EPISODE 59

[INTRODUCTION]

> **"EA:** *Research takes time. It just does. There's no way around it. And so being able to plan ahead is really helpful. But there needs to be time. And at the end of the day the, whole cross-functional team, and the company, or the organization, is looking to build something good. And studies have shown that the more user-centric you are, the more efficient you are at building good products, right? So it's about communicating that value-add of, "Look, we have the same goal. And I'm trying to help you meet your goal."*

[00:00:32] TG: You're listening to the UI Narrative podcast, the bi-weekly podcast that shares the stories of people of color interface designers and researchers and their contributions towards creating user-centered experiences. And I'm your host Tolu Garcia, let's get started.

Hey, guys. It's Tolu here with a quick word from our sponsor. To design great products, a focus on the user is everything. That's true for me and for the teams at Google. Today's sponsor, Google Design, produces original content, like articles and videos to show how Google's products come to life, and to inspire designers everywhere. For example, on design.google, you can learn how Google Maps streamlined a palette of 700 colors down to 25 major and minor tones, or how an R&D team distilled five years of research into a tiny, intuitive, emotionally intelligent radar chip. How cool is that y'all?

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[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:47] TG: Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the UI Narrative podcast. Let me introduce you to today's guest. Eniola Abioye currently conducts impactful user research with cross-

functional teams at Meta. She began her people research career at Branding Science, an agency in biotechnology space. And later moved on to advanced design thinking at Keiser Permanente. She then designed research strategy and led research across a digital platform at Silicon Valley Bank.

Outside of her full-time position, Eniola provides career coaching to other UX researchers and leads UX projects with social justice organizations in her community. She's excited to share how UX researchers are uniquely positioned to drive inclusive and accessible innovation in tech.

Everyone, please give a warm welcome to Eniola joining us on the UI Narrative podcast.

[00:02:45] EA: Hi. It's so good to be here. Thanks for having me.

[00:02:48] TG: So let's start off by going into your journey to becoming a UX researcher. So I know you started out your career doing research in human biology. So let's do a little rewind. Tell us about the first memory you have of being interested in research in general.

[00:03:05] EA: Yeah. Back in school, I had it all figured out, and knew I was going to be a doctor and study integrative biology at Cal. I was very into the science aspect of medicine, so like biology, was very into chemistry. And I've always been a super extroverted person. I've always been a people person. And I've always been a listener. And so I just figured that that's at the junction of the people in science was medicine, and that was the only way to do it. And then I really quickly realized that I didn't want to be a doctor and I'm not meant to be a doctor when I got to college when I started understanding more of, one, options of careers, and that there wasn't like this limit of 10 that I had heard about in high school. But also, that I just wasn't – I didn't want to be in the hospital space, right?

So I started expanding options. And, in studying biology, I had to do a lot of academic research. And so I was interested in the research part of talking to people and understanding people's experiences in different arenas. And then my first job out of school was at Branding Science, like you said, and it's a marketing user research firm in the biotech space. So it really met both of my loves for like science and people, because I got to understand like drug mechanisms, and different therapy areas and things like that, and talk to doctors, and patients, and caregivers,

and then drive what they wanted and what they needed and felt like they weren't getting drive companies to build that.

[00:04:34] TG: Awesome. I'm glad that you were exposed to other careers other than those typical like STEM ones that we hear growing up. And that's something I really want to figure out the way of how I can tell people about other careers in tech just in general growing up. Because you don't realize how limited you feel until you're like exposed to other career options out there.

[00:04:57] EA: Mm-hmm. No. Exactly. I tell people all the time like, my younger siblings, and cousins, and people I'm around every time I speak on a panel to find the thing that really drives you, because I feel really lucky to have found something where I'm genuinely like excited to do it. And I genuinely like my job. Because that's just not something I take for granted, right? I grew up in a space where it was like, "Look, you do what you have to do." And then you can enjoy life. But I genuinely do enjoy what I do as well. So I think that's an added bonus.

[00:05:25] TG: Yeah. So I want to get more into how you heard about UX research. So I know you got your degree in human biology. But how did you initially get introduced into UX research?

[00:05:36] EA: My introduction was really in my first job at a school. I was, like a lot of people, coming out of college casting a very wide net when I was particularly interested. I knew I didn't want to be a doctor, but I was still very much so interested in serving in the healthcare space. And so I applied to lots of different companies. And when I was talking to Branding Science and figuring out that and they were telling me about what they do, I didn't know that companies did that. I like didn't know it was a thing until I knew it was a thing. And then it just clicked for me when I was able to get started and listen to people who were more tenured, run research and design research. So that clicked for me.

And I think back when I was working at Branding Science, UX wasn't as popular as it is now. Or more, so companies were doing UX and people were doing UX, but weren't necessarily always calling it that. So I didn't make that connection until a little bit later. Like I knew I was doing user research, but I didn't know that UX was this whole world that there are like tons of different like career options and pathways into and things like that.

[00:06:43] TG: Yeah. It's crazy how like a lot of people don't even know how jobs that they're already doing connects within UX. For me, I was doing some UX, but not really, because I was doing web design. But I had no idea what UX was and I was doing web design. Can you imagine? But it was through a co-worker, because they had hired a UX designer, and I was like, "What is that?" And that's how he's like, "Hell, you should be a UX designer." And I was like, "I should."

[00:07:10] EA: Yeah. No. I hear that all the time, whether it's other people in the UX field or clients that I coach of like, "Hey, I do all these things, but my title is like program manager, or operations, or something like that. Something nearby. And I just always harp on the fact that like a lot of people do UX. And in order to do good design or in order to shape like a good user experience, people do base it in human-centered design. We just don't always call it that, right?

So a lot of times people come on and they like tell me about their work and tell me about what they do, and I'm like, "That's UX. That's what we call this methodology. That's based in human-centered design." And so a lot of it is just like exposure and being able to translate, because UX, like its own world, has its own language that people look for and kind of understand, and it's ever evolving, right? But so much of UX already exists. Like it wasn't a thing that someone said, "Hey, let's go and build this," and they built a thing. It was something that people noticed as a trend in good products and then said, "Okay, let's call it this." So it already exists. And so many people do it without having the UX title or without purposely going into it. But the reality is you have to do some form of UX research to build good products.

[00:08:26] TG: Definitely. So for you, what made you decide that UX research – And I feel like it's more of just a title for you since you've had so much research experience. But was there any moment where you felt like you had to make like a pivot or like a transition into like UX within tech? Are you like already getting experience with that?

[00:08:46] EA: Yeah. No. There was definitely a big transition point in my career when I left Kaiser Permanente, which is this huge healthcare company organization. And it's mostly on the West Coast. But it is national. When I left there and kind of like I was in my health care space where I was really comfortable. So I had done biotech. I had done healthcare. And I pivoted to Silicon Valley Bank, which was going into fintech, right? So that was a strong pivot, because

Kaiser Permanente and Silicon Valley Bank are very different companies, like different stages, different types of companies, different customer groups. And also going into doing user research in a different type of like framework, right? So going into a more agile environment. So that was a big pivot for me. And then of course like the subject matter of what the company works on, people were like, "Okay, you've been in healthcare. That aligns with kind of what you studied and who you are. So why fintech? Why money?"

And I figured out that like, for me, the draw was being able to hold space for folks as I have very intimate conversations, right? So of course, I did that all the time in healthcare. And it's quite similar doing it in fintech. And I realized that really quickly, because people were – I was talking to people about their relationships with their bank. I was talking to people about their startups, because Silicon Valley Bank is kind of branded as the bank for startup companies. And so those are still very sensitive conversations, and ones where there's a specific level of care that you have to have in talking to someone even about a product, because people don't just share like, "Here's how I use this product, and that's about it." They share how it integrates into their life, right? Or how the emotions they feel when they have a bad banking experience versus one where they feel valued as a customer, right?

So I love that I've been able to bounce around industry and kind of understand different user segments and have different types of conversations and design different types of products. But I think starting out in healthcare has really given me like hands-on training and the sensitivity you need and just like holding space for folks. So I take that to everywhere I go no matter what kind of conversation I'm having.

[00:10:55] TG: When you're making the transition to get into like fintech type of companies, was there any type of like additional training that you had to do or like online certifications or courses?

[00:11:05] EA: I did some courses. There wasn't anything that I like had to do. But I had some free time. So I was exploring different types of case studies and things like that. I'd say the one thing that was most helpful for me was coaching. I'm someone who has a lot going on all the time. I'm a busybody. So I'm always doing something. And so I respond really well to having one-on-one coaching of someone who's like, "Hey, remember, this is your goal. This is what

we're doing. We're meeting this week. I want you to have this done," and so on and so on. And so I was like, "Wow! That was really, really good for me," because it kept me really anchored in this goal of transitioning into a different industry and doing more UX work and also growing as a researcher. So that was really helpful for me. And I recognized the need for coaching to help make that pivot, because it's hard to kind of do it on your own, and it's intimidating to go into another industry. And I noticed really quickly that a lot of researchers, like myself, were having trouble understanding that they were doing UX and translating into the language of UX. And so I started coaching shortly after I made my transition and have just grown that and worked with a lot of different people from nutrition, public health, some people who were UX researchers and wanted to progress their career. And it's just been really rewarding to see people hit their goal or do well and hear from recruiters and things like that. Like it's just a lot of fun.

[00:12:30] TG: Thank you so much for giving us an overview of your research background. And I'm glad that we could like emphasize how special it is to have you as a researcher on this show. I don't think we touched on you have like eight years of experience in research. It's a total contrast to my eight years in designs. And I just think that's why it's so important to have your insight on today's topic. How to facilitate a user research study? Because it's going to be a great guidance for those looking to become a better UX researcher.

[00:13:01] EA: Yeah, this is going to be a good one.

[00:13:01] TG: Yeah. I really wanted to have this conversation with you, because I always look at research from like a design perspective to be able to validate my design decisions. But every time I'm talking to a researcher, I'm learning something new about how to design better products for humans. So yeah, I'm excited to dive into this.

[00:13:19] EA: Nice. I always work really closely with the designers where I'm at, and we also have each other's back and kind of advocate, because we're both based in human-centered design. They're both based in design thinking. And so being able to like advocate and pull each other in when it's needed is always really great. So I've always had good relationships to designers. And I keep them very close.

[00:13:42] EA: Okay. So in order for us to help those who have never heard about UX research before, like connect the dots, we're going to be using a hypothetical design brief to explain our process for how to facilitate the user research on a project. So the brief that we have, the client is IKEA. And for those that don't know, IKEA designs and sells ready to assemble furniture, kitchen appliances, and home accessories, among other goods and home services.

So what IKEA wants is a live chat UI added to their website. So let's say that they hire Eniola and I to be the UX researcher and UX designer on the team to help with their new feature ad. And we're not going to go super into depth, like ideating to solve all of IKEA's problems. But we will be walking you through the process of how to research and – Of like how research and design would collaborate.

Eniola, with this project brief, if I was a designer on the team, the first thing that I would do is come to you to ask you to find out like if the users even want a chat UI on the website, because some clients will be like, "Let's add this feature." It's like, "Wait, wait, wait."

[00:14:53] EA: Yes. Agreed.

[00:14:56] TG: So I'd like for you to like walk us through like the steps you would take to get started. Like who are you talking to? What types of questions are you asking them to like learn more about the objective?

[00:15:06] EA: Yes. No. That's so funny, because I have definitely been at companies where people are like, "We're going to build this thing." And I'm like, "Okay. Well, why are we building this thing?" And we get a myriad of answers, and they're not always based in kind of like, "Oh, the user has communicated this."

And one thing I want to say just before we get started is user centricity is something that like a lot of people aspire to, but it's hard to shift. Like change is really hard, especially at a company level. And so little by little, you can kind of drive towards user centricity. But at the end of the day, no matter what type of company that you're at, there's still going to be some, "Okay, well, we've seen like what the competition is doing. And we should build it because these are the times and this is what the landmark looks like." And that's all fine, because that influences what

we should be building and when we should be building it. But the user needs to be at the center of why we're building something.

For me, I would actually pull together a few different roles. So of course, as a designer, we'd be working really closely together from the beginning, because the designer needs to understand some of the same things that I need to understand. Another role that I would pull in is the person who is kind of most close to the product or the product roadmap. So oftentimes that's a product manager. Even if they're not called that, they're serving that role, right?

From product, I would really want to understand kind of what the roadmap looks like now and where the business is trying to go, right? Because oftentimes that's like product's role is like, "Okay, I understand the objectives and key results of the business. And I understand what key performance indicators look like," right? OKRs and KPIs. And so that information from them needs to inform, okay, how we research. And I want to know what are we trying to solve. And what does good look like, right? So we can like do all the research and figure out what to build and stuff. But I need the metrics of what good looks like, right? And you as the designer should get that as well.

Another person that I would pull in really early on is the data scientist or data analyst, someone who looks at the backend data and can interpret those numbers for me. Because a lot of times, research shouldn't just start with, "Okay, here's what we want to know. Okay, let me go ask these people about it." It should start with understanding what we already know, right? So we call it secondary research. Researching the information we know.

I would work with the data analyst specifically to understand, Okay, on the backend, let's look at what user – When people are contacting support, let's look at what those conversations look like and any trends that we see there," right? Because a lot of times the numbers will tell you a lot. And then the deep qualitative work comes in to support what the numbers also say oftentimes. And they should align somewhere, right?

Another person that I always want at the beginning is the content strategist to understand kind of like what our content looks like now and the tone of the business, and what we're trying to

achieve, and how we speak to users to incorporate that into the final design. So I want them in the very beginning so they know the context as we go through.

So once I have that team, like I mentioned, I would start out with data and see not only like what trends do we recognize, but are there user segments that we can identify based on the numbers, right? Everyone doing user research is great. And you're not just designing for one user. So you have to make sure to differentiate and understand the different types of users and user behaviors or personas that are within your user base so that you can design specifically with each of them in mind as specific as possible.

[00:18:33] TG: Yeah, that is great. For , e on the designer side, like if I don't have like a user researcher on the team, then typically like the main questions I'm trying to answer is like the who, what, when, where, why and how as quickly as possible, because – Well, most of the clients that I work with, it's more of like quick turnaround. And I may not have as much time to do the research. But the great thing about having a researcher on the team is it just enables you to – The researcher will establish guardrails, basically, for like their research objectives, and it helps inform the designer on potential UI patterns to use. Especially with the already like existing product, it's just a lot easier if there's some guardrails there. Because as designers, we always want to come up with the most like amazing thing, but it's not always what entirely what they need. Maybe it's just a little design element that they need within it.

[00:19:23] EA: Right. Right. And then the great thing is, as you build a relationship, as a researcher with a designer, that just relationship is really key because UX researchers will oftentimes build out like experience principles or design elements that people really respond to, or things that we should always consider in building for a certain segment. So you don't have to start from scratch every time. Every time a question pops up into a designer's head, or a product manager's head, or we're looking to build something, we can throwback to the trends that we're already seeing instead of being like, "Okay, you got a question? Let me go." Ask it again. Because that's not being efficient with money. It's not being efficient with time. So, yes.

[00:20:01] TG: Yeah, that's something that – I was actually having this conversation a week ago on a coaching call, like telling the designer, "The research you do at any phase could be useful even a year from now."

[00:20:13] EA: Yes.

[00:20:14] TG: What's something I'm trying to get her to understand was you should always be trying to collect data on like how people are responding to the product, because it may not be useful now, but when you're adding in that new feature later on, you don't want to – Especially like when you're in a company that has like really fast turnarounds, it's great to have that data to lean on. It's like, "Oh, okay. Well, at least I have something to compare of. Like, okay this is probably how they would want this new feature to look," right?

[00:20:39] EA: Yeah, yeah.

[00:20:40] TG: Compared to like, if you're like, "Okay, I have to have this done in three days. Like do I have time for research?" Just like –

[00:20:45] EA: Right, right. And then, one, it always takes the pressure off you the more data you collect and hearing straight from the user's mouth, because if you have to deliver something that's not the best news, which everyone has to do at some point in their career, you're like, "Don't take it from me. Take it from the users, right? Because my job is literally to bring the user voice to the table. So that makes it a lot easier. And then, like you mentioned with timeline, you get to a point where, with a team, as the relationship develops, you can more and more kind of plan ahead, right? So in the road mapping process, as you're building out the road map, let UX design and UX research also build out that roadmap with you so that you're building up when we're building stuff based on the, like, user pain points, and irritations, and opportunities for delight. And that being prioritized rather than just kind of like planning out the roadmap and then inputting UX research where it should be, inputting design where it should be.

[00:21:39] TG: Mm-hmm. Definitely. Is there a way that you can be more like inclusive during this phase as a project, like as you're starting to build your team?

[00:21:48] EA: Yeah. I think inclusion happens over time, and often times it starts in the background, right? As you're kind of understanding the product and learning about like how the product team works, kind of calling out things that you see might be assumptions and validating

those assumptions is a good place to start, right? So I see, based on this, we're kind of assuming that all of our users are tech savvy enough to approach this. Or we're assuming that all of our users are able-bodied and calling that out and saying, "Well, let's push on that. Because this is an assumption we're making, are we sure about that?" And then kind of drawing that and throwing back to the data and throwing back to what you hear from users. And that will like open people's minds up, too, of like, "Oh, we have to consider that too, or else we're building an exclusive product."

[00:22:37] **TG:** Definitely. And I guess this ties, too, into like how you're beginning to form your hypothesis. Once you have your team together – I'm just trying to picture like, for you, how you would do it. Like what steps do you take typically? And like what are you in the company – Because I know you're already like formulating what you guys believe you know. And someone that might have its biases in it, which is hard to break until you start to have the data. But like for your own process, how do you begin to form that hypothesis?

[00:23:04] **EA:** Yeah. So like I mentioned earlier, I start with the secondary research of working with a data analyst to understand the trends on the backend. And then from there, I formulate a hypothesis with the team. So everything is collaborative. Everything is let's touch base at multiple points and get questions and get people's feedback and things like that. But I formulate a hypothesis of, "Okay, so imagine if I go on IKEA's backend and I see the support emails or they're like allocated into different buckets or something like that." And I make a hypothesis that building this live chat feature will reduce like support calls or support emails by a certain percentage, right? Or will replace and bring something in-house or automate something at a certain percentage. And then I work with product to understand what kind of ROI that would bring on the research, right? Return on investment, ROI, and that's always important to take into account when you're planning research so that the people at the organization that you work with understand, "Hey this is the goal. This is what we're working towards. And this is an outcome, a type of outcome that we can expect." So I build my hypothesis around what the data is telling me, and then run that back to the collaborative team that I'm working with to then build the research plan.

[00:24:18] **TG:** Something I also just want to stress for listeners that aren't that familiar with hypothesis. Just being aware of like her your hypothesis will help you select the right research

methods to fulfill whatever your research objective is. And also, you can use this early like hypothesis that you gather to help communicate what you discovered later on through the research process. Like for an example, using IDEA. Like we believe that the user wanted a chat that was available like 24/7. Do you believe that was correct? But then you discovered that users are only on the website from 3am to 12am. So it really, really helps later on in the process to prove why your research is so useful.

[00:24:57] EA: A tool that I really like using that's based on design thinking is called a How Might We. As you're doing research, or as you're kind of observing users, because companies often don't start from zero, right? So if you're a new researcher and you join a company, it's not that companies know nothing, right? It's just they've hired and they've expanded the team. So starting with understanding where you're at. And then as you do research and you hear insights coming in, or you're observing users, understanding like, "Okay, this is a need that someone has named here, that a group of someone has named. So how might we facilitate this need ...?" right?

And so the goal of the How Might We is not to solution yet, right? Because there's a time to solution, and it's later. But as you're in the midst of research and you're hearing trends, say someone's like, "I can't call support on the phone because it takes forever, and I just don't have the time freedom for that." So how might we allow for customers to access support services in a way that doesn't require like solid blocks of time, right?

So I haven't necessarily solutioned and said, "Well, hey let's build this live chat feature where they can like be on hold or they can like chat and receive a chat back later." But I've addressed the need that we are trying to meet. And so I focus the research a little bit more.

[00:26:12] TG: Something I love about UX researchers is asking them like what research methods that they use. And I always seem to get like the same answer, "It depends."

[00:26:21] EA: Do you? What do you usually hear?

[00:26:24] TG: It's totally understandable, though, because you know there's so many variables to choosing the right method that will provide the data that you need. So for this IKEA project, I

know we've been a bit vague like with some of the restrictions. But the little that you do know, how do you decide on which research methods to use?

[00:26:40] EA: Yeah. Well I'll preface this by saying I'm very much so a qualitative researcher. Qual is why I love research and why I do it. But every researcher needs to dabble in both, because they go hand in hand. So like I mentioned before, looking at the data and trying to understand user segments. There aren't clear user segments outlined by the data on the backend. Then I would try to segment users by doing something really general and like maybe starting out with like a quantitative study.

And it's something like really simple to understand the current experience with support with the company to then segment them from there, right? So if I ask the question – If I ask NPS, right? NPS is net promoter score, the quintessential question of how likely are you to recommend this to a friend or colleague, right? NPS isn't perfect. That's a different conversation. A different episode. But I would use that to say, "Okay, I have my promoters, right? In the eight to ten range. I have my one to three, and I have folks who are who are kind of in the middle. If I don't have existing user segments or personas that I can work with yet, I would start there, to understand like, "Okay, these people have different attitudes towards support already. So I want to hear from each of them." Because they're going to be people who are like, "Oh, I love IKEA. IKEA is the best. Everything is perfect. Nothing can change." And then there are people who are like, "I know can't stand this company, but I use it anyways." So wanting to hear from differentiated segments. And that's one way you can do it if you can't do it on the backend.

Methods, methods based on time and resources, right? I would choose between – I would do some type of interview, because we're at the exploratory phase of research, right? We're looking to build something new. I'm looking to to understand if there's a desire for it. So based on time, I would either do moderated or unmoderated in that second stage after the survey. And pro of moderators that you can kind of go off script and get much deeper. And people are usually more likely to be more talkative if someone is there with them, rather than a moderated. There are some limitations to that. If someone doesn't understand the question, they don't understand the question. Or they usually go a little bit faster than moderated interviews. So that's something I would take into consideration.

And then as we move through different phases of the researcher or of the design process, I would employ different methods. So as we get more into the iterative phase of, "Okay, we're building it. We've heard what people want. And we have an idea of what to incorporate into this feature, this product that we're building. Let's start testing some lo-fi, low-fidelity, prototypes with people to see if we're on the right track." So that would be a lot of both moderated and unmoderated usability testing to understand, "Okay, is this intuitive for folks? Do people like the UI?" What are some like key feedback that we're hearing from groups as we do usability studies? And then fast forward to the more kind of like evaluative, like, "Okay, we have this thing. It's looking pretty good. Let's make sure that people like it on the larger scale," would be more of the quantitative methods. So that's in a nutshell.

[00:29:53] TG: Yeah. It's amazing seeing how you break it down, because there's so many things within research that I don't include as a designer. It's just a lot more to my job, to be honest. Not trying to do all the things. But it's always so fascinating hearing like how far you can break down the data. Like how much you can collect and then how it can inform like me, as a designer, like starting off with lo-fi. That sounds amazing, because, typically, it's like I'm going straight into like hi-fi sometimes.

[BREAK]

[00:30:25] TG: Let's take a short break.

So one of the top questions I get about product design is how do I stay inspired? And the other day I decided to take inventory of what I'm doing routinely. The biggest thing that stood out to me was how I'm always investing time to understand products that are advancing in design and technology. Today's sponsor, Google Design, produces original content like articles and videos to show how Google's products come to life, and to inspire designers everywhere. On Google Design, you'll get to know how the products used by billions actually get made. And hear from desires behind some of your favorite products like Chrome, Google Maps, and Nest. Head over to design.google to get inspired. That's design.google. Or follow them on Twitter and Instagram @GoogleDesign.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:31:21] TG: So within choosing like research methods, what are some ways that you can make sure that you're being inclusive?

[00:31:27] EA: So one of the ways I try to make sure that I'm inclusive is in the method in which I'm researching and kind of like being really flexible with the time blocks or the platform that I'm using, right? So if I'm scheduling 90-minute interviews all within the middle of the day, that excludes people who can't afford to take that time off in their schedule. Or if I'm only doing things where people can tap in via live video. Like, obviously, in this digital space, like video is great. But there are some people who don't want to have a conversation like that. And so if you log on to Zoom and you want to have your camera off, that's totally fine. Or if you want to orchestrate a different way to participate in research, being open to that. Obviously, there are constraints.

But looking to – Like I take a really active role in recruitment as well to try to make sure that we're getting a good range and looking. Sometimes in past companies, I've taken a role where I'm like hand-picking folks based on like the data we have on them. And so just the most you can, diversifying your pool of who you're speaking to, and then making room for people to interact in different ways I think is really helpful.

[00:32:34] TG: So you already discussed some things that you would include in like a research plan, as far as like the methods, research methods that you would use, hypothesis. Is there anything else like before putting a research plan together at this point that you would need to know that I'm missing?

[00:32:52] EA: Something from when – I work with a cross-functional team, something you gather first is like the high-level research questions. And you can help your your team kind of formulate those. But, yeah, that's something that I would need, because as a researcher, whether I'm embedded or if I'm embedded versus consultative, they work a little bit differently. Because when you're embedded into a team, you're kind of going along with the team. So you have the context of like, "Hey, here are some questions that I know are gaps."

When you're consultative, like even if you work for a company and if the model is consultative, and so you're kind of moving around and doing research where it needs to be done, gaining that context at the very beginning is going to be – And continuously throughout the project is going to be very, very important.

Usually, I'm asking the team, different members of the cross-functional team, to give the high-level research questions and like gaps in knowledge that they need to build this thing. And then often, working with them to kind of scope them and be like, "Okay, well, this we can fit in one project. This is a whole other project of itself." And just like working around with those. And then, though, we try to keep it – I try to keep it, too, around three to six high-level research questions per project. And then I build methods around that.

And then products usually have different phases. So it's fine to do some questions in one phase and some questions in another. And those questions, some people get confused that those are the questions we want to ask. But they're just like the high-level questions that will guide their research.

[00:34:16] TG: As you're putting together like research plans, I'm sure you've done several, what are some of like the hardest sections? Are there some sections that you have to work harder to like obtain the information that you need while compiling it?

[00:34:29] EA: Sure. Yeah. So the first one that comes to mind, and I guess I haven't really like thought about this very much, but the first one that comes to mind is metrics of like how do we measure good? And how do we measure like progress in this space? And how research impacts it? That just takes some conversation and takes a lot of collaboration to pull together, because it comes from different people on the team. So like, as a researcher at past companies, I've had to facilitate that sharing of information to build out these encompassing metrics.

[00:35:05] TG: So when you start to begin the research study, do you bring in another researcher or go solo? Like what's your I guess preferred way that you like to work? And what's your process like gathering the research?

[00:35:16] EA: It's not that I have a preference to work solo like as a researcher, because UX research and UX in general is very much so a team sport. But when it comes to resources and companies, there's often not too many researchers at a place there's. You know what I mean? There's often more research to be done and kind of an infinite amount of things to learn, versus a very finite amount of researchers. So I do a lot of like peer review when I work. But as far as shaping the research and like conducting research, it's usually on me.

[00:35:52] TG: What's something that about facilitating research that you wish someone had told you like when you first got started?

[00:36:00] EA: I wish someone had told me at the very beginning of my career. So I started out agency side. So this is something that I grew to understand. But I wish someone told me that this is just a ux research thing and not just an agency thing. No matter where you are most places, you're still going to have to have some element of educating your organization about the ROI of UX research or the importance of UX design. And it's just part of the role. You can be at a company that is specifically in UX or specifically in design thinking and still have to do some education of like how research works and how a design process can be most user-centric.

There's always going to be that element of like pushback, right? Which I think is generally healthy. There's always going to be people asking questions about why research is done how it's done. Why is the sample look like this? And why not this? And well, it would make me feel better if we talked to a few more people. And just understanding that there's a strategy that goes into building research and into conducting it.

And so, obviously, wiggle room is important when you're working with any type of team. But just making sure to understand there's a strategy behind it and so you can stick by kind of your plan and – They're looking to you to advocate how to do UX research. So advocate, talk about your strategy and why it's the way it is.

[00:37:26] TG: Couldn't agree more. There's this book that I read called Articulating Design Decisions, I think. I'll link it in the show notes. But something that he talks about, one of the main things I loved about the book was asking questions that set you up for success. And also, too, as you're going through explaining your decisions – And this is just specifically for designers. I

mean, it can affect researchers too, but like asking yourself like what problem does it solve, so that way you'll be able to articulate that well when you're getting combating questions that relate to that. Like how does it affect the user? And how is it better than like the alternative that they already explored? Because you're always going to get pushback on the client or the boss wanting to go like the cheaper route or the easier route for things on their project. But I think it's important to be able to stand your ground and be able to explain why. The value-add basically.

[00:38:20] EA: One of the things that a lot of researchers find that they have to negotiate is time, right? Because there's always – We always want to ship things faster. We want it now, and things like that. So research takes time. It just does. There's no way around it. And so being able to plan ahead is really helpful. But there needs to be time. And at the end of the day the, whole cross-functional team and the company, or the organization, is looking to build something good. And studies have shown that the more user-centric you are, the more efficient you are at building good products, right? So it's about communicating that value-add of, "Look, we have the same goal. And I'm trying to help you meet your goal," right? That's why it helps to understand what the goals of the organization are. I'm trying to meet that goal.

Now, when it comes to things like cost and amount of time you take, those are all really malleable. So you can work within that, right? So a really high concern is cost, right? There are tons of ways to do research and get kind of scrappy and be a good steward of resources. And you don't have to spend a lot of money always, right? Before I was doing research for a company, I do research with community organizations. And the budget isn't always huge, but we get it done.

[00:39:38] TG: Do you have any tips for like facilitating research remotely or like any gotcha moments that you've had recently? Or new things that you've had to learn?

[00:39:46] EA: Yes. I think – Okay. So, yes. Obviously, for two years, we've been in a solely digital age. I've done digital research before then, but I feel like my favorite kind of sweet spot was doing in-person research. And even more so, ethnographic research, where you get to be in their setting of whatever it is that they're using. When it comes to digital research, I think it's super important to be really intentional about kind of connecting with the person that's on the other side of the screen, right?

We look at these screens. Most people are having like meetings where they're just staring at a camera. And so to like take time at the beginning of a – If you're doing a one-on-one interview, take time to just connect and like not kind of stand or small talk, but just like take time to let the user understand that like, "Hey, I realize you're a person and not just someone on the other – Something on the other side of my screen."

And then I'd say, two, maintaining eye contact and bringing energy. So bringing the energy for the interview is really important, because you'll talk to people who are at all different places, right? Some people don't want to have their screen on, or their camera on. Some people don't want to – Like don't have a bunch of energy or aren't really excited about the conversation. So like bringing that energy to like let folks know that you're listening to them and that you're really excited to talk to them. This isn't just another session you have to check off for your day.

Snd so I've watched a lot of research sessions happen, and I've seen a lot of researchers conduct research. And for one-on-one interviews, especially digitally, something that is just a no-no for me and that I've seen is researchers trying to take notes as they're conducting like a one-on-one interview. It's just one of my pet peeves, because you're trying to maintain as much connection with the user as possible to really like facilitate them sharing what it is they have to share.

And so looking down and kind of like they're looking at the top of your head instead of your face now is just something that I just advocate that people don't do, record it, have someone else take notes. Do what you have to do. But I think we should try to avoid that at all costs as researchers.

[00:41:54] TG: Yeah. I'm glad you touched on that. Because, for me, even in general, like it's a struggle to try to take notes while talking to somebody, because you're like, "Dang, I think I missed something what they said." And it's like you end up having to watch the video anyways to get those **[inaudible 00:42:07]**.

[00:42:08] EA: Mm-hmm. You're not present. You're splitting your presents. And folks can feel that.

[00:42:12] TG: Yeah, definitely. Thank you so much for giving like all this information about how to facilitate user research study. There's still another section that we need to get to, like a phase of like iteration, synthesizing your data from the research through design, content, information, architecture, interaction, etc. So I think we need to do like a part two on this for this topic.

[00:42:35] EA: Sounds good.

[00:42:37] TG: To get the research study. Awesome. Yes. I'm glad you're down for that. But, yeah, I just really wanted to emphasize like the beauty of having a UX researcher on the team that can deliver all this discovery data that you need, and they'll give it to you on a platter, for my designers out there, so you can get to focus on the design. The user research will most likely be like facilitating the usability testing too. So if you're considering a UX researcher as a career, please do it. We need more of you out there. Really, there are not that many UX researchers, even though you may feel like you see it a lot, there's not that many.

[00:43:10] EA: The industry is growing so rapidly. Like I see – And this is probably because my algorithm is all UX research all the time.

[00:43:17] EA: I'm sure.

[00:43:20] TG: I see so, so, so, so, so many roles. And I'm seeing so many companies being like, "Okay we're diving in. We're hiring our first UX researcher. What have you?" So yeah, there's tons of room in the industry.

[00:43:35] TG: All right. So next we're going to get into listener questions. So I asked on Instagram what questions you have for Eniola. And thank you guys for coming through. This is so many questions. I'm not gonna be able to get through all of them. So I'm thinking that we're gonna split it into two parts. Some today and then some next episode. So this first one is from Kat NNG. They ask, "As someone trying to pivot into UX research for market research, what are some resources I should be looking into? And any advice that you have?"

[00:44:07] EA: So the good thing about transitioning to UX research from market research is that you're super close. A lot of the methodologies can be similar. Or you're already working in kind of understanding human factors at a large scale, and why people do what they do, and how to predict user behavior. For resources, I always tell people to exhaust all the free resources because there's so much out there. And depending on how you learn, you can decide whether you'd like to just like try to consume as much as you can around user research, and user centricity, and design thinking on your own kind of on the Internet. Or you can decide if you'd like to go the boot camp route, which is they really just serve the purpose of exposing you to more kind of user centricity and user research driven methods and frameworks. Or if you'd like to do something one-on-one, coaching is also an option there.

As far as resources, I would expose yourself to as much user-centricity frameworks and learning as you can to see, one, if this is a pivot you really want to make. But two, start to – As you're working in market research, start to understand what you're hearing specifically from users and like what, within the market, on a smaller scale, on a more like in-depth scale, what you're hearing a user say? If you have the ability to.

[00:45:27] TG: The next question is from Like the Bridge. They ask, "How do you determine what projects are portfolio worthy?"

[00:45:35] EA: I really like this question. So when building a portfolio, I'll say that you're really like giving a company or an organization a preview into like what you can do, right? How you approach research and what your strategy looks like as far as what to research, when to research, how so.

So for portfolios, I just want to make sure that when I see a portfolio and you're doing a portfolio review for like interviewing at a company, I've done a lot of interviews at the companies I've worked at before. And what sticks out to me is if I'm seeing one study, then that study has to show range of your research ability, right? If I'm seeing – Two, like those projects should be very different and that the methods are different. The people are different. So I can see that range. I want to see your interaction with different methods. I want to understand kind of start to finish. So if you have end to end work, that always works really well.

If you're showing to or are building out a portfolio, I usually tell people to build a master and then cater which case study they'd like to present based on the interview. Or if you're listing, if you're hosting your portfolio somewhere online, just wanting to show range is important to impact. So looking at projects, I want to understand what the impact was on the organization. What were your next steps, right? Recommendations. What you would do differently if you could do it all over again.

So I think it's not about as much of like which project can make it, but making sure that you communicate all of these things as you're building out your portfolio. And then if you didn't play the biggest role in like determining decisions or kind of deciding on things throughout the research process, then maybe you de-prioritize that project and emphasize projects where you had decision-making power and you pulled together a team and you worked collaboratively with people, because that's something you want to showcase.

[00:47:32] TG: All right. So that's all the listener questions that we'll have for this week. So on the next episode, because we're definitely going to do a part two to this, we're going to be answering questions from fannyfanny.au, lizmassie68, and then a couple other questions from Kat NNG and Like the Bridge. As a reminder, you could be included in the next episode. Make sure to follow me on Instagram @uinarrative, and Twitter @uinativeco. I randomly ask questions that could be featured in an upcoming episode.

[00:48:03] EA: Awesome. Well, I had a lot of fun. We can talk about UX research all day. So thanks so much for having me and giving me the time.

[00:48:11] TG: So I'd like to end the show with a random question like completely unrelated to what we've been talking about. Say you're independently wealthy and you don't have to work, what would you do with your time?

[00:48:23] EA: I like this question even more. Yeah, I've thought about this a lot. I would travel the world, and that would be my primary concern of where do I want to go next. I love travel. I'm an adventurer. So just like seeing pretty places and exploring new places is just – It would be my full-time job.

[00:48:41] TG: We got cut off towards the end because my Internet was being – I ain't going to say it. A B. But, yeah, for me, I would definitely want to travel too. Ride along with Eniola. I've always wanted to travel the world. Just be hiking everywhere. You can connect with Eniola on her website, eniolabioye.com, or follow her on LinkedIn. And I'll have both of those links in the show notes.

If you have any questions about UX research, please leave it in the comments or book a session with any Eniola on her website. She does coaching for people looking to get into UX research. She has several years of experience. So I definitely recommend you use her as a resource to get started in your career in UX. And make sure to tag @uinarrative in any comments, questions about today's episode. Also, don't forget to share this episode with anyone you think would benefit from it.

[OUTRO]

[00:49:36] TG: Thank you for listening to the UI Narrative podcast. If you like what you hear, make sure to show this podcast in love by commenting and subscribing where you listen. You can find me on Instagram and Facebook @uinarrative, or Twitter @uinarrativeco. I also respond to emails at hello@uinarrative.com. Talk to you later. Bye.

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