



UX Strategy - thinking & doing

Welcome to our interview series on Experience Design Strategy.

In this series Tim Loo, Executive Director of Strategy at Foolproof, will be talking to global leaders and experts on the thinking and doing of experience design strategy.

Tim's fourth interviewee is **Pamela Pavliscak** is the Founder of [Change Sciences](#) and [SoundingBox](#), a Design Researcher, speaker at conferences around the world, and an author of a forthcoming book 'Designing for Happiness'.



Tim Loo



Pamela Pavliscak

Q. Please introduce yourself and tell us what you do?

A. Well, I lead a company that focuses on design research and strategy so that's our role. Constantly we're brought in to gain a new understanding of how things are working for people who are engaging with whatever that technology is, but also from the business perspective of how that is working in tandem with all of the other research and data that they're gathering to inform their decision making. And so I'm constantly bumping up against the questions of how do we track our progress? How do we measure success? How do we balance business needs and the needs of all kinds of different stakeholders in this process?

My interests are all over the place when I think about it. Sometimes, I think 'wow I gave that talk a few years ago and I'm still very interested in measures and data and bringing together qualitative methods with quantitative methods. I'm really interested in bigger picture stuff too, like emotional and social wellbeing and you think about them and first and you're like 'how?', 'what?' Does that really make sense? But somehow, to me, it all comes together and makes sense.

Q. What's the impact of the products and services that organisations provide for their customers? What's the impact of technology on the wellbeing of people and society? It's such a big idea and yet, as design specialists, we don't have a really good handle on understanding impact, or measuring impact.

A. Yes, first of all, there's this tension that we have. We're very conscious as designers and developers that we are designing our world and how we experience the world in a lot of ways. And we're engaged with technology that's becoming more and more part of our everyday lives in all kinds of ways, so we're conscious of that. At the same time, people are making their own experiences and shaping those experiences and that's a fundamental tension that we have in our industry. So it's very hard to come together and find out how we understand that in a way that we can track.

Of course, in design we're very deeply committed to understanding people - gaining empathy - and we use a lot of qualitative methods for that which are great.

But it's hard to translate those into something that we can measure and track, and get on the radar and understand. There's a truism: if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. But I think if you can't measure you can't improve it, either. It's this weird tension because I think we in design have an antipathy to reducing

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something to a number, or to just one simple measure. At the same time, it's pretty hard if we don't have that kind of way of understanding - it's pretty hard to understand if we've succeeded to make a case, to branch out. I think that's what we're all contending with, every day. It's a complicated issue.

Q. Have you seen a raised maturity in organisations that you deal with around how they think about the measurement of customer experience, or user experience?

A. I think so, maybe organisations still feel too siloed or like they're not coming together. But, I do feel like there's been a move towards going to the next level with measures. So, for a long time, Net Promoter Score (NPS) has been something that is deeply entrenched that people have been committed to. Now what I am seeing among our clients is a questioning of that, because it's a proxy for satisfaction and for all these other things that we care about, but it's not everything. And so, if you're rated at 9 or 10 you're a promoter and what about all of those other 8's what are we meaning to them? Ultimately, it's hard to gauge where that takes us long-term.

I've definitely had clients who are thinking, 'we have the short-term measure, and we're pretty good at that. We're pretty good at engagement kind of measures, like time on site, or clicks, or signups, or things that are very much in the moment.' The field is now looking longer-term, NPS was the only signal that we really had for things like loyalty long-term, and that's got a lot of shortcomings.

I think people are trying to experiment with what kind of Net Positive Value we're providing to people over the long-term - how does that relationship evolve? Do we have a sense where our level of engagement, or relationship, or intimacy - or however you want to put it - is maturing over time? That's where the organisations that are really thinking about ways to measure and improve, and guide progress, are aiming towards. They tend to be the bigger enterprises, they're more mature, have spent more years thinking about this, and already have a pretty good toehold in the market and they are the ones looking to figure out a longer view of things.

(TL) Certainly, I think that reflects my experience of working with pretty big organisations and NPS - it's become so well entrenched in these organisations - that you simply have to work with that as one of the numbers in the framework. When I talk with people who work regularly with NPS, and the outputs from that, that sort of data gathering, or regular metric that gets produced - they're looking

at the number, but mainly examining the verbatims – they're looking at the words that are actually coming through with those because often they're the most helpful things.

A. Absolutely, that's how you get at the 'why' - why are those numbers important? Why are people saying that? And that kind of underscores what's essential about having numbers and measures, which you need - at some level. **You definitely also need the stories, the words, the perceptions, the emotions, of people as they're experiencing it so that you can round out that number and give it a fuller meaning, a fuller picture,** and I think that's a really good point.

Q. Are wider frameworks that you work with or have seen in action actually a step forwards?

A. Yes, I think there're a few different frameworks out there. One of the most basic ones is SUS (System Usability Scale) that's geared towards usability, a lot of organisations are using that. But that's only part of the picture, it's kind of like NPS – it's really, really, focused. The other one that a lot of organisations are using is 'Heart'. This was developed by the folks at Google: 'Happiness, Engagement, Acquisition, Retention and Task Success' – not necessarily in that order but it had to make an acronym. Which I totally understand, because we've developed a platform and we're kind of toying with a name – we'd been using with for years 'Usability, Engagement, Conversion' – as our three big buckets, and having multiple factors in there, and then we had to move it around to make a fancy acronym which we called reverb, and we added in longer-term metrics.

So, all of those are great because they get in some key things like: how are you bringing people on at first? How are you retaining them over the long-term? How are they feeling? How are they actually behaving or experiencing it? What are their perceptions? I think those are all facets that we need. And so I understand the impulse to simplify under one score, but I think that if you're looking for ways to bring more people into the process, to achieve goals along the way, to break things up so you can calibrate your experience a little more, then having a framework is great. One thing I'm really interested in now is researching whether technology has dovetailed with our emotional and psychological well-being. I'm also looking at some of the global indicators that are being used to measure success. For years we had one – it was GDP.

Now countries are experimenting with other kinds of measures. There's no one good measure, there's 'Genuine Progress Indicator' and that tries to capture all of that unmeasured value. So, in the tech community Open-source would be a good

example of unmeasured value. It doesn't contribute directly to the economy but it's not being measured in GDP. There are other frameworks like the 'Social Progress Index' that look at healthcare, education and the environment.

The main motivation behind all of these is to look at it more holistically - let's look at it big picture and then see if we can separate it out into these different threads, or topics, or subject areas, which we can then focus in on. And better still in each of those, if we're really sophisticated, we're going to draw from a couple of different data sources. For instance, if we take this over to tech and you want to look at gauging people's emotional reaction to an experience as a way to understand it, you might still keep NPS in there as a gauge of overall feeling, but you might simply want to ask them - something we don't like to do in design sometimes because we think people can't articulate it - but when it comes to what they're feeling in the moment, or long-term, as an overall, people can. You might set other indicators too like did they not return things? Did they stay a customer for a long time? Having those drawn from different sources, **a subjective source, an objective source and a long-term held measure and then grouping them together in a system makes a lot of sense - it gives it more credibility and more nuance that you can work with too.**

Q. What is your take on this idea of happiness and how businesses think about customer happiness?

A. . I think that's evolving too and that's a really interesting conversation. For years we had this concept of delight, and that would be the candy on the table, or a really delightful detail. I think what's happening now is that we're realising (as all of these other academic fields are coming in to have their say about happiness) that we know a lot more things about happiness, little touches can add to your happiness in the moment but they wear off - delight has a shelf life.

We have to think about other factors and that's where looking at all of this great research that's coming out of behavioural economics, psychology and sociology comes into play, because we can see some consistencies. There are some things that consistently drive wellbeing and that is strong relationships, great conversations, feelings of belonging. Lots of things that are relevant to our tech experiences, that we know in the back of our minds, but they might seem squishy.

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To some extent we can't design so people feel a certain way all the time, or they take away this certain meaning, but we can facilitate that and support it if we make it a goal and put it out there and say, 'yes this is actually what we want to do'. A lot of companies are moving towards that and there's a lot of business contexts where that's already happening. At Fordham University, they had something called the 'V Positive Index' (Value Positive Index) and they're looking at some of these factors - mostly in terms of marketing. So, looking at it as brand promise more than the experience that you have, but it's starting to make its way over. So, when we say happiness now, it's not happiness with a small 'h' but Happiness with a big 'H' around this idea of well-being.

Q. Generally speaking, no organisation can ever deliver their complete end of life cycle of customer experience without some level of friction. So, it's about choosing where you want to have the friction and the pleasure to be. Is friction and effort – on the user's part - something you've thought about as well?

A. Yes, actually a lot, because I think when we talk about wellbeing and technology a lot of our conversation has historically been around productivity, convenience, efficiency and friction. That's what we consider to be a great experience, that's what's going to make people happy. But, what we're learning from the research about happiness is it's not the place you get to but the process that you grow into it, and part of the way you do that is by making your own meaning and figuring things out yourself. If you look up behavioural science, there's this whole idea of the 'investment' and putting in a little effort is something that has come out of behavioural design, and it has been applied in good ways and bad ways, but all of that is relevant. So, figuring out what are the things which need to be frictionless still and where do we invest a little effort is an interesting conversation that we're going to continue to have. I think some of it has to do with our self in relation to how we use technology.

If I think of a technology as part of my self - as an extension of my self - Alexa would be a good example, they're even debating how much personality you give it. I view Alexa as just a long finger, 'put on this music', 'play the audio book', 'order the thing', I don't know if I really want to have a conversation with her. Especially when I think about who am I really having a conversation with. However, there may be experiences where I am feeling social about it. I think that's an area that's going to be interesting to explore, I think this sort of dovetails with the idea of friction – how much do we want to invest in that relationship, or are we investing in ourselves? Those are all important things we need to start thinking about and figuring out.

Q. Do you have any thoughts around what areas of impact and measurement these 'digitally transformed' or 'digitally re-platformed' companies should be focusing on?

A. I think a lot of organisations at this point are thinking about how do they measure the long-term value that they're having in people's lives and that's really hard. Because right now we're measuring stuff that's pretty easy and available, that's why we're in this mess, because it's pretty easy to collect really basic engagement measures like time, or clicks, or scrolling and it's harder to measure these other aspects of experience. I think those are the numbers that people are going to want to start to measure - what place does this have in my life, long-term? For the organisations we work with it's been a bit of an individual experience, but it always revolves around some balance of those traditional metrics because those aren't going away and you have means to measure those. But bringing in other measures that are not purely attention, or economics, that are situated with other human beings - the other stakeholders in this system, is equally important.

Q. Is the word love even a meaningful thing when we talk about businesses and brands?

A. I think it's just another stand-in for the same concept whether you call it love, or you call it happiness, or you call it long-term value. It's this idea that, 'we have to get at something bigger' in a way that's actually legitimate. If you think about it there are certain products, certain experiences in your life - in everyone's life - that it might really be a hardship if that was taken away. Or you feel irrational emotions about it. I can think of many experiences where I feel irrational emotions. I can think of digital objects that I narrate as if they have personalities. You know, we do crazy stuff, we develop these crazy attachments and I think businesses are coming to recognise (hopefully) that there is something there to building those relationships and if they're really advanced they're recognising we shouldn't exploit those for short-term gain. That we should try to develop those and try to understand these relationships over the long-term and having numbers is a way of getting at that, but of course you need all of the other storytelling and personal information around it to really understand that.

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I've seen that a lot more companies are also thinking about these big ideas that seem 'squishy' we wouldn't have talked about them ten years ago. I've been in this for a while and back in the late nineties it was still a question whether people could even make money on the internet... would that be a thing? It sounds ridiculous when you look back on it now but we've figured out a lot of things and now we're at the next level.

But I wonder on the level of organisational structure where that's going too. Because so much digital experience has been about screen experience and now organisations just got that going - got their digital grouped together - and now it's all unwinding again because we're going back to physical products with embedded chips or technologies. So that may be behind this move to think about bigger metrics and the bigger picture too.

Q. What excites you most about looking forward when we look at the role of experience researchers, strategists and designers?

A. I still remain excited about the role of technology in our lives. I have three kids and there's lots of fretting over kids and how their brains are being destroyed by technology and all that stuff. But I see so many positives and I see so much curiosity, hope and drive for a positive future and that kind of motivates me. Because there's so much going on that you can almost get lost in it in a way and that's a pretty exciting time. I feel like, maybe in the last five years, 'ok yes, we know how to do this stuff we're finally getting it', and now that's completely come apart again and that excites me.



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