Testing service concepts.

SERVICE PROTOTYPING

The service prototype is a tool for testing the service by observing the interaction of users with a prototype of the service established in a situation and condition where the service will exist. The aim is of service prototyping is to verify what happens when some external factors interfere during the service delivery, factors that it's not possible to verify during any preceding tests, but that could have a significant impact on the user perception and experience.

Exploratory prototyping can be used as part of the research into a problem. It uses creative techniques to bring ideas and potential solutions to life and engages with users and stakeholders to assess what might work in practice. Exploratory prototyping allows you to test the demand for and viability of ideas, and generate new approaches to service delivery.

Developmental prototyping can help to further develop new service ideas, or improvements to an existing one. This might involve testing specific elements of the service such as a new role of technology or the physical conditions in which a service might be delivered. Similarly, it can involve bringing together multiple parts of a service that have been developed and trying to simulate how a service would operate in practice. This may involve testing an idea or improvement to one part of a service, running several different iterations of the service, or running one short cycle of the complete service on a small scale.

Nesta has produced a useful guide to service prototyping (http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/prototyping_framework.pdf) covering;

- Identifying Opportunities;
- Building the Team
- Mapping existing Services;
- Choosing the Test Location;
- Identifying Target Users;
- Generating Ideas;
- Creating Prototypes;
- Evaluation;
- Prototype Planning; and
- Creating a Blueprint

Prototypes can vary in style from a quick pen and paper sketch to a code prototype that works like a fully interactive website. You should use the prototype that best meets your needs at the time. Sketches are useful for exploring and discussing basic ideas with colleagues. Code prototypes are better for user research because they're more realistic.