The UX Button: an exploratory approach to UX embedding

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Introduction

Imagine this bright, tomato red button that seems to scream PRESS ME! It is hard to refuse, isn't it?! Is it only me, or do you ever feel an acute urge to press the emergency button in toilets? I certainly know that my two-year-old daughter would press a button like this. Then imagine that the button is labelled 'the UX button'. Now even the most law-abiding librarian would press it!

This urge is something that we capitalised on when we created a prototype for an internal UX support service at the SLU University Library, and I'm about to share our story. I want to inspire you to experiment with how to embed UX in your own institution and how to communicate and deliver UX methodology support in a simple and concrete way.

Figure 1
The bright red UX Button, here imaged in greyscale.

Strategic goals

The intention to work with UX methods is well established among staff, as well as in our management. UX work no longer depends on individuals being interested. In fact, UX is in one of the overall goals in our strategic plan formed back in 2017.

This goal states that by 2020 the library should 'work strategically with user-centred methods in order to create relevant, seamless and cohesive user services.' We also have three supporting goals in order to make this rather big one more graspable:

1. In our organisation there is broad as well as deep knowledge of the importance of developing our services from the users' viewpoint.
2. We work actively and continuously with UX methods in projects and in day-to-day activities, and we allocate sufficient resources to do so.
3. We have a flexible and purposive internal methodology support that makes it easy to maintain the user perspective in our work.

In 2017, we already had staff engaging in UX research and design to some extent, but in order to reach the strategic goal we needed a systematic approach to embed UX work. We needed to bring the user perspective into focus for *all* library staff. The intention to work with UX was there already (hey, it made it to the strategic plan!), but it was not something that everyone was engaged in or considered important. As a UX coordinator, it was my job to make this goal a reality along with my excellent co-pilot Ingela Wahlgren. Ingela was in fact co-author of the paper originally accepted to UXLibsV, but since she also was invited to hold a workshop (summarised elsewhere in this volume), I ended up presenting and writing this conference proceeding on my own.
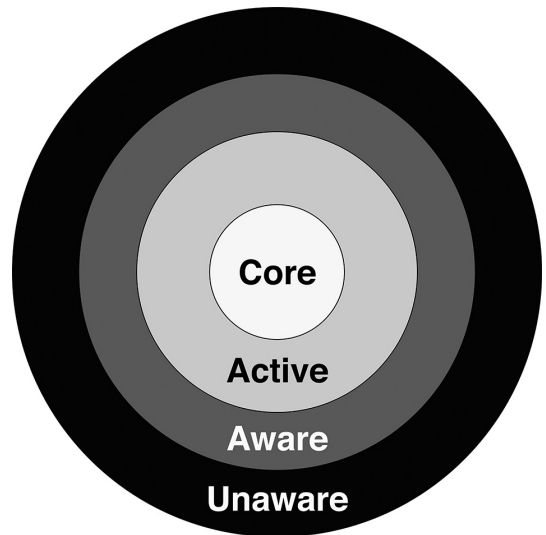
The Onion

Together with our line manager Malin Jenslin, we decided that we didn't want an expert team doing all UX work. We wanted everyone on board. In order to understand why we chose to embed UX in this particular way, you need to know that our organisational structure and culture is not hierarchical, and our library has a strong internal culture of co-creation. Our professional roles and job descriptions are not set in stone and there is a lot of room for self-leadership.

The model in Figure 2, originally made by Malin Jenslin, explains our concept for embedding UX on an organisational level. It is like an onion, with all its layers.

- The innermost circle, called the core, is the library's internal UX support. Our job is to both deepen and broaden the organisation's knowledge on UX methods, and it is our responsibility to make sure that our library continues to move forward towards our strategic goal.

- In the second circle, you will find colleagues who are actively working with UX methods in order to make sure that our users' needs of our services and systems are met. It is our management's responsibility to create the best possible conditions and organisational structures in order for us to be able to work like this.
- In the third circle, you'll find the people who are aware of UX and how they might contribute to the goal, but they are not actively engaged in any UX activity from day to day.
- In the outermost circle, we have the people who are still unaware of what UX is all about.

Figure 2 The Onion (adapted from a model by Malin Jenslin).

The long-term goal is that the outer circle no longer exists. And when it is no longer there, the innermost circle is not needed at all. When all our colleagues are either actively working with UX or aware of its importance, our work is done.

Proactive and reactive, operative and strategic

So, I was to come up with a concept for UX support. Some kind of manifestation of the innermost circle in the onion. The wish list from my line manager stated that it should be something that was proactive as well as reactive, and operative as well as strategic. I'm not going to lie to you: it was hard in the beginning. I got stuck several times, overthinking or caught up in fear of not making it. What did my colleagues actually need in order to change their perspective? Should we try inspirational workshops? Should everyone go to the UXLibs conference? Was the strategic goal even possible to achieve in the first place? My head almost exploded.

One day when I was especially anxious, my boss said to me: "But, Kitte! What does the UX button look like?" I don't think she meant me to, but I took her question quite literally and stood in front of my whiteboard and sketched a very rudimentary prototype of a button. Next, I formulated a hypothesis where I tried to define our colleagues' needs and what the button could do to meet those needs. You can see this very first prototype in Figure 3. By forcing myself to actually draw something and tackle the problem like it was a service design challenge, I felt energised and I didn't feel stuck anymore. Sometimes all you need is the right question from someone.
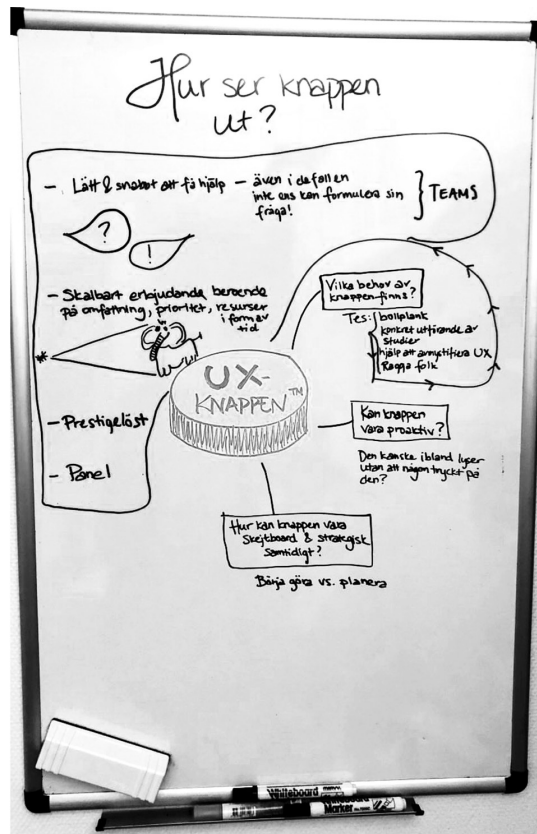

Figure 3   The first prototype of the UX Button.

The launch of the Button

The hand-drawn thing I made on the fly transformed to our first real working prototype of the UX Button. It has been up and running since December 2018. I want to emphasise that we do see it as a prototype. It is not something that is set in stone, and perhaps that also made it easy to have some fun with.

So, let's get into the specifics of this first prototype. It has the following features:

- Friendly UX support is the core of it all. One of the needs my colleagues had was to have someone demystify UX. For some of them, it was just a fancy word or a hype that would soon be gone, so there needed to be a low threshold. I want the support to be friendly. I want them to feel safe to just ask for help, even if they don't know in what way.

- The support is scalable, from just brainstorming potential UX methods to one of us actually being project leader in order to make sure that the user perspective is ever present. Sometimes it is just a meeting and sometimes it is a workshop with an entire team. It all depends on the priority of the project and on how much time we have to spare at that moment.
- At our library we use Microsoft Teams for our internal communication and in our library team we have a channel called the UX Button. It is the fastest and easiest way of contacting us.
- One of the things that my colleagues have had problems with in the past is finding users for UX research. To tackle this problem, we have just recently created a user panel to lower the threshold and make it really easy to find users.

What is special about the UX Button is that sometimes it lights up and sets off an alarm even though no one pressed it, making it possible for us to raise our voices whenever we feel that the user perspective is lost in the organisation. It is always tricky to criticise someone's work, but doing it as 'the button' instead of as an individual makes it easier. Suddenly it is an offer to help out, and not criticism. I want friendly support that's not afraid of asking challenging questions.

So, how did our colleagues react to the launch of the UX Button? When we presented it at a staff meeting, we asked them to write down the answer to a really quick question: When would you press the UX button for support? We got a lot of interesting answers and I want to show you three examples:

"I would press the UX button when I'm working in projects, BEFORE we change our current work processes (for example when developing systems), to make sure we don't change things according to what we THINK the users want."

"I really need the 'button' worked into my system. In most cases (in my work), I need to find out how the user uses the service, and in what ways I should adapt it to the user's needs."

"When creating and implementing new forms for ordering books."

These specific and broad answers really reflect our work as well, since they range from the operative to the strategic. I want to point out once again that the UX Button team is not employed to conduct all user research. If we did, perhaps that would make the quality of the actual research better because we've got the

experience? It would speed up the process for sure. But how long would that last? Would our colleagues fully embrace the process and the results if they hadn't been actively participating? No, probably not. If you recall the onion illustration above, the second layer consists of people who are actively working with UX. They press the UX Button to get support, but they do the actual work themselves. I think that this makes it easier to get approval from our colleagues, since they have the ownership of their own UX research and design process.

When we launched the UX Button, things were a bit slow at first. A couple of months later we were quite busy. Our colleagues seemed to like the concept of the button, and they started to press it. Even our management talked about how they needed to press the button, so the image seemed to resonate.

The future and further iterations

Since the Button is a prototype, our next step was to evaluate and iterate it. We have done so since the UXLibsV conference in June, and discovered three problems with the initial version. Firstly, Ingela and I quickly got far too busy. We did not have time to deliver the support we wanted to and at the same time handle other work tasks. The answer to this problem came from our library management who recently let Sarah Meier join the UX Button team to work with me and Ingela. Secondly, and this is probably because of the lack of time, we found it hard to prioritise. When forced to choose, should we help a colleague with feedback on research questions or plan a larger workshop with a whole department? It was a challenge to balance the reactive and proactive. The solution to this was to book meetings once a month with our line manager Malin in order to discuss and prioritise our work together with her. The third thing we realised was that we had perhaps sometimes left our colleagues adrift. When they ask us for help with doing UX research, we help them with that particular step and sometimes they don't know how to move on to the design phase of the process by themselves. This one is a bit trickier to solve, but we have to find ways to keep them close during the entire process. One possible solution might be to do more library development in the form of projects in general, since projects usually focus on delivering something in the end. These projects should preferably be small, iterative and agile in their nature.

In 2020, it will be time for the SLU University Library to write a new strategy for the upcoming years. The current strategic goal that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter focuses a lot on user-centred methods. But is it really about

the methods? Sure, UX methods help us find out user behaviours and needs, but without an organisational culture supporting the whole process from research to design, the methods are just methods and not a guarantee that we will deliver services that are relevant to our users as a result. Perhaps our next goal will focus less on methods and more on culture? Whatever the future holds, I think that the most important part for the UX Button is to help our organisation transition into one where the user perspective is ever present and where we actively look at our library and its services from the users' point of view. By bringing everyone onboard for the trip, I think a *real* shift of perspective can be achieved. And I think that is the only way to really make a difference for the user in the long run. As Anneli Friberg mentioned in her keynote, culture eats strategy for breakfast, and changing a culture takes time and persistence.

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