



# LX Design

Gaining Insight into Learner Motivation

## by Phylise Banner

The emerging field of learning experience (LX) design blends together concepts, theories, and methods from the fields of information design, instructional design, user experience design (UX), Design Thinking, and service design. LX design is the craft of creating human-centered experiences that enable learners to achieve goals and realize their potential.

Key to designing these learner-focus experiences is the processes of getting to know who our learners are. Not just their demographics, preferences or knowledge gaps (the information we typically glean from needs analyses). In the LX design space, we use the discovery process to do just that – discover who our learners really are.

The LX design discovery phase relies heavily on UX and service design principles and practices. Typical components of this phase include:

- Reviewing existing data, resources, assets, and feedback from prior experiences;
- Interviewing stakeholders and learning community members;
- Conducting focus group sessions (including stakeholders and learning community members);
- Exploration and development of learner personas;
- Facilitation of empathy mapping exercises; and
- Developing Design Thinking “how might we” statements to articulate learning challenges.

Each of these phases support the LX designer in understanding who the learners are that we are designing for. And, we keep these learners in mind

throughout the design, development, delivery, and facilitation processes of our learning solutions.

## Debating Personas

There is a buzz in the UX design space regarding the value (and validity) of personas in the design process. Debate has been going on since Alan Cooper offered the concept of personas in his book *The Inmates are Running the Asylum*. Should they be based on demographics? Are they simply stereotypes? Are we really designing for fictional characters? These questions (and associated arguments) are certainly compelling, and will continue to shape the way we use personas in design.

In the LX design space, however, integrating the UX process of creating learner personas has added a layer of depth and insight into our learners that was not there before. And weaving in the Design Thinking practice of empathy mapping brings an even deeper understanding of what is motivating our learners to participate fully in the learning experiences we craft.



Motivation is the key word in all of this. When we talk about our users in the UX and service design space, we may talk motivation – what makes someone buy something, or interact with something. In the LX space, we need to look more

deeply into what motivates our learners. This is what shapes their intentions in every step along their learning journeys.

Going back to the definition of personas, according to Cooper, “Personas are not the real people but they represent them throughout the design process. They are hypothetical archetypes of actual users. Although they are imaginary, they are defined with significant rigor and precision. Actually, we don’t so much ‘make up’ our personas as discover them as a byproduct of the investigation process.” So, how do we investigate motivation?

## The Motivating Factor

In 1995, Steven Reiss developed the Reiss Motivation Profile®. Based on research into why people are the way they are (and how we might predict their behavior), the profile tool is a series of questions designed to reveal a person’s fundamental goals and values. Reiss’ research (based on surveys from more than 6,000 people) revealed these 16 basic life desires that motivate us: power; independence; curiosity; acceptance; order; saving; honor; idealism; social contact; family; status; vengeance; romance; eating; physical exercise; and tranquility.

As designers, we can tap into Reiss’ research and explore this comprehensive roadmap for motivation and user/learner preferences. Just as game developers consider human motivators in their design processes alongside game mechanics, exploring these motivators (and integrating this profile tool) into the LX design process can help us better understand our learners and tailor our design solutions.

Consider a learning experience that you have had. As you were immersed in that experience did you find yourself looking to lead others? Were you curious about topics that may not have been

addressed? Did you have trouble finding your way around the learning space? Was it just too much information that overwhelmed you to the point that you needed a break? Did you wish that you had more interaction with others who might have been learning with you? Were you imagining a better way to design the learning experience you were in? Did it bother you that things were not progressing as you expected? Did you find a way to help others along their learning pathways? Were you hungry (yes, hungry)? Did you need to get up out of your chair because you’d been sitting too long?

These types of questions enable us to better understand our learners. In the LX design space, these 16 motivators from Reiss can shape the personas we develop, guide the learning journeys we design, and guide the pathways that we set our learners off on as they travel towards their goals and realize their potential.

Think about how you might shape the experiences of your learners by including these motivators in the development of learner personas. You will be pleasantly surprised at the insights you gain as you (and your teams) become more aware of shifting learner strengths and aspirations.

*Phylise Banner is a learning experience designer with over 25 years of vision, action, and leadership experience in transformational learning solutions. A pioneer in the learning experience design space, she regularly experiments with emerging methodologies and technologies in order to shape vibrant and engaged communities of practice.*

*She is a Certified Learning Environment Architect, Adobe Education Leader, STC Fellow, performance storyteller, avid angler, aviation enthusiast, and currently training to be a private pilot. She is also the proud owner of a 1967 Amphicar.*

# Learner Motivations Table

This simple table is compiled from an LX design sprint workshop exercise. Use this to consider and discuss the learning experience design implications of each of these specific desires/motivations.

Basic Desire	Associated Emotions	Design Ideas
power	competence influence	leader boards, certificates/badges, mentorship opportunities, certifications, championships, challenge coins
independence	freedom agency	adaptive pathways, choose-your-own options, self-paced exercises, opportunities for learner contribution, opportunities to opt out
curiosity	sense of wonder	learning channels, more to explore, rabbit holes, insights from external sources, access to experts, mentorship
acceptance	confidence	scaffolded goals, retention nudges and cues, opportunities for positive formative feedback, clear assessment rubrics
order	stability consistency	sequential courses, visual cues, clear navigation elements, themes, explicit instructions in multiple formats
saving	ownership economy	certificates/badges, physical learning assets, testing-out options, workbooks and job aids, challenge coins
honor	loyalty commitment	group activities, certificates/badges, mentorship opportunities, themes, rewards for completion, opportunities for learner contribution
idealism	compassion optimism	learner involvement in the design process, volunteer opportunities, mentorship opportunities, opportunities to share narratives at the end of learning to inspire others
social contact	belonging engagement	group activities, interaction components, learning teams and tribes, opportunities for learner contribution/sharing
family	love togetherness	mentorship opportunities, group activities, interaction components, leader boards, games
status	self-importance pride	leader boards, certificates/badges, mentorship opportunities, certifications, championships, challenge coins, learning channel levels, opportunity to contribute as an expert
vengeance	anger hatred	opportunities to step away from learning, active moderators and mediators, competition, feedback opportunities, learner agency
romance	appreciation of beauty	visual metaphors, consistency, graphic themes, opportunities to share and experience narratives, more to explore, rabbit holes, access to experts
eating	hunger longing	breaks, snacks, timekeeping elements, recipes as learning metaphors, opportunities to contribute snacks
physical exercise	vitality liveliness	breaks, stretches, involving learners and ergonomists in the space design process, step challenges, healthy living advice
tranquility	safety peacefulness	consideration of liminal spaces, meditation and mindfulness opportunities, critter cuddles, opportunities to opt out