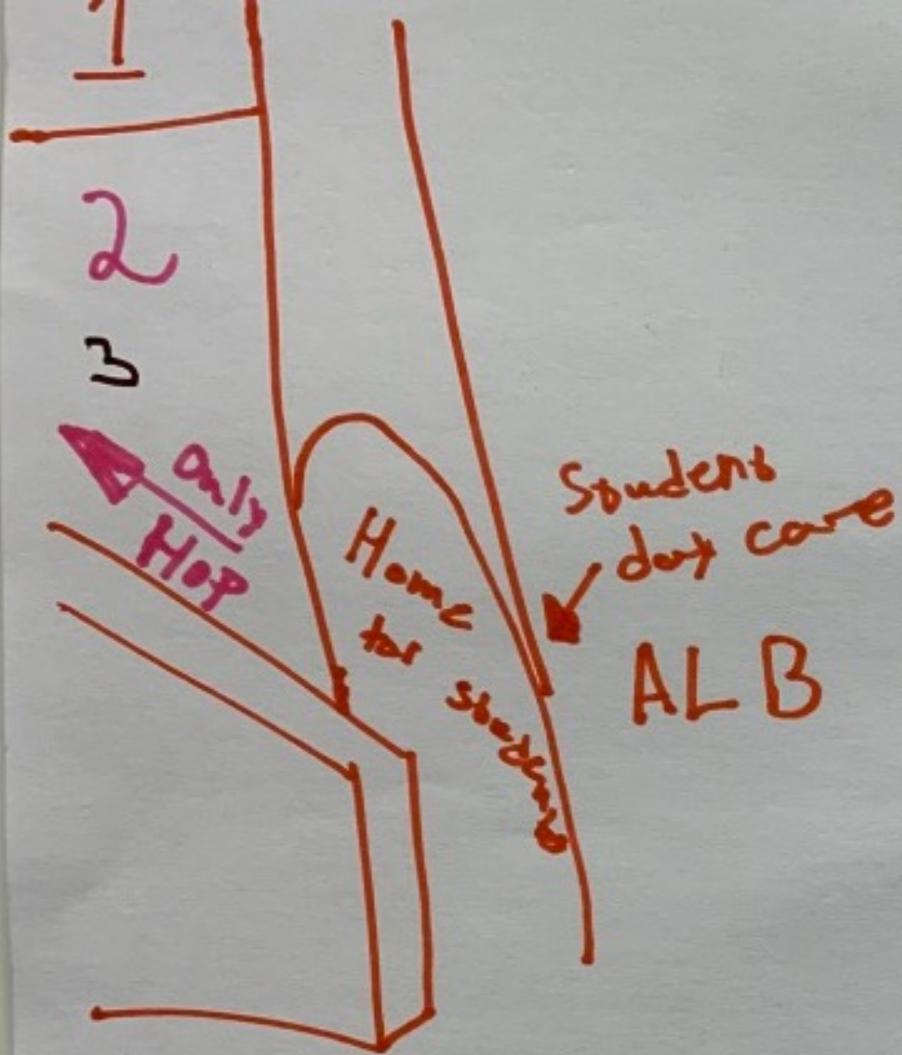
Students:

- 'we are second class citizens'; 'forgotten'
- décor is not welcoming
- not sure where to go or what was theirs (apologetic behaviour)

Visitors

- uncertain where to go









Prototyping

Welcome screen

- Hasn't that always been here?

Reception desk nearer entrance

- failure, only needed at start of academic year

Floor signage

- yellow tape, then pictograms

Room signage

- I actually put up signs (and they worked)

Communal study furniture

- students voted with their feet
- complaints: 'the children' were obscured



Experimentation welcomed

- Users were pleased to be asked
- Most staff were energised by prototyping activity
- Rapid visible change and improvement
- By the time I left... the big cultural shift still had to come



Students now welcome!

- investment in bespoke communal study furniture
- ‘the children’ sculpture was actually removed to make room! (I think they’re now plotting my demise in a Stockholm cellar somewhere)
- signage and welcome screens retained
- atmosphere change: a buzz, a new dynamic

Example Two: Belfast





Welcome to Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland

Where I led UX Research & Design training days
with library staff that were intended to demonstrate:

- how easy UX research was to conduct
- how rapidly UX design can be deployed in the form of prototypes

And, more widely, to inspire change in the library culture



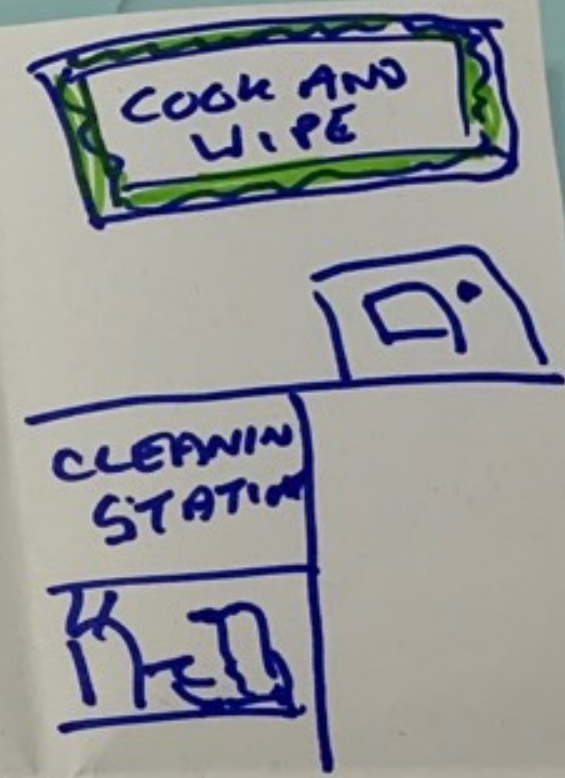
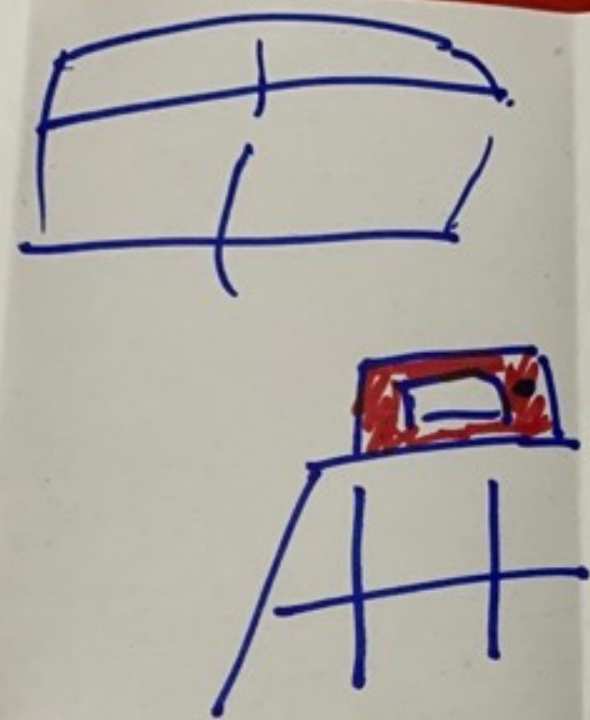


Warning: library curse word ahead! (brace yourselves)

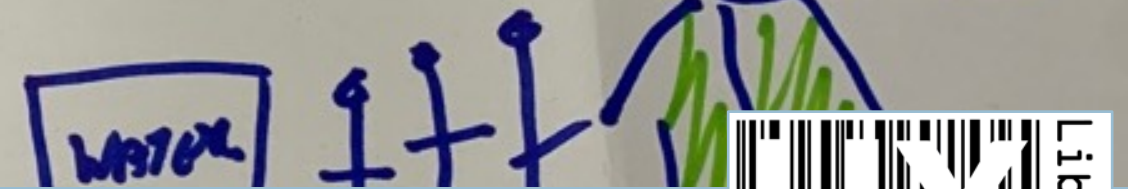
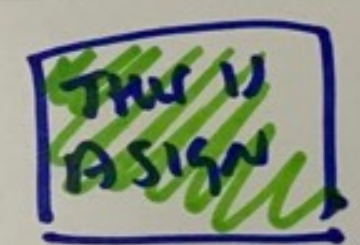
It was almost immediately obvious during user research that one of the biggest issues was the lack of **microwaves** in the student lounge near the Library entrance.

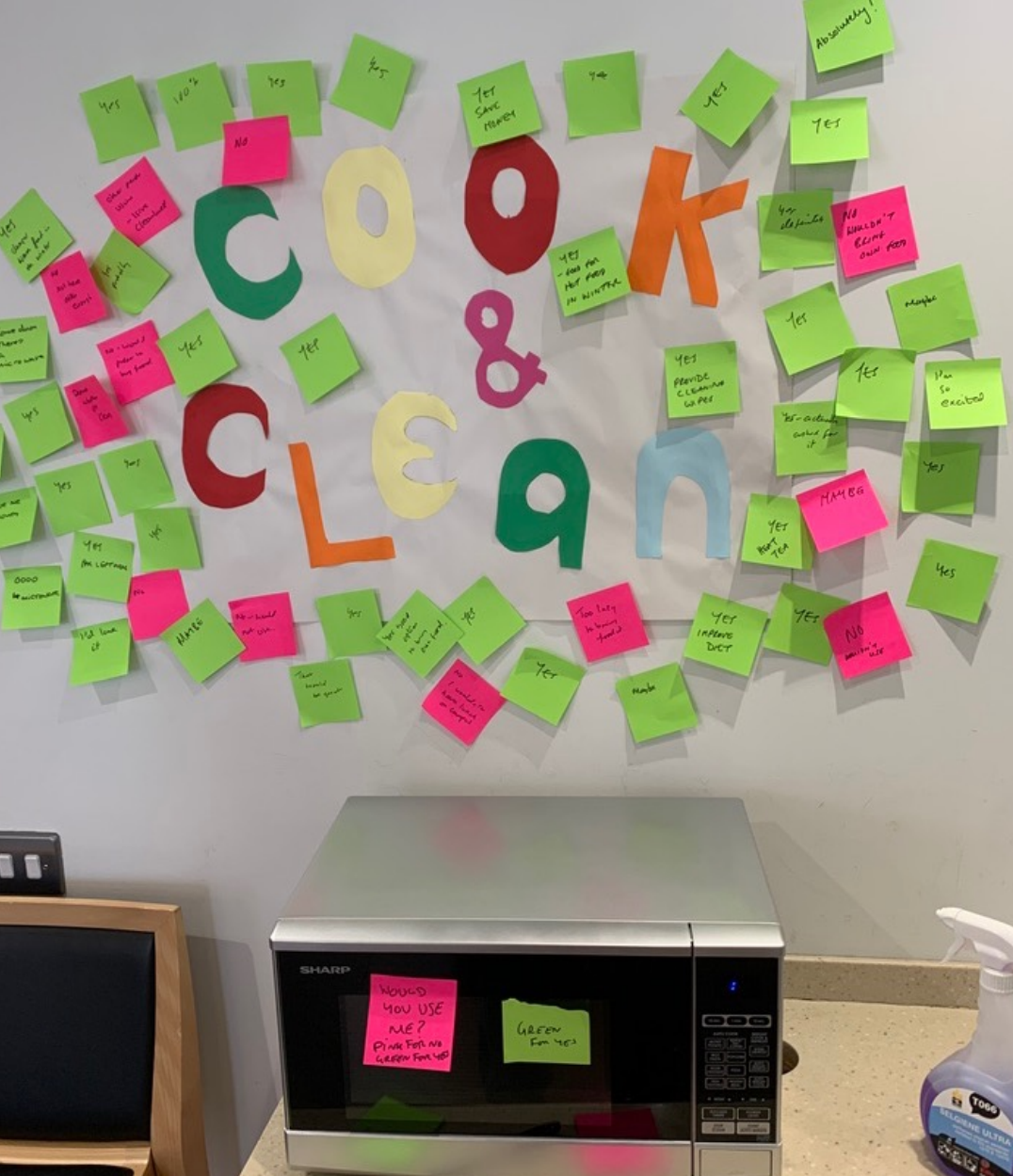
Before I had the chance to ask, some of the library staff present quickly defended why microwaves were not provided.

Their reasons included: fire hazard, hygiene, carpets, power sockets, staffing, not library responsibility, unicorns, zombie apocalypse etc.



WASH & SAFETY SAYS YES.





Prototyping

How are we going to prototype this?

Not a money issue (prototyping should involve little or no expenditure) as a microwave was available.

A bigger block was culture...

A culture which widely agreed that microwaves could not possibly be provided despite the ongoing and increasing student demand for them and their lack of availability nearby on campus.

The microwave was put out (together with a strong cleaning message) and students stuck green post-its if they wanted it and pink if they did not. As well as *ad hoc* guerrilla interviews, actual use of the microwave also helped staff gauge demand.



After just an hour or so...

It was not only agreed that adding a microwave to the student lounge was a good idea...

But 3 more were ordered before the end of the day!

UX Design had challenged the culture and something considered **impossible** in the morning had become a fully backed success story by the afternoon. Yes, there were details to be worked out but there was now a will to make this happen.

As you can see from this picture, Sally - one of the library staff (who had been arguing for microwaves for years) was thrilled, and more importantly so were the students.





Example Three: Leeds





Welcome to Leeds University Libraries

Recently I've been working with Leeds University Libraries on a UX programme intended to embed UX Research and Design thinking and practice.

There is an honesty that they have a definite desire to become more agile and less bureaucratic in approach, but this, as ever, is easier said than done.

During the programme many of the LEGO Serious Play models built by attendees underlined the scale of the problem faced. Many were variously titled: 'tradition'; 'red-tape'; 'bureaucracy'.



ARE YOU **SPIRALING?**



DO YOU NEED
S P A C E ?

THEN VISIT

THE SPIRAL SPACE

A new community led art and garden
space for mindfulness, wellbeing,
relaxation, and fun.

Edward Boyle Library - Level 9

Are you spiralling?

Research at Leeds revealed that some students working in one of the main libraries felt very stressed, perhaps, especially as we were researching during a period when students were revising for exams*

(*By the way there is no *good time* to do UX. There's a lot of nonsense talked about not disturbing students at specific times of year. My experience is that provided you are friendly and show genuine interest in your users they will nearly always stop what they're doing to help regardless of their workload or the time of year.)

Ideation in response to this user data around this topic of stress led to the creation of a mindfulness prototype: The Spiral Space.





The Spiral Space...

A place where students could take a break from their studies and revision and de-stress by:

- drawing pictures
- colouring-in
- or potting plants

The space was heavily used during a short afternoon of prototyping.

And better still the data gathered was considered enough evidence to secure internal funding for a more finessed prototype and more research.



What happened next?

Presentations given by staff on this and the many other prototypes created and tested had the effect of accentuating and announcing a culture shift.

A senior manager admitted that before this UX work people wouldn't even move a table or chair without a paper having to be written first for subsequent approval or rejection by a committee.

After a presentation to staff a few weeks later, the same manager thanked me profusely for saying that I had noticed a culture shift happening. Although this was absolutely something I felt I was witnessing, I was also trying to speak it into existence – real substantive change needs all the help it can get.



Culture and you, yes YOU!

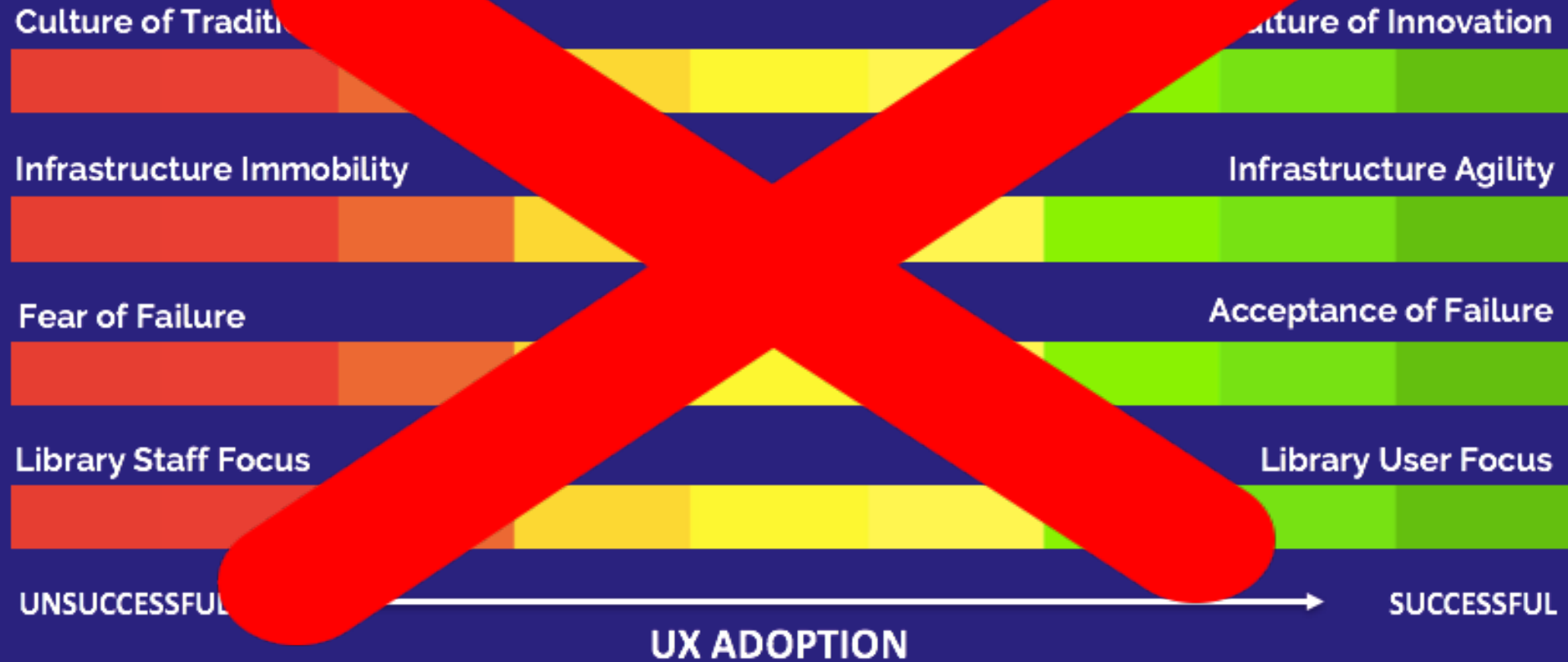
I also led a UX for Senior Managers Day at Leeds and we inevitably ended up talking about organisational culture.

During the day a senior librarian called out the other people in the room who were talking about culture because they were describing it as something that was happening separately from them, or passively 'to them', and therefore, as something that could not be changed. His words to these people were: 'You are the culture'.

And I agree with him. Culture is not something 'happening over there', but something that all staff contribute to and which they can **ACTIVELY** influence. **ALL OF YOU** can influence it.



UX ADOPTION IN LIBRARIES: institutional character & the opportunity for UX adoption



Andy Priestner, May 2017



The impact of UX work on organisational culture

Culture of Tradition

Culture of Innovation



Infrastructure Immobility

Infrastructure Agility



Fear of Failure

Acceptance of Failure



Library Staff Focus

Library User Focus



UX work will move you along all 4 spectrums





Changing culture

Culture is a definite threat, but we are a part of it and it can be influenced.

And if you are brave and challenge the status quo through UX Design - prototyping new or modified services in response to user research data - then it can even change quickly.

The children sculpture CAN be moved.

With UX Design. people no longer have to imagine, they see the alternative, and they believe, and they become more open to change and possibility...

AND the culture shifts.





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