



# **USER CENTERED CONSULTING: Applying User Experience Across the Project Life Cycle**

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User experience (UX) is commonly associated with the design of websites and applications, but its principles have far broader applications across industries and business functions. At its core, UX focuses on how people interact with systems, processes, and data, aiming to make those interactions intuitive, efficient, and effective. When neglected, poor UX creates barriers to adoption, reduces productivity, and undermines confidence in both technology and organizational decision-making.

This paper expands upon the concept of UX beyond traditional digital design, positioning it as a critical tool for consulting practices. By incorporating UX throughout

the project life cycle, consulting teams can enhance requirements gathering, improve process design, and deliver solutions that stakeholders can easily navigate and trust. Practical applications include designing more accessible data visualizations, streamlining reporting and compliance systems, and refining internal workflows to minimize resistance and error.

Consulting teams can offer UX as a client service that strengthens adoption, drives efficiency, and ensures technology investments achieve long-term impacts. UX serves as a bridge between strategy and execution, enabling organizations to align complex systems with the people who rely on them every day.

## Introduction

In many organizations, user experience is often associated purely with website or application design. While creating intuitive digital products is important, this limited view overlooks the broader value UX can deliver across the business. UX is about designing systems, tools, and processes around the needs of the people interacting with them. Its goal is to make interactions efficient, clear, and meaningful. When framed this way, UX becomes a discipline that extends well beyond digital interfaces and into the daily operations of business, project management, and data analytics.

For consulting teams, working in industries such as utilities, transportation, and buildings, incorporating UX principles throughout the project life cycle creates significant opportunities. The project team plays a vital role in bridging the gap between technical solutions and end-user adoption. By applying UX thinking, they can help clients reduce inefficiencies, increase trust in data, streamline internal processes, and ensure that investments in technology and systems achieve their intended outcomes. This paper defines the fundamentals of UX, explores the consequences of poor UX, and demonstrates how the business team can expand its application to deliver more effective, user-centered consulting services.

## What is User Experience?

According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), user experience is defined as “a person’s perceptions and response that result from the use or anticipated use of a product, system, or service.” When dissecting the ISO definition, it can explain how UX is much broader than just making websites “look good.” The

definition contains two main aspects. First, a person's perception and response, an area that is uncontrollable by the project team. Second, a product, system, or service, an area that is completely controllable by the project team. At its core, UX is about understanding people. It focuses on user-centered design which examines people's needs, goals, and behaviors, and then builds a system that supports them. Successful user-centered design involves performing user research, creating user personas, crafting wireframes or mockups, creating interactive prototypes, and testing different designs. It is vital that UX design is an iterative process, where user feedback is continuously gathered and incorporated into the design.

UX can be applied across several domains: digital interfaces, business tools, customer processes, organizational workflows, and so much more. It is about aligning technology and processes with human expectations so that tasks feel natural and outcomes are achieved with minimal effort. UX ensures systems work for people, enabling them to accomplish their goals effectively while feeling confident and supported throughout the process.

## The Risks of Poor UX

When organizations neglect UX, the effects expand far beyond frustration at an interface level. Poor UX can result in inefficiency, confusion, and errors which compound over time. For example, in business analytics, a poorly designed dashboard can obscure critical insights. Instead of empowering decision-makers, the dashboard creates more questions, slows progress, and undermines the data integrity. In project management, convoluted systems that are unintuitive or overloaded can discourage adoption and lead teams to work outside the system.

Poorly designed UX can also bring increased financial and reputation costs. Employees waste valuable time navigating confusing workflows or correcting mistakes, while customers disengage from the frustrating or inaccessible product. This diminishes confidence in both the technology and the organization that provides it. In highly competitive industries, the difference between success and failure often comes down to whether users find systems easy, clear, and reliable.

Eventually, ineffective UX does more than just inconvenience users, it creates risk. It slows adoption, reduces efficiency, increases training costs, and leads to missed opportunities. Across websites, applications, business analytic platforms, or project management tools, poor UX directly undermines productivity, engagement and organizational effectiveness.



## Core Principles & How to Create Favorable UX

Good UX extends throughout the entire user journey, from the user's first impressions, through completing a task. Successful user experience is achieved by intentionally designing systems, processes, and tools around the people who will use them. There are several design principles that can be followed to create a successful UX. It begins with knowing your users, understanding their goals, challenges, and their "why," which is learned through research and observation. From there, design choices should prioritize usability and clarity, ensuring interactions are intuitive and information is presented in a way that avoids unnecessary complexity. Consistency across layouts, terminology, and workflows builds user confidence, while feedback reassures

users that their actions are successful and highlights when adjustments are needed.

Practical design techniques also have a role in achieving good UX. Effective use of white space reduces visual clutter, while simple navigation and responsive design ensure users can accomplish tasks easily across devices and environments. Accessibility should be built in from the start so that solutions work for individuals with diverse abilities, roles, and technical skill levels. Throughout the process user feedback is essential, providing insights to refine and improve experiences as the system evolves.

## How Consulting Teams Can Offer UX as a Service

Consulting teams can bring significant value to clients by incorporating UX principles throughout the project life cycle. In areas such as utilities, transportation, and buildings, projects often involve complex systems, large data sets, and diverse stakeholder groups. By utilizing UX principles, consultants ensure that solutions are not only technically sound but also intuitive, efficient, and aligned with how people actually work.

UX can shape every stage of delivery, from requirements gathering to rollout. In the early phases, research and stakeholder engagement help to identify how people really interact with systems and where pain points exist. These insights guide the design processes, dashboards, and workflows so they align with user needs rather than forcing users to adapt to a rigid system. During execution, practices such as journey mapping, prototyping, and usability testing allow teams to refine solutions before they are fully implemented. This iterative approach reduces risk and training costs while increasing stakeholder confidence.

Throughout the project, UX can shape how communication, processes, and change-management are handled. Clear, user-centered updates make information accessible to a wide audience, while thoughtful workflow design reduces resistance and supports adoption. Anticipating risks tied to poor user adoption and addressing them with intuitive design ensures smoother rollouts and stronger user engagement.

As a consulting service, UX extends far beyond traditional digital products. It can be applied to data visualization, ensuring dashboards and reports are clear, actionable, and tailored to different audiences. It also supports process improvement by streamlining workflows, minimizing errors, and reducing administrative burdens. Even internal project management systems can be reframed with UX principles to support employees.

By offering UX in this way, consulting teams can provide clients with more than just technical solutions. They can deliver experiences that improve adoption, increase efficiency, and strengthen trust across stakeholders. This approach ensures organizational change is not only strategic, but also sustainable, user centered, and impactful.

## Conclusion

User experience is often underestimated in industries outside of technology, yet its impact is universal. Whether designing a dashboard for energy forecasting, streamlining reporting in utilities, or improving project workflows, the principles of UX apply anywhere there are users. Poor UX creates risk, slows adoption, reduces efficiency, and erodes trust. While good UX empowers organizations to achieve their goals with clarity and confidence.

For consulting teams, offering UX as part of client services is a natural extension of their core strengths. Project managers ensure structure, communication, and adoption, while business analysts uncover business needs and translate them into actionable requirements. By layering UX into this work, consultants elevate solutions from simply

being functional to being truly usable and sustainable. This means designing not only for outcomes, but also for the people who drive those outcomes. UX consulting is about creating alignment between strategy and execution, data and decisions, technology and people. By incorporating UX throughout the project life cycle, the business team can help clients in all industries not just implement solutions, but realize long-term value through systems that are efficient, intuitive, and user centered.

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### About the Author

Debbie Logsdon is a Consultant at Primera, specializing in data analysis and automated business tools. Debbie received her Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from Illinois State University, later returning to school to earn a Masters in Nutrition. An instrumental member of Primera's consulting division, Debbie contributes to utilities-based programs and project development initiatives.