

# Inwards and outwards research

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# We are testing an idea



**Inwards** means

“looking at the service or thing  
that you’re making”

**Outwards** means

“looking at the real world,  
finding out about users,  
their needs and behaviours”

# Inwards research looks at the service

## **For example, a usability test**

- Asking the participant to try a task you have constructed
- Using a specific aspect of a service
- Often in your own controlled environment

# Outwards research looks at the users and their world

**For example, listening to live calls in the call centre**

- Low number of calls
- Not set any direction
- Accept whatever turns up
- Looking for the big picture, broadest patterns

# The Service Manual describes four stages in a service

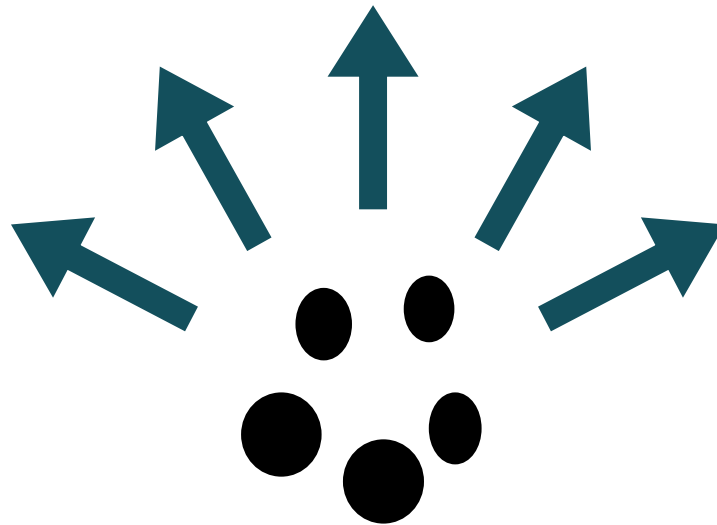
Discovery    understand the problem  
that needs to be solved

Alpha        try out different solutions

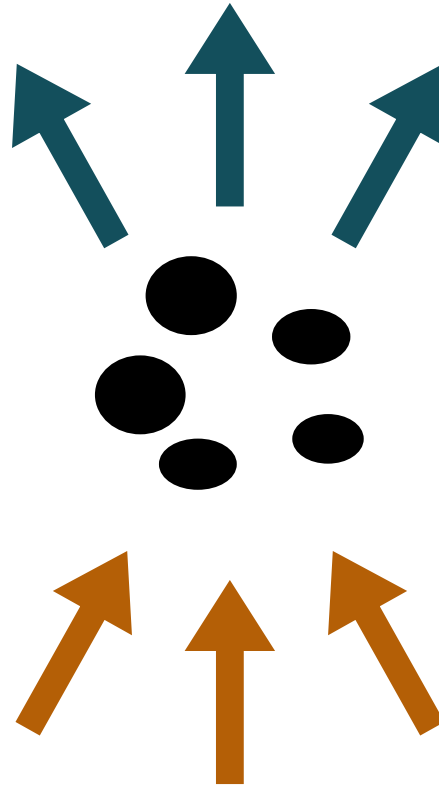
Beta         pick your best idea  
and build it for real

Live          support the service in a  
sustainable way; iterate and  
make improvements

# Discovery research looks outwards to what people do

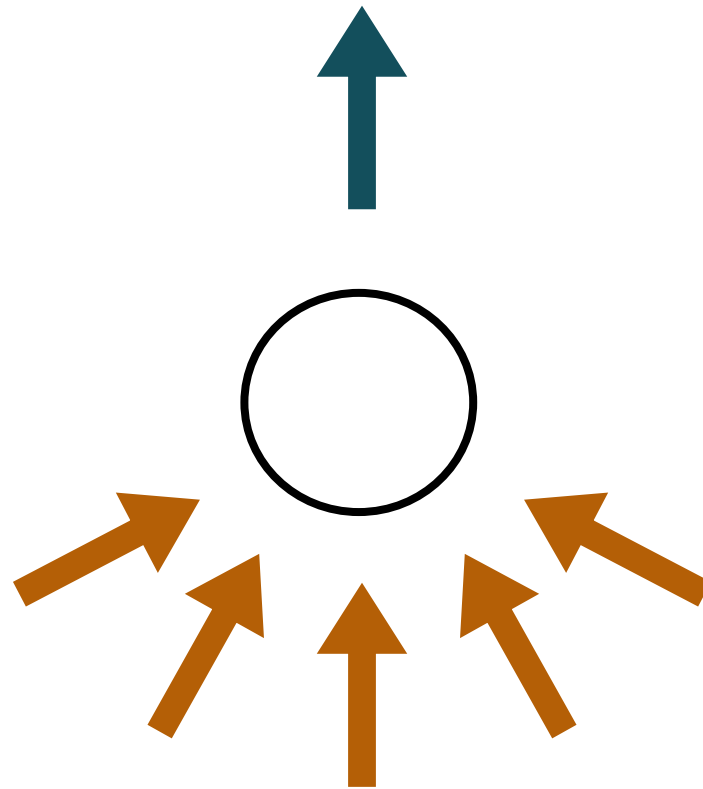


# Alpha research continues to look outwards and starts on ideas

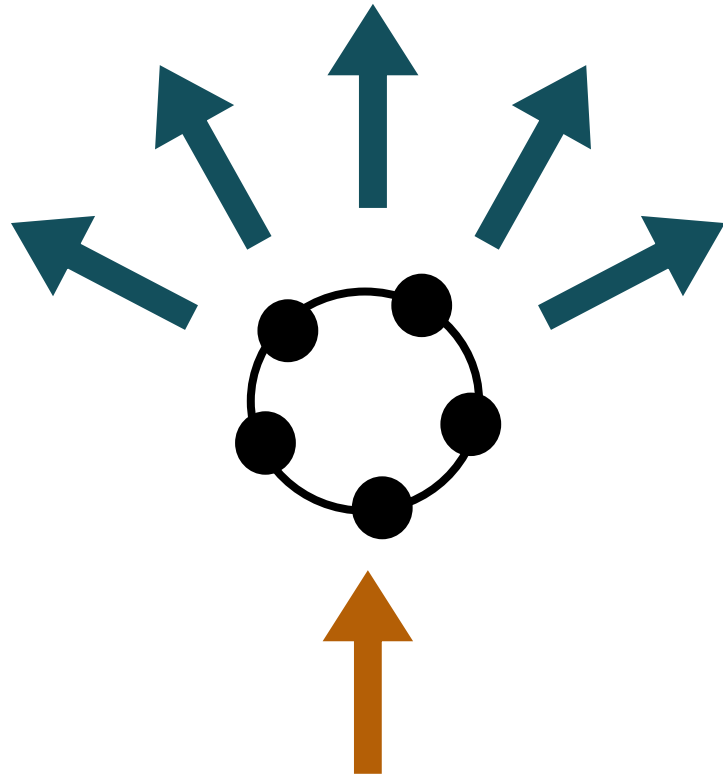




# Beta research mostly looks inwards at one probable idea

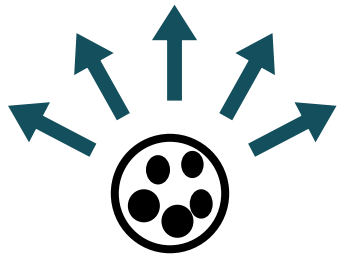


# Live research mostly focuses outwards again

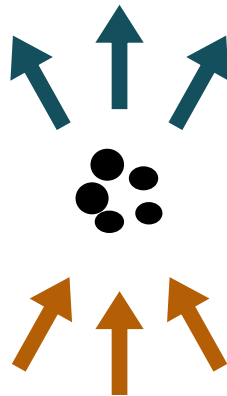


# Each stage of a service has a different research focus

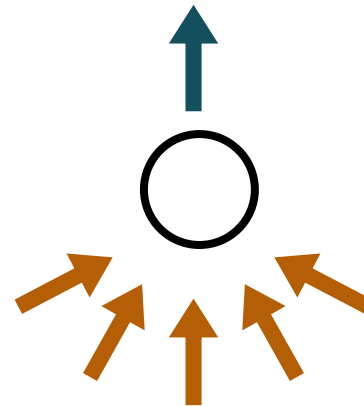
Discovery



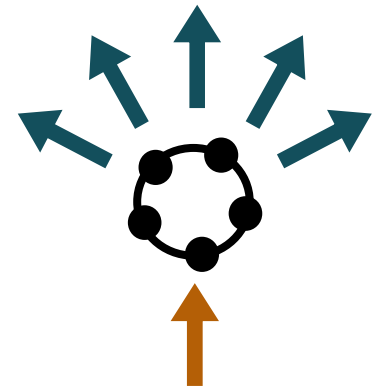
Alpha



Beta



Live



# Each stage needs different types of research questions

Some questions focus **outwards**, looking at the real world, finding out about users, their needs and behaviours.

Some questions focus **inwards**, towards the service or prototypes you're building.

# Research methods also focus inwards or outwards

Aim to align your research questions  
with the stage and focus.

Then choose a research method that  
works for that research question.

More on this later.

# What counts as 'inside' or 'outside' your service?

## Outside (or 'scope')

- Who are your users?
- What do they do that touches your service?
- What constraints do you work within?

## Inside (or 'thing')

- What does this service offer to users?
- Does this service make it easy for users to do what they need to do?

# Write down the name of the service you're working on

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- Take a worksheet
- If you're working on more than one service, chose one
- Write down the stage the service is in (discovery, alpha, beta or live)

# Describe the scope of the service that you're working on

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- If you're not working on a service, choose anything



# Example: some recent questions from a research brief

- Who are the users who need this?
- To understand/validate user needs
- Is it where users expect it to be?
- Do users understand it?
- Do users find it useful?
- What do users think might be missing?

# A research question can look outwards or inwards

## **Outwards**

- Who are the users who need this?
- To understand user needs

## **Inwards**

- Is it where users expect it to be?
- Do users understand it?
- Do users find it useful?

# Some research questions are tricky

- What do users think might be missing?
  - Expects users to recall what they need, predict future needs, and consider gaps between what they see and what they might need.
- “To validate user needs”
  - We think this means “check that our understanding of user needs is correct”.  
That understanding is part of our service.

# Write a Post-It note for each of your research questions

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- Put your name on each Post-It
- Plot each of your questions on the scale of inwards - outwards looking

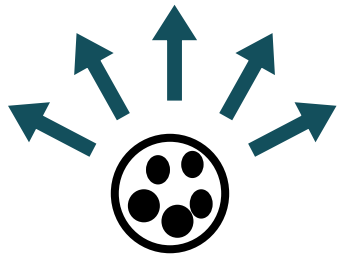
# Stick your note(s) on the service stage

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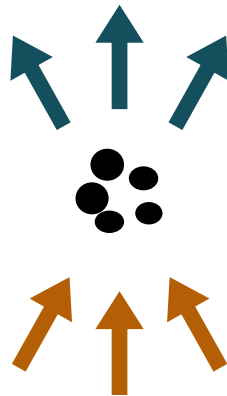
- Left hand and right hand of the room
- Four service stages where we are collecting notes on each side
  - Outwards is exploring the world/users
  - Inwards looks at a service

# Each stage of a service has a different research focus

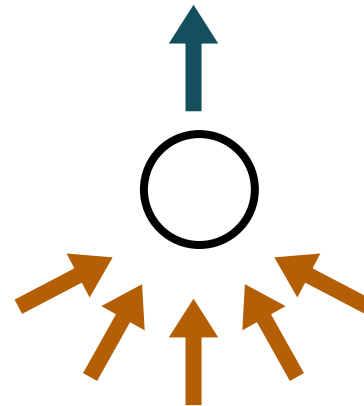
Discovery



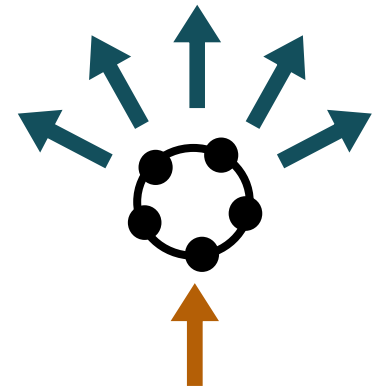
Alpha



Beta



Live



# Let's have a look at questions that don't fit their service stage

- Inwards questions in discovery?
- Outwards questions in beta?
- Any other mismatches / discussion points?
- This can be an indication of a wider problem in the team.

# There are 3 things you can do with questions that don't fit

1. Change the question so it better suits its' stage
2. Postpone the question to a stage where it fits better
3. Accept this question where it is



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# Is this mainly inwards or mainly outwards?

- Interviews
- Work observation
- A/B testing
- Highlighter (“pens of power”) test
- Diary study
- Workshops
- Eyetracking
- Customer feedback

# Plot the research methods that you use on the in-out scale

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Is there a good match?

- Inwards questions and inwards methods?
- Outwards questions and outwards methods?

# Key ideas to take away

- Think about whether your service is at a stage that focuses inwards or outwards
- Consider whether your research question matches the stage
  - Change the question
  - Postpone the question
  - Accept the question
- Choose your method to match the questions and the stage
- Don't expect any single method to deal with every question at a particular stage.

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