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Informed Empathy: Tool, Practice, System

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Most people have a misconception of what empathy is. Yes, it is your ability to feel what another is feeling, but is much more than that. This innate, intuitive ability within each and everyone of us, one of our defining qualities as a species, can be a very useful tool; a tool that can be used not only in our daily lives but also to design better, educate better and govern better.

What we propose is to come out of our passive selves and become active members of change. The transition from a state of subconscious empathy to that of a conscious one. With simple tools that we have arrived at through research, we believe this can be achieved. We call this framework 'Informed Empathy'. We designed multiple interventions that are manifestations of this tool; a playbook for school children, an Empathy Card toolkit, speculative experiments, a tool for measurement amongst others. Different outcomes for various fields such as education, upbringing, social media and conflict resolution.

Empathy is something that has been oversold in design schools for a long time. A user centric approach to design is often synonymous with empathy, but it doesn't really mean the same. In fact the process is biased by the designer's motives, the market expectation and the clients expectation. While it is true, that a user centric approach is essential, we must ask ourselves if it is enough? Empathy is on the other

hand a useful research tool for designers. For empathy in its true sense is a tool for arriving at objectivity in a subjective circumstance.

Stay with us a minute, Empathy is often misunderstood with morality. Morality offers a preconceived response and dulls our senses to look for new information. To understand empathy in its entirety we had to study it across fields; psychology, biology, philosophy and neuroscience. We sought out to deconstruct empathy to its core; how our brain empathises as a cognitive process. The result of examining it as a system allowed us to also understand how to modify it. Empathy became a function of five parameters. We realised empathising is a process and there are steps to arrive at it.

But designers aren't the only ones that need to exercise empathy. In fact Design isn't the only field needs to practice design. The tool we propose can be used by a variety of people for a variety of occasions. The grander purpose behind empathy is to form understanding between people to co-exist and co-create together. Introspection and reflection are the most effective ways to co-exist and 'Informed Empathy' makes this process deliberate.

By exposing Private and Public organisations, formal and informal governments and institutions to 'Informed Empathy' we seek to help them create a generative learning environment which promotes co-creation and growth, it also allows to seek meaningful feedback, and create new partnerships. We believe that large scale transformations for equitable and inclusive solutions in fact start at some place small, it starts with basic human consideration - empathy.