



Practical Empathy

Indi Young

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Conventional product development focuses on the solution. Empathy is a mindset that focuses on people, helping you to understand their thinking patterns and perspectives. Practical Empathy will show you how to gather and compare these patterns to make better decisions, improve your strategy, and collaborate successfully.

Practical Empathy Details

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Adrian Howard says

Initially I thought this was going to be one of those "good, but I know this already" books, but it ended up sparking a *lot* of ideas in my head. Especially some of the ways of talking about ongoing research — language is so important in helping folk see value. Going to be revisiting this in the context of the stuff I do with customer interviewing & incremental persona.

Ninakix says

I really liked Young's first book, Mental Models, because it depicted a clear process for people who were looking for a design process. But this book was a bit trickier: I understand what she was trying to get at, but I think with these books, they tend to be an in depth description of designer's processes, and might be better if they were descriptive instead of prescriptive. Process is probably partly personality driven, partly driven by the requirements of one's design challenges, so understanding that would be a better way to digest this book. I feel like this book teetered on this weird edge of focused on practicality, and focused on empathy. So, a bit odd. Probably people coming out of firms like IDEO, Frog, or Jump might have done better with this topic. Portigal's book on interviewing is probably a better introduction for people looking to learn more about interviewing, but I did appreciate the general approach to interviewing in this book, which can be summed up as: stop thinking so much and just effing listen.

Gabrielle says

It started ???but apart from some tips for empathy w coworkers in the final chapters it lost my interest by focusing too much on methods. I'm too intuitive for that nonsense.

Josh says

For all the naysayers, the thinking style approach to capturing reasoning, reactions and guiding principles through active listening and cognitive empathy is a game changer! We will rue the day we stuffed so much pap and fluff into our personas!

Mitch Dowell says

I actually purchased the audiobook version of this book. The author (Indi) did a great voiceover job - something that can't actually be said about all authors. She does a great job of explaining what empathy IS and what it ISN'T, and provides some good techniques for listening at work. Although, I think that is where she lost me at times in the book - especially in the later chapters. She gets a little too "textbooky" towards the end on the topic. But overall is still worth 4 stars and I would highly recommend this book.

Brian says

Young's instructions on conducting a formal listening session are worthwhile. Much of the rest of the material, while not total fluff, seems like it was added just to make it book length.

Peter says

The core message of this book is to listen to others. It offers a methods that helps in listening: building the empathy, that may lead to better decisions (applying empathy). On it's core it's unguided talk, keeping yourself from reactions, emptying your mind, and listening to reactions, reasoning and guiding principles. So not for example opinions or facts. When working with this quotes the key is to make summaries, actions followed by brief information that captures the specific intent of the talker. These can be written lightweight, just after the session. Working with these summaries results in patterns that can be used for specific purposes. Such understanding, the summaries can be built up across years, since these qualities of people don't really change (like for example product usage patterns change).

Marrije says

Meh. Vague and meandering - the first few chapters are interesting, but I wasn't impressed by the rest. A pity, since I had been looking forward to this book and it appeared to be the exact thing I needed...

Karen Mardahl says

I intended reading this earlier, but got caught up in a million other things. Thank goodness for my local UX Book Club meeting. It got me to read it. I'm glad. I thought it was a very worthwhile read. It got me thinking in lots of different directions. I especially liked what I call the soft skills part. I think soft skills are too often neglected. I am referring especially to the listening part. I like how she gives very practical examples for practising, which is sound advice. After all, you read these books to learn something, but how often do you remember to start practising and applying the lessons learned. Sometimes you don't know quite how to begin or where. Indi Young covers that. Thanks, Indi!

Even though this is coming from a UX library - the book products of Rosenfeld Media, there are chunks of this book that I would like to share with other parts of many organisations!

I'll update with a longer review soon. In the meantime, I will just strongly recommend that you check out this book if you are in technical communication, ux, design, development/programming, project management, and anything that sounds remotely like those things. :)

Tomas says

If you want to start with user research, start with this book and read chapters 4 & 5. The book describes the most basic method how to listen to users. It is a must have basics before you'll start with other methods (in-depth interviews, usability study etc.). It's really descriptive and contains a lot of handy and practical advices. That star down is for the first 3 chapters and the chapters at the end (6 or 7 and more) - why so many words for such simple things? These chapters are just waisting of time.

Gary says

The first 3 chapters have the most value. Clearly defining empathy and drawing a line between emotional and cognitive is important. The later chapters on how to listen, how to use empathy in teams and in the workplace seemed less valuable to me. The content seemed obvious and a little fluffed to fill out a "how to" book. Generally, I appreciated a good third of this book's ideas.
