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Exploring the influence of Design Thinking tools on the accountability of decision makers in aid projects

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

There is continued criticism regarding the over-reliance on rational, linear and quantitative management approaches by decision makers of aid projects within Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Such approaches have led to accountability efforts being primarily directed to donors with limited participation from beneficiary populations. There is an increasing interest in Design Thinking by decision makers as an approach to support more beneficiary-centred accountability in projects. However, there is limited understanding about whether Design Thinking tools can influence the accountability of decision makers.

Accountability can be conceptualised as 'felt' accountability which privileges the internal motivations and *virtue of* decision makers; and as 'imposed' accountability which privileges formal, coercive and compliance-based *mechanisms on* decision makers. The objective of this thesis was to understand whether specific Design Thinking tools can influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects. To achieve this, the thesis explored two case studies in Ghana and in UK/Lebanon.

The research methods involved participatory action research during the projects, followed by semi-structured interviews with key decision makers after project completion. The analysis was conducted by a combination of manual processes and NVivo software. The analysis revealed decision makers perceived two specific tools, being personas and Journey maps, as having influenced their 'felt' accountability. There are four emergent factors that suggest how the tools may be contributing to the 'felt' accountability of decision makers: this is firstly by building a shared picture among diverse groups, secondly by humanising complex information, thirdly by grounding discussions in realities, and lastly by deepening empathy and connection between decision makers and beneficiaries. This is the first study to suggest that the inclusion of Design Thinking tools can influence, and even enhance the 'felt' accountability of decision makers towards beneficiaries. However, more research is needed to test these suggestive findings.

Keywords

Chapter One   Introduction

1.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a high-level overview of the thesis context and structure. The chapter starts by providing some background context and justification for the research, an indication as to where it sits at the intersection of different disciplines, a summary of the research objectives and methods, and summary of key terms, before offering the outline structure for the remainder of the thesis.

1.2 Context and background for this research

For the past 20 years, there has been increasing scrutiny of developmental Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) for the limited impact of their projects on beneficiaries (Andrews 2014; O'Dwyer & Unerman 2007; Ebrahim 2009; Madon 1999). As a result of this increasing scrutiny, NGOs have been institutionalising a host of accountability mechanisms and charters (Ebrahim 2009; Schmitz et al. 2012; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). To date, this expanding body of research has been heavily weighted towards the accountability relationship between NGOs and their funding organisations, commonly referred to as 'donors'. In this relationship, the donor usually sets the project objectives and finances the NGOs, directly or through in-country partners, to implement the projects (Agyemang et al. 2009). The donors then hold the NGOs accountable through regular reporting against the agreed upon objectives (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). The mechanisms employed are often founded on quantitative-heavy and linear, cause-effect models of change in human systems (Ronalds 2012; Britton 2005). However, decision makers within NGOs who oversee projects have often protested that imposed and functional donor-centred accountability practices have become too dominant and undermine more social, beneficiary-centred accountability practices. These would involve greater stakeholder participation in defining the need or solution(s) early enough regarding the issues that affect them most (Schmitz et al. 2012; Murtaza 2012; Porter & Kramer 2011). With this ongoing accountability tension as a backdrop, more and more individual decision makers within NGOs are turning to Design Thinking for new inspirations and tools that

could support them in aligning with beneficiary needs and preferences (see for examples, Bazzano et al. 2017; Toyama 2017; Jackson 2015; Amatullo 2015; Fotso & Fogarty 2015; Catalani et al. 2014).

Although the debate around accountability in the international development and aid literature has been growing in prominence, NGOs have maintained a track record of institutionalising accountability regimes that prioritise donor requirements through stringent compliance-based mechanisms that do not leave much room for the prioritisation of beneficiary needs. Drawing from Accountability Theory, the concept of accountability is often perceived as a normative mechanism used for the assessment of the actual behaviour of public agents (Koppell 2005). For others, however, the concept of accountability is about *feeling* accountable, and is perceived more like an internal 'virtue', or a positive quality of a person (Fry 1995; Bovens 2014). Accountability regimes instituted by organisations can either prioritise this 'felt' accountability which privileges the internal motivations and *virtue* of decision makers; or 'imposed' accountability which privileges formal, coercive and compliance-based *mechanisms* onto decision makers (Fry 1995; Vance et al. 2013). As a *virtue*, accountability is perceived as a characteristic where a decision maker demonstrates a willingness to accept responsibility, while as a *mechanism*, accountability is perceived as a process in which a decision maker is obligated to explain their actions to another party who has the right to pass judgment on the actions as well as to subject the person to potential consequences for their actions (Bovens 2014; Tetlock et al. 1989).

The initial concepts and mechanisms on accountability were developed by Tetlock (1983, 1985, 1992) through a series of publications in the 1980s and 1990s. Lerner and Tetlock (1994, 1999, 1998, 2003) then worked together to develop what is now referred to as Accountability Theory and has been increasingly applied in organisational research. The need to be answerable for decision-making processes and their outcomes tends to make decision makers think more deeply and systematically about their process and behaviours (Tetlock 1985). It is therefore proposed, that in any given decision-making situation, a decision-maker's accountability is the result of that decision maker being pulled in different, sometimes competing, directions by personal/ethical, social/relational and institutional pressures.

In this thesis, accountability is understood as the perceived need to justify or defend a decision or action to some audience(s), which includes self.

The theoretical concepts from Accountability Theory have served to anchor this thesis in concepts that have been studied extensively. The objective of this thesis was not to test a hypothesis, but rather to explore and develop a model for how Design Thinking tools may be influencing decision makers' 'felt' accountability in aid projects. Therefore, the unit of analysis is the individual decision maker, though, this thesis recognises each individual is operating within a complex web of relationships and dynamics. Each individual is likely navigating 'felt' accountability towards multiple stakeholder groups as they work to serve beneficiaries, are employed by NGOs, and are funded by donors.

1.3 Justification for this research

It is becoming increasingly prevalent that for-profit businesses are shifting towards the need to embrace a 'customer-centred' management culture (Goran et al., 2017). This is also reflected in the culture of government bodies basing policy and service delivery decisions on being more 'citizen-centred' (Brown & Katz 2009), and academic institutions evolving to be more 'student-centred' (Harju & Åkerblom 2017). Recent advances by some decision makers suggest there is an emerging trend in the aid sector to follow suit and adopt more 'beneficiary-centred' (or just 'human-centred') approaches (Macdonald & Miller-Dawkins 2015; Santos & Wauben 2014). For businesses, governments, and academia, this evolution to more customer-centred, citizen-centred and student-centred management cultures, respectively, has largely been supported through a Design Thinking approach that utilises principles of connecting multiple perspectives, empathy, ambiguity tolerance, engagement with aesthetics and creativity (Boland & Colopy 2004; Michlewski 2008; Amatullo 2015). The most commonly reported characteristic for success in applying a Design Thinking approach among business, government and academic groups, is when it is infused with existing management practice (Buchanan 2001; Brown & Katz 2009; de Mozota 2013; Lockwood 2013; Liedtka 2014). Therefore, the justification for this research was founded on exploring similarly emerging patterns in the aid sector by specifically looking at whether Design Thinking tools can have any influence on the accountability of decision makers seeking to be more 'beneficiary-centred' in their projects.

Despite the emerging trend for decision makers to use Design Thinking tools in aid projects, there have been very few and limited attempts to describe design-related influences in the context of the aid sector (see Amatullo 2015 with Unicef, Vasdev 2013 with World Bank Group, Miller & Rudnick 2012, 2014, 2015 at United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research). There is limited understanding around how Design Thinking has been used in aid projects and whether the tools are perceived to influence individual decision makers sense of 'felt' accountability.

1.4 Research objectives and approach

A fundamental premise of this thesis is that certain Design Thinking tools can influence individual 'felt' accountability among decision makers of aid projects. Although the criticality of accountability in aid projects has long been acknowledged (Ebrahim 2009; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015), and despite some decision makers turning to Design Thinking to support more beneficiary-centred accountability (Jackson 2015; Santos & Wauben 2014), there remains limited academic attention to examining the role of Design Thinking in this context.

The primary aim of this thesis was to understand whether specific Design Thinking tools have the potential to influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects. In pursuing this aim, other objectives included:

- To gain insight into which (if any) Design Thinking tools were **identified** by decision makers as influencing their 'felt' accountability.
- To explore how Design Thinking tools were **perceived** by decision makers to be influencing their 'felt' accountability.
- To provide practical case examples on how Design Thinking tools were **used** in aid project contexts when they were perceived as influencing 'felt' accountability.

Based on the research aim and objectives, the primary research question is:

Can Design Thinking tools influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects? If so, which ones and how?

This primary question reflects the exploratory nature of this thesis which is grounded in a combination of Accountability Theory and the perceptions and experiences of decision makers involved in the two project case studies. Despite the increasing pressure on decision makers to design and deliver projects that are accountable to beneficiaries, documentation of examples where Design Thinking tools have contributed to 'felt' accountability of decision makers are not evident in any of the design, business management (accountability), or international development/aid bodies of literature. The topic of this thesis is interdisciplinary and sits at the intersection of all three, as demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Interdisciplinary cross-section of this thesis. Source: Author.

The research methodology chosen for this thesis is anchored in the researcher's perception of the research issue of 'felt' accountability as subjective and having 'multiple' explanations (Creswell 2007, p. 17). Consequently, the researcher sought to observe and construct explanations based on 'real world' phenomena (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Based on this, there was a clear justification for an action research approach supplemented by other qualitative methods to facilitate an inductive research process. Action research is a collaborative approach to research that provides people with the

opportunity to act in an effort to resolve specific issues while endorsing participatory strategies (Berg et al. 2004). The combined action research and qualitative process involved two cycles of 'plan-act-observe-reflect' across two real world projects (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). The plan stage involved research design and case/participant selection. The act stage involved the researcher actively engaged in the projects by facilitating the Design Thinking process. The observe stage involved the researcher conducting ten semi-structured interviews with decision makers (six for cases study one, four for case study two). The reflect stage involved grounded theory and case studies to guide the combined manual category theme and NVivo software analysis.

For both projects, the researcher was employed by the consultancy ThinkPlace while enrolled at RMIT part-time. Through the course of the researcher's consulting work, these two projects qualified for inclusion in this thesis; firstly, based on relevance to the research aims and questions; and secondly based on convenience as the projects came to the researcher rather than the other way around. The researcher held the concurrent responsibility of guiding the design process and the tools/methods applied during their involvement in each project. The potential interviewees were identified through the course of the researcher's active role during each project. The qualifying inclusion criteria for interviewees required they had decision-making responsibilities as well as direct experience with Design Thinking tools during the project. Grounded theory was used to guide the manual analysis of category themes, supplemented by software-based analysis using NVivo 10. Although the predominant mode of analysis was manual, the combination with NVivio 10 software and iterative case study analysis cycles allowed the researcher to concurrently zoom in and out between codes/themes, from one project case to another, and across many literature concepts. This combined approach has enhanced the integrity of the findings in this thesis (Yin 2010), by informing links as to how the data may address oversights in the existing literature and support the development of the conceptual model so that it is verified in practice.

1.5 Findings and contribution

Consolidating concepts from various bodies of literature and real world practitioner experience from two action research case studies, this thesis explored whether Design Thinking tools can influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects.

In doing so, it contributes from a unique and interdisciplinary perspective, to the accountability debate in the aid sector.

Case study one explored the use and influence of Design Thinking tools in a project that focused on improving maternal, newborn and child health outcomes in Ghana. Following an in-depth Design Thinking process, this project introduced *CHN on the Go*, a mobile phone application, to improve health worker motivation among community health nurses (CHNs) in Ghana. The Design Thinking tools that were identified by six decision makers as most influencing their 'felt' accountability in this project were the Personas and Journey maps. Case study two explored the use and influence of Design Thinking tools in a project that focused on redesigning the humanitarian system with a particular emphasis on Lebanon/Syria, while being led by a research NGO in the United Kingdom (UK). After an in-depth Design Thinking process, this project produced a series of publications to catalyse new thinking among humanitarian organisations around the world. The Design Thinking tools that were identified by four decision makers as most influencing their felt accountability in this project were the Journey maps and Personas.

Personas and Journey maps were the tools repeatedly cited by interviewees as being most influential for their individual processes of 'felt' accountability over any of the other Design Thinking tools or methods. Personas as a design tool brings focus, empathy, consensus, efficiency and better choices by design teams (Cooper 1999; Cooper & Reimann 2002; Grudin & Pruitt 2002; Ma & LeRouge 2007; Mulder & Yaar 2006). Journey maps as a design tool is best described as a walk 'in the customer's shoes' (Holmlid & Evenson 2008) where the processual aspects of delivering a service are 'analysed, modelled, managed, or (re)designed' (Følstad & Kvale 2018) from user perspectives while achieving a greater level of stakeholder empathy with those users (Segelström 2013). In line with both the decision makers identifying these tools as most influencing them, this thesis focused on Personas and Journey maps as the tools in question.

The analysis points to the use of personas and Journey maps as having offered decision makers four influencing factors on their 'felt' accountability:

1. **Builds a shared picture:** the tools supported decision makers to have a 'shared picture' of the problem from the perspective of the beneficiaries. This shared picture sets the collective frame for decisions to be agreed upon based on what is best for (or most accountable to) the beneficiaries.

2. **Humanises complex information:** the tools gave a 'human face' to what was already known through statistical data. This human face helped decision makers see old problems in new ways and for information to be processed in formats that depicted beneficiaries as people rather than numbers.

3. **Grounds discussions in reality:** the tools 'grounded' day-to-day conversations in other people's realities rather than assumptions. This grounded information helped situate decision makers in beneficiary contexts when making decision about/for/with them.

4. **Deepens empathy and connection:** the tools enabled decision makers to 'connect' in more personal and empathic ways. This supported human-centred decisions that put the needs of the beneficiaries before other considerations.

This is the first thesis to suggest that the inclusion of Design Thinking tools can influence, and even enhance the 'felt' accountability of decision makers towards beneficiaries. However, more research is needed to test these suggestive findings.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. Following this introduction chapter, Chapter Two presents a summary of Accountability Theory to outline the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. The chapter goes on to provide a summary of literature relating to aid sector accountability and the tensions between the donor, NGO and beneficiary accountability relationships. Chapter Three discusses and justifies the research paradigm, specific methods employed for this thesis, and their limitations. Chapter Four presents the findings of the thesis in the form of two separate case studies, one situated in a global health project context in Ghana, and the other in a humanitarian project context in UK/Lebanon. For Chapter Five, the findings from Chapter Four are then compared and integrated into a new conceptual model that extends upon the concepts from the literature and theoretical underpinnings. Chapter Six presents a summary of the thesis, the research conclusion, and an overview of the implications of the research before outlining opportunities for future research.

1.7 Summary of key terms

The key terms and definitions discussed in this thesis are summarised below:

Table 1: Definitions of key terms

Term	Definition	Reference
Accountability	The perceived need to justify or defend a decision or action to some audience(s), which may include self.	Tetlock 1985;
'Felt' accountability	Accountability which privileges the internal motivations and virtue *of* decision makers. It is more a 'state of mind' than a 'state of affairs'	Fry 1995; Schlenker & Weigold 1989; Frink & Klimoski 1998
Imposed accountability	Accountability which privileges formal, coercive and compliance-based mechanisms *on* decision makers. It is more a normative mechanism used for the assessment of the actual behaviour of decision makers.	Fry 1995; Koppell 2005
Beneficiary	A person, organisation, etc., that is helped by something; someone or something that benefits from something. In the context of aid, the term 'beneficiaries' usually refers to the persons and the communities that utilise the project outputs.	Merriam Webster 2014
(Development) Non-Governmental Organisation – also NGO	A not-for-profit organisation focused on alleviating poverty and improving living conditions in developing country contexts.	Johnston 1981
Design Thinking	A human-centred approach to problem solving that engages in iterative cycles of sense-making, prototyping, experimenting, gathering feedback and redesigning.	Liedtka 2015; Razzouk & Shute 2012
(Design) Tool	Anything used as a means of accomplishing a (design) task or purpose.	Alves & Nunes 2013

(User) Persona	Archetypes built after extensive observation of the potential users that represent a character with which designers and decision makers can engage.	Stickdorn & Schneider 2011; Tassi 2008
(User) Journey Map	A visualisation of a user's experiences over time and space required to accomplish a certain goal. The moments of interaction or touchpoints are used to construct a 'journey' that allows designers and decision makers to see what is working and what needs improving.	Hegeman 2012; Stickdorn & Schneider 2011, p. 158

Chapter Two   Literature Review

2.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the relevant literature and provide the theoretical underpinning and conceptual framework which provided anchoring for this exploratory thesis. The chapter starts by providing various conceptualisations and definitions for the notion of accountability, then situating concepts of individual 'felt' accountability and 'imposed' accountability in the organisational contexts of NGOs. Following on from that, a more in-depth review is made of the tensions experienced by individual decision makers between donor-centred and beneficiary-centred accountability requirements. Then the concept of Design Thinking is introduced and defined as one of the approaches decision makers are turning to as they seek new inspirations and methods. Lastly, a visual diagram represents a consolidation of the literature concepts and how they come together to form a platform, the primary aim and research question of this thesis.

2.2 Theoretical underpinnings: Accountability Theory

2.2.1 Defining the concept

In the economics literature of the 1970s, accountability was referred to in relation to agency theory, where it was a formal structure for monitoring managerial actions and their alignment with incentives (Eisenhardt 1985; Jenson & Meckling 1976). In the social psychology literature, the concept was broadened to incorporate informal accountability mechanisms such as personal relationships, and the cognitive and behavioural consequences (Tetlock 1985). Since then, others have referred to accountability more as a self-governing or regulatory mechanism that is supported by an individual's values and ethics (Schlenker & Weigold 1989; Frink & Klimoski 1998). More recently, the concept of accountability is often perceived as a normative mechanism used for the assessment of the actual behaviour of public agents (Koppell 2005).

The initial concepts on accountability were developed by Tetlock (1983, 1985, 1992) through a series of publications in the 1980s and 1990s. Lerner and Tetlock (1994, 1999, 1998, 2003) then worked together to develop what is now referred to as Accountability Theory and has been increasingly applied in organisational research. The need – or perceived need – to be answerable for decision-making processes and their outcomes tends to make decision makers think more deeply and systematically about their process and behaviours (Tetlock 1985). What is meant when a decision maker is accountable? Tetlock (1985, p. 307) defined accountability as *'a critical rule and norm enforcement mechanism: the social psychological link between individual decision makers on the one hand and the social systems to which they belong on the other.'* This definition is limited in scope because it focuses only on formal mechanisms (Dhiman 2017). Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty (1994, p. 634) defined accountability as *'being answerable to external audiences for performing up to certain prescribed standards thereby fulfilling obligations, duties, expectations, and other charges.'* This definition is stronger in that it suggests more informal accountability modes; however, it is still limited because it does not encompass the possibility of self-accountability (Dhiman, 2017). In another definition Frink and Klimoski (1998, p. 9) state that: *'accountability as perceived need to justify or defend a decision or action to some audience(s) which has potential reward and sanctions power, and where such rewards and sanctions are perceived as contingent on accountability conditions'.* This definition demonstrates that a decision maker may still feel accountable to self, particularly when a decision's moral imperative is high (Dhiman 2017). It is therefore proposed, that in any given decision-making situation, a decision maker's accountability is the result of that decision maker being pulled in different, sometimes competing, directions by personal, relational and institutional pressures. Accountability Theory therefore has a range of levels in the process of accountability. In this thesis, accountability is understood as the perceived need to justify or defend a decision or action to audience(s), which includes the self.

For this thesis, a useful way to break down accountability as a concept will be to distinguish between its most common uses; firstly, as a 'felt' virtue and secondly, as an 'imposed' mechanism. For some, the concept of accountability is more about *feeling* accountable, and is perceived more like an internal virtue, a positive quality of a person (Fry 1995; Bovens 2014). Accountability regimes instituted by organisations

can either prioritise 'felt' accountability which privileges the internal motivations and *virtue* of decision makers; or 'imposed' accountability which privileges formal, coercive and compliance-based *mechanisms on* decision makers (Bovens 2014; Fry 1995; Vance et al. 2013). As a *virtue*, accountability is perceived as a characteristic where a decision maker demonstrates a willingness to accept responsibility, while as a *mechanism*, accountability is perceived as a process in which a decision maker is obligated to explain their actions to another party who has the right to pass judgment on the actions as well as to subject the person to potential consequences for their actions (Bovens 2014; Tetlock et al. 1989).

2.2.2 Imposed and 'felt' accountability

In aid project settings, imposed accountability regimes are predominantly made up of formal oversight and control mechanisms placed on NGOs and their individual decision makers (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015, Edwards & Hulme 1995; Najam 1996; Roberts 2001; Sinclair 1995). This privileges a traditional view of accountability where people are being 'held responsible' by others. In this type of relationship, people need to justify their actions through 'the giving and demanding of reasons for conduct*'* (Sinclair 1995, p. 221). This translates into compliance-based accountability that takes the form of short-term accounting for resource use, activities and outputs (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). These metrics tend to be more helpful for donors' budgeting processes rather than for NGO decision makers in their accountability towards other stakeholders such as beneficiaries (Ebrahim 2009; Agyemang et al. 2009). Should decision makers opt out and not comply, consequences can come in the form of funding withdrawal. Therefore, such dominantly imposed accountability regimes can be quite threatening to the underlying missions of NGOs (Chenhall et al. 2010).

In contrast, 'felt' accountability regimes would privilege the internal motivation of decision makers instead of the external pressures placed on them by funders and/or their own NGO structures (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). This notion privileges a less popular view of accountability where people 'feel responsible' to themselves. Within this type of regime, individuals possess an intrinsic responsibility to 'feel' accountable or answerable to themselves in the form of their own values, ethics and morals, which they seek to align with those of other key stakeholders (Lewis & Madon 2004; Sinclair 1995). In this type of relationship, Roberts (1991, p. 365) argues that at its essence,

'accountability is a social acknowledgement and an insistence that one's actions make a difference to both self and others'. It is this social acknowledgement that drives that personal sense of responsibility from an ethical or virtue-based dimension that is absent from imposed accountability regimes in aid projects (Roberts 1991, 2001; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015).

In practice, 'felt' accountability regimes would seek to build a shared vision among individuals in organisations to develop 'collaborative relationships of collective responsibility for outcomes' which highlight interdependence among them (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015, p. 41; Ebrahim 2003, 2009; Najam 1996; Roberts 2001). It becomes a collectively generated sense of reciprocated accountability rather than one that is imposed from a single direction (Ebrahim 2003; Sinclair 1995). A 'felt' accountability regime is therefore more integrated and embedded in an organisational culture than an external structure (Hilhorst 2003).

Within aid project setting, a 'felt' accountability regime would allow decision makers a voice in the establishment of collectively agreed expectations which align organisational and project goals with personal values (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). 'Felt' accountability regimes could prosper where NGOs face less external accountability pressures, since this will allow for accountability structures that align with the agreed upon needs and values of the people (Ebrahim 2009). However, prioritising 'felt' accountability of individuals may risk an inward looking focus being the only consideration. This inward looking focus may also encourage individuals to be unaware of and/or uninterested in the perspectives of beneficiary stakeholders whom their mission seeks to assist (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015; Unerman and O'Dwyer, 2006). Hence, the prioritisation afforded to the 'felt' accountability of individual decision makers needs to also pay rigorous attention to engagement with, and prioritisation of, the beneficiary stakeholders to whom they dedicate their work (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). In practice, 'felt' and imposed accountability regimes co-exist to varying degrees and can often operate in tension in aid project settings (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). Given the very different characteristics of both regimes of accountability, decision makers will need to manage the tensions inherent in their co-existence by attempting to balance externally imposed accountability demands with internally driven 'felt' accountabilities (Dempsey 2007; Fry 1995; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015).

Combined or 'adaptive accountability' regimes try to strike a balance while also prioritising the perspectives of beneficiaries (Ebrahim 2003b, p. 194).

There has been some discussion around 'adaptive accountability' regimes as integrating both the virtue focus of 'felt' accountability with the mechanism focus of imposed accountability (Ebrahim 2009; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). Unlike both 'felt' and imposed regimes, adaptive regimes endeavour to prioritise beneficiary voices as part of their accountability processes. This integrated notion would avoid accountability that is blind to the actual experiences and perspectives of beneficiaries, given that a purely 'felt' accountability regime would place too much emphasis on and trust in individual decision makers who get to decide what they are accountable for and how this accountability is to be assessed (Unerman & O'Dwyer 2006). Ideally, both 'felt' and imposed accountability coexist with an understanding that it may shift over time (Ebrahim 2009).

2.2.3 Influencing elements on accountability

Accountability Theory proposes several elements that influence the process of an individual decision-maker's accountability such as the presence of another person, identifiability, and expectation of evaluation. More so, 'even the simplest accountability manipulation necessarily implicates several empirically distinguishable submanipulations' (Lerner & Tetlock 1999, p. 255). In a recent study investigating the relationship between user interfaces in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and accountability, user interface (UI) artefacts were shown to manipulate four of the core elements of accountability theory that influence employees' accountability processes (Vance et al. 2013, 2015). Accountability theory was used to test this emerging model and develop four user interface (UI) design artefacts that raise employees' accountability perceptions and decrease organisational policy violations. In their seminal work, Williams et al. (1981 p. 309) pointed to the first of the four elements being identifiability in that a person's 'knowledge that his outputs could be linked to him' and thus reveal his/her true identity; Lerner & Tetlock (1999 p. 255) pointed to the second of the four elements being the expectation of evaluation in that the belief that one's 'performance will be assessed by another [party] according to some normative ground rules and with some implied consequences'; Vance, Lowry and Eggett (2015) built on this and validated two more elements in their HCI study with the awareness of

monitoring is a user's state of active cognition that his/her system-related work is monitored; and social presence being the awareness of other users in the system.

However, Frink & Klimoski (1998) had identified six elements rather than four which influence the process of an individual decision-maker's accountability. These include social context in which agent is situated; observation and evaluation by a principal; standards and expectations against which agent's behaviour is judged; agent's belief that they will have to answer, justify or defend the decisions; decision related outcomes highly valued by agent (specified or unspecified, objective or subjective); and actual decision or action. Five out of the six are extrinsic, while one out of the six stands out as intrinsic (ie. decision related outcomes highly valued by agent). Typically, decision makers can find themselves in situations with conflicting accountabilities due to a number of contradictory elements coming from different directions and stakeholders (ie. being pulled in different directions based on NGO, donor, beneficiary, and self). What tends to happen in such a situation, is that decision makers try to cope with the dominant accountability force (Frink & Klimoski 1998). The theoretical concepts from the accountability body of knowledge referenced above have been consolidated and adapted as follows into Figure 2.
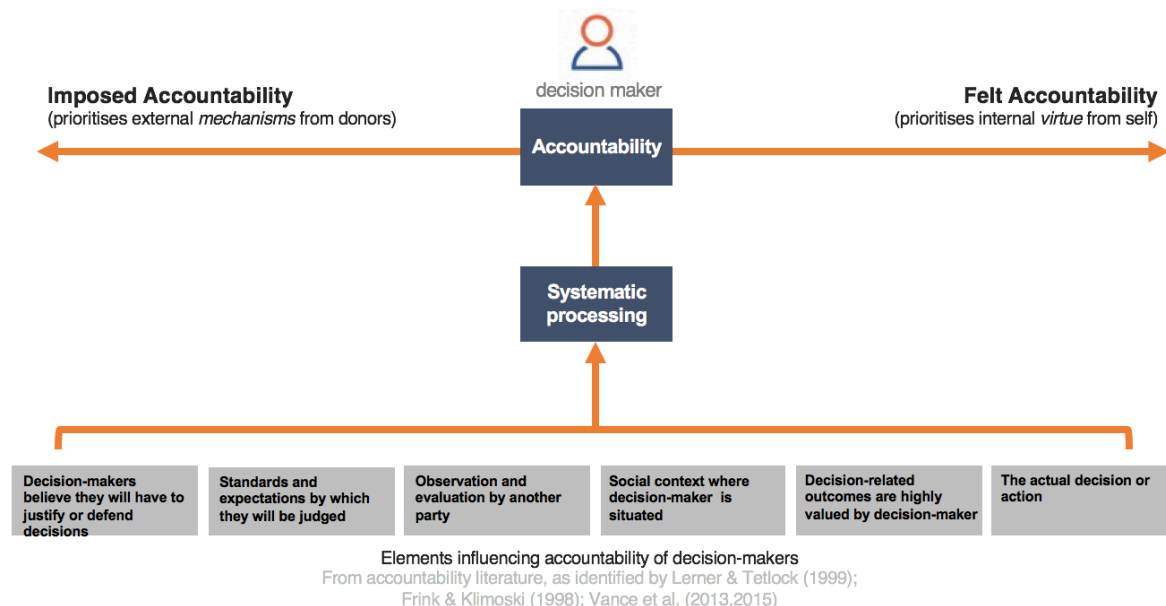
Figure 2: Consolidated accountability theory framework. Source: Author consolidating Tetlock (1985) Lerner and Tetlock (1999); Frink and Klimoski (1998); Vance, Lowry, and Eggett (2013, 2015).

This model above visualises recent thinking on individual accountability processes from the accountability literature as it relates to decision makers in organisations. It

serves as a useful framework for anchoring this thesis in concepts that have been studied extensively. The aim of this thesis was not to test a hypothesis, but rather to explore and develop a model for how Design Thinking tools may be influencing decision makers' 'felt' accountability in aid projects. Therefore, the unit of analysis is the individual decision maker, though, this thesis recognises each individual is operating within a complex web of relationships and dynamics. Each individual is likely navigating 'felt' accountability towards multiple stakeholder groups as they work to serve beneficiaries, are employed by NGOs, and are funded by donors.

2.3 Situating the decision makers in NGOs

The individual decision makers of aid projects in the aid sector are often employed or contracted by development NGOs. There is little agreement on how to define and classify NGOs (Banks & Hulme 2012; Fisher 1997; Vakil 1997; Doh & Teegen 2002; Martens 2002; Vakil 2018) especially since they are so varied in their structure, culture and the issues they address (Banerjee 2006). Vakil (1997) suggests there are six categories of NGOs: 1) welfare, 2) development, 3) education, 4) networking, 5) research, and 6) advocacy. These categorisations have not changed significantly in recent times. In contrast to Vakil, Tvedt (1998) adopts a grounded approach to the classifying of NGOs operating in the aid sector as he argues that the term NGO refers to all organisations that are institutionally separate from the state and are non-profit-distributing (Tvedt 1998). Rather than Vakil's categorical approach, Tvedt insists that it is the degree to which an organisation exhibits autonomy that qualifies it as an NGO, not the nature of issues the organisation engages with or other differentiating characteristics. Even though it begs for more generality, this seems a fair distinction by Tvedt given the varied types of organisations that are registered as NGOs. The type of organisations can be local and international; membership numbers counted in the millions or simply one individual (eg. briefcase or suitcase NGOs); they can focus on a single issue or push an entire ideology; involve famous celebrities or grass roots activists; control large multi-millions dollar budgets or be purely volunteer based (Lehr-Lehnardt 2005; Anheier & Themudo 2005).

NGOs can also be categorised in different ways that include subject matter or sectoral classifications (Sarwar & Osorio-Cortes 2018):

1) Based on the industry sector of the project (eg. health, energy, livestock, water and sanitation, financial services).

2) Based on issue (eg. gender, empowerment, poverty, environmental, governance, humanitarian relief)

The many efforts to define NGOs seem to establish various organisational and functional features that distinguish them from each other. While not providing as much clarity, maintaining generality about the distinguishing feature of NGOs is that they are not from government and not from commercial entities, but rather they are centred in civil society. However, the changing culture of NGOs into more professionalised entities has been criticised for compromising their ability to help the communities they claim to serve.

2.4 The original interest in accountability

It is undisputed that NGOs have played a significant role in aid delivery since the 1970s. They have been lauded for their unique position to pursue people-centred services and advocacy work that 'fill gaps left by the failure of states across the developing world in meeting the needs of their poorest citizens' (Banks and Hulme 2012, p. 3). What could be disputed, however, is whether this unique position to 'fill gaps' has been effectively utilised by NGOs over the years. Banks and Hulme (2015, 2012) are among many voices who call out the inability of NGOs to meet their goals of long-term societal change. As funding and prominence of NGOs has grown, it appears that so have concerns about their legitimacy.

It is unsurprising then that there has been a growing trend in the design and implementation of more stringent accountability mechanisms to try and address some of these concerns regarding their legitimacy. Historically, the interest in accountability within the aid sector began in the late 1980s and early 1990s when 'grassroots' groups who were made up of volunteers for humanitarian or religious purposes began to professionalise. As volunteers became permanent paid staff, came more formal management structures that tended to focus more efforts on fundraising and reputation. Before long, NGO literature became increasingly dominated by corporate management practices to support the emerging organisational evolution that was taking place. As NGOs developed their own self-identities, their original concern with the beneficiary needs was now competing with the more pressing interests of the

organisation itself (Edwards & Hulme 2002). Jordan and van Tuijl (2006) argue that NGOs are required to abide by extensive accountability measures as a direct consequence of the rapid growth in terms of numbers, size and funding of organisations, and their increasing influence. Others maintained it was because of the professionalisation or 'NGOisation' of aid that the actors who were initially thought of as part of the solution were actually being considered as part of the problem (Edwards & Hulme 1995). It can be argued, that within this backdrop, the fixation with accountability took a strong hold. New ways of ensuring accountability infiltrated the practices of NGOs and the decision makers within them. However, looking back on the literature in the last 20 years on this topic, there appears to have been very limited anticipation of the unintended consequences that the well-intentioned accountability-focused practices would have.

Instead, there has been growing scrutiny of development NGOs for their limited impact for beneficiaries (Andrews 2014; Madon 1999; O'Dwyer & Unerman 2007; Ebrahim 2009). As a result of this increasing scrutiny, NGOs have continued to institutionalise a host of accountability mechanisms and charters (Ebrahim 2009; Schmitz et al. 2012; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). To date, the critique has been heavily weighted towards the accountability relationship between NGOs and their donors. In this relationship, the donor usually sets the project objectives and finances the NGOs to implement them whether directly or through in-country partners (Agyemang et al. 2009). The donors then hold the NGOs accountable through regular reporting against the agreed upon objectives (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). However, decision makers within NGOs who oversee projects have often protested that imposed and functional donor-centred accountability practices have become too dominant and undermine more social, beneficiary-centred accountability practices. They highlight greater stakeholder participation in defining the need or solution(s) early enough regarding the issues that affect them most (Schmitz et al. 2012; Murtaza 2012; Porter & Kramer 2011). Banks and Hulme (2012) go on to argue that NGOs have sacrificed their activism and humanitarian principles at the grassroots level just so they can comply with donors who determine the terms for their survival. This could be a direct consequence of accountability practices that favour donor requirements over beneficiary needs.

As discussed earlier, accountability can be understood as a relational notion, given it is found in the relationship between actors/agents. For example, in commercial settings, it is found in the obligations between corporate boards and shareholders; or in public sector terms it is found in the obligations between governments and voters. The basic foundation of the obligation in these examples is said to be relatively straightforward (Gray, Bebbington & Collison 2006) when compared to NGO accountability. Accountability within an NGO structure seems much more complicated and problematic as NGOs are expected to satisfy multiple and usually competing obligations (Courville 2006). Despite Koppell's (2005) warnings against what he termed 'multiple accountability disorder', many others such as Naidoo (2003) debated exactly why NGOs should be held accountable on these multiple terms. The expanding types of actors that NGOs are finding themselves accountable to means there can be disconnects and competing priorities that emerge between their financial obligation to donors and the ethical obligations to communities that NGOs claim to serve (O'Dwyer & Unerman 2008).

2.5 Donor-centred and Beneficiary-centred accountability: A felt tension

There are some who believe NGOs are sufficiently accountable, those who would contest this completely, and others who claim the issue is in getting the right balance of accountability directed between the competing stakeholders. Most contributions warn specifically of this donor-centred accountability being the predominant influence on NGO decision-making at the cost of beneficiary-centred accountability (Ebrahim 2010). For the decision makers overseeing projects within NGO structures, their day-to-day practices tend to concentrate more on donor reporting requirements than beneficiary needs, all the while, missing the mark when it comes to relevance and effectiveness (McGillivray & Pham 2017; Miller & Rudnick 2014; Bearce & Tirone 2010). Donors are perceived to be part of the problem as they tend to prioritise reporting on resources, resource use, and immediate impacts (Ebrahim 2003; Edwards & Hulme 2002; Najam 1996). There are also many examples in the literature of aid projects meeting their targets but completely missing the point, as Ebrahim (2003) argues, the aid community generally prefers short-term, tangible outcomes which require high levels of control in decision-making and conditions in project

implementation. This is contrary to longer, iterative and human-centred projects that do not provide tangible results (that is, measurable with straightforward counting), or may not correspond with the outcome designed in the initial plan even if it better addresses the needs of beneficiaries (Dennehy et al. 2013). This is why it is suggested that decision makers of aid projects tend to follow suit and prioritise this more imposed donor-centred accountability, at the expense of beneficiary-centred accountability, as they depend on donors for professional survival (Edwards & Hulme 2002).

Chambers and Pettit (2013, p. 138) write about this tension between donor-centred and beneficiary-centred accountability as a result of 'governing dynamics that… prevent the inclusion of weaker actors and voices in decision-making'. They also discuss the changing nature of aid sector rhetoric to include more words like 'partnership', 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'transparency', which imply changes in those governing dynamics. Despite the many other instances in the literature which call for greater accountability toward beneficiaries (Cronin & O'Regan 2002; Dillon 2004; Ebrahim 2005; Lloyd 2005; Najam 1996), this rhetoric seems not to have been matched in practice. On the ground, accountability of decision makers to beneficiaries and any other stakeholder group other than funders seems quite weak (Edwards & Hulme 2002). For the resulting projects, the tension in this accountability paradigm can lead to decisions and outcomes that are disconnected from the real needs of beneficiaries. There are many institutional pressures identified about how the current 'imposed' regimes of accountability can create tensions that have negative effects on project decisions and project outcomes. Some of the imposed institutional pressures most commonly referred to in the literature include logical planning approaches, linear project processes, and quantitative-heavy dependencies. These three institutional pressures are further elaborated on in the following section.

2.5.1 Logical planning approaches mean 'things rather than people'

On the ground, project-level decision-making is foundational to delivering effective aid that does not 'miss the point' for beneficiaries. These every day decisions are dominated by a rational model of thinking in practice. The rational model is based on an analytic, systematic, rule-based and prescriptive mechanism for decision making (Hodgkinson & Healey 2011). Taking a closer look at an example of how this plays out, for instance, most donors require the use of the Logical Framework Approach

(LFA) as a planning, implementation and evaluation framework and to demonstrate accountability for correctly spending allocated funds for specified purposes (Najam 1996). Its origins lie as a planning tool for the US military and US space agency NASA before being adopted by USAID and other European aid organisations in the early 1980s. It became the global standard required by most donors for planning and tracking accountability in aid projects. Yet, there is significant evidence that this linear framework is constrictive as it curbs participation and reinforces existing top-down relationships of power and control (Chambers & Pettit 2013; Tacchi et al. 2010). Furthermore, many scholars agree about this tool not being conducive to community processes and can actually prevent communities from driving their own development agenda. Dennehy et al. (2013) emphasise it is important to build systems and procedures that are contextualised and begin from the community's needs and capabilities, instead of expecting communities to conform to donor requirements of using tools such as the LFA which tend to focus more on 'things' rather than 'people'. The almost universal complaint about the LFA is that it promotes a mechanistic idea of cause and effect (Golini, Landoni & Kalchschmidt 2018; Bakewell & Garbutt 2005) which tends to produce confusion rather than clarity, generate monitoring and reporting processes unrelated to real project issues and reinforce a false linear formula in which specified inputs lead to specified outputs (Bornstein 2003). The literature points to other contexts which the LFA does not handle well, such as 'complex multi-factor processes'; 'non-transparent political decision-making processes'; and, 'soft social changes' (Bakewell & Garbutt 2005).

The requirement to fit within rationalistic frameworks encourages decision makers to focus on work that demonstrates predictable outcomes, quickly. As a result, decision makers can sometimes 'lose sight of emerging opportunities and unintended positive and negative outcomes/impacts' (Bakewell & Garbutt 2005, p. 13). As a heavily relied upon decision-making tool, the failure of the LFA to cope with unintended consequences should not be taken lightly. It is these unexpected consequences which can sometimes be the most important consequences of all. There are many project examples where the most prominent success was seen in areas not anticipated in the plan, making it very difficult to report on with logical and rational approaches: 'In cases where donors have a distaste for reporting beyond the terse numbers neatly set out in the LFA's rows and columns, insights of real value are highly vulnerable' (Harley 2005,

p. 32). There are also examples in the literature of projects meeting their targets but completely missing the point (Ebrahim 2003). Project-level decision-making becomes beholden to industrial-era management approaches that are '*cause-effect models of change in human systems*' (Britton 2005; Dennehy et al. 2013), rather than contextually sensitive and adaptive to the complexities of real human needs on the ground.

2.5.2 Linear processes of change mean 'disconnected realities'

Decision makers who pursue this rational model generally follow a linear process which involves identifying the problem, assessing the relevant evidence, generating a set of possible solutions, evaluating the options, and then making a choice based on logical considerations and deliberation (Calabretta, Gemser & Wijnberg 2016; Elbanna 2006; Janis & Mann 1977; Schwenk 1984). Edmonds and Cook (2014) outline the key stages of a typical project cycle in what they term a 'social development context' which directly applies to the kinds of aid projects being examined in this thesis.

Edmonds and Cook (2014) explore this typical project cycle and process in detail. In summary, what happens initially, is an issue is identified, then a series of attempts to comprehend it through standard assessments or baseline surveys that offer indicators for assessing the project results. For instance, if the problem is poor school attendance of children, a survey is run to understand the extent and frequency (eg. which children, how many, where, etc) and factors that may be influencing the issue (eg. economic, access, family expectations etc). From there, a project is structured, usually based on existing project models and informed by the survey and assessment data. Decision makers tend to opt for a 'plug and play' approach where issues identified are addressed through rigidly formulaic approaches which means tried and tested approaches are used on common issues regardless of local cultural and social differences. This can make the difference between failure and success (Edmonds & Cook 2014). They go on to explain how using more assessment and quantitative methods do not offer the kind of qualitative information which is useful in making grounded and contextualised project decisions.

2.5.3 Quantitative-heavy dependencies mean 'stifled learning'

Many decision makers of aid projects have adopted traditional management practices which have brought with them stringent audit cultures fixated on procedural numbers and obligatory reporting (Angus 2008). In a different sector, but in the same vein, Joel Best (2012, p. 27) challenges the tendency to depend on numbers and statistics as absolute:

> *People gather statistics much as rock collectors pick up stones. This is wrong. All statistics are created through people's actions: people have to decide what to count and how to count it, people have to do the counting and the other calculations, and people have to interpret the resulting statistics, to decide what the numbers mean. All statistics are social products, the results of people's efforts.*

His point resonates with the status quo today affecting the aid sector accountability debate, where there is a reluctance to acknowledge that all statistics are shaped by human actions. The excessive emphasis on numbers, when those numbers are in fact social products, can lead to un-nuanced decisions that are based on disconnected realities. As previously discussed, this translates into compliance-based accountability in the form of short-term accounting for resource use, activities and outputs (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). These mostly numerically oriented metrics offer decision makers limited space to align, integrate or adapt their own values, strategy and mission within the requirements – which results in some decision makers pursuing unidirectional accountability towards donors who determine the 'language of justification' mentioned earlier (Roberts 2001, p. 1567 ; Sinclair 1995). This behaviour has adverse effects as learning through failure is disincentivised. Instead perceived failure from what was agreed upon with donors, as defined by the often numerical metrics adopted, is punished with the withdrawal of funding (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015; Sinclair 1995). This has been reported to place pressure on decision makers to show everything in a positive light to their donors, and subsequently stifle the possibility of learning and improving performance within the sector (Strathern 2000; Taylor & Soal 2003).

In contrast, there needs to be efforts towards basing decisions from a more holistic and grounded picture rooted in the non-quantifiable aspects of people's lived experiences. Imposed regimes of accountability that are heavily dependent on quantitative data are susceptible to criticism for expecting decision makers to sacrifice

their personal empathy and sense of solidarity. This kind of personal empathy and connection often comes from shared experiences and qualitative activities such as storytelling and collaborative future-making (Gair 2012).

2.6 New approaches are needed for supporting 'felt' accountability

Imposed accountability regimes can be criticised for expecting decision makers to sacrifice their 'felt' accountability which could hold real opportunities for decision makers to continue their 'vital' work (McGann & Johnstone 2005). The risk-averse mechanism like the LFA, inflexible linear aid project cycles, and an over-reliance on quantitative data alone to inform decisions all combined together do not allow space for, nor value or reward, strategic management styles. These styles encourage innovation, collaboration, risk-taking, experimentation, action learning and participatory ways of working (Tacchi et al. 2010; Angus 2008), which would in turn lead to enhanced accountability overall (Edwards & Hulme 2002). The issues with logical, linear and quantitative-heavy approaches to management are not unique to decision makers in aid contexts, there is extensive discussion in the broader management literature in the same regard. Liedtka (2013, p. 26) sums these issues up as:

> *the attempt to make a science of planning with its subsequent loss of creativity, the excessive emphasis on numbers, the drive for administrative efficiency that standardised inputs and formats at the expense of substance, and the dominance of single techniques, inappropriately applied*

Although rational, efficient and straightforward, these conventional approaches to decision-making have not proven effective in aid projects that are situated in contexts full of ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity. The analytical thinking toolkit that is founded on cause-effect models of change has its limitations (Jenkins 2010). There is extensive discussion in the broader management literature where decision makers from other sectors have turned to Design Thinking for new inspirations and approaches (Liedtka 2000, 2004).

2.7 Why Design Thinking is one of those approaches

Within the broader management literature, Design Thinking has been described as the best counter to constrictive management approaches – and as the best way to be creative and innovative (Liedtka 2018; Liedtka 2000; Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla et al. 2013; Boland & Collopy 2004; Dunne & Martin 2006). Upon taking a critical look at the Design Thinking discourse, it is evident the term 'Design Thinking' has varied meanings depending on its context. Design as a 'way of thinking' first emerged in Herbert A. Simon's 1969 book, 'The Sciences of the Artificial'. During the 1980s, Rolf Faste started teaching Design Thinking as a method of creative action at Stanford University. A broader view of Design Thinking as expressed by Buchanan (2001), refers to it as an approach to addressing ill-defined human problems. Design Thinking is increasingly viewed as a vehicle for the design discipline to contribute to other disciplines, especially in strategic management circles as an approach to dealing with complex realities (Johansson-Sköldberg et al. 2013). Razzouk and Shute (2012, p. 330) define Design Thinking as *'…an analytic and creative process that engages a person in opportunities to experiment, create and prototype models, gather feedback, and redesign.'* According to Dunne and Martin (2006) and Liedtka (2015), Design Thinking is a human-centred and open-minded approach to problem-solving, based on the way designers think and work. Design Thinking is fundamentally an exploratory approach requiring a conscious effort to let go of pre-existing solutions and an openness to unexpected discoveries along the way. Whilst providing a structure and coherence to the exploration, its emphasis is on being 'human centred' which is described by Sabine Junginger (2008, p. 30) as an approach that invites organisations to:

> *…introduce the perspectives and experiences of 'other' people – people who are not familiar with acronyms, processes, hierarchies, or standards created by internal experts. These people include customers, suppliers, and employees alike. To make the organisation and its products work for them, organisations need to change around the experience – from outside-in*

Shifting an organisation's focus to be outward looking rather than inward looking means taking deliberate steps to systemically uncover end user needs, build empathy among decision makers, and co-design solutions to ensure sustainability in the long

term. In contrast to conventional management approaches, Design Thinking therefore offers decision makers a 'human centred' knowledge system rooted in empathy with users, a pluralism of perspectives, experimentation and co-designing solutions (Liedtka 2018; Liedtka et al. 2013).

More and more, development NGOs are utilising Design Thinking processes, methods and tools. While there has been an abundance of studies in the past two decades on Design Thinking for business, much less is understood regarding Design Thinking for social innovation and international development (Bucolo & Wrigley 2013; Mulgan et al. 2007). There is a growing collection of Design Thinking tools and methods being applied in aid projects, these have mainly focused on the design of tangible products and services (Thomas 2006). For example, the design firm IDEO, worked with KickStart to create the MoneyMaker Pump, a small but powerful small-acreage irrigation pump with hard-to-ignore impact. Since 1991, the pump contributed to the creation of 64,000 new businesses, generating $79 million a year in new profits and wages. Another exemplar is the LifeStraw, a portable water purifier that has helped prevent common water-borne diseases. Forbes magazine called it one of the 'ten things that will change the way we live.' (Ely 2006, online). These are examples of newsworthy advancements; however, the real opportunity is to move from intermittent cases of product successes and explore whether Design Thinking's emphasis on human-centredness can have more strategic applications in the aid sector. This notion is noted in Buchanan's seminal work, where he makes clear that designers can go beyond basic form and function to more strategic applications of designing that 'advance human dignity'. He goes on to define the concept of human-centred design as 'fundamentally an affirmation of human dignity' (Buchanan 2001, p. 194). This supports that Design Thinking has a more significant role to play than just developing new products and services people can purchase and use. It now has an extended responsibility to advance people's dignity. This means beneficiaries – their voices, their values, and their wellbeing need to be at the centre of a decision-maker's sense of accountability.

Design Thinking offers a different approach and would suggest processes that are more widely participatory and intended at innovation and learning rather than externally forced control (Liedtka 2000). However, there are many instances in the aid

literature that challenge the idea that being more human-centred means decisions should be based on beneficiary preferences because people do not know what is best for themselves. For example, Geuss (2008) and Hobbes (2014) have separately showcased through different examples how entrusting people to be reliable judges of their own interests does not always end well. Banerjee and Duflo (2011) have also documented how aid projects have failed because of choices made by beneficiaries, such as food aid that does not reduce malnutrition indicators because beneficiaries chose more exciting and exotic food over what was more nutritious. These questions do not seem to appeal to decision makers who are perhaps more comfortable with pursuing beneficiary-centred accountability over efficiency and control for donors. For decision makers to 'transform' (Collier 2007) into being 'human-centred' (Buchanan 2001) and 'outward-looking' (Junginger 2008), it requires a shift in the tools and methods they use to do their jobs. Just as the field of business management found itself in need of new metaphors and inspirations for creating a set of possibilities that do not yet exist (Liedtka 2000; Liedtka & Ogilvie 2011; Liedtka 2014), so too, do some decision makers in aid projects seek new inspirations and approaches as they work through these tensions in accountability.

Design Thinking comes from a tradition of specifying solutions from the systematic application of ethnographic research, human-centred models and continuous evaluation design with users (Alves & Nunes 2013). Given this context, there is a diverse range of tools that provide a wide range of options for designers and decision makers to choose from. A large number of possible design methods and tools can be used to facilitate a Design Thinking process in a project setting. For example, Kumar (2012) outlined 101 different design methods and tools that serve different functions throughout a Design Thinking process. Soon after, Alves and Nunes (2013) identified over 164 design methods and tools by surveying a range of design organisations from academia and industry. Using multiple four box models, Alves and Nunes (2013) grouped the various tools and methods based on the motivation to use it, the audience, the representations used, and phases in the Design Thinking process. The Design Thinking process consists of five stages: empathising, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing (Brown 2008). From a design perspective, selecting the right tools and methods at the different stages is important for effective decision making in multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary contexts. As the discipline of design intersects more

and more with other disciplines, there appears to be a limited set of common references and tools. In supporting cooperation between disciplines to work together, Alves and Nunes (2013) created a taxonomy based on a study of ten sources and review of 164 methods and tools. Alves and Nunes (2013) also suggest that 71% of all methods and tools surveyed were referenced by a single source organisation— while only 15% of all methods and tools surveyed were referenced by at least three different source organisations. This accounts for 25 methods or tools. However, only 10 out of 164 tools and methods were referenced by at least five of the design organisations surveyed. The following table presents the most commonly used and referenced Design Thinking methods and tools according to Alves and Nunes (2013).

Table 2: Top ten referenced design tools and methods

Tool/Method Name	Tool/Method Description	Times referenced
Blueprint (service blueprint)	A visual schematic incorporating users' and service providers' perspectives, as well as other relevant parties.	6
User Journey Map	A visualisation of customer experiences over time and space required to accomplish a certain goal.	6
Focus Group	A forum of selected people controlled by an impartial moderator to give feedback to design ideas.	5
Interview	Also known as empathic interviews, provides deep information, not obtainable by observational research.	5
Observations	Used to identify problems about an existing situation or a prototype design, which can arise when people interact with services.	5
User Personas	Archetypes built after a preceding exhaustive observation of the potential users. They represent a 'character' with which client and design teams can engage.	5
Prototyping	A tool for testing the service function and performance by observing the interaction of the user with a prototype of the service put in the place, situation and condition where the service will actually exist.	7
Scenarios	Hypothetical stories, created with sufficient detail to meaningfully explore a particular aspect of a service.	7
Shadowing	Researchers immerse themselves in customers' lives, front-line staff, or people behind the scenes in order to observe their behaviour and experiences, while identifying the real moments when problems occur as well as situations where people say one thing but do another.	6
Storyboarding	A series of drawings or other visual representation of a sequence of events, either for a situation where a service is used, or the hypothetical implementation of a new service prototype.	6

Source: from 164 options in Alves and Nunes 2013, pp. 228-229.

Alves and Nunes also distinguish between both of these terms. A 'method' as an 'established, habitual, logical or prescribed practice or systematic process of achieving

certain ends with accuracy and efficiency, usually in an ordered sequence of fixed steps'; whereas a 'tool' is 'anything used as a means of accomplishing a task or purpose' (2013, p. 218). For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'tool' is used over the term 'method' as it provides a less limiting or predefined way of exploring what ways design is being used. The term 'tools' allowed for a more exploratory and open inquiry that embraced emergent possibilities about 'anything' that can assist in achieving a project's purpose or decision-maker's goal. In any case, many Design Thinking tools can be quite visual and can require high levels of engagement that help decision makers see relationships between concepts (Straker & Wrigley 2014).

Bucolo and Wrigely (2012), as well as Straker and Wrigley (2014) argue that the issue is not that decision makers are not aware of different tools to do their jobs, it is more that their capabilities to include Design Thinking requires institutional changes that demand different leadership cultures and ways of thinking. However, previously ingrained processes can create strong organisational resistance to change (Straker & Wrigley 2014). Guenther (2012) believes that new tools should still be introduced to stakeholders to allow for the deviation from the way an activity was originally intended, and to revise tools to reflect varying needs in different contexts. Through a series of works, Wrigley and colleagues explore the role of Design Thinking tools through the perspectives of trained Design Thinking experts whom they refer to as 'Design Innovation Catalysts' (Wrigley & Bucolo 2012; Wrigley 2013; Wrigley 2016; Straker & Wrigley 2014). They identified the function of Design Thinking tools was often modified beyond the initial intention by the decision makers involved. There were three types of additional functions that were cited by decision makers. Firstly, the tools provided a way to communicate across business departments, secondly, they offered a safe space for creative thinking by staff, and thirdly, they facilitated further learning throughout the organisation (Straker & Wrigley 2014). However, they claim that it is not all about the tools. It was also discovered that the role of the designer facilitating the process or 'Design Innovation Catalyst' is equally as important as the tools themselves, since the designer needs to be able to 'bend the rules' and adapt tools to varying purposes and contexts spontaneously (Straker & Wrigley 2014, p. 3). Others in the literature have arrived at similar conclusions, that although Design Thinking tools may be provided to decision makers with instructions, they still need the mindset of a designer to be utilised to their potential (De Lille, Abbingab & Kleinsmann 2012).

2.8 Summary and Research Question

Though NGOs are thought to wield considerable power and influence, they are not free to decide how to demonstrate their accountability. If the obligation to give an account is one of the characteristics of the *mechanism* use of accountability, then an NGO is obligated to give an account to actors outside of itself. However, if by definition the notion of accountability is understood more broadly than an institutionally imposed *mechanism*, but also as an individually felt *virtue* that is driven by personal morals and ethics. This idea is more akin to a 'state of mind' than a 'state of affairs' (Frink & Klimoski 1998) then this may present an opportunity to re-calibrate the accountability debate taking place in the aid sector to a more balanced one that includes both interpretations. Very few accounts explore the notion of 'felt' accountability at the individual decision maker level which may be considered to hold a great deal of promise for individual decision makers in allowing them to continue their 'vital' work (McGann & Johnstone 2005).
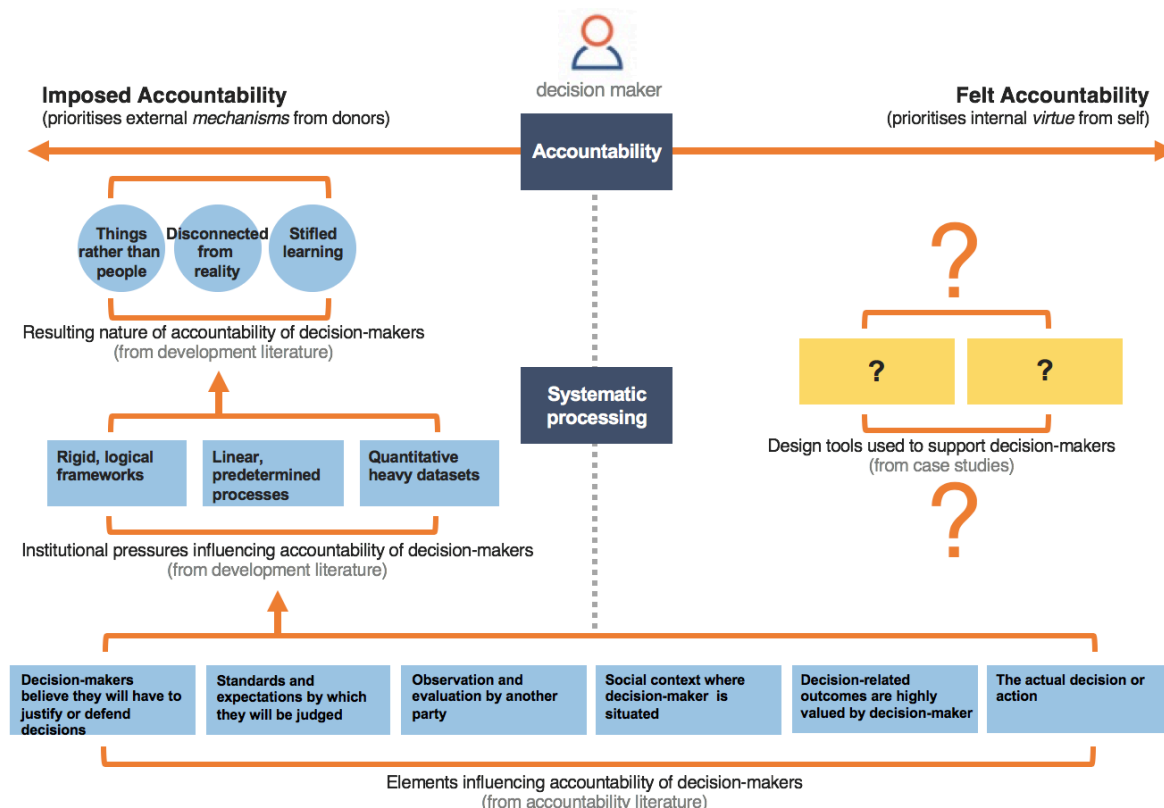
Figure 3: Consolidated concepts from literature review. Source: Author consolidating concepts from theory and literature review.

With this backdrop, some individual decision makers are turning to Design Thinking for inspiration on how to return to their NGO roots of human-centredness that puts beneficiaries first. Despite this emerging trend of using Design Thinking in aid projects, there have been very few and limited attempts to describe the practices of design in the context of aid or explore the influence of Design Thinking tools on decision-making and accountability at the individual level. There has been little empirical evidence to indicate which tools from the ones being used are valued and employed in decision-making, and whether they have had any influence on decision maker 'felt' accountability. Based on the literature, the fundamental premise of this thesis is that Design Thinking could influence individual 'felt' accountability among decision makers of aid projects. Although the criticality of accountability in aid projects has long been acknowledged, and there are some decision makers turning to Design Thinking to support more beneficiary-centred accountability, there remains limited academic attention to examining the role of Design Thinking in this context.

The primary aim of this thesis was to identify whether specific Design Thinking tools used in real world settings have the potential to influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects. In pursuing this aim, other objectives included:

- To gain insight into which (if any) Design Thinking tools were identified by decision makers as influencing their 'felt' accountability.
- To explore how Design Thinking tools influenced decision makers' 'felt' accountability as perceived by them.
- To provide practical case examples on how Design Thinking tools were used in aid project contexts when they were perceived as influencing 'felt' accountability.

Based on the consolidation of the literature review above, research aim and objectives, the primary research question was:

Can Design Thinking tools influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects? If so, which ones and how?

This primary question reflects the exploratory nature of this thesis which is grounded in a combination of Accountability Theory and the perceptions and experiences of decision makers involved in two project case studies. Despite the increasing pressure on decision makers to design and deliver projects that are accountable to

beneficiaries, documentation of examples where Design Thinking tools have contributed to 'felt' accountability of decision makers are not evident in any of the design, business management (accountability), or international development/aid bodies of literature. Based on these knowledge gaps, the line of inquiry pursued involved the following sub-questions:

1. Which – if any – Design Thinking tools were **identified** by decision makers as influencing their 'felt' accountability?
2. What are decision makers' perceptions on how Design Thinking tools **influenced** their 'felt' accountability in aid projects?
3. How were Design Thinking tools **used** in the context of NGO-based aid projects?

The research questions reflected the need for an exploratory approach that was grounded in the perceptions and experiences of the decision makers involved and situated within specific project contexts. Creswell (2013) indicates that by gathering stories from participants about their personal experiences, a researcher can reveal the unique individualities and self-perceptions of participants. Such narratives can offer a new understanding of decision makers experiences of accountability and how Design Thinking contributed to those experiences. These questions and objectives have been derived from the deficiencies in the existing literature and have directly informed the research framework and research methods.

Chapter Three　Research Methodology

3.1 Objective

This chapter describes the research design chosen to explore the influence of design tools on the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects. Chapters One and Two of this thesis outlined the relevant literature and provided some theoretical underpinning and conceptual framework from which to launch the exploratory research question. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the reasons for the research methodology and methods that guided how data was collected and analysed.

The chapter starts by providing a justification for the research paradigm and qualitative approach before providing an outline of the research design. A more in-depth presentation of the methods is then covered. In doing so, the rationale for the choice of methods and explanations of participant targeting, data collection, coding and analysis processes are also detailed. Lastly, the limitations of the research methods are acknowledged and a summary of the chapter is provided.

3.2 Research paradigm

3.2.1 Social constructivist position

Over the past three decades, there has been significant debate in the social sciences surrounding methodological choices (Creswell 2009; Datta 1994; Gage 1989; Rossi 1994), as scholars debated over the 'superiority of one or other of the two major social science paradigms' (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998, p. 3). Some recent research points to a continued 'superiority' of quantitative and positivist approaches (Ryan et al. 2002). Going further than stated superiority, some researchers in the field of management refer to the phenomena identified by Dopuch and Reysine (1971) whereby researchers who prefer or specialise in one methodology tend to 'belittle' those adopting different research paradigms (Thomas & Brubaker 2000, p.12). These attitudes are further encouraged by others' statements like, 'good research uses the scientific method' in business research methods literature (Cooper & Emory 1995, p. 40). However, this

kind of starting point to research does not consider that methodological choice is dependent on ideological beliefs of the researcher in relation to the nature of the research question (McMurray et al. 2004).

The research methodology chosen by the researcher is influenced by their assumptions and beliefs about what is 'real' (ontology) and the way they make sense of knowledge and 'truth' (epistemology), which then affects the process of conducting research (methodology). Morgan and Smircich (1980), describe ontological assumptions as a continuum with 'realism' on one end – where researchers tend to view reality as objective and independent of individual perceptions – and with 'idealism' on the other end – where researchers tend to view reality as subjective and socially constructed. This is depicted in Figure 4 below:

REALISM
(reality is objective)

RESEARCHER

IDEALISM
(reality is subjective)

| Reality is concrete structure | Reality is a concrete process | Reality is a contextual field of information | Reality is a realm of symbolic discourse | Reality is social construction | Reality is a projection of human imagination |

Figure 4: Range of ontological starting points. Source: Adapted from Morgan and Smircich 1980.

Therefore, the selection of research methodology is not achieved in isolation of the influencing ontological and epistemological factors on the researcher. For instance, when a researcher sees an issue as objective, then knowledge is expected to be formulated through empirical measurement which tends to involve quantitative research that adopts mainly deductive processes (McMurray et al. 2004). However, when a researcher sees an issue as subjective or 'multiple' (Creswell 2007, p. 17), then knowledge is expected to be formulated through interpretation and social construction, which tends to involve qualitative research that adopts inductive processes (McMurray et al. 2004). Creswell also suggests this kind of research requires researchers to '*lessen the distance between the researcher and the focus of research*' (2007, p. 16) which lends itself to qualitative methods of inquiry such as phenomenology, ethnographic studies, action research, grounded theory, case studies and narrative interrogation (Creswell 2007).

The research questions that surfaced from the literature review in Chapter Two assume an ontological position that is more located towards the subjectively social constructivist and 'idealistic' end of the continuum. The research methodology chosen for this thesis is also anchored in the researcher's perception of the research issue of 'felt' accountability as subjective and having 'multiple' explanations (Creswell 2007, p. 17). Consequently, the researcher sought to observe and construct explanations based on 'real world' phenomena (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Based on this, there was a clear justification for an action research approach supplemented by other qualitative methods which will be described further in the following section.

3.2.2 Inductive processes

The notion of constructing explanations based on 'real world' phenomena also pointed the research design to inductive processes, which produce theory rather than a clear conclusion or hypothesis (Cooper & Emory 1995; McMurray et al. 2004). The theory produced is based on an 'inferential jump beyond the evidence presented' (Cooper & Emory 1995, p. 27) and is described by McMurray et al. (2004, p. 70) as 'the only sensible manner of proceeding' when too little is understood about the phenomenon being researched. Taking an inductive approach has meant this thesis is unable to provide a truly valid theory because there still stands the potential for many other alternative explanations (Abercrombie et al. 2000; Cooper & Emory 1995). The theory and ideas presented in this thesis are therefore not able to be empirically tested, though they provide insights that may be taken forward and enhanced by accumulating additional corroborating evidence (Abercrombie et al. 2000; McMurray et al. 2004). The following section first provides an overview of the research questions and a description of the specific methods that were employed.

3.3 Research methods

For this thesis, a range of research methods were combined for the researcher to be able to thoroughly understand the phenomena being studied from the perspectives of decision makers. In reflecting on the research objectives, questions and paradigm described above, the following table provides a summary of the considerations for the selection of the research methods.

Table 3: Research methods considerations. Source: Author.

Research objectives	Research questions	Research considerations
To gain insight into which (if any) Design Thinking tools were identified by decision makers as influencing their individually 'felt' accountability.	Which – if any – Design Thinking tools were **identified** by decision makers as influencing their 'felt' accountability?	This required real-time, participative observation and post-project reflection with participants for them to self-identify the tools which had any influence on their 'felt' accountability.
To explore decision maker perceptions on how Design Thinking tools were influencing their 'felt' accountability.	What are decision makers' perceptions on how Design Thinking tools **influenced** individual 'felt' accountability in aid projects?	This required real-time, participative observation during key project moments and post-project reflection with participants on their perceptions to how the tools may have influenced their 'felt' accountability.
To provide practical case examples on how Design Thinking tools were **used in aid project contexts** when they were perceived as influencing 'felt' accountability.	How were Design Thinking tools **used** in the context of NGO-based aid projects?	This involved a combination of participatory action research and observation in real-time to describe how the Design Thinking tools were integrated within existing aid project contexts.

In aligning with the research considerations stemming from the research objectives, participatory action research was explicitly used in conjunction with other observation and interview methods for the two case studies included in this thesis. The researcher was employed by the consultancy ThinkPlace, and so the projects came to the researcher out of genuine real world needs rather than the traditional way of researcher seeking out the research. In addition to the consulting-related activities for each project, the researcher also engaged in an interconnected action research inquiry for this thesis.

3.3.1 Action Research

Although not easily defined, action research has been described as a process aimed at 'developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes' as it brings together action, reflection, theory and practice in collaboration with others (Reason & Bradbury 2001, p.1). It has also been described as collaborative approach to research that provides people with the opportunity to take action in an effort to resolve specific issues while endorsing participatory strategies (Berg et al. 2004). Riel (2010) defines action research as a reflective process of progressive problem solving

led by individuals working with others in teams or communities to improve the way they solve problems (Riel 2010). According to Bob Dick (2002, p. 159), action research is a 'family of research methodologies' that pursue both action and research outcomes simultaneously.

Given its starting point is in everyday experience and the 'development of living knowledge', action research 'can be considered a verb rather than a noun' (Reason & Bradbury 2001, p. 2). Based on this explanation, it is clear that action and research are inherently intertwined in real life, and not polar opposites of one another as they are sometimes claimed to be under the assumptions of empirical realism/positivism (Reason & Torbert 2001). One key value of action research is to not so readily separate understanding and action, but rather see that only through action is real understanding possible since 'theory without practice is not theory but speculation' (Bradbury-Huang 2010, p. 93). Action research acknowledges the social world to be always changing, and that both the researcher and research phenomena being part of that constant change (Chandler & Torbert, 2003).

Since the foundation of action research by pioneer Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, several appropriations have emerged, although similar in aims, they differ in method (Craig 2009). There are many action research methodologies used by researchers in Higher Education and other disciplines, however, the one most relevant to this thesis is 'participatory action research' (PAR). PAR is more concerned with how to change structures in the transformation of society than some other forms. For example 'practical action research' has been criticised for its lack of authenticity since the researcher is still the one guiding the 'practical reasoning' (Kemmis 2009, p. 76). PAR on the other hand, 'promotes a critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical action to promote change' (Grundy, as cited in Manfra 2009, p. 4). The key characteristics are participation and action. With action, research goes beyond gathering information but also having that drive change. With participation, research is an empowering process with 'equal and collaborative' involvement of participants (Chandler & Torbert 2003).

In contrast to traditional methods, PAR aims not only to understand past events, but also present phenomena, particularly the ongoing dynamics of human interactions in which the researcher is a participant (Chandler & Torbert 2003). From the realist

ontological perspective, research validity is improved the more the researcher is separated from the phenomena being researched; however, as demonstrated above, this can be unhelpful as a method for learning to exercise timely, real world action in the present. A key argument for action research in this thesis is its exploration of the 'felt' condition at an individually subjective level, hence, the research needed not to do away with subjectivity, but rather 'tame' it (Peshkin1991). The challenge for the researcher was to put the necessary precautions in place so that instead of merely reinforcing one's preconceived ideas, the process of gathering and analysing the data expanded or changed it (Fine 2008). One of the practices to help the researcher 'tame' the bias is to identify and articulate their prior assumptions throughout the research process – since making biases visible makes them more susceptible to revision (Peshkin 1991). Another practice to 'tame' the bias is to facilitate such deliberations on assumptions as part of a group – since shared discussion allows for people to articulate biases so they can be 'displayed, dissected, challenged, and pooled' (Fine 2008, p. 223). Action research offers an advantage in this way.

Although he explains that there are many methodological choices in action research, Dick (2002) also suggests the following considerations to guide decisions on research methodology. According to Dick (2002), if the primary goal for using action research is participation and equity, then the more suitable approaches are the many varieties of 'participatory" action research (PAR), as explained by Whyte (1991), Greenwood and Levin (1998), Smith et al. (1997), and Zuber-Skerritt (1996). If, however, the primary goal for using action research is for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of a highly interconnected and complex system, then the more suitable approaches are the several varieties of systems methodology, including those of Checkland and Scholes (1999) and Flood (2010). As Dick (2002) outlines, other types of action research approaches stem from teacher research and 'living theory', for example, Mills (2000), Power and Hubbard (1999), and Whitehead (1993); or approaches on 'action science' developed by Argyris (1999) and Argyris and Schön (1996); or approaches on 'action inquiry' of Fisher and Torbert (1995).

Like most others who write about action research methodologies, Dick also maintains that the use of a cyclical or spiral process of planning, action and review as defining characteristics of action research. The value in the spiral process and simultaneous

pursuit of both action and research allows the researcher to continuously move between action and critical reflection (Dick 2002). Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) describe the action research process as having a spiral of: plan, act, observe, and reflect. Dick (2002) specifically points to Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cycle as being relevant to approaches which favour higher degrees of participation and treat political considerations explicitly (Dick 2002). This cyclical nature is another advantage of this thesis as it repeatedly proceeded through a series of plan-act-observe-reflect steps. Unlike traditional research methods, action research does not end once findings and conclusions have been formulated by the researcher, on the contrary, this sparks a renewal of a progressive problem-solving spiral (Dick 2002; Riel 2010).

Figure 5: progressive problem-solving spiral
Source: Riel (2010) adapting Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

For this thesis, the main purpose of the action research spirals was to ensure flexibility that was responsive to 'real world' learning among adult learners and professionals, hence the use of the Kemmis and McTaggart action research model – which has shown to be a more suitable and preferable management learning approach (McMurray 2006). Each turn of the spiral allowed the opportunity to test assumptions and interpretations that guided the researcher's plans in action (Dick 2002).

3.3.2 Qualitative Methods

The combined action research and supplementary qualitative methods involved two cycles of 'plan-act-collect-reflect' across two different 'real world' projects. The plan stage involved research design and case/participant selection. The act stage involved the researcher actively engaged in the projects by facilitating the Design Thinking process. The observe stage involved the researcher conducting ten semi-structured interviews with decision makers (six for case study one, four for case study two). The reflect stage involved grounded theory to guide the combined manual and NVivo analysis. To supplement the action research process in addressing the research questions and considerations, there were four specific qualitative methods drawn on to strengthen the data collection and analysis processes. A short description and justification for each method is provided below.

1. Natural Observation & Reflexivity Journal

For this thesis, observation was used as a complementary data collection technique to accompany other techniques. Clinical observations are usually objective and realistic, used to demonstrate frequency or quantity of activities, whereas natural observations like the ones used for this thesis, are more subjective, take place in real-world settings and can demonstrate more qualitative aspects of activities (McMurray et al. 2004; Pace & Faules 1994). One of the advantages of using this method is that it does not interfere with the people or the activities being observed. For this thesis, the observer was a participant in the projects, and so observations were not structured during specific hours, but involved the researcher being attentive to detail, especially in relation to non-verbal behaviour in day-to-day activities while part of the team (McMurray et al. 2004; Ticehurst & Veal 2000; Baily 1978). Observations were reported as researcher notes in a reflexivity journal that captured descriptions of key activities, any verbal feedback from participants, as well as non-verbal reactions the researcher observed to the tools and techniques during the projects by other participants. The use of some light observation is worth mentioning given the possible influence on what was written in the reflexivity journal, however, since it was not a strictly prescriptive interpretation of the observational method, this therefore did not contribute significantly to the analysis – unlike the other methods described below. Given the researcher's design training and experience, the observation and 'reflection-

in-action' applied for this thesis stems from Schön's work on the reflective practitioner and reflective organisation (Schön 1983; Argyris and Schön 1996). This method was much less intended as a step-by-step process to report, and more intended as a raised awareness and responsiveness in the moment.

2. In-depth Interviews (semi-structured)

Employing a constructivist paradigm and seeking participants' stories, their narratives of their history and experiences led to semi-structured and in-depth interviewing as the most practical method to capture those stories and feelings (Engel & Schutt 2009). For this thesis, using semi-structured interviews has enabled learning about the language used by participants and the situated contexts in which participants operate, which are both essential in gaining insight into their perceptions, values, and relational aspects that are significant to understanding their experiences. Anchoring the research in unstructured interviews has generated rich data that can be analysed in different ways (Blaikie 2009).

3. Grounded theory

For this thesis, grounded theory provided the systematic guidelines for gathering and analysing data using inductive strategies (Bryant & Charmaz 2007). Starting from a divergent set of assumptions, this research has followed leads gained from the data generated more so than the literature review of traditional objective and quantitative research design (Glaser & Strauss 1967). While such objective research methods may generate data (not theory) to test existing theories by logically deducing hypotheses from them, using the grounded theory method provided this thesis a set of robust procedures that enabled the emergence and generation of ideas that may later be verified through traditional logico-deductive methods (Bryant & Charmaz 2007). Therefore, the theoretical analysis of the data relied on key issues emerging rather than forcing concepts into any pre-conceived categories and support the aim of the thesis to further theory development.

4. Case study

The notion of the 'case' can refer to whatever bounded system (Smith et al. 1973) is of interest – whether an institution, a program/project, or population. For this thesis, each case study refers to a project case bounded by geography, timeframe, organisation and sectoral focus. Case studies are considered a strong method for

adding to experience and improving understanding (Stake 1978, 1994). However, case study research has also been criticised for not being able to produce scientifically generalisable findings (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster 2000). For Guba and Lincoln (1994), the necessity of strict generalisations in social research is questionable in and of itself, so they argue that the purpose of case studies can also be to provide 'working hypotheses' for strengthening understanding. The case studies in this thesis provide a bounded focus and real-world inspiration toward new ideas for better understanding the phenomena being studied.

3.4 Research conduct

3.4.1 About the research process

The combined action research and qualitative process involved two cycles of 'plan-act-collect-reflect' across two different 'real world' projects. The plan stage involved research design and case/participant selection. The act stage involved the researcher actively engaged in the projects by facilitating the Design Thinking process. The observe stage involved the researcher conducting 10 semi-structured interviews with decision makers (six for cases study one, four for case study two). The reflect stage involved grounded theory to guide the combined manual and NVivo analysis. In practice, the below steps were followed in the data collection, analysis and thesis development process:

1. **Literature review:** An in-depth literature review identified significant gaps in knowledge regarding accountability and Design Thinking in aid projects.

2. **Research design and ethics approval:** Secondly, the literature and accountability theory informed the research design and interview questions for the ethics application to BCHEAN. NOTE: Ethics clearance was received through RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and has Ethics approval No.19022.

3. **Case and participant selection:** The researcher was employed by the consultancy ThinkPlace while enrolled at RMIT part-time. In the course of the researcher's consulting work, these two projects qualified for inclusion in this thesis; firstly, based on relevance to the research aims and questions; and secondly based on convenience as the projects came to the researcher rather

than the other way around. The interviewees were identified through the course of each project. The qualifying inclusion criteria for interviewees required they had decision-making responsibilities as well as direct experience with Design Thinking tools in the project.

4. **Action research and observation:** The first round of action research began in Ghana in 2013 as the researcher was co-located in-situ with other decision makers on the project for three months. The second round of action research began in 2017 for the Lebanon/UK based project, as the researcher was co-located in-situ with other decision makers for six months. In both cases, the researcher held the responsibility of guiding the design process and tools/methods applied during their involvement. The action research cycle was conducted once for each project. At the end of the first project the action research learnings were used to inform adaptations in the design thinking approach applied in the second project. Instead of being involved for three months, the desire for the design consultant capacity to be involved for a longer period was integrated to make the second project six months in duration. Instead of converging early on, the desire for spending more time exploring and prototyping various options as a team was also made intentional during the second project. Lastly, learning how critical the personas and journey maps were in allowing participants to feel immersed in the design process during the first project, ensured greater time and energy to develop, visualise and role play using these tools during the second project. The two cases offer different contexts, for example, by geographic region, with one being in Ghana, the other focused on Lebanon with a global outlook. The case contexts also differ by organisational function, despite both being development NGOs, with one being an implementing organisation and the other being a research organisation. The case contexts also differed by technical area, with one focusing on global health and the other focusing on humanitarian relief. These contextual differences across the two cases allowed for comparisons across the data to identify insights and establish integrity based on recurring patterns that emerged across both cases, despite the differing contexts.

5. **Pre-test interviews and tool refinement:** Before commencing post-project, participant interviews, three pre-test interviews took place to enhance 'validity' of the questions and to make refinements to the tools after testing them.

6. **Participant semi-structured interviews:** Following the Ghana action research, six participants were invited, briefed and interviewed. Following the Lebanon/UK based action research, four participants were invited, briefed and interviewed. Given the two cases offer different contexts, this allowed for data comparisons from the interviews.

7. **Data recording, coding and analysis:** The interview data was transcribed and coded using Creswell's (2009) framework. It was manually category theme analysed using grounded theory, then supplemented with using NVivo 10 software as a tool for further analysis. Although the predominant mode of analysis was manual, the combination with NVivio 10 and iterative analysis cycles allowed the researcher to concurrently zoom in and out between codes/themes, from one project case to another, and across many literature concepts – which has provided an enhancement in the integrity of the thesis findings (Yin 2010).

8. **Conceptual model development:** The data analysis and emergent themes have informed a conceptual model and discussion chapter.

9. **Confirming, merging, and refining the model:** Finally, the literature review findings were merged with the primary data findings to confirm, and where appropriate modify, the conceptual model. The model has provided a platform for further significant research into this emerging field of inquiry.

3.4.2 Research ethics

This study received ethics clearance through the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and has Ethics approval No.19022.

The Guba and Lincoln (1989) framework for ethical practice of qualitative research has been used to ensure healthy researcher-researched relationship. Drawing on this framework, there has been researcher self-disclosure and sharing to ensure truthfulness and authenticity from interviewees and motivate participants to talk about and share their experiences freely. Several aspects of Guba and Lincoln's (1989)

framework for ethical practice were integrated into how the research for this thesis was conducted. This is outlined further in the following sections.

3.4.3 Case selection

The focus of this thesis is on decision makers working within developmental NGOs. Starting by situating the decision makers of interest for this thesis within the NGO structures of the aid sector was important in clarifying the scope of this inquiry. Vakil's (1997) categorisations are relevant here because the two case studies analysed in this thesis are based on projects with development NGOs and research NGOs. For the first case study in Ghana, the sectoral focus is global health for the second case study in UK/Lebanon, the issue focus is on humanitarian relief. The researcher was employed by the consultancy ThinkPlace while enrolled at RMIT part-time. In the course of the researcher's consulting work, these two projects qualified for inclusion in this thesis; firstly, based on relevance to the research aims and questions; and secondly based on convenience as the projects came to the researcher rather than the other way around.

3.4.4 Participant selection

The decision makers who were selected for the semi-structured interviews were identified through the course of each project. They have come from the following organisations:

Case study one

- Grameen Foundation – development initiatives focused on innovative mobile health programs (3 interviewees)
- Concern Worldwide's Innovations for MNCH – development initiatives focused on maternal, newborn and child health programs (3 interviewees)

Case study two

- Overseas Development Institute – a policy think tank focused on humanitarian relief and international development assistance (4 interviewees)

To qualify for inclusion in this research, participants had to meet the following selection criteria:

- Had decision-making responsibilities within the identified project case
- Had direct experience with Design Thinking tools in the identified project case
- Has familiarity with traditional aid accountability mechanisms

Once a participant was determined to meet the selection criteria, they were formally recruited. This means they were personally contacted by email or skype audio call to introduce the thesis, then asked for their involvement before being provided with the 'plain language statement' which outlines all the ethical considerations for them to verify their consent prior to participating.

3.4.5 Tool selection

During the action research component of each project, the researcher facilitated a Design Thinking process that used a number of the tools and methods identified in Alves and Nunes' (2013) study. The rationale for the selection of these specific Design Thinking methods and tools used during the project is challenging to articulate given the 'real-world' action research nature of this thesis. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, it is difficult to identify and categorise all the possible Design Thinking methods and tools here as they would number in the hundreds. However, as Alves and Nunes' (2013) survey of 164 methods and tools demonstrates, there were certainly more commonly used tools than others. To maintain an abductive Design Thinking process (Cross 2011; Dorst 2010), many different methods and tools were applied in an experimental fashion, and then the ones which provided value for the decision makers were focused on more in the project processes. Both cases used tools that are more recognised and most commonly used by designers than other tools (Alves & Nunes 2013). The tools and methods the decision makers were exposed to in each project are listed below.

Case study one

This project applied eight out of ten of the most commonly used Design Thinking methods and tools, as surveyed by Alves and Nunes (2013). These were:

- Focus Groups: There were 10 x 2 hour focus groups conducted with community health nurses and pregnant women and nursing mothers during

the early research phase of the project. The majority of the project team participated in these activities.

- Interviews: There were 12 x 60 minute semi-structured interviews with nurse supervisors during the early research phase of the project. The majority of the project team participated in these activities.

- Observations: There were two weeks of observations in health centres and clinics across five districts during the early research phase of the project. The majority of the project team participated in these activities.

- Personas: There were three nurse personas and two supervisor personas developed collaboratively by dividing the project team into small groups of three people and providing them with quotes from the interviews and focus group discussions. The personas were then used for inspiration during ideation, prototyping and other decision-points in the project. The entire project team participated in these activities.

- Journey maps: There were a series of four Journey maps developed collaboratively by dividing the project team into small groups of three people and providing them with process maps from the focus group discussions to create the Journey maps. The Journey maps were then used for inspiration during ideation, prototyping and other decision-points in the project. The entire project team participated in these activities.

- Prototyping: There were a number of ideas and concepts generated by the nurses, supervisors, and project team. A shortlisted number of these ideas were further developed and prototyped in small group work during workshops. The entire project team participated in these activities.

- Scenarios (ie. Role Plays): There were a number of real-life scenarios enacted in the form of role plays to test the shortlisted ideas and prototypes with nurses and get their feedback. The majority of the project team participated in these activities.

- Blueprint: An outline of the design activities, rationale and outputs from the early stage research and workshops with the project team was compiled into a clear summary report to guide decision-making during project implementation. The entire project team participated in developing the

content for this tool and referred back to it during the course of the project.

The above methods and tools have been visualised along a timeline below to demonstrate how the tools fit in along the timeline for transparency.
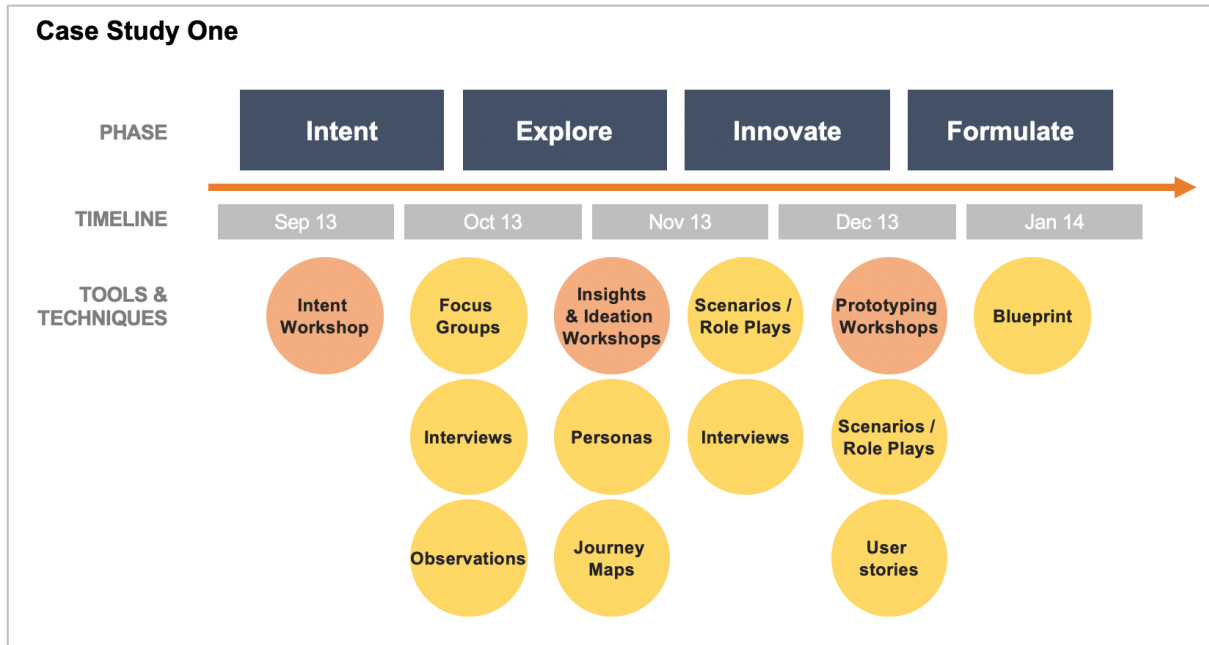
Although the decision makers were involved with all of the above mentioned methods and tools, however, the ones that were singled out by decision makers interviewed from this project were the Personas and Journey maps.

Case study two

This project applied six out of ten of the most commonly used Design Thinking methods and tools, as surveyed by Alves and Nunes (2013). These were:

- Interviews: There were 75 x 90 minute semi-structured interviews with different actors in the humanitarian system during the early research phase of the project. Two members of the project team participated in these activities.

- Observations: There was one week of observations in community-based organisations in Lebanon during the early research phase of the project. Two members of the project team participated in these activities.

- Personas: There were 14 personas developed collaboratively by dividing the project team into pairs and providing them with quotes from the

interviews. The personas were then used for inspiration during ideation, prototyping and other decision-points in the project. The entire project team participated in these activities.

- Journey maps: There were a series of 12 Journey maps developed. The project decision makers did not create the Journey maps in this case, they were constructed from raw verbatim interview data by the design team and so the decision makers were somewhat shielded from the high level of complexity associated with data collection and analysis (Følstad & Kvale 2018). Nevertheless, the processual aspects were still used to deconstruct aspects of the user experience in order to be analysed, modelled, and redesigned in small group work during workshops from a user's view point (Følstad & Kvale 2018). The Journey maps were also used for inspiration during ideation, prototyping and other decision-points in the project. The entire project team participated in these activities.

- Prototyping: There were a number of ideas and concepts generated by the project team and other participants during interviews and workshops. A shortlisted number of these ideas were further developed and prototyped in small group work during workshops. The entire project team participated in these activities.

- Scenarios (ie. Role Plays): There were a number of real-life scenarios enacted in the form of role plays to test the shortlisted ideas and prototypes with various actors to get their feedback. The majority of the project team participated in these activities.

The above methods and tools have been visualised along a timeline below to demonstrate how the tools fit in along the timeline for transparency.

Case Study Two

Although the decision makers were involved with all of the above-mentioned methods and tools, once again, the ones that were singled out by decision makers interviewed from this project were the Personas and Journey maps.

3.4.6 About data gathering techniques

The type of observation conducted was a combination of *focused observation* where observation was supported by interviews with participants; and *selective observation* where the researcher focused on different types of activities to identify the variations in those activities (Angrosino & DePerez 2000, p. 677). Other key steps undertaken during the observation processes involved:

1. Initially, to establish trustworthiness and facilitate prolonged engagement (Guba & Lincoln 1994), the researcher selected projects that allowed the researcher to be considered a participant with full membership in the groups being observed (Dewalt & Dewalt 2002).

2. At the commencement of each project process, the researcher would advise participants that the researcher was conducting this research (the thesis) and would be observing as a participant in the process.

3. For each project, the researcher mapped out the who's who in each environment without forming too many assumptions and preconceptions (Kutsche 1998).

4. Then as Merriam (1988) suggested, there were several elements observed and documented in the form of hand-written field notes, these elements included the physical environment, the participants, the activities and interactions.

For the interviews, participants were provided with a 'plain language statement' in English delivered via email, that was then discussed and confirmed verbally immediately prior to commencement of an interview to ensure participants consent was informed regarding the following:

1. Participation in the research is completely voluntary. When a participant accepted the invitation, they were asked to share their views in a one-on-one semi-structured interview of approximately 60 minutes in duration.
2. Depending on the participant's location, the interviews were either conducted face-to-face in a quiet and private place, however, due to the varied and distant locations participants were based, some interviews were conducted over online video conference or Skype facilities.
3. There were no known or anticipated risks associated with participating. Should a participant become concerned about their responses or find participation in the interview distressing, they would have been advised to inform the researcher as soon as possible.
4. The perspective, expertise and experiences of the participants were more important than having a 'right' or 'wrong' answer to any of the questions. This thesis is intended to benefit those organisations directly involved, the broader international development and Design Thinking communities, and indirectly, the beneficiaries of future aid projects.
5. There were no costs or reimbursements associated with participation in the research.
6. Participants could decline to answer any of the interview questions. Further, they would not be treated any differently if they decided not to participate or if they withdrew once they had started.
7. With the permission of each participant, the interviews were audio recorded to facilitate the timely and accurate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.

8. All information provided was considered completely confidential, including participant's identity. Their names do not appear in the thesis, however, with their permission, anonymous quotations were used.

9. Participants were informed that RMIT University wanted to ensure they were treated in a fair and respectful manner. If they had any comments or concerns resulting from their participation, they were provided with the contact for the University's Research Office.

For this thesis, data gathering, analysis and interpretation has been a demanding process where the ideas and materials generated continuously evolving, however, it has provided the flexibility to evolve the line of inquiry and move in new directions as more information was obtained (Glaser & Strauss 1967). In order to become theoretically sensitive to the data, and given the nature of the projects being two years apart, the data gathering and analysis processes have been taking place concurrently (Glaser & Strauss 1967), constantly comparing information gathered based on a grounded theory approach as modelled on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Charmaz (2000, 2002, 2011).

3.4.7 About data analysis and interpretation techniques

The following activities guided the interpretation of the data based upon narrative qualitative research approaches, as mainly described by Creswell (2013) and Engel and Schutt (2009):

1. The researcher began by conducting a small pilot test of three interviews to verify the credibility of the tool and enhance the trustworthiness of the interview questions in relation to the thesis objectives. Some minor refinements were made to the interview tool.

2. During each interview, multiple recording devices were activated as a precaution to any technology failures, in addition, interviewer notes were taken throughout.

3. Following each interview, the recorded audio files were transferred from the audio recording devices into a password-secured storage drive and backed up. The originals were deleted from the audio devices to allow for space for the next interview recording.

4. Following each interview, the researcher wrote down self-reflections in a reflexivity journal. This has allowed a record of any biases, judgements and orientations that could be influencing the researcher's interpretations of the data (Creswell 2013). Going back to these notes and reflections during analysis reduced the probability of forcing data into a pre-existing, deducted framework.

5. Each audio recording was subsequently transcribed verbatim into electronic format within 24 hours of the interview being conducted to avoid difficulties with recall. These were organised in computer files that are on a password-secured storage drive.

6. Each transcript was then reviewed and verified by re-listening to each audio file while reading the completed transcription and ensuring all identifying elements were coded appropriately.

7. Transcripts were then printed and read in their entirety between two to three times each to achieve sensitivity with the raw data. During this step, the researcher highlighted key quotes and wrote notes in the margins of the transcripts. At this stage, these notes were brief ideas or key concepts that seemed relevant.

8. The researcher wrote up the highlighted quotes onto post-it notes which allowed the freedom to cluster and group similar quotes up on a wall in several different ways, to visually see patterns and themes emerge from the data. Photographs were of taken of the different patterns.

9. After the manual theme analysis process and familiarisation with the data, the researcher used an inductive approach to develop a list of tentative codes that matched text segments.

10. The transcripts were then imported into NVivo 10 software program and data was then coded by grouping the small categories of information, whether phrases, sentences or full paragraphs using category theme analysis (Creswell 2013) in a systematic manner. Drawing from the work of Yin (2010), the codes the researcher used included manifest codes (recurring terms), latent codes (themes occurring beneath the surface) and in vivo codes (terms in the language of those being interviewed). A label was attached to each code and evidence of the codes was sought across the interviews.

11. The researcher regularly wrote memos about the codes and their definitions throughout analysis, and then continuously comparing and rechecking the data with the codes to ensure there was no 'drift' in the meaning of codes and to confirm their consistency (Creswell 2009).

12. The researcher continued to deconstruct the data through the process of grouping and classification. Comparisons between data, contexts and concepts helped the researcher maintain rigour when looking at (a) different people's beliefs, actions, and accounts; and (b) categories in the data with other categories (Charmaz 1983; Glaser 1978).

    Several general themes were identified that served as broad units of information comprised of several codes grouped together to form a mutual or related idea. Each overall theme contained sub-themes/categories.

13. The researcher then made comparisons between the themes identified in the interviews and the themes from the observation notes to determine similarities, differences and relationships to see what patterns emerged. In aiming to 'discover' rather than pre-define meaning and processes, the researcher looked for patterns both when focusing on a single project case or across the two project cases (Strauss & Glaser 1970).

14. The researcher then took those comparisons between the two project cases and fleshed them out in order to make more sense of the data and interpret the larger meanings from contextualised, project-specific perspectives. This final phase known as 'representing the data' involved putting the findings of the analysis into words and several iterations of a conceptual model.

15. As the conceptual analysis of the data developed, the researcher returned to the literature and compared how the findings fit within those constructs (Charmaz & Belgrave 2002). Without losing the human story and verbatim material to demonstrate the connection between the data and the analysis, the literature also needed to be weaved in explicitly and thoroughly at the same time (Charmaz & Belgrave 2002; Glaser 1978; Strauss 1987).

As will be seen, the findings and discussion focus on the key emerging themes identified from the analysis and interpretation processes described above. Despite the above documentation of activities as linear steps, the process of analysis and interpretation was iterative as data analysis from the interviews were considered in the

context of participant observations as they were generated. The key thing to note is that by combining multiple modes of analysis – that is, using manual category theme analysis and NVivo-based analysis combined, has meant that key themes and patterns were picked up by one mode that the other would have overlooked. As a result, the combined use of the different data analysis techniques enhanced the integrity of the research findings.

3.4.7 About researcher background

The researcher for this thesis and 'design catalyst' in the action research cases (Wrigley 2013; Wrigley 2016) has 15 years' of professional working experience in research, strategy and design. The exposure to design methods began while studying architecture at UTS in 2003 and concurrently working in an architectural design studio part-time. After graduating with a Bachelor of Design (Architecture) from UTS, the researcher moved into organisational consulting work in Sydney, firstly with companies such as Qantas and Toyota, and then later in Canberra with federal government. While at the design consultancy ThinkPlace, the researcher moved from Canberra to Accra, then to Nairobi to set-up the ThinkPlace Kenya studio. For the past six years, the researcher has partnered with healthcare providers, financial services companies, NGOs, and governments on delivering more human-centered services for low-income populations using design thinking. The researcher has since moved to London and is working on a PhD focusing on the value and tensions with design in global development programs. The background of the researcher and 'design catalyst' demonstrates a high maturity with design thinking concepts due to the strong combination of university-level qualifications and many years of professional experience applying design in practice settings.

3.5 Limitations and mitigations

Taking a participatory action research approach supplemented with other qualitative approaches emphasises constructed realities, interaction with participants, and rich descriptions. As a result of taking these approaches, there is an acknowledgement of the limitations presented, as questions of reliability and validity are sometimes raised. There are three key limitations explored below:

Researcher bias from insider perspective

Questions of reliability and validity are sometimes raised with action research and qualitative methods, particularly when the researcher is considered an 'insider'. Since the researcher was a full member and participant in the projects selected and continues to be employed in the field, this has proven to be an advantage in offering unique insights as an 'insider.' However, it can also introduce bias in other ways, such as limiting curiosities, so they only discover pre-anticipated themes (Chenail 2011; Johnson 1997). In order to minimise this bias, the researcher subscribed to the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Creswell (2009, 2013), and followed their systematic procedures to assist in objectively studying the subjective in this thesis.

Creswell (2009, 2013) discussed the concepts of reliability and validity in inductive qualitative research as requiring a different approach than in deductive research. He defines qualitative validity as occurring when the researcher has assessed the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings through a strict and robust set of procedures (Creswell 2009). Validating the research process is of particular importance in the constructivist perspective as a co-constructor of knowledge, the researcher needs to intentionally engage with proven strategies to reduce or remove their own bias, such as recording self-reflections in a reflexivity journal, for example. There were five strategies employed to enhance the truthfulness and validity of this thesis as adopted from Creswell (2009, 2013) and others:

1. Recording self-reflections in a reflexivity journal to be transparent about past experiences, biases, and orientations that could be shaping the approach to the study and interpretations of the results (Creswell 2013).This has been helpful in ensuring honesty and awareness of my biases both as the research began and throughout the process so that those biases could be tracked and moderated (Creswell 2009). This tool has also reduced the probability of forcing data into a pre-existing, deducted framework during analysis.

2. Systematically checking transcripts against handwritten notes to verify no mistakes or omissions were made in the conversion of data into an electronic document (Creswell 2009).

3. Regularly writing memos about the codes and their definitions throughout analysis, and then continuously comparing and rechecking the data with the

codes to ensure there was no 'drift' in the meaning of codes and to confirm their consistency (Creswell 2009).

4. Reviewing progress with my thesis advisor, and given that I am employed in the field, I was also able to engage in peer consultation and share general themes without identifying participants. This enabled the emerging themes to be audited by external sources for truthfulness (Creswell 2013).

5. Conducting small pilot test of three interviews to verify the credibility and enhancing the trustworthiness of the interview questions in relation to the study aims.

Selection bias from convenience sampling

There may be selection bias as convenience sampling was used from project-related networks known to the researcher. Although studying a random sample provides the best opportunity to generalise the thesis findings, it is not the most effective way of developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human experience and behaviour (Marshall 1996). Convenience sampling is understood to be the least rigorous sampling technique, involving the selection of the most accessible subjects (Marshall 1996). However, given the emerging nature of this research area, convenience sampling was deliberately chosen to ensure familiarity with the research phenomena and for participants to draw on their personal experiences of the project case to subsequently arrive at 'richer' insights. Choosing people at random to answer questions about Design Thinking in aid projects would be analogous to randomly asking a passer-by how to repair a broken-down car, rather than asking a car mechanic (Marshall 1996). Although there are limitations with a convenience sample like this, as the findings may not be indicative of the actual trends within the population group, this is not worrisome as this thesis is designed to represent the experiences of a few early adopters and indicatively demonstrate to others of new ways of working. The benefits have outweighed the limitations as having known experts with relevant experiences to participate has produced significantly rich data. To manage the limitations associated with this selection bias, recording field notes in a reflexivity journal has provided insights into the researcher's own subjectivity and has ensured a deliberate effort to record any issues related to community bias given participants will be sought from similar backgrounds and networks.

Findings are non-generalisable

The findings and report on the experiences of participants in this thesis are not indicative of actual trends, and do not result in a definitive capture of reality that can be generalised for a larger population group. As discussed earlier, inductive processes produce ideas rather than a clear conclusion or hypothesis (Cooper & Emory 1995; McMurray et al. 2004). The ideas produced in this thesis are based on an *'inferential jump beyond the evidence presented'* (Cooper & Emory 1995, p. 27) which was described by McMurray et al. (2004, p. 70) as *'the only sensible manner of proceeding'* when too little is understood about the phenomenon being researched. The ideas presented in this thesis are therefore not able to be empirically tested, though they provide insights that may be taken forward and enhanced by accumulating additional corroborating evidence (Abercrombie et al. 2000; McMurray et al. 2004).

Although this thesis does not result in a definitive capture of a reality that can be generalised for a larger population group, the reflections and experiences from participant accounts could uncover meaningful and relatable insights that can be taken forward by others in the field.

3.6 Summary

As outlined in the preceding sections, this thesis aims to identify whether Design Thinking tools influence the individually and subjectively 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects. These sections have demonstrated how the research paradigm was determined by the purpose of the thesis and the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent in the researcher and research topic. Also illustrated were the influences on the research paradigm in the selection of appropriate research methods combining participatory action research with observation, interviews and grounded theory. Then this rationale for different methods was followed by the specific utilisation of the methods and the researcher's steps in ensuring ethical and truthful qualitative research practices. The iterative nature of analysis using a combination of manual, NVivo software and case study techniques – all while returning to the literature review process – has proven an enhancement in the integrity of the research findings.

Chapter Four   Findings

4.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the findings from the action research and other qualitative data gathering and analysis methods in answering the key research questions. The chapter starts by answering the primary research question of whether (and which) Design Thinking tools were perceived as influencing 'felt' accountability, before separating the findings into the two case studies. Each case study provides an in-depth description of the project background and how the tools were developed and used in that context, before providing raw interview quotes to answer the question about how decision makers perceived the tools as influencing their 'felt' accountability. Lastly, a summary of the findings from across both case studies is presented.

4.2 Which Design Thinking tools and why

Based on the interview data, the Personas and Journey maps were repeatedly cited by participants as being the most influential tools for their individual processes of accountability over any of the others used for the Design Thinking process in the projects. The evidence for this claim will be provided and elaborated upon later in this chapter. In line with highlighting what was identified as most relevant or useful tools in the context of 'felt' accountability in aid projects – as specified by the decision makers themselves – this thesis' findings discuss these two specific tools. Before presenting the findings, this following section will first provide a short summary on these two specific tools and how they have been discussed in management contexts in the past. They are yet to be explored or written about academically in relation to accountability or aid project contexts, another reason for the significance of what this thesis explores.

4.2.1 Personas for understanding people's preferences

One of the most commonly used and referenced design tools is the User Persona. The User Persona (or just Persona) is an abstraction tool used to create a characterisation of the ideal users (Cooper & Reimann 2003) for a service or product

(Pruitt & Adlin 2010; Miaskiewicz & Kozar 2011). The purpose of the Persona is to put at the forefront of a designer's or decision-maker's mind a relatable and real example of the person that would use the intended product or service (Floyd, Jones, & Twidale 2008). Elements which are considered building blocks of Persona compositions include having an archetypal image of the user, their common characteristics, roles, goals, segments, preferences, interests, and needs (Floyd, Jones, & Twidale 2008; Pruitt, & Adlin 2010).

There is an ongoing debate on whether the Persona's abstract and fictitious nature make it irrelevant. In addition, within the literature exist other criticisms since Personas are based on qualitative research, making them resource intensive, requiring exceptional skill to develop (Miaskiewicz, Sumner & Kozar 2008) and subject to biases (Rönkkö, Hellman, Kilander & Dittrich 2004; Portigal 2008). However, there is a greater swell of argument to counterbalance this view. There are multiple authors who are resoundingly in favour of Personas noting how this tool brings focus, empathy, consensus, efficiency and better choices by design teams (Cooper 1999; Cooper & Reimann 2002; Grudin & Pruitt 2002; Ma & LeRouge 2007; Mulder & Yaar 2006). Furthermore, criticism of resource intensity and special skills are countered by the fact that Personas can be created with any existing data – both qualitative and quantitative (Pruitt & Grudin 2003). But perhaps it is the psychologist Grudin (2006) that makes mention of the most powerful aspect of a well-crafted persona and that is the capacity to engage the social part of a designer's brain (or decision-maker) through fiction to quickly and easily determine a user's real perspectives and preferences. It is this rooting in the real behavioural preferences that target users might have which greatly contributes to the effectiveness in creating usable solutions (Koltay & Tancheva 2010).

4.2.2 Journey / Experience maps for understanding people's experiences

The use of narrative and scenarios can further enhance the use of personas (Belcher et al. 2005) which might be why Journey maps were also identified in the interviews with decision makers as influencing their 'felt' accountability. Journey maps, also commonly referred to as experience maps, are another design tool that has been used in management circles to gain more user-centred insight and enhance decision-making. This is particularly the case for service-based offerings where the experiential take-away is the key to competitive advantage (Meyer & Schwager 2007). Holmlid and

Evenson (2008) best describe Journey maps as a walk 'in the customer's shoes'. In essence, the processual aspects of delivering a service are 'analysed, modelled, managed, or (re)designed' (Følstad & Kvale 2018, p. 3) from a user's view point. The purpose of which is two-fold; to illustrate user insight and to instil a greater level of stakeholder empathy with those users (Segelström 2013).

The Journey map's adoption by recognised service design firms (Kimball 2011), mainstream business journals (Richardson 2010), and the public sector (Parker & Heapy 2006; HM Government 2007) speaks to its broad reaching fluidity, flexibility and effectivity. To the contrary, Følstad and Kvale (2018) point to some weak links in the chain when reviewing the literature on Journey maps. They point to a high level of complexity associated with data collection and analysis as well as the plurality of methodologies, terminology and granularity as limitations. Despite this, they admit this is likely due to the immaturity of the tool in modern practice rather than its poor efficacy in being a human-centred design tool. The growing emphasis in management practice on creating more meaningful user experiences points to a shift towards an experience economy from a product/service oriented one (Pine & Gilmore 1998). This shift is also taking place in the aid sector. It involves allowing the decision maker to think of their responsibility as designing and delivering an integrated experience as perceived holistically by the people they are serving, in contrast to designing one single intervention or 'touchpoint.'

The following sections take a deep dive into the two case studies and how the tools were developed and used in each project context before exploring the influence on the decision makers more broadly, and more specifically, their 'felt' accountability.

4.3 Case One: Ghana

Based on the growing interest in Design Thinking as an approach among aid sector decision makers, this case study explores the use and influence of two tools in a project that focuses on improving maternal, newborn and child health outcomes in Ghana. Following an in-depth Design Thinking process, this project introduced *CHN on the Go*, a mobile phone application, to improve health worker motivation and job satisfaction among community health nurses (CHN) and their supervisors in Ghana.

As established in Chapter Two, despite increased reports of the use of Design Thinking in aid projects, there is little systematically documented cases of how design tools were used within project contexts and how they influence decision makers' sense of 'felt' accountability. This case study first provides a country-level contextual background on the nature of the problem this project was looking to address. Then it provides an overview of the specific project objectives and scope, before discussing how the relevant design tools were developed and used by decision makers in the project. Lastly, a description of the project's resulting outputs and outcomes is provided before a summary of the key emerging concepts that are relevant to the research question are highlighted.

4.3.1 Which tool(s) were identified as most influential?

The Design Thinking tools that were singled out and identified by decision makers as enhancing their 'felt' accountability for this project were Personas and Journey maps. As will be demonstrated through quotes from the interviews in Section 4.3.3, both of these tools were mentioned by the interviewees as helping them put the user front of mind (Floyd, Jones, & Twidale 2008). The decision makers on this project agreed with the dominant view in the literature, noting how these tools brought focus, empathy, and better decisions by the team (Cooper 1999; Cooper & Reimann 2002; Grudin & Pruitt 2002; Ma & LeRouge 2007; Mulder & Yaar 2006).

4.3.2 How did the identified tool(s) fit in with the project?

4.3.2.1 What is the background context for the project?

Although Ghana has seen substantial advances in health over the past several years, much work remains in improving the health conditions of its population living in rural areas. The maternal mortality ratio of Ghana is currently estimated at 380 deaths per 100,000 live births with a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target to decrease this rate to 190 deaths per 100, 000 live births by the end of 2015 (Requejo et al. 2015). The under-5 mortality rate in Ghana was 60 deaths per 1000 live births, not yet reaching its MDG target of 43 deaths per 1000 live births by 2015 (Requejo et al. 2015). Early childhood mortality and maternal deaths are predominantly caused by complications during and immediately following delivery and premature births. Skilled birth attendants are present at varying rates, with 91 percent of women in urban areas

delivering at facilities compared to only 59 percent of women in rural areas (GSS 2014). The government of Ghana has shown a strong desire to reduce such preventable deaths, including establishing rural health clinics in communities, known as Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) facilities, to bring basic maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) care closer to families living in rural areas (Andrawes et al. 2016). As seen in the figure below, community health nurses work at both health centres and CHPS facilities.
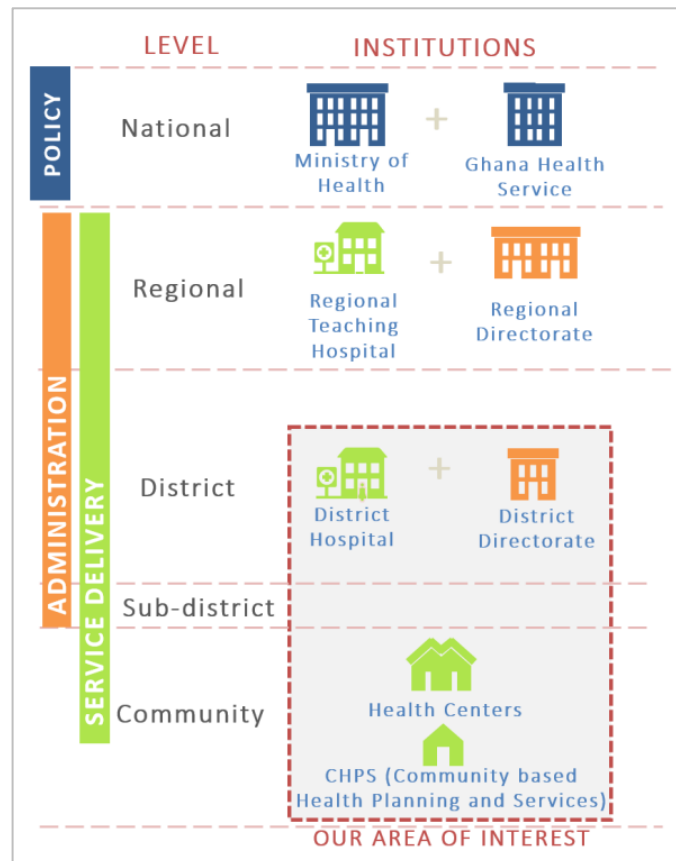
Figure 6: Project-level focus in health system context

Ghana is faced with various concurrent health system challenges including not enough trained health workers, limited incentives for trained health workers to move to remote areas of the country, limited supervisory support and professional development opportunities, and inadequate health infrastructure and resource distribution; all of which make working conditions challenging and demotivating, particularly for community health nurses in rural areas (Kwansah et al. 2012).

The central objective of the project was to research, design, build and pilot-test a mobile phone application to support frontline community health nurses in their roles delivering MNCH care in rural areas of Ghana. With mobile network coverage continually expanding and costs for airtime and devices steadily decreasing, mobile devices were viewed as having an important role supporting the health system, particularly at the frontline level (Andrawes et al. 2016). There was agreement among the project's partners that traditional problem solving and innovation approaches were limiting. The project team was determined to strengthen their understanding of the beneficiary, in this case, the community health nurses – and their motivational drivers impacting on patient care (Andrawes et al. 2016).

As a result of this project, the mobile technology solution was developed and piloted with community health nurses in five rural districts in Ghana: Ada East, Ada West, Ningo Pram Pram districts in Greater Accra Region, and South Tongu and South Dayi districts in Volta Region. The project was delivered over a two year period, with the initial 12 months involved the research, design, testing and build phases, and the latter 12 months involved implementation and monitoring of the pilot. The project team for the first 12 months consisted of a multidisciplinary group drawn from five organisations including Grameen Foundation, Concern Worldwide, John Snow Inc., ThinkPlace, and staff from the Ghana Health Service. This multidisciplinary project team made up the decision-making group and there was agreement upfront on taking an approach that would prioritise listening and empathising with the needs of community health nurses and others before generating solutions (Andrawes et al. 2016). The Design Thinking process involved approximately 110 people which was comprised of 60 community health nurses, 12 nurse supervisors, 18 pregnant women and nursing mothers, as well as more than 20 stakeholders from the partner organisations just mentioned. A deliberate attempt was made to seek input from the unconventional voices usually excluded from decision-making in this context (Dandonoli 2013).

4.3.2.3 How were the design tools developed?

Persona development and rationale

The primary motivators and qualities that differentiated the nurses were used to segment the community health nurses through the creation of Personas. The

Personas that were created by the project team became fictitious archetypes that represented the goals, preferences and behaviours of larger groups of nurses that were interviewed. By emphasising human and behavioural characteristics as the differentiating features between one persona and the other, they further brought the nurses to life by giving them names, personalities and faces (Andrawes et al. 2016).
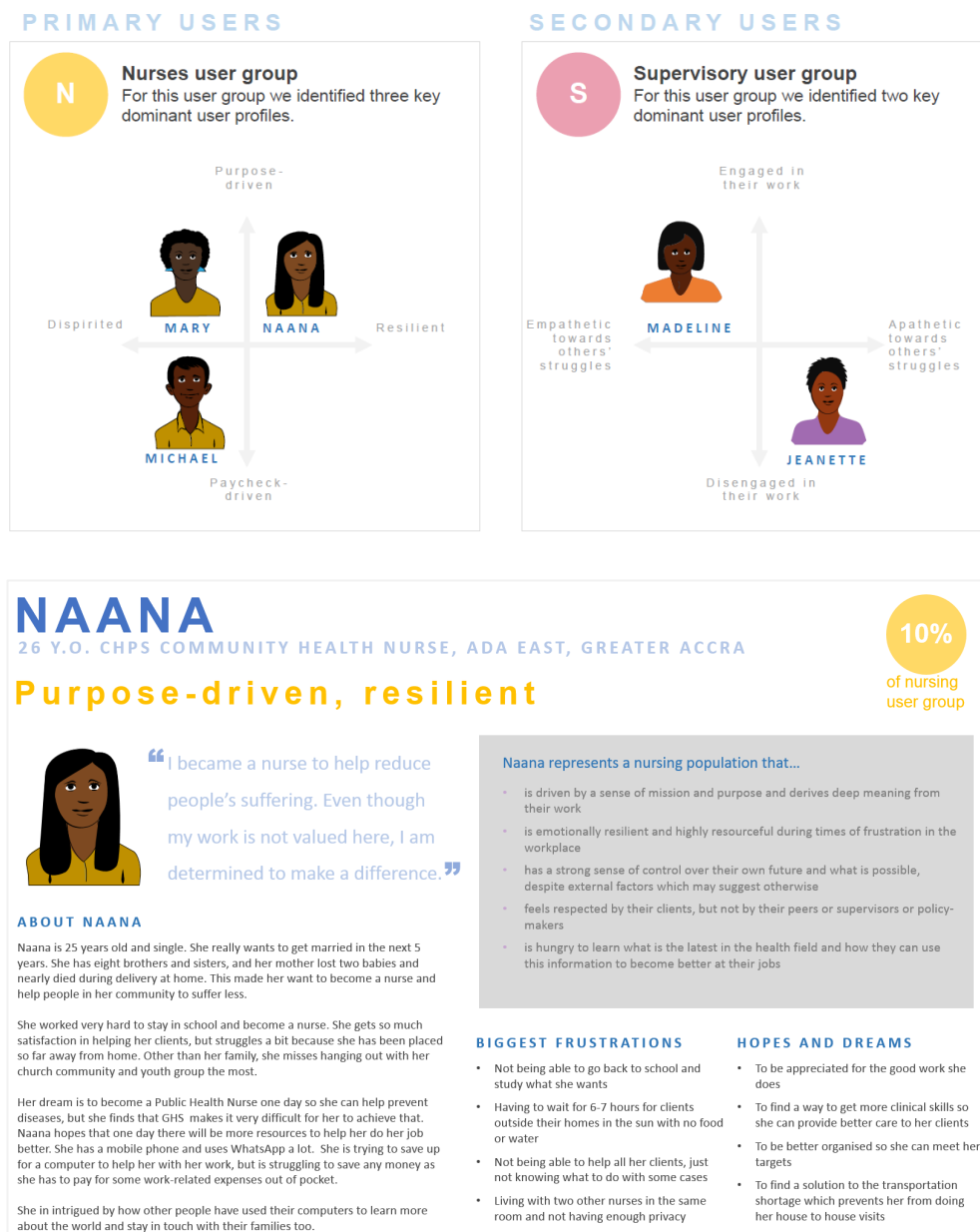
Figure 7: Persona framework and example. Source: CCH Service Design Blueprint (2014), with permission.

For the Personas to be useful for the Design Thinking process, the population of users were categorised using their intrinsic motivational drivers, rather than using generic demographic factors, such as age, gender, hierarchical position or geographical

location. Through collaboratively debating the differentiating characteristics and linking character patterns based on real nurse quotes and stories, two dimensions were prioritised along two axes. One axes represented if a nurse was purpose-driven (driven to provide care for the sick) or paycheck-driven. The other axes represented a nurse's ability to be resilient or become dispirited in the face of challenges. From this exercise, three nurse personas were developed: Naana represented nurses who were both purpose-driven and resilient; Mary represented nurses who were purpose-driven and had a tendency to become dispirited; and Michael who represented nurses who were driven primarily by the paycheck and had a tendency to become dispirited (Andrawes et al. 2016).

Journey mapping development and rationale

During the early design research phase of the project, journey mapping activities were facilitated to more deeply understand the nurses' frustrations and challenges in their key work activities. To achieve this, a series of process mapping and journey mapping of the steps, the highs, and the lows of the four most common workflows. These included: (1) routine home visits; (2) community outreach or clinics; (3) supervisory visits; and (4) monthly data reporting. Journey mapping allowed the decision makers to better understand the nurses' work flow and identify opportunities for improvement with a strong degree of granularity and nuance (Andrawes et al. 2016). Moreover, the visual representation of these maps also allowed decision makers to easily consume this information (as seen in Figure 8).
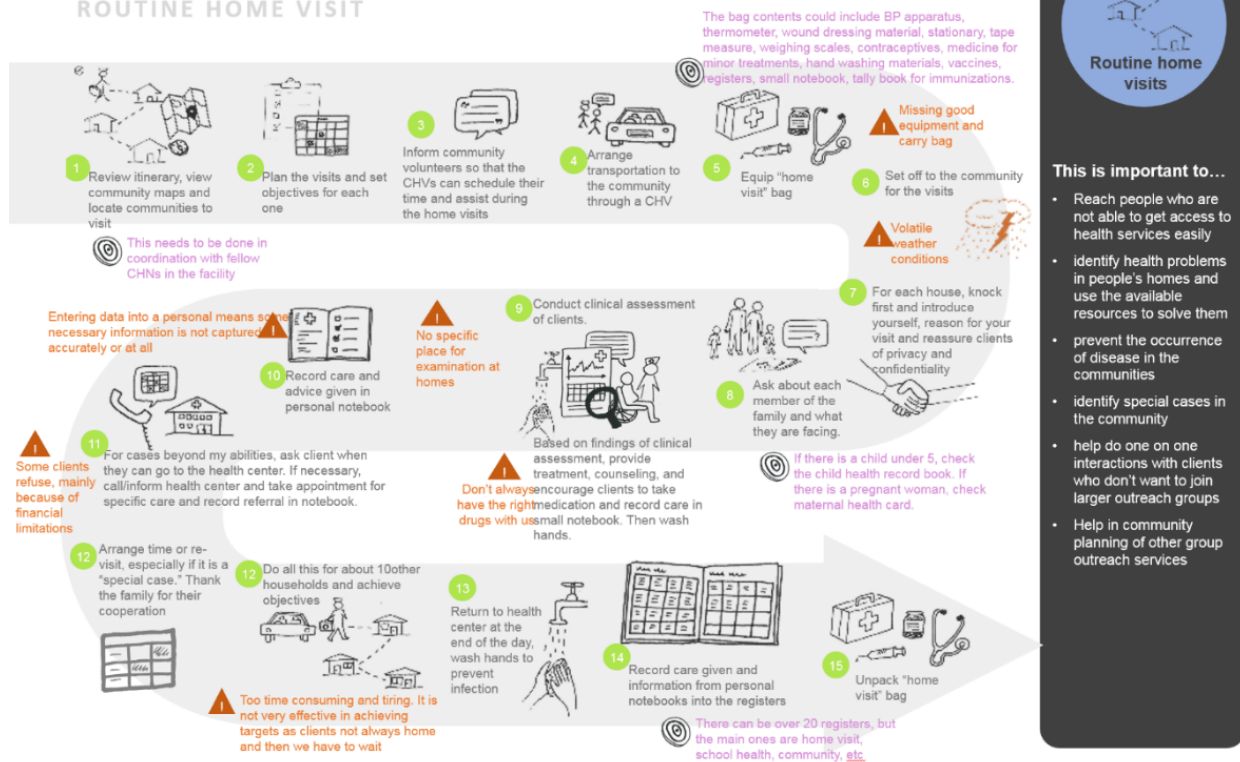
Figure 8: Journey/Experience Map for Routine Home Visits. Source: CCH Service Design Blueprint (2014), with permission.

The journey mapping activities exposed the inefficiencies, and sometimes breakdowns in work flow that influenced the nurses' motivation or confidence – which in turn could dissuade pregnant woman and nursing mothers from seeking care. In addition to surfacing opportunities for improvement in the workflows of activities such as home visits and community outreach, the journey mapping showed other systemic issues that were influencing the everyday motivation of the nurses. For example, the Ghana Health Service instructs that public funding for health facilities comes from revenues generated from certain curative services. This places unnecessary pressure on the community health nurses (who predominantly provide preventative services), to refer clients for services that yield revenue for curative services at higher level district health centres (Andrawes et al. 2016). This was found to further community health nurses' views of being unappreciated for the preventative services they are responsible for providing.

In another example, journey mapping on 'monthly data reporting' demonstrated the pressure felt in meeting clinical and health coverage targets set nationally. To a certain degree, performance at the health facility and individual level was heavily influenced on whether numerical targets were met, rather than the quality of care provided. Some nurses even expressed how they felt pressured to fabricate numbers relating to services rendered in order to appear competent and productive in front of others (Andrawes et al. 2016). The journey mapping of 'supervisory visits' revealed the propensity of some supervisors to take more of a fault-finding approach instead of a problem-solving approach with nurses. This was partly due to the pressures supervisors themselves faced in meeting their own targets, as well as not having the appropriate training to be supportive supervisors. What surfaced from the collaborative development of the Journey maps revealed a more nuanced picture of the strained relationships between community health nurses and their supervisors for the project decision makers to take into consideration (Andrawes et al. 2016).

Photos: Journey map sense-making and development with nurses. Source: Author
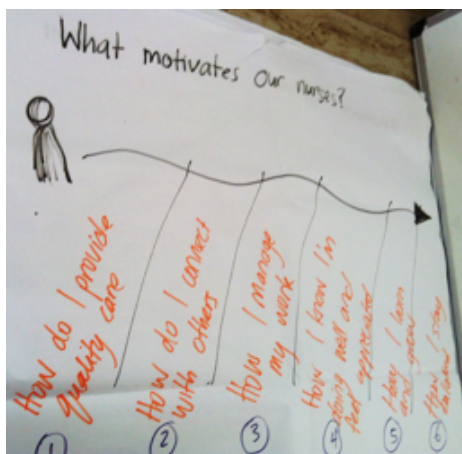
Persona function and use

Whether the nurses were more like a Naana, Michael or Mary, they were generally seeking more recognition, better tools to do their jobs and opportunities for professional development (Andrawes et al. 2016). Acting as stand-ins for real end-users, these Personas were tools that helped guide the project team in making decisions about what matters most to the beneficiaries over what was in their log frame.

During the interviews conducted, decision makers in the project team reflected on the power of the Personas in helping them develop a strong, grounded empathy for decisions throughout the design, planning, build and implementation phases of the project. Two decision makers noted how as a rule, they did not usually engage users during the design and planning phases of a project, however, the Design Thinking tools changed that for them:

> *Say, we are doing a proposal for USAID or whoever we are writing the proposal for, we don't engage them [end-users] then. We make up what we think we should be doing, given the resources we have and the experiences within the team that we have, so during those proposal writing stages, we don't include them in that. Its only once it has been approved, funded and we are ready to implement, then we go to the users for a needs assessment and requirements gathering exercise. – IM2*

> *In some ways, users should be consulted a lot more when the requests for proposals are being put together. The persona work for this project helps ground what is proposed in a lot more of a concrete way than the way proposals were done before. Now, we have a proposal writing team, they look at what projects we have done in the past, they identify what's out there and which proposal requests we should respond to based on the knowledge of what we've done before and what we're doing now. – IM3*

One decision maker shared an idea to counter this non-inclusive approach by having dedicated funding for Persona development and Journey mapping in each project so decision makers can develop more empathetic understandings of the beneficiary

needs during the early stages of future projects. Ultimately, future projects would see beneficiaries inputting in the process of defining the problem from the beginning facilitated through the use of Design Thinking tools.

Journey mapping function and use

Despite facing significant daily challenges, many community health nurses expressed deep satisfaction with their jobs. Some of the positive motivators included the opportunity to serve people most in need, building strong relationships with their communities, and having a positive influence on family health, helping to reduce suffering, making a child smile, supporting a family to decide how many children to have and when (Andrawes et al. 2016). Maintaining the integrity of the words the nurses used to describe their experience of a motivating or demotivating factor along the Journey maps helped decision makers reframe their understanding of the opportunity or challenge and inspire design ideas from the nurses' perspectives. One participant shared that it was initially very difficult to explain the logic of some decisions to new staff who joined the project team. He shared there was a lack of understanding of the nurses' experiences that made it difficult, whereas:

> *…because we had gone through the [Design Thinking] tools and process we knew that even though [someone suggests] a logical explanation or option, we had these gut feelings about how we needed to go about [determining our next step], and it was hard to articulate. – IM2*

Even during the latter 12 months of the project, decision makers went back to the Design Thinking tools periodically and revised them to capture the nurses changing experience through qualitative deep-dives. The qualitative deep dives provided a nuanced, evolving and human-centred picture by which decisions were adapted month-to-month to be evidence-based and rooted in the reality of the nurses. However, measuring and reflecting on such changes does not lend itself to traditional quantitative measures of success to do with health outcome impact, nor resource use:

> *This project is a typical example where your classic quantitative measures may not show a huge improvement, but qualitatively and experientially you might actually see a big difference – IM3*

One example mentioned by this participant was in relation to the application's module offering nurses the opportunity to 'learn and grow' through video based learning and

accredited assessments. Although there are in-built assessments that can provide quantitative measures to demonstrate improvements in the nurses' knowledge of certain health topics. There is also the consideration that these assessments would not necessarily show a significant improvement in knowledge, if for example the nurse already knows the answers, or can get the answer from a colleague (Andrawes et al. 2016). These are the types of unintended consequences which can be picked up through more qualitative enquiry. As noted in the literature review, in many project cases, decision makers have had to adopt quantitative-heavy management practices which have brought with them an audit culture of procedural numbers and obligatory reporting (Angus 2008). In this project case, what nurses shared with the decision makers directly influenced what indicators were considered as part of the accountability framework on the quality of experience and not just the numbers reached.

4.3.2.5 The resulting project outcome

By gaining a deep understanding of the challenges through the Personas and Journey maps, the decision makers were able to generate and endorse new types of ideas from a place of empathy with the nurses. This process of going from ideas to implemented technology solutions involved a series of eight co-design workshops – four with the multidisciplinary project team, two with nurses and supervisors and two with district and regional health directorates. A total of 47 ideas were generated at first, then they were grouped into ten 'opportunity spaces'. These were further fused into six final concepts:
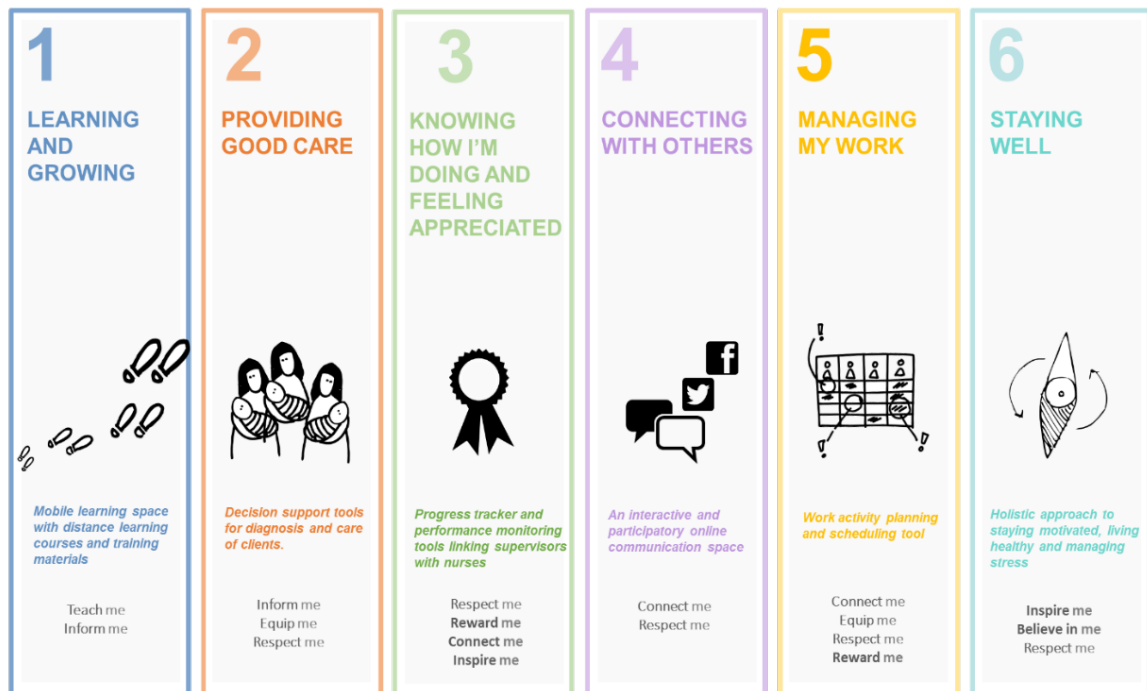
Figure 9: The final six concepts. Source: CCH Service Design Blueprint (2014), with permission.

The six concepts were developed into six modules on a smart phone application called 'CHN on the Go.' These are described below:

1. Learning Center: global health distance learning education providing a range of courses in MNCH and family planning.

2. Point-of-Care: decision-support tools to provide care and counselling for pregnant women, mothers and children during consultations.

3. Peer Connect: a peer-to-peer communications platform, through WhatsApp, enabling nurses and supervisor to exchange messages, questions, and experiences.

4. Planner: a calendar tool to help nurses plan and record the various activities they perform so they can manage their workload and organise their time effectively.

5. Staying Well: A personal wellness tool to address stress and provide inspirational material.

6. Achievements: a tool for individual nurses to track targets related to their day-to-day work activities, plans to complete education courses in the Learning Center and to track other personal targets.

The end result was a useful and usable suite of modules accessible on the mobile phone application: CHN on the Go (see Figure 10).
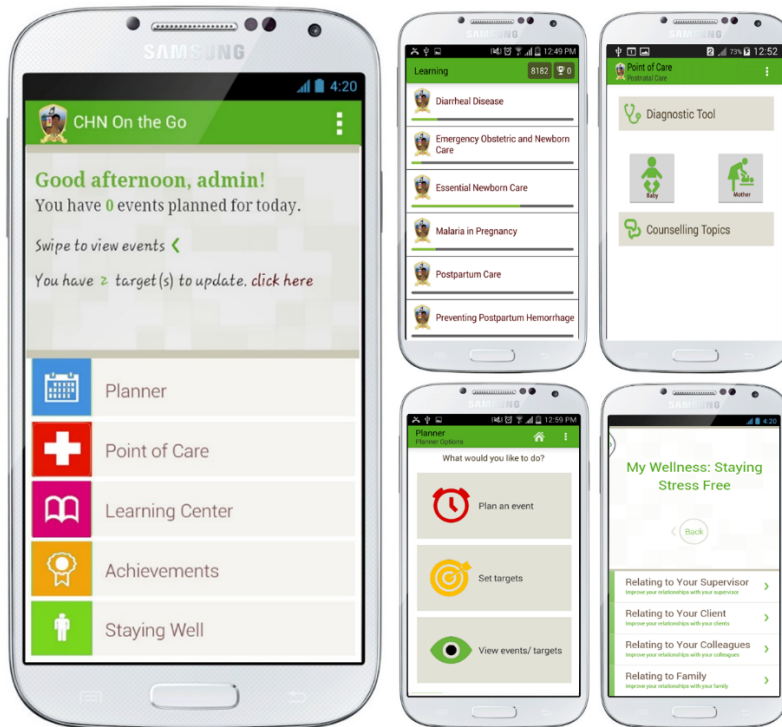
Figure 10: Interface prototypes and visualisation. Source: Grameen Foundation Ghana project files (2014), with permission.

4.3.3 What was the influence of the tool(s) on 'felt' accountability?

4.3.3.1 Different perspectives on accountability

Before moving into the specific reflections on how the design tools may have influenced accountability for the decision makers on this project, interviewees were first asked to reflect on their views about the meaning of accountability to them. One viewpoint that surfaced more than once supported the literature regarding how accountability in aid is more dominantly *imposed* based on donor requirements, and hence reducing the possibility for *'felt'* accountability in this context (Ebrahim 2009; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). To highlight this, the following quotes capture the viewpoints on accountability from the decision makers on this health project:

> *Accountability is a blurry concept to me. We often say one thing, yet do the other –*
> *Decision maker IM2*

> *Accountability to me is not spending hundreds of hours of staff time trying to justify*
> *a thirty dollar expense that the receipt got lost for – Decision maker IM6*

There perhaps seems a tension or conflict that emerged when interviewees were asked about what accountability meant to them in their roles between what it is and what it ought to be.

My organisation is accountable to the donors that fund us… but I guess the whole point of my job is, ideally, to keep us accountable to the beneficiaries, but I can't say if I actually feel like I can do that – Decision maker IM1

The reality is that NGOs are going to do whatever they can get funding to do. The projects we are involved in are not determined by beneficiary needs, they are determined by what the donor wants done technically, whether we can win it, and how much money we can get. Most NGO talk of accountability is totally worthless – Decision maker IM3

My argument is we are highly mindful of our beneficiaries, we are mindful of what they need and want, but I don't know if we are necessarily accountable to them at the end of the day. They are not the people we usually go and ask whether they liked what we did, or how to make it better! – Decision maker IM5

For most interviewees there seemed a tension between what it is and what it ought to be. However, for one interviewee, this tension was not so blurry. When asked about who they feel primarily accountable to in their role:

Realistically, I first feel accountable to the project manager and the donor who is funding us because we have to account the work to them. I feel mostly accountable to the donors because they are the ones who control your destiny and can determine what you're working on in the future.– Decision maker IM5

However, I am the one doing all the number crunching and developing the reports so I will skew a lot more on that accountability question towards the donor, versus people who are programmatically focused and spend a lot more time in the field.– Decision maker IM5

This indication was reflected in other responses, as interviewees who had closer proximity to beneficiaries in their day to day work were more inclined to respond with saying they find their own ways to feel accountable towards beneficiaries even if the accountability *mechanisms* their organisations and donors put in place do not make it easy.

One interviewee contrasted their own individual sense of accountability when compared to the way the rest of their organisation saw it. They shared that accountability for the organisation was driven by quantitative considerations, and that qualitative considerations were usually absent when they set goals to keep themselves accountable:

> *So [management at HQ] came up with this idea of a unifying goal… to reach 30 million poor people by 2030… In some ways, it is kind of inspiring to try and reach that number, but at the same time, for me, it's the quality of the reach as well. It could be that we reach that number because we sent sms messages to 30 million people, but has that really changed their lives at all? – Decision maker IM2*

Another interviewee reflected on the same, they questioned when accountability is understood in terms of reaching 'millions' and not understood in terms of the actual qualitative change in someone's life as what decision makers ought to be holding themselves accountable to:

> *You may reach a million people or even a hundred million people, but how you reach them or how the impact you had on them isn't necessarily looked at or addressed, then what's the point? Right? – IM1*

> *Using the personas to guide our decisions meant that by using the same amount of resources, we could choose to do what is best for Mary, Naana and Michael rather than what is best for [our organisation or the donor]. – IM1*

Both these interviewees who worked closely together in the field, shared how the Personas helped them place emphasis in their day-to-day work on Mary, Naana and Michael. Instead of adopting the organisation-wide notion of accountability tied to a goal of 'reaching' 30 million people, they perceived the Personas as influencing their sense of accountability in a very personal and individual way.

> *Taking time out of what is considered to be my job in my job description, and walking in the shoes of the nurses, this changed my entire outlook on the project and whom I am going to work for everyday – Decision maker IM2*

Their personal goals and targets in their jobs were no longer about reaching the greatest number of people possible to report back on, but rather invest wholly in

making a real and marked impact on the lives of people whom they did reach. For another interviewee who was not in the field, also commented on how the personas provided a useful counter narrative to 'humanise' the statistics that usually guide their decisions:

> *These actual human stories helped humanise our user and kept me thinking about that individual user in mind – or multiple personas if you will – throughout the project, it influenced me in a different way to the usual thinking in statistics – Decision maker IM5*

> *The personas gave a human face to a lot of the issues that we already knew, so it is not that we didn't know, but its more than reading about percentages, it felt different to be imagining, okay, here is a typical user, this is what they need, and this is what we need to do about it... – Decision maker IM3*

Reflections from decision makers in this project suggests the potential for real and marked impact on the lives of users can be hindered when the interviewees felt like they were being forced to be made accountable based on the number of people 'reached' than more meaningful (relational or behavioural) changes that can be more difficult to account for.

4.3.3.3 How the Design Thinking tools were perceived as influential

The Personas and Journey maps were singled out as the tools that influenced the 'felt' accountability of decision makers by keeping the nurses front of mind and bring the nurses' voices into project decisions. The personification of beneficiaries otherwise referred to in numerical terms influenced the interviewee's sense of who they felt they worked for – from the 30 million number senior management had set or the real-life impact on Mary, Naana or Michael. Decisions became about the latter rather than the former when impact was defined in ways they could relate to and connect with on a human level.

> *I would wake up in the morning with the nurses' on my mind. My sense of accountability to them felt different to my sense of accountability on other projects. – Decision maker IM1*

These decisions would take place within the confines of boardrooms and NGO offices, but by putting the personas up on the walls and keeping the nurses' voices present, it made them feel like they were able to stay accountable to their beneficiaries.

> *The personas gave us a whole new language to speak about the reasons why behind every decision... because this person is like that, we need to do it like this… This made me feel like I was doing my bit for the nurses. – Decision maker IM1*

> *Using the personas to guide design decisions rather than what I assumed they wanted did make me feel more true to myself, like my accountability was finally respecting the beneficiaries more than I have felt in previous projects – Decision maker IM2*

One interviewee who was not part of the design research activities early on in the process reflected on the longer-term influence of this:

> *I wasn't able to go to the field with the others. But those personas you all created helped bring – and keep – the nurses voices in our boardroom decisions and meetings for months and months after the fact – Decision maker IM5*

For another interviewee who was heavily involved in the early stage design research that informed the development of the Personas and Journey maps reflected on how this experience was different for them:

> *But being able to slip into the nurses' shoes or the supervisors' shoes was easier for us to do naturally in the process, but not so much for the newer staff, they had to rely more on the personas and journeys – Decision maker IM2*

For those who were part of the development of the tools, they felt a natural understanding and connection to the users. This made decision-making more naturally human-centred even without referring back to the Personas or Journey maps as perhaps what they had learned had become intrinsic. However, for those who were not part of the development of the tools, there was a greater reliance on referring back to the tools during conversations.

The Personas and Journey maps were also used to facilitate the generation of ideas and this was noted by one interviewee as being one way the tools were used to enhance his 'felt' accountability towards the nurses:

The ideas were generated directly with a sample of those end users in the room with us physically, and when they weren't in the room, the ideas were generated or built upon with a persona lens, so that at least, at a subtle level, the end users were still 'in the room with us' and I felt more accountable to them that way because we were still honouring their preferences in their absence – Decision maker IM6

These design tools were useful in guiding decisions to deliver something that is valued and meaningful to the beneficiaries without us getting lost – Decision maker IM3

Quantitative formulations of accountability mechanisms within NGOs, such as defining targets based on number of beneficiaries reached, can influence how the interviewees described their individual sense of accountability. However, proximity to working closely and directly with beneficiaries day to day suggested a stronger motivation for interviewees to want to be more accountable to their beneficiaries. Regardless of proximity, all interviewees shared how the Personas enhanced and supported their personal 'felt' accountability, whether through informing more beneficiary-centred decisions, or having a personified user to remind of the why their work is important, rather than objectified statistics.

In another example of how the personas triggered a different action from the team, one interviewee shared how a work-around was decided on that would enable her to continue working on this project when she technically was 'not supposed to'

My time and remuneration [as an employee of the NGO] was being covered by another project budget that was unrelated to this one, but after doing the research and developing the personas and Journey maps for this project, there was no way I could leave it there and go attend to something else. I felt compelled to finish what I started with the nurses – IM1

Following her exposure to the design research and active participation in the development of the User Personas and Journey maps in case study one, the interviewee was greatly moved on a personal level. She expressed her greater sense of motivation to work on alleviating the nurses' challenges she had connected with emotionally was very strong. So together with other project decision makers agreed that her involvement in the other project she was 'supposed to' be on – the one actually

accounting for her time/remuneration – would yield less benefit for the beneficiaries relative to if her time and motivation was allocated to this project. However, there was no budget to cover her involvement. The work-around the decision makers made here was for one project budget to pay for the activities conducted and resources utilised on another project. This interviewee believed this workaround was decided purely in the interest of beneficiary outcomes, rather than complying with the donor requirement of sticking to what was pre-determined in the project log frame (LFA). When asked what inspired the need for this workaround, the interviewee answered that it was based on two factors. One, was that the discussions were intuitively grounded and situated in the contextual realities of the project and beneficiary needs. Two, was a deep emotional connection and empathy with the nurses. She indicated that both of these factors were derived from her early stage involvement in the design research activities, and specifically the development of User Personas. This is a clear example of how decisions made based on individually 'felt' accountability inspired by design tools can be quite different if those same decisions were made based on complying with organisational or mechanistic versions of accountability.

4.2.4 What is the summary of key findings?

There are four key concepts emerging from the decision makers reflections and perceptions on how the Design Thinking tools influenced their felt sense of accountability. These are summarised in the table below:

Table 4: Summary of key findings for Ghana project

Project: Ghana Health worker Motivation	
Emerging concepts on how DT tools may influence 'felt' accountability	**Supporting keywords from analysis of interviews and observations**
Builds shared picture	• Brought others along the journey • supports a shared understanding
Distils complex information	• Humanises the complex • provides qualitative/narrative evidence for decisions
Situates and grounds discussions	• About real life impact and real issues • not about the numbers but what lies beneath
Deepens empathy and connection	• Decisions are based on beneficiary preferences put ourselves in their shoes before a decision • allows space for empathy to guide decisions

Source: Author consolidating key themes, categories and codes from NVivo and manual analysis

4.4 Case Two: Lebanon/UK

Following on from the previous example, this case study explores the use and influence of two tools in a project that focuses on redesigning the humanitarian system with a particular focus on refugee settings such as Lebanon, while being led by an NGO in the United Kingdom (UK). After an in-depth Design Thinking process, this project produced a series of 'Constructive Deconstruction: Reimagining Humanitarian Action' publications and thought pieces in the form of reports and podcasts to catalyse new thinking among humanitarian organisations and donors around the world.

As established in Chapter Two, despite increased reports of the use of Design Thinking in aid projects, there is little systematically documented cases of how design tools were used within project contexts and how they influence decision makers' sense of 'felt' accountability. This case study first provides a country-level contextual background on the nature of the problem this project was looking to address. Then it provides an overview of the specific project objectives and scope, before moving into exactly how the relevant design tools were developed and used by decision makers in the project. Lastly, a description of the project's resulting outputs and outcomes is provided before a summary of the key emerging concepts that are relevant to the research question are highlighted.

4.4.1 Which tool(s) were identified as most influential?

The Design Thinking tools that were singled out and identified by decision makers as enhancing their 'felt' accountability for this project were Personas and Journey maps. As will be demonstrated through quotations from the interviews in Section 4.4.3, both of these tools were mentioned by the interviewees as helping them 'walk in the user's shoes' and identifying more meaningful user experiences (Holmlid & Evenson 2008). These tools enabled the decision maker to think of their responsibility as designing and delivering an integrated experience as perceived holistically by the people they are serving, in contrast to designing one single intervention or 'touchpoint.'

4.4.2 How did the identified tool(s) fit in with the project?

4.4.2.1 What is the background context for the project?

Humanitarian crises are diverse, complex, and not always limited to hyperlocal geography – the crises affecting one people and one place have a powerful relationship with the international humanitarian system's greater efforts to prepare for and respond to crises worldwide. In recent years, the international humanitarian system has seen a rapidly shifting landscape of actors: first, an increasingly changing nature of crises; and second, exponential growth in funding. This system is comprised of 4,480 operational aid organisations with expenditures of over $25 billion and more than 450,000 professional humanitarian workers (ALNAP 2015). Despite all this, the international humanitarian system is considered to be struggling to meet the global demand, with some suggesting 'atrophy, inflexibility and a skills deficit' in situations that require speed, flexibility, and creative approaches to navigating the complexity at hand (ODI 2015). Recent efforts for change have resulted in small tweaks to current practices instead of any disruption to the underlying architecture and assumptions that the system has been built on for decades.

In 2015, ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group launched the 'Constructive Deconstruction' research project to conduct a systems rethink. Track One of the project used traditional research methods and reinforced the understanding that, on a conceptual level, the humanitarian system is characterised by a growing stated desire to see and affect change (ODI 2016). In practice, however, in-field observations and other ethnographic accounts reveal a demonstrated lack of appetite for change and a noticeable absence in the mechanisms, norms, and incentives to support that change (ODI 2016). Track One has also underscored that humanitarian crises are truly a different kind of problem, ones that are laden with challenges that cannot be resolved merely by gathering additional data, defining issues more clearly, or breaking issues down into smaller problems. These types of problems were first coined as 'wicked problems' by Horst Rittel (Kunz & Rittel 1970, Rittel & Weber 1973) in the 1960s and 1970s. They are 'a class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications of the whole system are thoroughly confusing (Churchman 1967, p. 141). They involve non-linear decision-making, shifting problem definitions,

and interconnected issues. Traditional, rational, and linear management approaches are not suited for the 'wicked problems' that humanitarian system actors face in reality. Following Track One's work in identifying the theoretical and analytical frameworks that describe what impedes effective response in today's humanitarian system, the next phase (Track Two) was to employ a Design Thinking approach to re-imagine what alternative humanitarian action could look while utilising tools such as Personas and Journey maps.

4.4.2.2 What is the project-specific overview?

The aim of using a Design Thinking approach was to provoke new dialogue among decision makers about the multiplicity of pathways to, and visions for, more human-centred and accountable humanitarian action. ODI partnered with ThinkPlace and convened a group of experienced humanitarian practitioners, refugees and other recipients of aid alongside people from the private sector, finance, academia and the media to form the project decision makers, also referred to as the Core Design Team (CDT). The CDT convened for six co-design workshops over a six-month period.

The primary question the CDT was tasked to answer was: 'What would humanitarian action look like if it were re-imagined based on lived, human experiences?' To answer this effectively, the aims of the design-related research were to:

1. Surface situated stories and narratives about people's touchpoints with the formal humanitarian architecture, framing those experiences in their own words, and designing preferred future scenarios from a place of deep empathy with them.
2. Identify 'extreme cases' and cases of 'positive deviance' where people interacting with the formal humanitarian architecture share the ways they 'work-around' the barriers they encounter.
3. Provide a deliberate and safe space to co-design preferred future experiences WITH people who interact with the formal humanitarian architecture, rather than FOR or TO them.

The challenges with the existing international humanitarian system have been well-documented. The aims of the research components of this design project were not aimed at producing new knowledge about the established issues, but rather about

framing both challenges and opportunities, barriers and enablers in a human-centred way and through the words and imagination of people who are experiencing them.

The project ran over six months and involved 75 user interviews for the discovery phase (not including the 20 interviews for the user testing phase), six co-design workshops with the CDT members, and one large co-design workshop with an extended design group of 50 participants. Interview participants ranged from aid recipients to funders, to implementers, and policy-makers across 16 locations and 73 organisations worldwide.

In addition to the initial discovery phase interviews, the design process involved an exploratory phase to generate as many ideas as possible before beginning to converge or focus on any given set of solutions. The project achieved this by convening over 50 participants for a two-day 'Insights and Ideation' workshop on 3-4 May 2017. Participants of this workshop included government officials, funders, technologists, private sector disruptors, international NGOs, local/national NGOs/CBOs, volunteers, researchers, policy-makers, host community representatives, refugees and others who are displacement-affected. Once the project decision makers converged on a particular set of solution ideas, the team conducted user testing with a variety of people 'inside of' and 'outside of' the international humanitarian system to refine the assumptions and principles underpinning the shortlisted ideas. These were tested through interactive workshops, but also through comparative analysis (one-on-one interviews with people who are engaged in 'real-world' applications of similar concepts). In total, the user testing engaged 31 people across several protracted crisis contexts from 25 organisations.

Although a meaningful effort was made to speak to as many different perspectives as possible, there was a particular emphasis on the protracted humanitarian crisis caused by the Syria conflict. This also involved primary research in the refugee host country of Lebanon.

4.4.2.3 How were the design tools developed?

Given the nature and scope of this project being more ambiguous in terms of who the users of interest were, a critically important step prior to commencing the interviews was mapping the broad actor groups and understanding their roles, functions, and

relationships. This was achieved through a non-representative 'wheel' visualisation that allowed the team to circumvent discussions around real/perceived hierarchies and, instead, discuss where and how current humanitarian action fails to place 'people affected by crisis' at the centre of its operations.
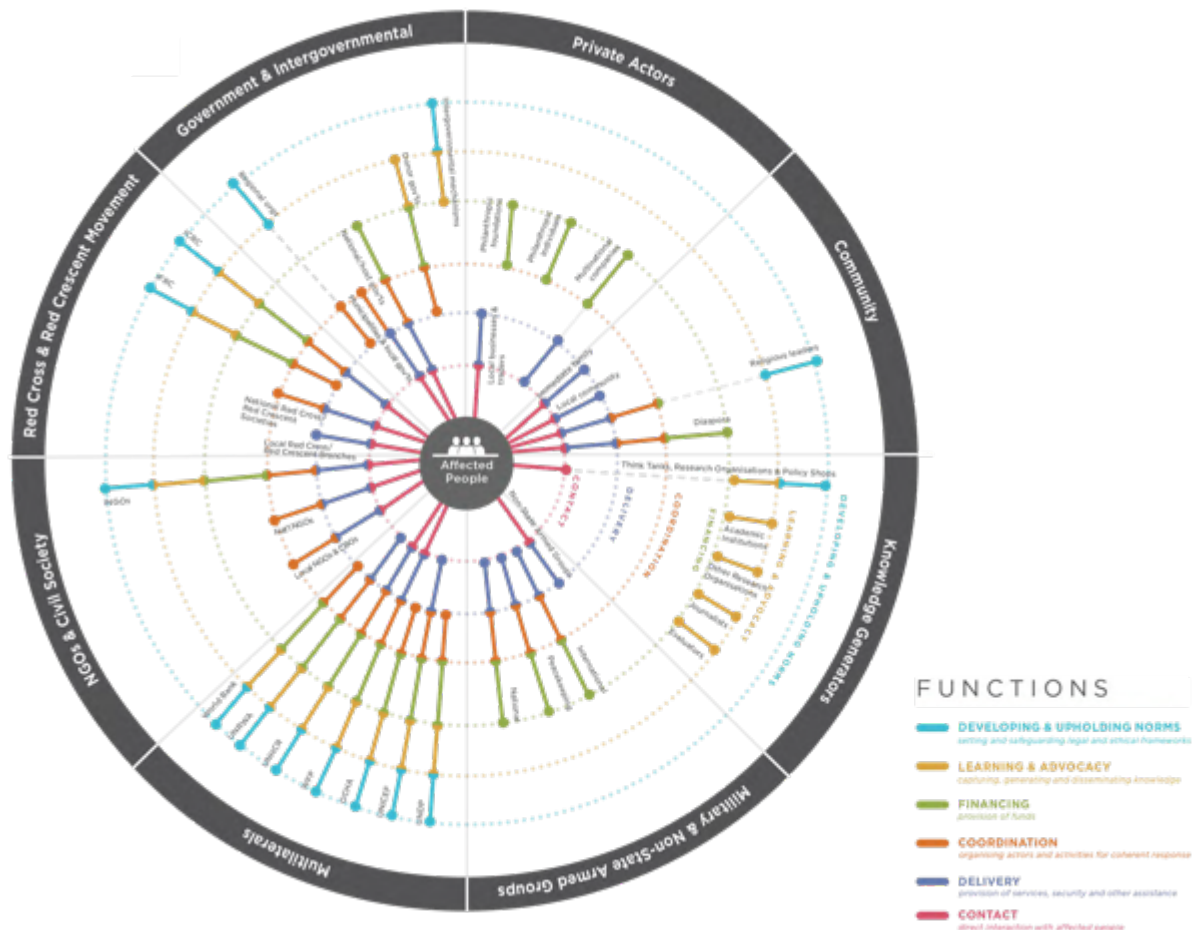
Figure 11: System actors map. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

There are millions of people who interact within the humanitarian system in some way. The broad actor groups were categorised as People affected by crisis, Government and Intergovernmental, NGOs and Civil Society, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Multilaterals, Military and Non-State Armed Groups, Knowledge Generators, Community, and Private actors. In this map, the circular rings represent the functional areas in which different actors operate, as well as incorporating an indicative sense of the function's proximity to people affected by a crisis.

Persona development and rationale

For the purposes of this project, there were 14 Personas created to represent the needs, aspirations and preferences of six different groups of primary and secondary users of the humanitarian system. The 'primary personas' are the primary users of the humanitarian system, being the aid recipient or beneficiary. There were a number of 'secondary personas' who are other users of the humanitarian system for whom the project decision makers decided they will need to make accommodations for in their design deliberations as long as the experience of the primary Personas was not compromised.

The 14 Personas created were based on composites of the 75 discovery interviews and those patterns were analysed thematically and then situated across a two-by-two matrix. The matrix highlights each user group's relative capacity to influence change in the humanitarian system as well as their relative degree of 'affectedness' as it relates to crisis (see figure 12 below).
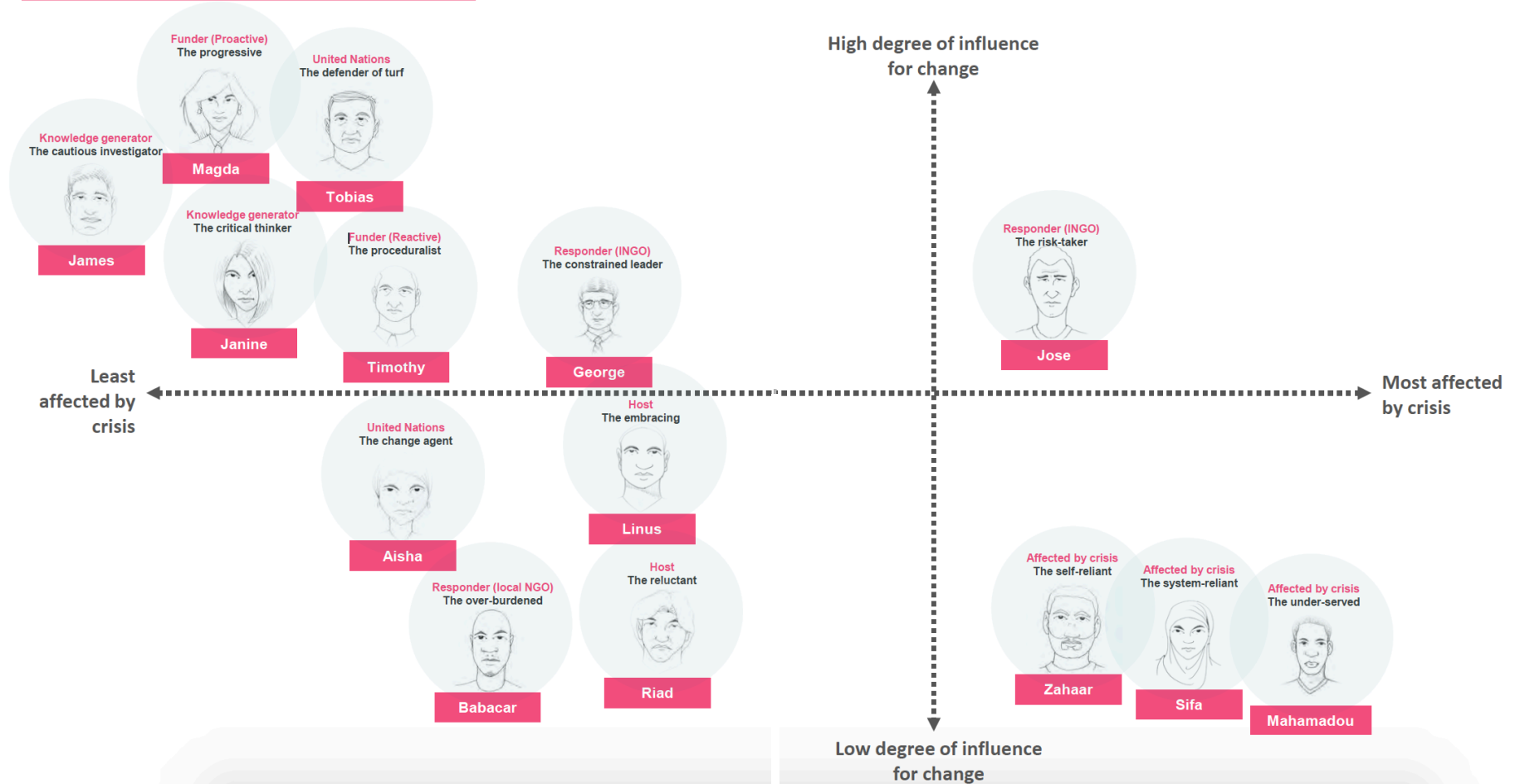
Figure 12: Personas mapped on two-by-two matrix. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

The characteristics used to differentiate between the personas included a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. There were six key persona categories 1) Persons affected by crisis; 2) NGO Responders; 3) United Nations; 4) Funders; 5) Hosts; and 6) Knowledge Generators. For the first category of 1) People affected by crisis; the intrinsic qualities that differentiated between the Personas referred to whether the forcibly displaced person or refugee had a sense of a) self-reliance; b) system-reliance; or c) in need but underserved.

For the second category of NGO responders; the intrinsic qualities that differentiated between Personas referred to whether they had a sense of being a) a risk-taker; b) over-burdened realities on the ground; or c) constrained by bureaucratic rules and procedures. For the third category of United Nations; the intrinsic qualities that differentiated between the Personas was whether they had a sense of a) having to defend their work/turf; or b) the change agent from within. For the fourth category of Funders; the intrinsic qualities that differentiated between personas referred to whether they were a) progressive and pro-active for change; or b) traditional and procedural. For the fifth category Hosts; the intrinsic qualities that differentiated between personas referred to whether they were a) embracing of refugees and forcibly displaced people; or b) reluctant to have refugees and forcibly displaced people in their communities. For the final category Knowledge Generators; the intrinsic qualities that differentiated between personas referred to whether they were a) cautious investigators; or b) critical and unafraid.

Figure 13: Two personas from 'Persons affected by crisis' category. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

While a Persona is not a real person, he/she needed to 'feel' like a real person for decision makers to engage with the Persona in a real and meaningful way. This is why basic information about the Persona (eg. name, age, aspirations, frustrations, personal biases) is critical to ensure that people can connect and empathise with them.

Journey map development and rationale

In this project, the Journey maps were derived from in-depth interviews and guided storytelling activities that exposed not only a person's touchpoints with the system, but also their thoughts and feelings about that experience. A total of 12 Journey maps were documented from the 75 early-stage and exploratory interviews with system actors. The range of experiences were consolidated into stories from the following perspectives: four Refugees, four Local NGO, one International NGO, one United

90

Nations, one Funder, and one Host. A list of the Journey maps and their titles – which were also direct quotes from the interviews – are provided below:

|		
EXPERIENCE MAP 1	A billion workshops, just because	LOCAL NGO, SYRIA
EXPERIENCE MAP 2	Obsessed with their own bureaucracy	SYRIAN ADVOCATE, TURKEY
EXPERIENCE MAP 3	Holding down the fort, without power	UN NATIONAL, YEMEN
EXPERIENCE MAP 4	I am African like they are African	REFUGEE, DRC
EXPERIENCE MAP 5	Any press is bad press	REFUGEES, KAKUMA CAMP, KENYA
EXPERIENCE MAP 6	There's no room for us in life, or in death	REFUGEE, GREECE
EXPERIENCE MAP 7	Divide and disempower	HOST MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, LEBANON
EXPERIENCE MAP 8	Cash: cure or curse?	PROGRESSIVE FUNDER
EXPERIENCE MAP 9	Contract compliance or saving lives?	LOCAL NGO, MYANMAR
EXPERIENCE MAP 10	Not all law is good, obviously	INGO FRONTLINE STAFF, IRAQ
EXPERIENCE MAP 11	Being called a liar in public	LOCAL NGO, SOMALIA
EXPERIENCE MAP 12	If you don't kill yourself, you are killed already	PALESTINIAN REFUGEE, UK

Figure 14: Complete list of final set of journey / experience maps. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

The stories were shortened and consolidated but were maintained in the raw 'first-person' verbatim form, to give project decision makers the opportunity to empathise with and embed themselves in the thinking and actions of the user. The upper part of the Journey map is comprised of a narrative story, while the lower part annotates the identified 'barriers' and 'enablers' from the story. These were determined by project decision makers and participants of the co-design workshops during an activity where they had to take themselves out of their usual day jobs and empathise with the person who's experience it is. They then wrote down the 'barriers' (ie. what are the challenges?) and 'enablers' (ie. what are the opportunities?) from that perspective.

EXPERIENCE MAP 7

Divide and disempower HOST MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, LEBANON

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Stages Along the journey	I AM EXCLUDED.	I WISH THEY'D ASK.	I WISH THEY'D COUNT.	I WISH THEY'D CARE.	I WISH THEY'D THINK.	I DON'T SEE CHANGE.

User Experience Activities, thoughts, feelings

1. In my municipality in northern Lebanon, we have 6,500 Lebanese in this village and then 3,000 Syrians. There are four local NGOs working in the village, and we don't know anything about their work because these NGOs don't pass by the municipality at all. We are unaware of who is entering, what money is entering, what these NGOs are doing exactly. I wish they would liaise with me more in future, there is no communication at all, yet I would like to cooperate with them.

These local, Lebanese NGOs are all in it for their 'own profit' they might say they are non-profit organisations, but, they are in fact profit organisations!

2. These NGOS bring foreigners to work with them and they don't mobilise people from our own community to help the Syrians with their projects. They should involve the Lebanese community that is already living here and have them work with them. This is something that increases the hatred and conflict between the Lebanese and Syrians.

The decisions on what they want the projects to do comes from the outside without doing any needs assessments with the community. Sometimes they think that something is a need, when it's not actually a need.

3. Most of the projects that come to us are very low budget. How the money is spent is not organised, so in the end they end up not finishing the project that was meant to be. Sometimes we have to actually contribute from our own municipality funds to finish their projects, and sometimes the project just stops because we don't have the money.

There is no budget transparency, neither do the reports ever reflect the work that is actually done.

4. When the donors give these NGOs money there is no strategy, there is no plan for productivity, there is no plan for continuity, there is no plan for maintaining anything, they are not creating employment, they are not empowering people, actually they are disempowering people, they are disabling people and are creating more unemployment.

The NGOs come, do their project, and they just apply it, they don't mobilise the community. Now, the community are disabled. They don't involve them, instead they are making them incapable of doing stuff. It forces them to just wait for the funds, wait for the money and think, well there are people coming to do this stuff for us and we don't need to do anything, we are not empowered, we do not have ambition, since we have people to do these things for us.

5. What about these ATM cards given to the Syrian refugees. This is humiliating because they give them 300 000 lira, and actually on 300 000 lira you cannot survive in Lebanon for one week, and it's supposed to be for one month. But still people are fighting for this money.

This money could be used to empower people, instead of this, the money is getting wasted. These ATM cards affect their dignity, it disables them, where they don't feel like they are doing something to earn it. And also, it creates more division, because now the Lebanese community is fighting for this card!

People feel the Syrians are taking the employment, they are taking the services – the water and electricity is not enough – they are taking everything, and the Lebanese are left with nothing.

6. Not too long ago, there was a huge incident where there were knives and lots of people got hurt, it was really a huge conflict in the village because of this divide.

I don't even see any change in the situation for the 3,000 Syrians in my village. There is nothing concrete, it's not something you can see, touch or feel. It has just been these NGOs working on their little projects. Everything is still the same for the people. It's not enough to do focus groups, it's not enough to bring the women teach them about the rights of the child, and you are not actually equipping them with anything useful. You are giving them knowledge, but nothing to actually survive.

But there are other villages who refuse to accept Syrians to live with them, but we accepted them because we know the people need help, so of course we will offer them what we have and we will not refuse to welcome them.

Enablers What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ Willingness to co-operate
- ✓ There are plenty of ideas in the community
- ✓ Contributing no rent to local economy
- ✓ Offer to co-finance project
- ✓ Donated land for the project
- ✓ Visions for use of cash assistance
- ✓ Sense of pride
- ✓ Willingness to accept and assist Syrians
- ✓ Lobbying for our ideas

Disablers What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Communication is non existent, boring municipality
- ✗ Complaints from constituents
- ✗ Information is not shared we are left in the dark
- ✗ Un-transparent and opaque
- ✗ Lack of long-term participatory planning
- ✗ Mistakes are repeated
- ✗ Disempowering lack of dialogue on priorities
- ✗ Lack of long-term capacity building
- ✗ Gaps between international actors and actors on the ground
- ✗ Listening deficit
- ✗ Creating divisions within communities
- ✗ No Syrian perspective
- ✗ Insufficient resource frustrations
- ✗ Dwelling so much on the past problems impedes visions for the future

Figure 15: Complete list of final set of journey / experience maps. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

In one example (above), the 'reluctant host' being the municipality mayor of a village in northern Lebanon shared his experience. He claimed he has 6,500 Lebanese and 3,000 Syrians in his village. He was frustrated with the four NGOs working in the village as he didn't know enough about their work, who was entering, what money was entering, and what the NGOs were doing exactly. He wished they would come and work in the village with more of a spirit of cooperation. He was unhappy with how the NGOS bring foreigners to work with them and don't mobilise people from his own community to help the Syrians. From his perspective, the NGOs should involve the Lebanese community and have them work with them in order to reduce the 'hatred and conflict' between the Lebanese and Syrians in his village. He shared that *'the decisions on what they want the projects to do comes from the outside without doing any needs assessments with the community. Sometimes they think that something is a need, when it's not actually a need.'* He commented on how giving Syrians ATM cards with free money affected their dignity, that it disables them as they don't feel like they have earned it. It also creates more division and crime in the village because the Lebanese members of the community are fighting and killing one another for the cards. By mapping the journey with all the highs and lows, this outlined the 'reluctant host' experience in a way that exposed various strategic and operational decisions that could be made differently to avoid such problems in future. There were several examples like this, another particularly interesting Journey map exposed other activities taking place on the fringes to 'get around' the rules set by the system. See figure 16 for details.

EXPERIENCE MAP 10

Not all law is good, obviously INGO FRONTLINE STAFF

Stages Along the journey	1 I AM DISILLUSIONED.	2 I SEE OUR HYPOCRISY.	3 I TAKE OTHER PATHS.	4 I FIND WORK AROUNDS.	5 I BREAK THE LAW.	6 I HEAR EXCUSES.
User Experience Activities, thoughts, feelings	There is a lot of 'capacity' to 'capacity-build' others, whether it's the state, or local NGOS, and that comes with a lot of consultants, a lot of smart thinking, (sometimes, not always). But, when it actually comes to getting shit done? I don't see that, really, in the field very much. For me, the biggest, most condescending 'white man savior mode' of humanitarian action is the one that thinks it can build capacity of the other by coming from somewhere that is completely disconnected from that reality. When we are talking about resilience building and the aspects that are less 'dependency', I mean, who are we talking about at the end of the day?	We don't have donors wanting to build the resilience of the Taliban health system, and that's a very effective health mechanism that exists in areas under the control of the Taliban, or al-Shabab in Somalia. There is no question or even desire to reduce dependency or build resilience or tackle issues in those areas because it is politically not aligning with what drives western humanitarianism. We are literally the only naive ones to think that is possible just because we adhere to humanitarian principles, as if those principles whitewash all other compromises that we make politically, they determine resources that we have, the human resources that we use.	When it's a white, middle class, male, Frenchman head of an NGO receiving a grant from OFDA to implement a program in, pick a country, and then claiming principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality, as a way to somehow whitewash all those other political choices and compromises. The aid sector today is rejected from many places that we need to work in. We have to find a way to divorce ourselves and find a true impartiality. For my organisation, this entails the rejection of funding from major donors. We don't take any money from ECHO, DFID, US, actually no European governments today, no US. We are lucky in that sense, we have a huge fundraising capacity that other NGOs have as well – but by the way, they just don't use it.	In Syria today, for us, our entire emergency response is based on a relationship with networks of local doctors and medical actors inside Syria. We are able to do that because we don't have money from governments that are telling us that we can or can't work with certain groups, or we have to sign a service agreement with a local NGO that then has to report to us with their receipts if they buy a generator in an area under siege, or all of this crap. We can make our own decisions based on our own resources and support the priorities of other actors that align with us in terms of medical action. I have been involved in programs where the aid system is allowing itself to be limited by what is considered legal. This is particularly important in the global war on terror environment and counterterrorism. Where 'treating terrorists', is considered illegal in Afghanistan, in Syria, in Iraq, and it is illegal in many ways.	Not all law is good, obviously. That entails breaking the law in many instances. There are many instances where we have set up clinics that have been illegal, underground clinics in Bahrain to provide treatment to torture survivors that are considered 'illegal' clinics by the state, whereas the other actors… well actually in Bahrain there were no other humanitarian actors because there was 'no humanitarian crisis' since [Bahrain] is a US ally. There are other examples where we have gone against, we have been the only ones willing to… and I am not saying this because we are so great… it's because we have the flexibility to do so and we are not bound by the same obligations and reporting and limitations that others face. Other actors can't do that.	That is where we will face problems again, we can't be all about doing things like WHO is today in Iraq, entirely embedded into the state. Negotiating with the Russians requires us not to be seen as agents of western imperialism, which requires us to have independent funding, which requires us to have an organisation that is an international movement not a western movement, it requires us to not have a track record of serving the state building interests of western donors, it requires greater adaptability from us as humanitarian actors, greater capacity and ability to navigate what is possible. Not in a condescending way, we will build your capacity kind of way which is the current approach of the humanitarian sector, but in a mutual solidarity kind of way of working together with other actors to do things, to get things done, to save lives, and to alleviate suffering.
Enablers What's enriching the experience?			✓ Huge fundraising capacity utilised, especially by private donations	✓ Adaptable to conditions on ground ✓ Attempting to form new alliances with civil society mechanisms and grassroots actors based on trust	✓ Flexibility around adherence to law which conflicts with humanitarian principles ✓ Adherence to medical ethical principles over law which is influenced by politics	✓ Flexibility and adaptability to work around barriers that conflict with fundamental principles
Disablers What's taking away from the experience?	✗ Smart thinking does not translate to effective action ✗ Western humanitarianism only addresses issues in politically aligned regions ✗ Humanitarian action disconnected from realities	✗ White saviour mentality ✗ Perverse political incentives of humanitarian sector ✗ Humanitarian principle 'white washing' to cover up political choices and compromises	✗ Aid is rejected in many places because of politics ✗ Hampered partiality	✗ Laws that limit humanitarian action ✗ Politics and legislation stemming from global war on terror environment	✗ Law that conflicts with duty of care and professional ethics ✗ Formal aid system abiding by laws created by atrocity perpetrators	✗ Inability of aid sector to work on multiple cross frontlines ✗ Formal aid sector serves dominant political powers and state building interests of western donors ✗ Formal aid sector unable to form new alliances or relationships

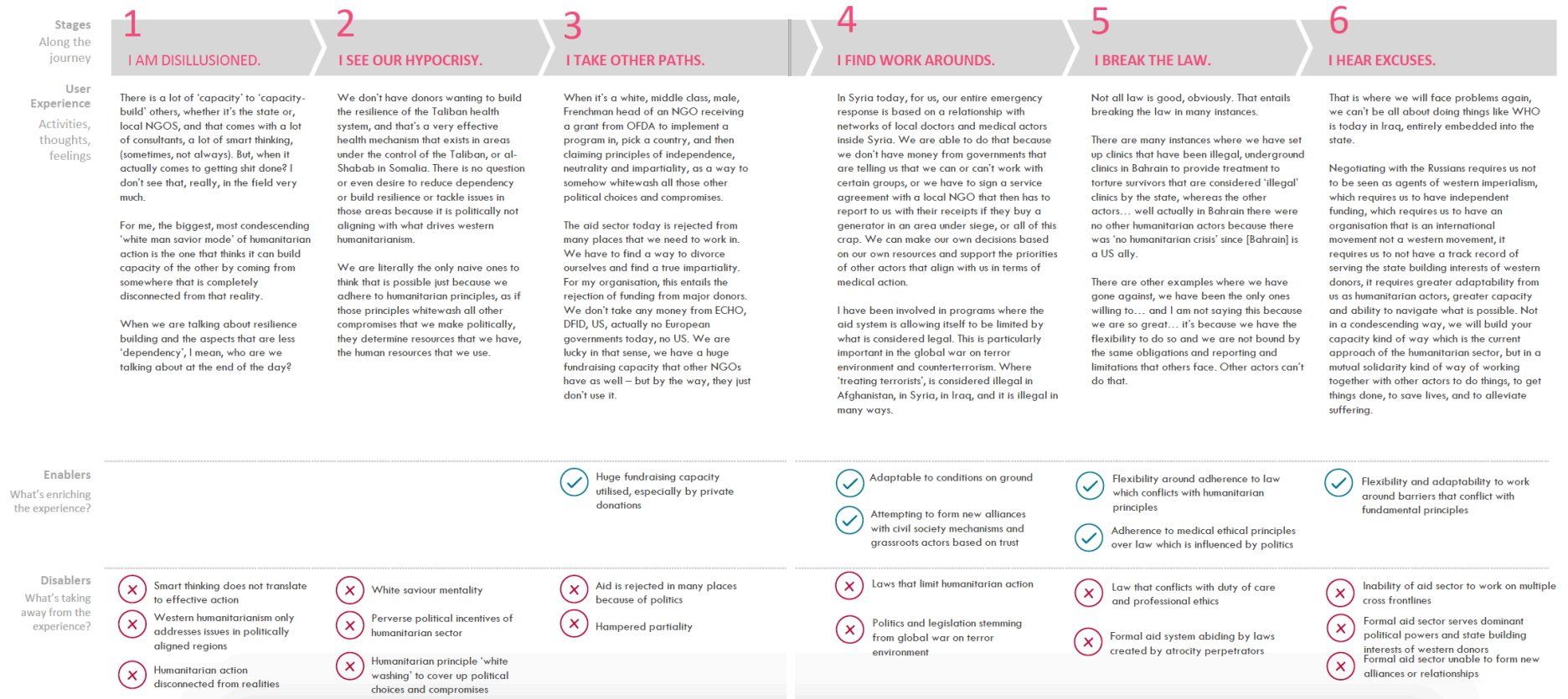Figure 16: Journey / Experience Map 'Not all law is good, obviously' (INGO Responder, Lebanon). *Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.*

In another example (above), the 'risk-taker' in an international NGO based in Beirut, Lebanon shared his experience of seeing 'a lot of 'capacity' to 'capacity-build' others… but when it actually comes to getting shit done? I don't see that in the field very much.' He said he had been involved in projects where the humanitarian system and its principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality was limited by what political interests decide are legal. This is particularly relevant to counterterrorism situations where medically treating 'terrorists' is considered illegal in places like Syria. He reflected that 'not all law is good, obviously' and that in his job, this meant breaking the law in many instances to maintain his humanity. He felt that contradictory political actions meant that humanitarians were increasingly being seen as western imperialists by the people and governments of countries they operate in. He wanted to see the humanitarian system become more adaptive to realities on the ground and work more equally and in solidarity with other actors to save lives and alleviate suffering.

Photos: Journey map sense-making and development. Source: Author.
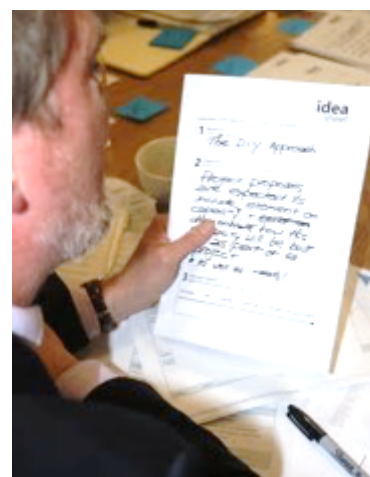
Persona function and use

While not exhaustive for describing the humanitarian system, this set of Personas developed served as a useful tool for bringing diverse perspectives into decision-making throughout the project. These qualitative examples go beyond traditional survey data sets.

> *The specific way in which Design Thinking commits to process is important - too often in the sector, process is for the sake of process, with very little reflection on the process design itself. Introducing new tools – like developing personas – is I think the first step in a long journey towards more intelligible design for the future. – Project decision maker (P)*

The personas were introduced to the decision makers through role-play activities between project decision makers and other project participants. The role play activities helped decision makers understand requirements of the Personas by removing themselves from their usual biases and assumptions and stepping into someone else's shoes to engage in a scenario.

> *Tools like role playing the personas and other visualisations helped me diagnose that we were sometimes talking cross-purposes about things that weren't necessarily mutually exclusive – they helped bridge our understandings. – Project decision maker (J)*

He shared that he could better focus on the real issues and avoid being side tracked by the usual requirements coming from elsewhere in their organisations and from donors. This also suggests that through the enactment of the Personas and other visualisations, this helped to bridge misunderstandings and enabled the decision makers to work more productively and collaboratively based on a more shared picture.

Journey map function and use

In addition to avoiding individual cognitive bias, design tools such as Journey maps can be used to seek inspiration from the edges. This is when designers deliberately incorporate the idea of designing with the extremes in mind or designing according to the principles of universal design. While any group of people can usually be described by a bell curve distribution, designing for the extremes of the population, or the people

at the 'edges', ensures that a new design can meet the needs of extreme users on the edges, but also capture the needs of all users in between. Hence, designing 'universally'. For this project, the Journey maps were intentionally selected and crafted to articulate how people have found work-arounds, improvisations and unobvious ways to achieve their goals despite the system rather than because of it. These Journey maps served as platforms of design inspiration for the project decision makers.

> *Without a doubt, the journey mapping and user-led tools provided a great new way of looking at old problems. It reveals that not only are certain humanitarian structures not suitable for some individuals, but that these structures could be unsuitable for the same people at different times of their lives. And many of the labels used in the sector are branding people with long-lasting discriminatory tags.'*
> *– Project decision maker (J)*

The Journey maps allowed project decision makers to walk in the shoes of others on their journey as they interact with the humanitarian system. This gave the opportunity to look closely at the journey of people they would otherwise conveniently label. This opened up a design space for project decision makers to consider how to re-imagine those touchpoints, and re-design them as the points for change, rather than perceiving the project task as a whole of system, top-down re-design.

> *Tools from Design Thinking helped us get to these issues of power and politics quickly and look at problems in new ways. – Project decision maker (J)*

> *This offered us many new ways to look at the same old issues, and in particular, represent such themes and concepts visually – Project decision maker (M)*

By revealing the leverage points in the system that could have the most significant effect on people's experiences of the system, the Journey maps helped the decision makers identify the key enablers, as well as key barriers which stand in the way of users achieving their objectives. From a design perspective, these barriers and enablers became 'grounded' opportunity spaces for change that was human-centred.

The framework for a future state humanitarian system had four critical layers to it. Firstly, the decision makers designed the 'vision layer' to set the why, and desired shifts and outcomes. Secondly, the decision makers designed the 'experience layer' to set the desired interactions and user journey that will deliver on the vision. Thirdly, the decision makers designed the 'functions layer' to set the roles and relationships that will deliver on the experience. Lastly, the decision makers designed the 'delivery layer' to set the specific concepts and processes that could support the implementation of the whole framework.

By gaining a deep understanding of the system's challenges through the Personas and Journey maps, the decision makers were able to co-create a vision for a future state humanitarian system.
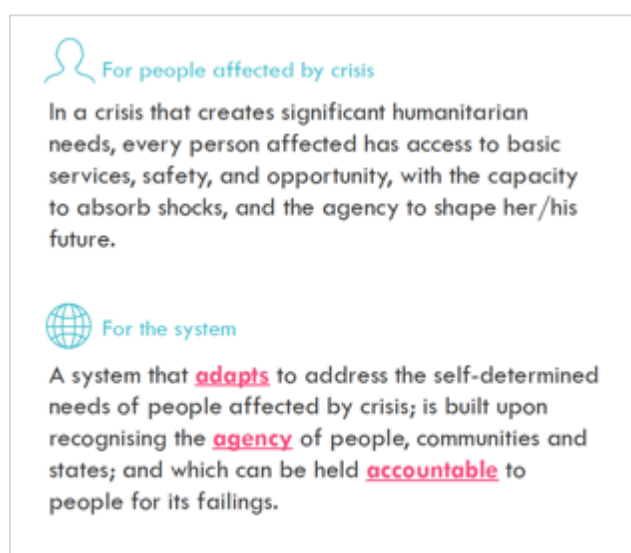
Figure 17: 'Future state' vision. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

This was built upon through a process that involved a series of highly interactive workshops where various ideas were generated, developed, and tested. These ideas and deliberations were consolidated into a series of outputs that describe a future humanitarian system that was designed from the perspective of the primary and secondary system users (Figure 18). As noted by Buchanan (2004), no-one experiences the whole system but rather people experience pathways through it. With this premise front of mind, the project decision makers no longer looked to redesign the entire system from the top down. Instead, their design activity began at the human

interaction level. At this level, the user is pulled (rather than pushed) to 'touchpoint' and interact with parts of the system according to their needs, preferences, motivators, and values. Different human pathways through a system provide insight into the multitude of different touchpoints and interaction points that could be leverage points for transformative change at the experience layer.
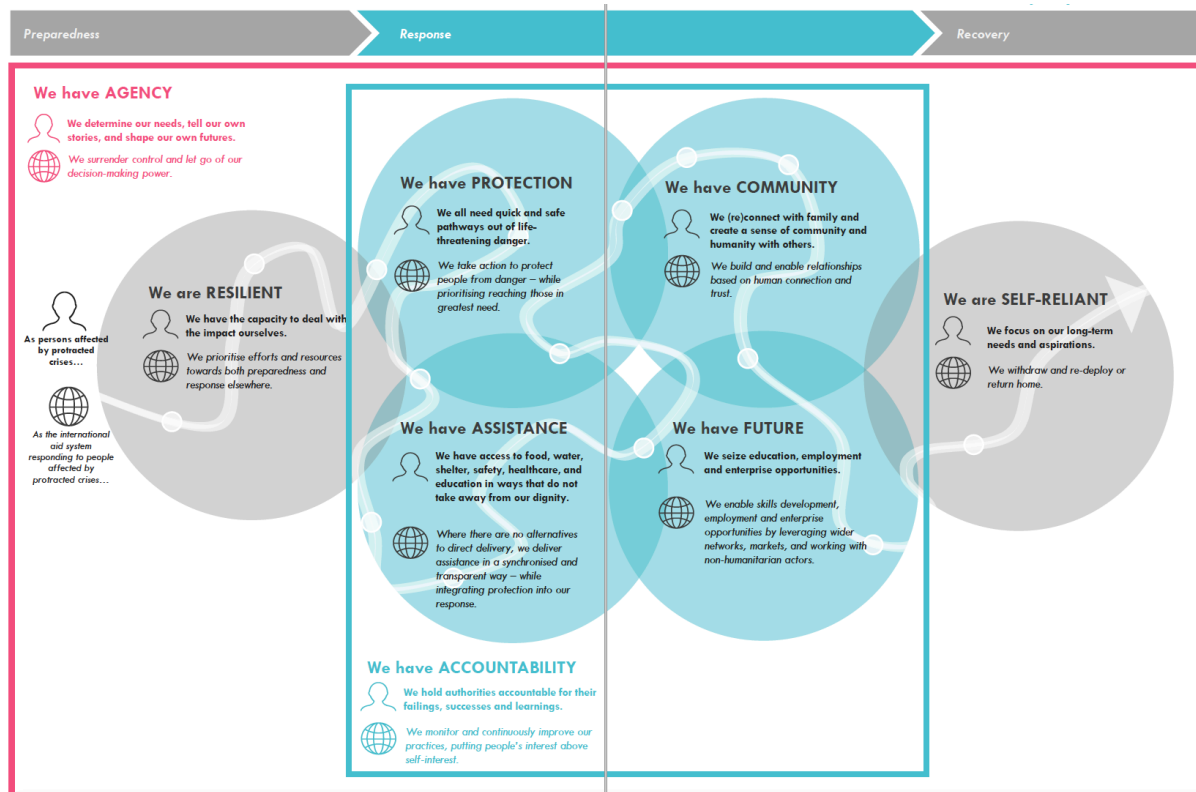
Figure 18: Future experience pathway. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

The 'future experience pathway' visually represents the human touchpoints on an archetypal journey of people affected by crisis (primary users) and the people/system who responds to such crises (secondary users). In reality, people's experiences are messier, more non-linear, and less comprehensive. The pathway outlines key user needs that international humanitarian actors could use as starting points to respond to effectively, needs such as resilience, protection, assistance, a sense of community, a future and self-reliance. These needs can be met through many various touchpoints by various channels. It also visually demonstrates through the blue box that people affected by crisis are agents of change in their own lives and this should be considered across crisis preparedness, response and recovery actions by the formal system. It also depicts that primary accountability of response efforts should be to the people

affected, while at the same time, and still maintain transparency and efficiency for funders. This depiction aimed to reinforce a starting point that is rooted in desirable user experience as they interact with the future humanitarian system.

One of the key outputs at the 'functions' layer explored what kinds of roles were required in a future humanitarian system to deliver on the vision and experience. There were six priority roles agreed upon by the project decision makers. Three out of the six sounded more traditional than the others, however, the project decision makers reshaped the description of those traditional roles to be inherently more human-centred. For example, the funder function was described as needing to be decentralised and depoliticised if it was to stay true to user needs rather than self-serving objectives. There were three other roles that were borne out of discussions of the Journey maps. Those included the 'connector' role that weaves through, synchronises and strengthens the system networks to facilitate collaborations; the 'multiplier' role that leverages the energy of non-traditional humanitarian actors to provide more options for people; and a 'storyteller' role that guides decision-making through co-created narratives that stay true to the lived experiences of people (see figure 19 below).

	funder	A funding and financing function that is depoliticised, anonymised and decentralised.
	custodian	A safeguarding, quality assurance and accountability function that provides checks and balances to ensure positive impact through honest and quality practices.
	assister	A response function that aims to maximise assistance and protection efforts and coverage based on those most in need.
	connector	A connecting, weaving and synchronising function that strengthens system networks, facilitates (un)likely collaborations, and intertwines 'assisting' efforts.
	multiplier	An energising and multiplying function linking traditional and non-traditional humanitarians (eg. informal groups or private business) and provides alternative options for people.
	storyteller	A storytelling function which guides strategic decision making by co-creating narratives that stay true to the lived experiences of people.

Figure 19: Future state functions. Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

One of the key outputs at the 'delivery' layer explored a shortlist of 27 specific ideas from the co-design workshops (from over 300 initial ideas) to reimagine the *how* of alternative humanitarian action. The workshop instruction was to think 'blue sky' and start with a blank slate and to think of what was 'desirable' rather than immediately possible or feasible. Many ideas were generated based on deliberately trying to think from the perspective of the Personas or by direct inspiration from a journey map. The issue of feasibility was not the main criterion for inclusion in the first instance.
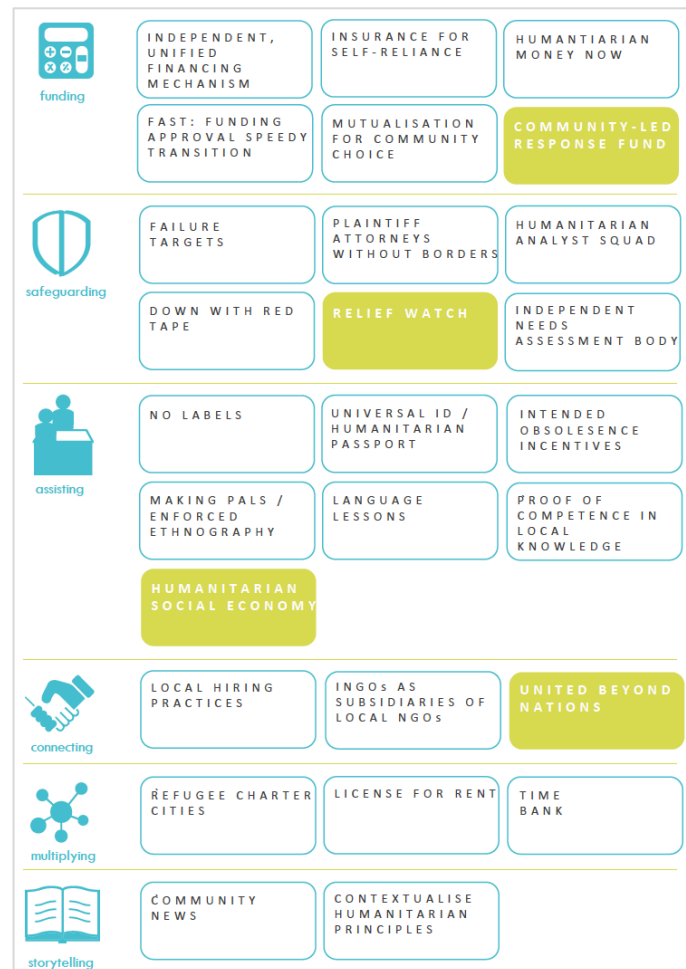
Figure 20: Shortlisted 27 Ideas (with selected 4 highlighted). Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.

Of the 27 shortlisted ideas, four of these ideas were chosen in line with the focus on Agency, Adaptability and Accountability (from the vision statement). The four ideas explored innovative financing, integrating short and long-term needs of crisis affected communities, better supporting local response efforts, and establishing accountability systems. In order to validate the assumptions and principles underpinning any potential implementation, the project team further developed and tested these ideas with 31 experts and practitioners from 25 organisations working in various protracted

crisis contexts. This was done through interactive 'user testing' workshops, and one-on-one interviews with people who are engaged in 'real-world' applications of concepts similar to the ones developed through this process. There were many elements of these ideas that were not new, and existing initiatives greatly helped the team conceptualise how each idea could be adopted, adapted and amplified for different contexts.

*Figure 21: Idea development for 'United beyond Nations'. **Source: ODI A Design Experiment – Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action Report (2018), with permission.***

4.4.3 What was the influence of the tool(s) on 'felt' accountability?

For the primary decision maker of this project, she contrasted the Design Thinking tools to the kind of methods they were using to tackle the project beforehand. They were using a combination of social science theory and previous analysis of the humanitarian sector's architecture, performance and political economy (Bennett 2018). However, she felt that these methods were limiting them in how they might be able to reimagine a more effective humanitarian system that actually 'put people at the centre.' She turned to Design Thinking as the approach to invite a more human-centred angle into the project and help them at least try to design the system from the perspective of users up and down the value chain.

4.4.3.1 Different perspectives on accountability

Before moving into the specific reflections on how the Journey maps may have influenced accountability for the decision makers on this project, interviewees were first asked to reflect on their views on what accountability meant for themselves. There were two dominant and contrasting viewpoints that surfaced among interviewees. One was that accountability is intrinsic and influenced by individual ethics and *virtue*, and two was that accountability is extrinsic and influenced by externally imposed regulatory *mechanisms*. To highlight this, the following quotes capture the viewpoint that accountability can be more about the individual *virtue*:

> *we are all motivated by an inner sense of accountability – an inner ethical code – otherwise we wouldn't be in this business… that is why I am in this role and not in banking – Decision maker (C)*

This interviewee shared that there is a 'code of ethics' that they have all signed, which is different to the 'inner sense of accountability' mentioned previously, in that it is a formal mechanism instituted by the organisation they work for.

> *I am bound contractually by this [organisation's] ethical code, it governs my behaviour as a professional in the organisation, it governs my behaviour towards the subject matter of what I do, it governs my behaviour in the conduct of my research and implementation of the organisation's missions – Decision maker (C)*

However, she reflects that the only reason she signed it was because it closely aligned with her own pre-existing personal ethical code and beliefs. The organisational code of ethics she referenced may be the institutionalised *mechanism* governing her professional behaviour, but it appears this *mechanism* was allowed to govern her behaviour because she's established that it first aligns with her own personal ethics and *virtue*. She goes on to say *'strangely, I don't feel accountable to my organisation'* and that besides signing up to all these ethical rules and obligations, her organisation is the last thing she feels accountable to, because:

> *I make the decisions I make, not because my organisation is telling me what to do, I do it because it is the right thing to do by the people who need help first, by other humanitarian organisations who I can help solve problems second, and by the taxpayers of the governments who fund our work third. My organisation comes last. – (C)*

This is in contrast to another interviewee who viewed accountability as something external to him, something that happened to him rather than within. The following quotes capture this contrasting viewpoint that accountability can be more about the institutional *mechanism:*

> *It is the ability of someone else to hold me responsible for what I have done.– Decision maker (M)*

> *I was officially accountable to the board, that is who held me accountable. They could hire me, fire me and tell me what to do – (M)*

This notion of it being someone else's responsibility to hold him responsible for his actions is heavily covered in the accountability literature as five out of the six elements that can influence 'felt' accountability are externally oriented. Elements such as whether there is identifiability, expectation of evaluation, or awareness of monitoring, while the one that is internally oriented is the value of decision related outcomes being highly valued by agent (Frink & Klimoski 1998). When this interviewee was pressed on exactly who he *felt* primarily accountable to and secondarily accountable to, he shared that based on intrinsic feelings, this is who he felt accountable to in order:

> *However, I felt more accountable to the staff of the office, the team who reported to me, then to my peers in the management team, then to our field teams, and then to beneficiaries. – Decision maker (M)*

This suggests that this type of decision maker views accountability as a relational construct with agents outside of himself. Even though the previously discussed decision maker viewed accountability as a relational transaction with agents outside of herself as well, she also recognised the accountability relationship she has with her inner self and her personally determined ethics and virtue. The other interviewees tended to share similar viewpoints to the first example rather than the second one.

4.4.3.2 Why the Design Thinking tools were perceived as influential

All four interviewees shared that for them personally, the Journey maps (often referred to by decision makers in this project as experience maps) were the most influential of the design tools on their experience of the project. Interviewees described the journey map tools in both functional and emotional terms.

> *a collaborative tool that deepened our empathy to develop a more user-friendly human system – Decision maker (J)*

> *Throughout the project, nothing that anyone else said struck me or touched me as much as what was in those experience maps – Decision maker (M)*

Another interviewee described it as the tool that got her most excited about the Design Thinking approach because it mapped out how human experiences of the same phenomena could be diametrically opposed:

> *for me, the light bulb moment in the process was reading all the experience maps at the same time with others in the [Insights & Ideation] workshop… they solidified for me how different people experienced the same thing completely differently depending on where they sit in the system – Decision maker (C)*

This deliberate opportunity to dive deep into many different and conflicting perspectives had significant implications for someone in a decision making position. The Journey maps made her question her position in relationship with others in the system. She stated that she thinks of humanitarian aid experience as having a certain dynamic where there are 'givers' and there are 'receivers'. The Journey maps helped

surface those relational power dynamics and differences, making them more explicit when decisions were being made.

> *The experience maps demonstrated for me that people on the receiving end experience that giving/receiving dynamic differently to how I do. Because I am part of the givers, and although I could see the benefits and drawbacks of the system from my giver position, the [design] tools demonstrated to me that the receivers did not see those benefits and drawbacks in the same way. – Decision maker (C)*

When looking to redesign the humanitarian system in a human-centred way, this means having to think about the multiple standpoints of its different users' experiences – whether a refugee, a local official, a donor, a country director from an international organisation or the head of a local NGO. One interviewee admitted that this came to life in the Journey maps and meant changing their entire starting point so it could account for the diversity of user perspectives. He shared this sentiment of how the tools forced them as a team to stop and pivot the project's focus:

> *The experience maps suggested that before reforming the architecture of the humanitarian system, we must first address all that lies beneath – Decision maker (J)*

The Journey maps directly influenced how conversations were forced to be reoriented and grounded in the actual lived experiences of the people who would be affected by their decisions. Another decision maker touched on the value of grounding across a 'spectrum of users' as it allowed him to better focus on the 'real issues' and avoid being side tracked by the usual requirements coming from donors and elsewhere in the organisation. Following this, this interviewee shared how he noticed people regularly referred to the Personas to consider whether to design a certain feature or idea. Another interviewee shared why he believed the Persona tools were one of the main strengths of this project:

> *The main strength was the immersion in the user experience, and the continued reference back to it; and to thinking across a spectrum of users – like in the personas – rather than one or two stereotypical ones. – Decision maker (M)*

This interviewee shared they were now more open to making decisions that were not driven by their own assumptions having gone through the Personas. The same

interviewee shared how both the Personas and Journey maps influenced the way he asks questions and the way he desired to interact with people on the receiving end of his work.

> *there was a granularity that tells the story, and you are able to see things that normally you wouldn't. At the level of director, you don't read things properly, you read things that summarise up, they are not as grounded, but these experience maps were compelling as they surfaced real issues – Decision maker (M)*

> *After my experience with the design tools, it has influenced the way I approach my work. I ask a lot more questions. I ask very different questions. I ask much more granular questions rather than generic ones like 'how is this service?' – and I put more people and resources on seeking these more granular answers. – Decision maker (M)*

The necessity to go beyond the changing nature of inquiry processes on an individual decision maker level, as well as changing the nature of conversations taking place on an interactional level. Another interviewee shared how the Journey maps forced a fundamentally different approach to defining and approaching problems in the aid sector compared to what is usually done:

> *As a sector, we tend to solve human problems through technical tools and processes – so if part of a [humanitarian] response is not working, we create a new lograme (LFA), or excel spreadsheet, or new organisation, or new working group, or new funding stream – all of which are technical solutions to human problems we encounter daily… The experience maps opened my eyes, they highlighted and put in front of me, that to solve a complex problem you need an empathetic solution, one that starts with a conversation, it could be more about mindset, culture, behaviour – so we should not be starting with [technical] tools, they should come after – Decision maker (C)*

The reasons why the interviewees found the design tools useful are evident in their reflections on how the tools influenced them in significantly personal ways.

4.4.3.3 How the Design Thinking tools were perceived as influential

When asked about whether the Journey maps influenced their sense of accountability, one responded with 'I just felt it' and went on to elaborate with the following reflection:

In a humanitarian response, whether you are in London or on the ground, there is a sense that people affected are 'other' – they are different to you, they have a different culture, religion, situation, like, they are in crisis and you are not. There are a host of reasons why you distinguish yourself from them. But what those experience maps did was put me at the centre of their crisis. In that moment, I remember feeling like I was transported to their world. And it made me ask myself – What would I do? And the truth is, instead of turning to the usual technical tools, I just wanted to do whatever I would do for my parents, my brother, my friend – Decision maker (C)

The Journey maps clearly influenced her 'felt' accountability through facilitating a different position from which to base her considerations and decisions:

[The Journey maps] drove me to consider my role as being more deeply embedded in the human experiences of others – I was no longer separate from them, there was a direct connection – Decision maker (C)

The Journey maps influenced her 'felt' accountability in a way that her decision making could be based on what she would want for herself and her family if she were in that situation. She no longer subscribed to her own othering attempts and distinguishing herself from 'them', rather she was able to connect with their experience and needs in a more human to human way.

I felt I was more individually accountable to people's experiences. [Especially after reading Experience Map 6], it made me feel like I had an important role to play to change things on a larger scale – Decision maker (C)

She recalled the story from Journey map six in great detail and then shared how it made her want to do more to solve those particular problems she had connected with.

I felt frustrated for them, I could see what was happening to them and it just pissed me off… It touched me, I had empathy for people who are in many ways unlike me, and in many ways just like me – it definitely increased my individual felt accountability towards them. – Decision maker (C)

This emotional connection provided a strong drive and motivation for seeking a change and feeling more accountability to a particular group experiencing a particular problem.

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The above quotations came from interviewees who viewed accountability as more intrinsic and based on *virtue*. From the viewpoint of the decision maker type who viewed accountability more extrinsically and based on *mechanism*, there were still some strong emotional reactions prompted by the Journey maps:

> *[Engaging with those experience maps] made me very frustrated. I felt motivated to do something. You're your own worst judge and I was feeling quite self-critical– Decision maker (M)*

> *When I read them, they made me very angry and very sad. The corruption ones, the ones from the Syrian refugees in Turkey and Palestine talking about how corrupt the UN system was, that made me angry in that self-righteous way. I wanted to drop everything else and go out and correct that corruption. It stoked the flame of action within me. – Decision maker (M)*

Though, when asked whether these feelings influenced his sense of individual 'felt' accountability, there was some tension in the response:

> *If you want to save the world, but the feedback from the experience maps told you what you're doing isn't right, then it triggers more than a 'felt' accountability. For me, it triggered a self-interest to want to do a good job for myself, it is kind of pleasure seeking. – Decision maker (M)*

The influence the design tools had seemed 'more than a felt accountability' and this interviewee questioned whether it had more to do with a desire to do good and look good rather than it being accountability related:

> *There's a different feeling that comes out with Design Thinking that makes me act better, make better decisions, change what needs to change in a program… I don't know if this is about accountability as much as it is about an individual's moral investment in doing a good job. Accountability, to me, has always been something external to me: It is the ability of someone else to hold me responsible for what I have done. Whereas Design Thinking put me in touch with the fact that I may not be doing a good job, so for me that is about self-esteem and self-interest. (M)*

> *The design tools do make a program better. For me, it is because I want to be associated with a great program, so these tools are triggering different receptors in my brain that helps me do a better job in the end. – Decision maker (M)*

However, based on the literature on the six different elements which can influence someone's 'felt' accountability discussed earlier, those elements such as a self-interest to do a good job can still be considered accountability related, theoretically speaking.

> *It has influenced me in terms of the flow of information I want to create in my organisation to have a much larger percentage weighted to how we were viewed by communities instead of so much being weighted to whether we met our targets or not. – Decision maker (M)*

> *when you put yourself in other people's shoes and judge problems from their perspectives, the results can surprise you. In place of politics, mandates and bureaucratic processes emerges compassion, ingenuity and good sense. Decision maker (C)*

Because of the experience with the design tools, not only was a sense of 'felt' accountability influenced, but also broader influences on how to approach problems differently in their roles. Solutions to systemic problems in the aid sector should not always be technical, some need to be more behavioural. This contrast between the technical and the behavioural also resembles some parallels with the literature on accountability and the contrast between the *mechanism* (more akin to technical) and the *virtue* (more akin to behavioural).

The effect of the Persona and Journey mapping tools went beyond the project's boundaries as the decision makers saw value that could be extended beyond the task at hand.

> *I have since been recommending design approaches for other humanitarian organisations to use in the future – Project decision maker (P)*

One interviewee incorporated the personas into their own lexicon and work habits by going back to his own organisation and spending a day with his team to develop User Personas specific for their humanitarian organisation.

> *Personas and journey mapping are tools we're exploring with other research in the future – Project decision maker (J)*

One of the decision makers reflected that expectations need to be managed, and that people who choose to use Design Thinking should be warned that the process may not always arrive at a 'blueprint solution' to a complex problem.

> *…but the sector always drives towards a blueprint that can be applied to every organisation in every country – which is clearly a fool's errand. However, that expectation means that Design Thinking will always be viewed with suspicion, as if it hasn't delivered – when in fact it has delivered, and probably delivered something more useful than a blueprint – Project decision maker (P)*

This reflection links back to the literature in that shifting an organisation's focus to be outward looking rather than inward looking means taking deliberate steps to systemically uncover end user needs and build empathy among decision makers through tools such as Personas. In contrast to existing management frameworks, Design Thinking tools therefore, offer decision makers of aid projects a 'human centred' knowledge system that focuses first on possibilities before moving onto constraints (Liedtka 2018; Liedtka et al. 2013), and not driven by individual cognitive bias (Liedtka 2015)

4.4.3.4 What is the summary of key findings?

There are four key concepts emerging from the decision maker's reflections and perceptions on how the Design Thinking tools influenced their 'felt' sense of accountability. These are summarised in the table below:

Table 5: Summary of key findings for Lebanon/UK project

Project: Lebanon/UK Humanitarian Redesign	
Emerging concepts on how DT tools may influence 'felt' accountability	**Supporting keywords from analysis of interviews and observations**
Builds shared picture	- supports a shared understanding - bridges multiple perspectives - keeps focus on a spectrum of users - continuously reference multiple standpoints – not just the stereotypical perspectives
Distils complex information	seeing old problems in new ways
Situates and grounds discussions	- keeps focus on real issues - getting to what lies beneath - conversations not at cross-purposes

Deepens empathy and connection	• allows space for empathy to guide decisions • allows space for compassion and connection • makes decisions user-friendly

Source: Author consolidating key themes, categories and codes from nVivo and manual analysis

4.5 Summary

Looking across the findings of both the case studies there are some critical areas of overlap regarding decision makers' perceived influence of Design Thinking tools on their individual 'felt' accountability. In both projects, the Personas and Journey maps were used alongside other methods, however, in both cases, they were consistently identified by the decision makers as the most influential tools for them on a personal accountability level.

The combination of action research, semi-structured interviews and case study analysis has surfaced four ways that Design Thinking tools may be contributing to the 'felt' accountability of decision makers. Notably, the first is by building a shared picture among diverse groups, secondly by humanising complex information, thirdly by grounding discussions in actual realities, and lastly by deepening empathy and connection. These are expanded on in the table below and will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Table 6: Summary of key findings across both case studies

Four factors	Description	Supporting quotes from case study one (Ghana)	Supporting quotes from case study two (Lebanon/UK)
1. Builds shared picture	The tools supported decision makers to have a 'shared picture' of the problem from the perspective of beneficiaries. This shared picture sets the collective frame for decisions to be agreed upon based on what is best for (or most	'Using the personas to guide our decisions meant that by using the same amount of resources, we could choose to do what is best for Mary, Naana and Michael rather than what is best for [our organisation or the donor].' 'I wasn't able to go to the field with the others. But those personas you all created helped bring – and keep – the nurses	'Reading all the experience maps at the same time with others in the [Insights] workshop… that tool solidified for me how different people experienced the same thing completely differently depending on where they sit in the system' 'The main strength was the immersion in the user experience, and the continued reference

		voices in our boardroom decisions and meetings for months and months after the fact'	back to it; and to thinking across a spectrum of users – like in the personas – rather than one or two stereotypical ones.'
2. Humanises complex information	The tools gave a 'human face' to what was already known through statistical data. This human face helped decision makers see old problems in new ways and for information to be processed in formats that depicted beneficiaries as people rather than numbers.	'These actual human stories helped humanise our user and kept me thinking about that individual user in mind – or multiple personas if you will – throughout the project, it influenced me in a different way to the usual thinking in statistics' 'The personas gave a human face to a lot of the issues that we already knew, so it is not that we didn't know, but its more than reading about percentages, it felt different to be imagining, okay, here is a typical user, this is what they need, and this is what we need to do about it...'	It opened my eyes, they highlighted and put in front of me, that to solve a complex problem you need an empathetic solution, one that starts with a conversation, it could be more about mindset, culture, behaviour – so we should not be starting with [technical] tools, they should come after.' 'There was a granularity that tells the story, and you are able to see things that normally you wouldn't. At the level of director, you don't read things properly, you read things that summarise up… but these experience maps were compelling.'
3. Grounds discussions in reality	The tools 'grounded' day-to-day conversations in other people's realities rather than assumptions. This groundedness helped situate decision makers in beneficiary contexts when making decision about/for/with them.	'I felt more accountable to them that way because we were still honouring their preferences in their absence' 'The personas gave us a whole new language to speak about the reasons why behind every decision... because this person is like that, we need to do it like this… This made me feel like I was doing my bit for the nurses.'	'After my experience with the design tools, it has influenced the way I approach my work. I ask a lot more questions. I ask very different questions. I ask much more granular questions rather than generic ones like 'how is this service?' – and I put more people and resources on seeking these more granular answers.' 'What those experience maps did was put me at the centre of that crisis. In that moment, I remember feeling in their position, like I was transported to their world. And it made me ask myself – What would

			I do? And the truth is, instead of turning to the usual technical tools, I just wanted to do exactly what I would do for my parents, my brother, my friend.'
4. Deepens empathy and connection	The tools enabled decision makers to 'connect' in more personal and empathic ways. This supported human-centred decisions that put the needs of the beneficiaries before other considerations.	'These design tools were useful in guiding decisions, guiding us all through how to deliver something that is valued and meaningful to the beneficiaries without us getting lost' 'I would wake up in the morning with the nurses' on my mind. My accountability to them felt different to my sense of accountability on other projects.'	'It drove me to consider my role as being more deeply embedded in the human experiences of others – I was no longer separate from them, there was a direct connection' 'I felt frustrated for them, I could see what was happening to them and it just pissed me off. It touched me, I had empathy for people who are in many ways unlike me, and in many ways just like me – it definitely increased the accountability I felt towards them.'

Chapter Five   Discussion

5.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key ideas and concepts derived from the two case studies in the previous chapter and address them in the context of the earlier concepts presented in the literature review. This chapter unpacks the relationships between concepts that provides some insight on how Design Thinking tools influence the 'felt' accountability experienced by decision makers of aid projects in NGOs.

5.2 Reflecting on the who: institutional vs individual accountability

In the literature review, there was an overriding conviction that a more beneficiary-centred accountability paradigm is fundamental to the legitimacy of NGOs and their aid projects. Even though some claimed the idea of accountability to multiple stakeholders as problematic in and of itself (Koppell 2005), many interviewee reflections did not see accountability as problematic, but rather agreed with Naidoo (2003), that the NGOs they work for should be held accountable on multiple terms – not only to the beneficiary and not only to the donor. From their perspective it is not either or. Many of the interviewees described accountability with words such as: *monitoring, evaluation, donors, reporting, and numbers.* This suggests an alignment with the traditional conceptualisation in accountability theory as an institutional *'rule and norm enforcement mechanism'* (Tetlock 1985, p. 307) focusing on a *'state of affairs'* (Frink & Klimoski 1998). On an individual level, some interviewees corroborated the literature and genuinely saw accountability to be best placed as an external *mechanism*. However, other interviewees described it more personally, with words such as *ethics, principles, motivation, the right thing, values*. This was more aligned with the *virtue* notion of accountability, one driven by morals and an individually 'felt' condition more akin to a *'state of mind'* than a *'state of affairs'* (Frink & Klimoski 1998, p. 9). Based on some of these reflections, the accountability debate going on in the aid sector may actually have the potential to become calibrated more evenly weighted towards individual virtue than the current dominance on organisational mechanics. The varying nature of the interviewee's perceptions of what accountability

means, perhaps suggests some hope for a more integrated and balanced form of accountability in the future. This idea was termed as adaptive accountability regimes in the literature (Ebrahim 2009; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015).

The notion of a moral imperative of their work and individual sense of accountability was mentioned by certain decision makers during the interviews and the observed project activities. When specifically asked who they personally felt accountable to most in their day to day jobs, some interviewees said their NGO management, some said their donor, and others said the beneficiary community they were serving. What was interesting was that those who said they felt more accountable to the beneficiaries were generally field based and spent more direct face-time with beneficiaries. Whereas the interviewees who said they were more inclined to feel accountable to their NGO management or donors were generally more removed from frontline interactions with beneficiaries. Some critics argue there are too many obstacles to achieving accountability given NGOs are not representative of the people in need they claim to serve, but of powerful donor interests (Chambers & Pettit 2013; Edwards & Hulme 2002). This concept seems to be regardless of how close to the beneficiaries or integrated the NGO employees may be. However, the reflections from some interviewees refute this notion entirely, as they expressed an eager and intrinsic motivation that 'we do what we can' and asserted their ability to 'navigate' accountability mechanisms that may seem to favour donors through 'workarounds' that in fact favour beneficiaries. Workarounds have been observed to enable short term navigation of problematic organisational processes in the broader management literature (Mohr & Arora 2004). This notion of workarounds was not universally raised in all interviews but interestingly did come up in both case studies as directly inspired and prompted by engagement with the Design Thinking tools. The tools tended to have an emphasis on 'extreme users' and user workarounds at times.

For example, in case study one, when one decision maker shared how she and her colleagues agreed on a workaround to enable her to continue working on the project when she technically was 'not supposed to'. The work-around the decision makers made was for one project budget to pay for the activities conducted and resources utilised on the other project. This interviewee believed this workaround was decided purely in the interest of beneficiary outcomes, rather than complying with the donor

requirement of sticking to what was pre-determined in the project log frame (LFA). When asked what inspired the need for this workaround, the interviewee answered that it was based on two factors (as stated in Chapter Four). One, was that the discussions were intuitively grounded and situated in the contextual realities of the project and beneficiary needs. Two, was a deep emotional connection and empathy with the nurses. She indicated that both of these factors were derived from her early stage involvement in the design research activities, and specifically the development of user personas. This is a clear example of how decisions made based on individually felt accountability inspired by Design Thinking tools can be quite different to if those same decisions were made based on complying with imposed and mechanistic versions of accountability. One question this example surfaces is what are the unintended consequences of a more individually 'felt' accountability guiding decisions? The current understanding of workarounds in aid is in its infancy and not within the scope of this thesis, however, a quick look at the literature is predominantly descriptive and discussion of the consequences of workarounds is speculative or deductive rather than empirical (Halbesleben et al. 2008). Despite workarounds having been observed to support short term navigation of problematic organisational processes (Dunford & Perrigino 2018; Mohr & Arora 2004), some warn that in doing so, they can create additional unexpected problems elsewhere in the system (Mohr & Arora 2004; Kobayashi et al. 2005). Also, who gets to decide what is in the best interest of beneficiaries in any given situation?

From the researcher's observations, criticising NGOs is misdirected as they seem more like the accidental outcome of the calculated efficiency that funds their existence, inherently forcing a certain directional flow of accountability at the institutional level. However, the case may be institutionally, the individual 'felt' accountability expressed by decision makers suggests a more human-centred accountability can potentially still thrive with the inclusion of aides such as Design Thinking tools – despite the competing multiple interests in some institutional NGO environments.

5.3 Reflecting on the accountability tension: imposed vs 'felt'

Just as the previous section suggested that a more balanced and integrated accountability regime can potentially still thrive with the support of Design Thinking tools despite multiple interests, here it is evident that it can also still potentially thrive

when the dominant thinking paradigm is heavily weighted towards the imposed. The decision makers' personal experiences in the project case studies aligned with the literature on the institutional pressures making 'felt' accountability or a hybrid of felt and imposed (ie. adaptive accountability) difficult to achieve (Ebrahim 2009; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). The interviewee accounts concurred that standard aid sector accountability regimes targeting NGOs have failed to address the issue of 'felt' moral and ethical responsibilities that confront them in the day-to-day.

Accountability regimes built on the foundations of logical, linear and quantitative management practices can tend to limit accountability to an audit-like reckoning (Angus 2008; Strathern 2000). This was demonstrated in case study one when two of the interviewees distanced themselves from their organisation's accountability measures, for example, of 'how many beneficiaries were sent a text message on health practices', and instead prioritised their day-to-day activities to be based on their individual 'felt' accountability toward more long term, real change in people's lives. This contrasts the literature review discussion on how imposed regimes of accountability can require decision makers to sacrifice their personal empathy and sense of solidarity, the kind that comes from shared experiences such as storytelling and collaborative future-making (Gair 2012).

Despite the apparent advances in the various notions of accountability, reflections from some of the interviewees still suggest that accountability in their other aid projects where Design Thinking methods were not used still feel like 'bean counting' or 'box checking' activities. Their reflections pointed to their individual efforts to work within and work-around pervasive and institutionalised accountability regimes. They believed these methods had more of a market ethic of value for money, one that is not personal, but rather 'just business'. If this is the dominant workplace culture within many NGOs, this supports why some decision makers may choose to adopt a client-based, service industry mentality where the client is the donor. It remains unclear exactly how damaging this externally imposed mode of accountability is from the limited number of interviews involved in this thesis. Additionally, the interviewees selected for participation in this thesis were more inclined to be the type of decision maker who were seeking more beneficiary-centred accountability to begin with given their previous experience with other projects where it was highlighted that the beneficiary

was not receiving the support they needed. It is clear from both the literature review and the interviewee accounts across both case studies that the terms of accountability are not usually defined by the beneficiaries. The claims in the literature that challenge the idea that decisions should be based on beneficiary preferences because people do not know what is best for themselves (Geuss 2008; Hobbes 2014; Duflo & Banerjee 2011) were universally challenged by interviewees. There was a humility among some of the interviewees about how dare 'we as foreigners' assume a superiority to assert that we know what is best.

The growing deficit between short term and long term, between quantitative and qualitative, between linear and iterative practices are all symptomatic of the growing deficit between donor-centred accountability and beneficiary-centred accountability (Ebrahim 2003). As the case studies have demonstrated, this growing discrepancy has actually heightened the moral and ethical challenges for decision makers on the ground running aid projects. Devotees to a beneficiary-centred model of accountability such as the decision makers in both of the case studies are taking it on themselves to bring Design Thinking tools into their practices. They presented with a great deal of enthusiasm for finding ways to practicing more beneficiary-centred decision making amidst the tensions they face. Donor requirements can greatly influence a decision maker's sense of accountability, however, as seen with both case studies, the donors are not always determining and dictating every single decision day-to-day on a project. It was not donors who redefined success from the beneficiary perspective. It was not donors who determined the design features of the mobile technology solution based on nurses' preferences. It was not donors who insisted on reaching lower numbers of people but getting deep and meaningful data instead. This research has shown that sometimes there is a space or opportunity that opens for individuals to exert their own decision making power in the day-to-day. There are a myriad of other factors that have the potential to influence a decision maker's sense of accountability when the traditional institutional accountability pressures may not be as intense in a project. There is then a critical opportunity to be intentional about those other factors that have the potential to influence. This thesis scope does not allow for a thorough investigation into all the possible factors, however, it does explore how two Design Thinking tools potentially influence decision makers sense of accountability to feel more inclined towards beneficiaries.

5.4 The influence on 'felt' accountability: four emerging concepts

As identified in the literature (Frink & Klimoski 1998; Tetlock 1999), when decision makers become accountable for project outcomes beyond their immediate control or when the decision outcome is not greatly valued by them, they are more inclined to take the safe, predictable and less risky route in their decision-making process. This interpretation was the same in the participant observations and interviews conducted. However, when it was observed that decision makers greatly valued the decision-related outcomes themselves – the use of the Personas and Journey maps seemed to influence the decision makers individually 'felt' accountability through four contributing factors to their systematic processing.

The analysis points to the use of Personas and Journey maps as having offered decision makers the following four influencing factors on their 'felt' accountability:

1. **Builds a shared picture:** the tools supported decision makers to have a 'shared picture' of the problem from the perspective of beneficiaries. This shared picture sets the collective frame for decisions to be agreed upon based on what is best for (or most accountable to) the beneficiaries.

2. **Humanises complex information:** the tools gave a 'human face' to what was already known through statistical data. This human face helped decision makers see old problems in new ways and for information to be processed in formats that depicted beneficiaries as people rather than numbers.

3. **Grounds discussions in reality:** the tools 'grounded' day-to-day conversations in other people's realities rather than assumptions. This propensity to be grounded helped situate decision makers in beneficiary contexts when making decision about/for/with them.

4. **Deepens empathy and connection:** the tools enabled decision makers to 'connect' in more personal and empathic ways. This supported human-centred decisions that put the needs of the beneficiaries before other considerations.

Below (Figure 22) is a depiction of how these four factors and the use of the Design Thinking tools fit in to the earlier framework derived from the accountability and development/aid bodies of literature:
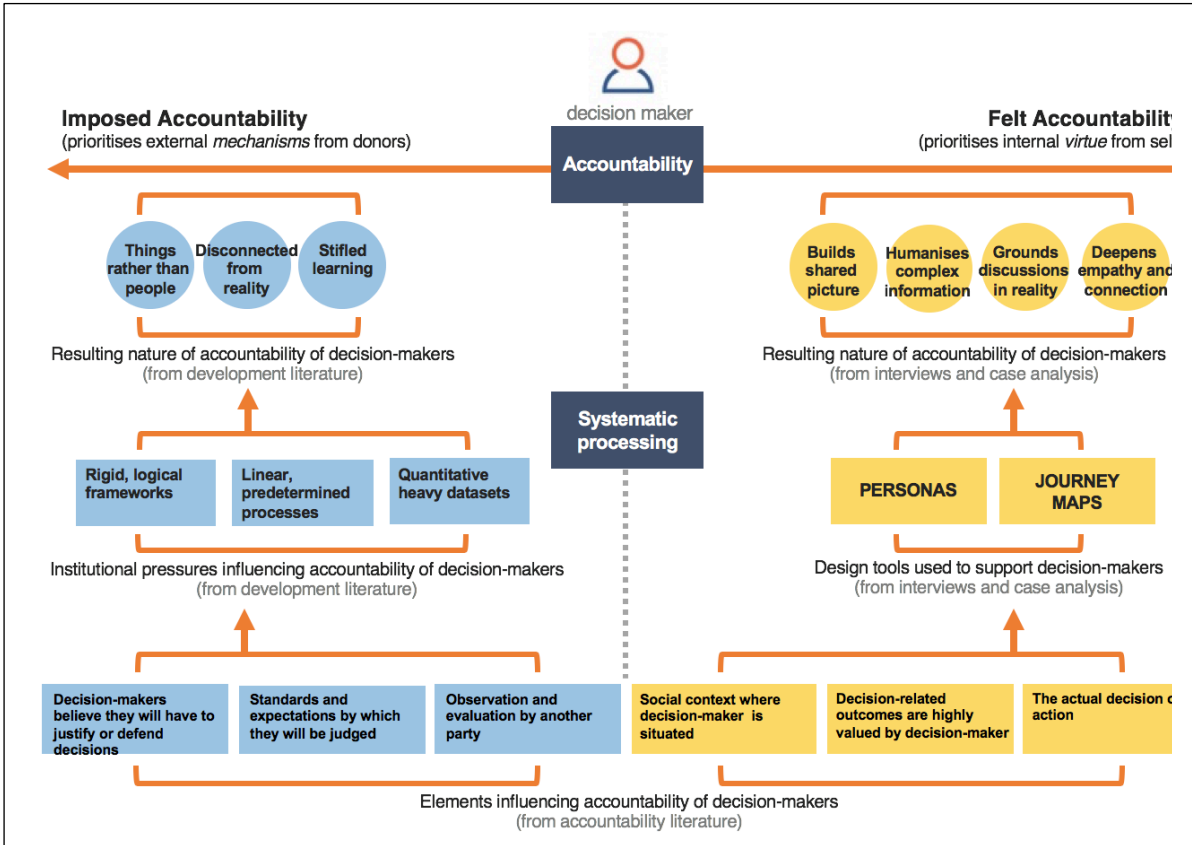
Figure 22: Conceptual Framework combining literature and thesis findings. Source: Author

The conceptual model above demonstrates on the bottom right side that when the decision-related outcomes are highly valued, or the social context where decision makers are situated is in close proximity to the beneficiaries, there seems to be an impact on accountability. When Design Thinking tools are used the impact is an internally *felt, virtue* version of accountability that is based on shared understandings, humanised information, contextually grounded discussions and deep human to human connection. Whereas on the bottom left side, when decision makers believe they will have to justify their decisions (especially numerically) or have certain standards/expectations by which they will be judged or evaluated by another party. These seem to be enabling conditions for institutional pressures based on logical frameworks, linear processes and quantitative heavy datasets to take hold and lead to an externally *imposed*, *mechanistic* version of accountability that reports on resource use, short term impacts and is disconnected from reality.

Through a series of works, Wrigley and her colleagues (Wrigley & Bucolo 2012; Wrigley 2013; Straker & Wrigley 2014) had also identified that the benefits of Design Thinking tools often went beyond the initial intention they were used for. The four factors in this thesis' conceptual model are suggestive as to how Design Thinking tools could potentially contribute to enhanced 'felt' accountability in aid projects. The four factors are further discussed below in relation to the findings from the case examples and concepts in the literature review.

5.4.1 Factor 1: Builds a shared picture among diverse groups of stakeholders

Instead of decision makers having to make sense of contradictory pictures of reality and competing narratives (Liedtka 2004), the design tools were perceived by interviewees to help build a shared picture that supported alignment among decision makers. A broad cross-section of people from different organisations and decision-making levels collaborated to build a shared picture among diverse groups in each of the projects. As Schön (1983, p. 338) hinted when discussing a 'reflective institution', so too did the decision makers need to be open to 'differentiated responses, qualitative appreciation of complex processes, and decentralised responsibility for judgment and action' which is in contrast to the normal emphasis on standard procedures, objective measures, and centralised systems of control. The decision makers being open to taking this more multi-perspective and qualitative approach provided the enabling conditions for the Design Thinking tools to help build a shared understanding. For example, in case study one, community nurses, health system leaders at the regional and national level, project planners, technologists, public health experts, cultural experts all came together to make the nurses' needs the dominant governing factor in their decision making. Using the design tools to unite such diverse groups throughout the design process to make decisions and co-create together had the potential for many issues and disagreements. However, the Personas and Journey maps acted as useful tools to aligning conversations on common goals and a united front. This agrees with Straker and Wrigley's (2014) findings that Design Thinking tools had provided a way to communicate across organisational departments and silos in business settings and was now reflected in the experiences of aid workers. Decision makers shared how they were no longer spending so much time trying to convince other stakeholders of their decisions, but had the tools to bring them along and make those decisions jointly. The observations also support the literature that suggested that actively involving

people to identify and address the issues that challenge them is the most effective and sustainable way of removing the constraints on their development (Dennehy et al. 2013).

In case study two, when one decision maker shared that reading all the Journey maps at the same time solidified how different people experienced the same thing differently depending on where they stand in the system. In this case, the Journey maps helped the decision maker seem to be less likely driven by individual cognitive bias (Liedtka 2015). Cognitive bias could be a potential limitation in the notion of individual 'felt' accountability if taken in isolation. However, when 'felt' accountability is grounded in multiple perspectives and realities, this seems to support a wider and deeper shared understanding. In both cases establishing this shared picture has suggested that it may be more likely for decision makers to feel an enhanced accountability towards the beneficiaries, without neglecting the other key stakeholders.

5.4.2 Factor 2: Humanises complex information

Instead of the usual over-reliance on statistical and survey data that has been criticised for disconnecting decision makers from realities on the ground (Angus 2008), the design tools were perceived by interviewees to humanise otherwise distant perspectives and distilled complex information for decision making. The visual depictions used in both projects were not intended to be accurate representations of absolute realities. However, the Personas and Journey maps provided the decision makers with new ways of understanding abstract issues that were lived experiences for the beneficiaries (Andrawes et al. 2016). In case study one, the Persona tool helped decision makers understand nurses' greatest sources of frustration and opportunities for improvement. This led to decision makers feeling like they could continue to honour their needs even when they were no longer present in the design activities. This in turn supported greater sense of 'felt' accountability towards the nurses among decision makers when they used the tools to inform decisions. In case study two, the journey map tool helped decision makers get to the 'granularity' of stories without getting lost in the complexity of the problem, with decision makers saying it helped them 'see things' they normally would not see themselves.

The tools themselves are not revolutionary in and of themselves, however, visualising what was learned in new ways helped decision makers use that data in ways that were

perceived to influence their 'felt' accountability towards their beneficiaries. Both tools embodied knowledge that could not easily be articulated using tables, words and numbers (Andrawes & McMurray 2014). The visual evokes empathy and as seen in these projects, can influence the nature of conversations being had, as conversations become more about t a user's outside-in perspective rather than the traditional organisation's inside-out default (Junginger 2008).

5.4.3 Factor 3: Grounds discussions in reality

Instead of decision makers basing things on boardroom conversations and rigidly linear project plans (Edmonds & Cook 2014), the design tools helped ground discussions in actual situated stories and realities. In both cases, the design tools offered the decision makers grounded and situated alternatives to the status quo of basing decisions on 'expert' input, or averages and numerical samples from quantitative data sets. This highlighted the desire by decision makers to work with data from qualitative and first-hand investigations with beneficiaries (Andrawes et al. 2016). The Design Thinking tools gave decision makers a nuanced and actual picture of the motivational drivers of beneficiaries and roadblocks that were referenced at several decision-points throughout the process. For the decision makers, this potentially meant an enhanced feeling of accountability towards their beneficiaries as they could better ground and situate their decisions in the words, values, experiences and ideas of the beneficiaries themselves. Prioritising the design based on Personas and a deep understanding of the system helped decision makers avoid the trap of making decisions based on what they thought beneficiaries want. Rather they were freed to base their decisions on what beneficiaries actually needed and valued (Andrawes et al. 2016). The beneficiary needs and values genuinely became at the centre of decision making.

5.4.4 Factor 4: Deepens empathy and connection

Through both tools in both projects, decision makers shared a sense of a strong, grounded empathy for all their decisions which followed in the planning, design and implementation of each of the projects. The tools were quite pervasive, in case study one, one person shared how they would wake up with the words, experiences and ideas of the beneficiary populations themselves on their mind. Others in case study two used words like 'pissed off' and 'sad' and 'angry' to describe what they felt as they

read through the Journey maps. Although the tools were pervasive in the lives of decision makers, they were also described as 'compelling' by them. In case study one, there was a potential relationship highlighted between decision makers who helped develop the Personas and Journey maps being more able to connect deeply with them and shared how their decisions became based on 'what Naana needs' or 'what will help Michael' rather than other institutional pressures. However, did this deep connection was possible for others too, for example, in case study two, the journey mapping tool provided a safe space, and a guided framework to shock decision makers in a way that triggers action for a potential change from the existing situation into a more preferred one (Simon 1967). In this case, the Journey maps supported the decision makers to take an outside-in view, rather than an inside-out view, as mentioned in the literature (Junginer 2008). Whilst this sounds like a simple and logical concept, it is much more difficult in practice. It is much easier to think from the perspective of our own organisational mechanisms. The Journey maps allowed decision makers to develop empathy of the user's experience of the humanitarian system. When decision makers were able to walk in others' shoes, they were able to better think about the decisions they have to make from those perspectives. From this knowledge, they shared how they were more likely to plan, design and make things with those other perspectives in mind.

Both the Personas and Journey maps helped decision makers develop a very personal and deep empathy that is directly traceable to the barriers and opportunities as articulated by the beneficiaries in their own words.

5.5 Design Thinking and 'felt' accountability: more than just 'tools'

As argued in the literature review, what was surfaced from the interviews supported that the issue is not that decision makers are not aware of Design Thinking tools to support more beneficiary-centred practices, it is more that the ability to embed new tools in their organisations require changes that demand different leadership cultures and ways of thinking (Bucolo & Wrigely 2012; Straker & Wrigley 2014). There were instances in both case studies where the decision makers adapted the tools for other purposes, which reflects how they were active in revising the tools based on their own individual needs and contexts (Guenther 2012). In saying that, Wrigley and her colleagues (Wrigley & Bucolo 2012; Wrigley 2013; Straker & Wrigley 2014) claim that

it is not all about the tools! In their work, it was also identified that the role of the designer facilitating the process is just as important as the tools themselves, since the designer needs to be able to 'bend the rules' and adapt tools to varying purposes and contexts spontaneously (Straker & Wrigley 2014, p. 3). This claim is corroborated in the researcher's own observations and discussions with decision makers in the two case studies. One interviewee from case study one shared that when they tried to use the Persona tool in their own organisation for another purpose: '*it didn't work… I couldn't do what you did'.* It is clear that the researcher's own maturity and expertise with design thinking played a role on the outcomes of the project. Additionally, this insight follows Bryant and Wrigley's (2015) idea for a translational role to bridge the gap between design thinking tools and the organisational context in which they are used. Others in the literature have arrived at similar conclusions, that although Design Thinking tools may be provided to decision makers with instructions, they still need the mindset of a designer to be utilised to their potential (De Lille, Abbingab & Kleinsmann 2012). The designer's mindset is one thing, however, the translation function and capability the designer holds also cannot be underestimated (Bryant and Wrigley, 2015). The Personas and Journey maps may be capable of facilitating new ways of thinking, however, the tools alone do not hold all the answers (Straker & Wrigley 2014). For this thesis, it is clear the researcher's design thinking expertise also played a significant function in facilitating the implementation of the personas and journey maps into the organisational processes of decision makers in aid projects.

Based on the findings of this thesis, there are a series of key recommendations for decision makers and their potential for 'felt' accountability, as well as for NGOs/other institutions and their potential for adaptive accountability. These recommendations are summarised in the table below.

Table 7: Recommendations for Individuals and Institutions

	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS & INSTITUTIONS	
	(Individual) 'felt' accountability	**(Institutional) adaptive accountability**
Builds shared picture	Being patient and taking the time to listen and collaborate with others.	Prioritising the facilitation function to arrive at meaningful shared understandings.

Humanises complex information	Being open to seeing old information in new ways that can inspire different action.	Providing permission for real-time qualitative data points to guide decisions.
Grounds discussions in reality	Being humble to putting biases and assumptions aside.	Enabling the time and space for discussions to be grounded and situated.
Deepens empathy and connection	Being vulnerable to feeling with others and trusting intuition more.	Valuing the emotional aspects of our humanity as much as the rational aspects.

For individuals, they will need to practice being vulnerable in professional settings, taking the time to have different types of conversations, and open to changing their sometimes ingrained views and approaches. This requires significant personal and professional changes and development for people. For institutions, they will need to provide permission to think differently, create the deliberate space early on to invite the subjective in, and change funding and reporting structures to allow for more adaptive and hybrid management approaches. This requires significant cultural and leadership changes for organisations.

These individual and institutional implications are critical for enabling the more hybrid and adaptive accountability that is increasingly being called for in the literature (Ebrahim 2009; O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015).

5.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of how findings from the two case studies presented show that Personas and Journey maps can influence 'felt' accountability in four ways being: builds a shared picture among diverse groups of stakeholders; humanises complex information; grounds conversations in reality; and deepens empathy and connection – particularly when decision makers greatly valued the decision-related outcomes themselves. Additionally, the chapter discussed how regardless of the situation institutionally, the 'felt' accountability expressed by decision makers suggests a more human-centred accountability can still thrive with the inclusion of aides such as Design Thinking tools despite the competing multiple interests in some institutional environments.

Chapter Six   Conclusion

As established earlier in this thesis, accountability regimes instituted by organisations can either prioritise a 'felt' accountability or 'imposed' accountability for decision makers (Fry 1995; Vance et al. 2013). Consolidating concepts from various bodies of literature and real-world practitioner experience from two action research case studies, this thesis has identified that Design Thinking tools can in fact influence the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects. In doing so, it has contributed from a unique and interdisciplinary perspective to the accountability debate in the aid sector.

The initial research question of whether (and which) Design Thinking tools influenced the 'felt' accountability of decision makers in aid projects required an exploratory approach that was grounded in the perceptions and experiences of decision makers. As Creswell (2013) suggests, stories were gathered from participants about their personal experiences to reveal the unique self-perceptions of participants. The narratives and self-perceptions gained through semi-structured interviews and participant observation have helped achieve a greater understanding of meaning in events and in human interactions.

Case study one explored the use and influence of Design Thinking tools in a project that focused on improving maternal, newborn and child health outcomes in Ghana. Following an in-depth Design Thinking process, this project introduced *CHN on the Go*, a mobile phone application, to improve health worker motivation among community health nurses (CHNs) in Ghana. Case study two explored the use and influence of Design Thinking tools in a project that focused on redesigning the humanitarian system with a particular emphasis on Lebanon/Syria, while being led by a research NGO in the United Kingdom (UK). After an in-depth Design Thinking process, this project produced a series of publications to catalyse new thinking among humanitarian organisations around the world. In both case studies, the Design Thinking tools that were identified as most influential on decision makers' 'felt' accountability were Personas and Journey maps.

When decision makers 'greatly valued the decision-related outcomes themselves' (Frink & Klimoski1998) the use of Personas and Journey maps seemed to influence the 'systematic processing' (Tetlock 1985) of their 'felt' accountability through four influencing factors:

1. Building a shared picture: which sets the collective frame for decisions to be agreed upon based on what is best for the beneficiaries.
2. Humanising complex information: to see old problems in new ways and for a 'human face' to complement other forms of data.
3. Grounding discussions in reality: helped situate decision makers in beneficiary contexts when making decisions about/for/with them.
4. Deepening empathy and connection: more personal and subjective materials supported decision makers to feel the needs of the beneficiaries as their own.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, the most dominant form of accountability was based on imposed mechanisms which favour logical, linear and quantitative approaches at the expense of 'felt' accountability (Ebrahim 2009). However, ideally both 'felt' and imposed accountability coexist to form a hybrid, *adaptive* accountability (O'Dwyer & Boomsma 2015). This thesis' findings are timely and relevant because of the growing body of critique mounting against decision makers in NGOs. The currently dominant model was weighted heavily towards imposed, mechanistic accountability is not working adequately. New models of accountability need to be tried and experimented with to calibrate towards a more balanced practice of accountability.

This thesis adds to the specific arguments for an adaptive accountability in aid projects by Ebrahim (2009) and O'Dwyer and Boomsma (2015) who have made the case and outline the WHY for an adaptive model of accountability as well as documenting the 'imposed' institutional barriers getting in the way of it. This thesis provides two distinct case examples for the HOW. Utilising Design Thinking tools and methods have supported decision makers – according to their own accounts – in being able to practice a more enhanced 'felt' accountability towards beneficiaries in their day-to-day work. The findings also contribute to the more general, broader body of work on decision maker accountability by the likes of Tetlock (1985), Lerner and Tetlock (1999), Frink and Klimoski (1998), and Vance et al. (2013, 2015). For future decision makers in practice, they could benefit from taking the aforementioned

recommendations as guiding principles that help enable the use of Design Thinking tools for 'felt' accountability in ways that balances out the heavy weighting towards imposed accountability. For future researchers interested in accountability, they could benefit from taking these findings into account as a starting point for understanding how Design Thinking can go beyond the production of goods and services and more as a cultural mindset for more virtue-based and human-centred accountability models in organisations – whether NGOs, government or business-oriented.

The originality of this thesis is clear given there has been no prior attempt to understand whether Design Thinking could influence 'felt' accountability and supplement 'imposed' accountability mechanisms in aid project contexts. This thesis significantly contributes to the aid accountability debate as it is the first thesis to suggest that the inclusion of Design Thinking tools can influence, and even enhance the 'felt' accountability of decision makers towards beneficiaries.

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Appendix

1. Research Ethics Notice of Approval Letter

RMIT UNIVERSITY

Business College Human Ethics Advisory Network (BCHEAN)

Building 108, Level 11
239 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

GPO Box 2476V
Melbourne VIC 3001
Australia

Tel. +61 3 9925 5555
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Notice of Approval

Date:	17 November 2014
Project number:	19022
Project title:	*Design thinking for international development management*
Risk classification:	Low risk
Principal Investigator:	Professor Adela McMurray
Student Investigator:	Ms Ledia Andrawes
Project Approved:	**From: 17 November 2014 To: 1 December 2015**

Terms of approval:

Responsibilities of the principal investigator

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by BCHEAN. Approval is only valid while the investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

1. *Amendments*
   Approval must be sought from BCHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment submit a request for amendment form to the BCHEAN secretary. This form is available on the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) website. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from BCHEAN.
2. *Adverse events*
   You should notify BCHEAN immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
3. *Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)*
   The PICF must be distributed to all research participants, where relevant, and the consent form is to be retained and stored by the investigator. The PICF must contain the RMIT University logo and a complaints clause including the above project number.
4. *Annual reports*
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report.
5. *Final report*
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. BCHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
6. *Monitoring*
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by BCHEAN at any time.
7. *Retention and storage of data*
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Regards,

A/Professor Cathy Brigden
Acting Chairperson   RMIT BCHEAN

2. Letter of invitation to participate in writing

Date

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *From Donors to Beneficiaries: Design Thinking and the accountability paradigm for development managers.*This study forms part of my doctoral research at the College of Business at RMIT University in Australia, under the supervision of Deputy Head Research and Innovation, Professor Adela J McMurray, PhD*.*

Study background

There are growing criticisms of the international development sector's management approaches to addressing complex challenges in developing country contexts. An over-reliance on quantitative-heavy and linear frameworks has ensured accountability is primarily directed to donors more so than beneficiaries, and that success definitions are more often than not defined by technocratic subject matter expert with little and/or late input from beneficiaries. The discipline of Design Thinking offers opportunities for a paradigm shift across the development landscape – its working culture, relationships, strategy and ultimately its outcomes – especially in better representing the voice of the beneficiary at the management decision making table, throughout the development lifecycle. This purpose of this study is explore how system-level Design Thinking can play a role beyond the design of products/services in development, but more so, in facilitating new ways of working between non-profit organisations, their beneficiaries, their donors and their implementing partners for more effective outcomes in the sector.

Your participation

Should you accept this invitation, you will be asked to share your views in a one-off, one-on-one semi-structured interview that will take approximately 60 minutes*.* The conversation will be audio taped to ensure accuracy and integrity, however, your confidentiality is guaranteed. Depending on your location, the interview will either be conducted face-to-face where feasible, however, due to the varied and far locations

participants are based out of, some interviews will be conducted over online video conference or Skype facilities. I have attached an information and consent form which has some additional details and a summary of the types of questions being explored. If you have any questions regarding this study, please do feel free to contact me. If you are interested in participating, please advise what dates/times would suit you best to schedule in a meeting time. If you know of anyone else who would be interested and have relevance to this study, please do let me know. Your perspective, expertise and experience are important. I hope the results of this study will be of benefit to those organisations directly involved, the broader international development and Design Thinking communities, and most of all, the end-users (or beneficiaries) of the thousands of development programs continuing to take place around the world every year.

I recognise that your time is valuable and thank you in advance for your support and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Ledia Andrawes

3. Briefing and consent – plain language document

Information and consent to participate in study on:

From Donors to Beneficiaries: Design Thinking and the Accountability Paradigm among International Development Actors

Project title and background

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *From Donors to Beneficiaries: Design Thinking and the Accountability Paradigm among International Development Actors.* This study forms part of the research of Ledia Andrawes at the College of Business at RMIT University in Australia, under the supervision of Deputy Head Research and Innovation, Professor Adela J McMurray.

There are growing criticisms of the international development sector's approaches to addressing complex challenges in developing country contexts. An over-reliance on quantitative-heavy and linear frameworks has ensured accountability is primarily directed to donors more so than beneficiaries, and that success indicators are generally defined by technocratic subject matter experts with little and/or late input from beneficiaries. The discipline of Design Thinking offers a set of management principles that could support a long needed paradigm shift across the international development landscape – its strategy, working culture and overall effectiveness – especially in better representing the voice of the beneficiary at the management decision making table, throughout the project lifecycle.

Purpose and goals:

The purpose of this study is explore how Design Thinking has, or can play a role beyond the design of products/services in development, but more so, in facilitating new ways of working between development organisations, their beneficiaries, and their donors, for greater accountability towards beneficiaries and more effective outcomes in the sector.

The specific objectives of the interviews are:

1. To gain insight into which (if any) Design Thinking tools were <u>identified</u> by decision makers as influencing their accountability.

2. To explore how Design Thinking tools <u>influenced</u> decision makers' accountability as perceived by them.

3. To provide practical case examples on how Design Thinking tools were <u>used</u> in aid project contexts when they were perceived as influencing accountability.

Description of Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you accept this invitation, you will be asked to share your views in a one-off, one-on-one semi-structured interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. Depending on your location, this interview will either be conducted face-to-face in your place of work where feasible. However, due to the varied and far locations participants are based out of, some interviews will be conducted over online video conference or Skype facilities.

In any case, you are asked to ensure the interview takes place in a private meeting room to make sure no one can hear your responses. If you decide to participate, you will be one of 10-15 subjects in this study.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. Should you become concerned about your responses or find participation in the interview distressing, please inform the researcher as soon as possible.

There are no costs or reimbursements associated with participation in this study. Your perspective, expertise and experience are important. The results of this study are intended to benefit those organisations directly involved, the broader international development and Design Thinking communities, and most of all, the end-users (i.e. beneficiaries) of the thousands of development projects that take place around the world every year. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Volunteer Statement:

The decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you withdraw once you have started.

Confidentiality:

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate the timely and accurate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential, including your identity. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality:

- Notes from the interview will be written with an alias for the quotes or information used.
- Your name will not be recorded in a way which could connect back to any data collected.
- Any personal information linking your organisation and job title, etc. which could also potentially be used to identify you, will be deliberately disguised in any publications.
- Hard copy project documentation will be stored in a safe with a lock while running the interviews (ensuring all data is de-identified anyway).
- Electronic transcripts and notes taken will be stored on a computer which requires a password, as well as ensuring the files containing the data are also password protected.

Fair Treatment and Respect:

RMIT University wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the University's Research Office.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact:

Supervisor Principal Investigator: Professor Adela J McMurray, PhD

Student Principal Investigator: Ledia Andrawes

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the Investigator.

_____   _____

Participant Name (PRINT)   DATE

_____   _____

Participant Signature   DATE

_____   _____

Investigator Signature   DATE

4. Interviewer question guide

Interviewer questions and probes for study on:

From Donors to Beneficiaries: Design Thinking and the Accountability Paradigm among International Development Actors

Identity, values and motivation

1. How long have you been in your role?
2. How long have you been with your organisation?
3. How long have you been in the sector?
4. What do you find most satisfying about your work?
5. What are the key challenges you find in your role? What do you find most frustrating about your work?

Accountability and the beneficiary

1. What does accountability mean to you?
2. Who do you feel (most) accountable to in your role?
3. Who do you feel your organisation is (most) accountable to?
4. How much do you engage and involve your 'beneficiary/user' in what you do?

Experience with design on an aid project

1. How would you define Design Thinking?
2. What has your personal experience of Design Thinking methods/tools been?
3. How have you / your organisation applied Design Thinking to your projects?
4. How has Design Thinking been beneficial?
5. How has Design Thinking influenced your individual sense of accountability?
6. Which methods/tools were most influential and why?

5. Excerpts from reflexivity journal

Case study one

Jan, 2014

Changing the format of the focus groups to incorporate more visual storyboarding elements to it felt right. I really had to question what we were doing opening a conversation with a group of nurses through standard interview questions when what we were after was non-standard insights. I could never have guessed the word motivation was going to be so contentious. This word was leading us down a very particular path… one completely based on an understanding of motivation as financial incentives alone. The shift to start the focus groups by getting the nurses to first reflect (then share) a story about 'a time I felt most frustrated' and 'a time I felt most satisfied' has made the biggest difference to creating a safe and open space for sharing their perspectives on their work without using the word 'motivation' or bringing the idea of money into it.

Case study two

March, 2017

It is fascinating how much resistance there has been among the team regarding the word 'user' and how it is not any better than 'beneficiary'. Beneficiary has always seemed too passive or like it implies they are recipients of something that the system produces for them, rather than active participants in the system. [One participant] shared his issue with the term 'user' being it reminds him of drug users. Another shared his issue with the term 'user' being too technology-centred. I wonder how using the term user or beneficiary change the way we understand the problem?

5. Coding schedule

Nodes\\A - Design

Nodes\\A - Design\Tools techniques **and principles of design**

- ➢ Un-assuming and going in with beginner's eyes
- ➢ Divergent thinking + ideation
- ➢ Collaborative facilitation
- ➢ User research: In-situ observation, interviews, focus groups
- ➢ Role plays
- ➢ Persona development
- ➢ Journey maps / Experience maps
- ➢ Prototyping
- ➢ User testing
- ➢ Blueprint

Nodes\\A - Design\Project Health Worker Motivation Ghana (influence of tools)

- ➢ brought others along the journey
- ➢ supports a shared understanding
- ➢ provides qualitative/narrative evidence for decisions
- ➢ decisions are based on beneficiary preferences
- ➢ put ourselves in their shoes before a decision
- ➢ not about the numbers but what lies beneath
- ➢ humanises the complex
- ➢ allows space for empathy to guide decisions
- ➢ about real life impact and real issues

Nodes\\A - Design\Project Humanitarian Redesign UKLebanon (influence of tools)

- ➢ focus on a spectrum of users / not just the stereotypical perspectives
- ➢ allows space for empathy to guide decisions
- ➢ supports a shared understanding
- ➢ bridges multiple perspectives
- ➢ allows space for compassion and connection
- ➢ makes decisions user-friendly
- ➢ keeps focus on real issues
- ➢ getting to what lies beneath
- ➢ conversations not at cross-purposes
- ➢ seeing old problems in new ways

Nodes\\B - Accountability

Nodes\\B - Accountability\Imposed and mechanistic

- ➢ Prioritisation of things over people
- ➢ Disconnection from grounded reality
- ➢ Limited and non-adaptive learning

Nodes\\B - Accountability\Felt and virtue-based

- ➢ Development of shared picture
- ➢ Grounds discussions in reality
- ➢ Deepened empathy
- ➢ Simplify/make human what is complex

Nodes\\B - Accountability\Barriers to 'adaptive' model

- ➢ The term - beneficiary - loses human connection
- ➢ Competition for funding and recognition
- ➢ hitting the target but missing the point (over-emphasis on numbers)
- ➢ over-emphasis on short term wins and low hanging fruit
- ➢ Spinning success stories (for self-preservation)
- ➢ Dishonesty about what is working and not working
- ➢ Expert-defined success and centralised planning

6. Screenshot from nVivo coding report

Nodes\\A - Design\Tools techniques and principles of design\Persona development

Document

Internals\\Interviews\\IM1

No		0.0392	3			

| | | | | 1 | LA | 12/07/2015 2:33 PM |

it was very conscious on our part to not forget the lessons learned and key take always from the human centred design phase and to make sure that those were incorporated along the way.
R: So what sort of mechanisms did you put in place to not forget?
P8:   So for example, we had developed user personas in that phase, I made sure that those personas were something that we printed and we put on the wall. And at some point whether you wanted or not your eyes go to that wall and you are like yes these are the kinds of people we are building these solutions for. Even more tangible than that was using some of the approaches that we learned along the way and in the design approach, things like role playing, some of the actual delivery methods, and how to make things more experiential, rather than a question-answer kind of thing as we are doing user feedback along the way as we are bringing in nurses. So some of these methodologcal processes were put in place so that we get a better perspective on what the users actually want, what's actually working for them, and what's not working for them.

12/07/2015 8:16 PM

Aggregate	Classification		Coverage	Number Of Coding References	Reference Number	Coded By Initials	Modified On
					2	LA	12/07/2015 3:32 PM

One of the ways that we are experimenting with in that one project is that for content that we developed for wellness for example, we did have the content provider develop content based on the user persona profile. So though the user personas were developed to understand the user better so we know the solutions we are creating addresses different needs, this was a way to see if there was a way we could continue to segment the real users into this persona types and see if we can provide specific content for each of those persona types and these are actually the real users. So I have no idea what's going to happen. It's kind of an experiment to see, because that was a very interesting process that we learnt during the design phase to see what it can actually give us or provide us in terms of how we're implementing the program, not just that, its actually how users are using the program, what works, what doesn't, and even more than that did we get the persona types correctly in the first place?

| | | | | | 3 | LA | 12/07/2015 3:32 PM |

we just got some actual data and this is data on usage. So we now know which of the nurses belong to which persona types and we can look at amongst these persona types, what aspects of that wellness content are people using, so it is quantitative but at least it gives patterns of use among those user persona types. But even kind of before that, what questions had how we used to segment people in those persona types already revealed a few interesting things.

Internals\\Interviews\\IM3

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The things that I value the most and I like the most are doing the process maps and the personas.

| | | | | 2 | LA | 12/07/2015 4:36 PM |

I have found the personas are the most effective way of promoting empathy and accountability in the design process is using personas, and making the team develop them themselves. When Linda and I, we ran our workshop on our program, there was the one thing that we didn't do correctly, we created the personas ourselves and I think that that was a flaw in the overall process because it didn't necessarily allow the teams to build enough empathy as they were starting to develop the ideas.

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