

Research that turns ambiguity into direction.

Sheyla Finkelshteyn, PhD (ABD) — Design Research • Cultural Research • Emerging Technology • Insight Strategy

Discover

Uncover latent needs, cultural tensions, mental models, and workflow realities.

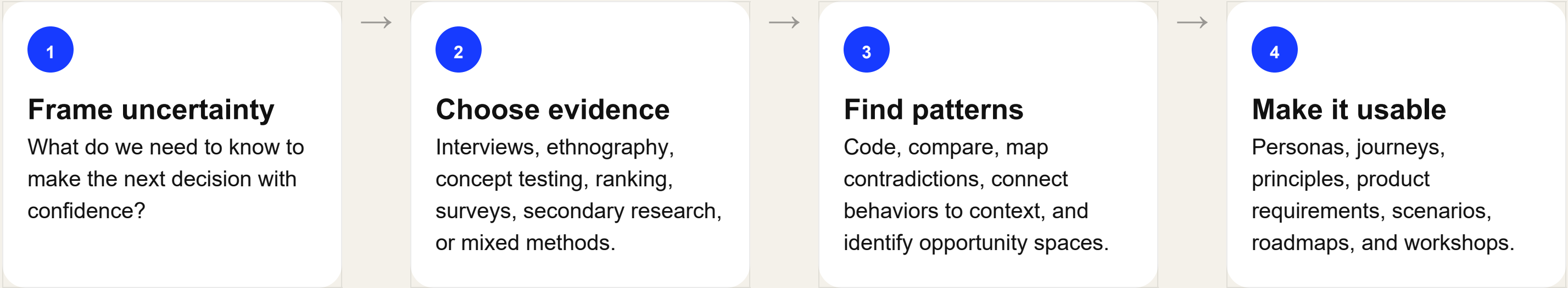
Synthesize

Turn messy qualitative evidence into durable frameworks and prioritized opportunities.

Activate

Translate insight into product requirements, experience direction, scenarios, workshops, and next bets.

I design research to answer the decision behind the question.



Methods

- Generative interviews
- Ethnography
- Participant observation
- Concept testing
- Co-design
- Journey mapping
- Thematic analysis
- Mixed methods

Tools

- Figma / FigJam
- Dovetail
- Miro
- NVivo
- Qualtrics
- SPSS
- Canva
- AI synthesis workflows

Designing trust into an AI product for public-health communicators.

The challenge was not “Do people want AI?” It was: **what would make an AI tool credible, useful, and safe enough to enter high-stakes health communication workflows?**

40+

public-health communicators
and related professionals
represented

42

user interviews across multiple
research groups

7

targeted concept-testing
sessions

1

research-to-strategy system
connecting insight to product
direction

We prioritized the questions with the highest impact — and the least certainty.

Core questions

- Where does AI fit — or fail — in public-health workflows?
- What creates trust in AI-generated health content?
- Which features solve meaningful work, not novelty?
- Where must human oversight remain non-negotiable?
- What does multilingual and culturally sensitive adaptation require?

My contribution

I translated research findings into personas, an end-to-end content journey, critical touchpoints, and user stories that connected human needs to product requirements.

Evidence stack

Stakeholder framing	Interviews	Ranking	Concept testing	Synthesis
Impact × certainty prioritization	Workflows, trust, AI literacy, pain points	Force trade-offs and identify priority needs	Observe reactions to proposed flows	Dovetail coding + strategic artifacts

Decision standard

“The research result is not a set of opinions, but a clear, defensible path to building the right tool.”

The strongest opportunity was not “more AI.” It was **more trustworthy AI.**

01 • Human review

Public-health professionals were open to AI drafting — but wanted humans to remain accountable for verification and approval.

02 • Sources build trust

Visible citations, evidence grounding, and source transparency mattered more than maximizing content generation.

03 • Culture is not translation

Users emphasized local linguistic and cultural knowledge when adapting messages for communities.

What this changed

- Trust and verification became product priorities.
- Human-in-the-loop workflows were preserved.
- Personas and journey maps kept future decisions tied to lived workflow realities.
- Concept-test findings informed prototype iteration.

Representative user signal

“As long as we get to review it and there’s citations for factual information... I’m comfortable with it.”

Public-health participant

Research did not end in a report. It changed what the team built next.

Product strategy

- Persona-driven product requirements
- Now / Next / Later prioritization
- Feature distinction between Akari and VeriComms
- Value proposition grounded in user needs

Experience strategy

- User persona + empathy map
- Journey map + CX flow
- Sitemap proposal
- Critical friction and integration points

Innovation roadmap

- Iterated prototype based on concept testing
- New collaboration features to explore
- Research backlog for trust, bureaucracy, translation
- Additional testing before implementation

The strategic outcome

A broad AI concept became a more focused product proposition: an evidence-grounded, human-reviewed thought partner for public-health communication.

Using research to focus a broad mission on the audience with the clearest unmet need.

The organization needed more than “user feedback.” It needed clarity on **who to serve, what problem to own, and where to invest next.**

Research

Survey + qualitative interviews with non-U.S. citizens building careers in the U.S.

Synthesis

Personas, empathy maps, CX flow, competitive analysis, and strategic positioning.

Decision

Narrow the near-term audience and center practical career acceleration, structured support, and community.

Research reframed the offering from “support for immigrants” to a more specific value proposition.

Signals from users

- Visa and work-authorization constraints create systemic friction.
- Lack of U.S. networks and experience slows career mobility.
- Automated resume screening is hard to navigate.
- The emotional burden includes identity loss and isolation.
- Users preferred structured, interactive support over passive content.

Strategic decisions

- Prioritize career-driven immigrant women / long-term visa holders.
- Lead with practical job-search and entrepreneurship support.
- Define KPIs across community growth, usability, and professional outcomes.
- Develop a research backlog to validate future expansion.
- Align website messaging to the clarified mission and audience.

Research became a mechanism for saying *not yet* to broad expansion — and *yes* to a sharper, higher-value audience strategy.

Treating workshops as a live research environment for emerging behavior.

300+

professionals trained across education and workforce settings

Repeated exposure to real users revealed how people interpret, resist, trust, and operationalize generative AI — often differently from what they say they want.

Research loop

Observe: questions, hesitation, workarounds, misconceptions

Measure: surveys, confidence, adoption barriers, learning outcomes

Adapt: curriculum, examples, tools, and workflow recommendations

Re-test: watch what changes in the next cohort

Studying what people do when identity, belonging, and institutions collide.

Research design

- 11 in-depth interviews
- Participant observation and field notes
- Iterative inductive + deductive coding
- Analytic memos and theory-guided synthesis
- Focus on identity, recognition, legitimacy, power, empathy, and participation

Why it matters for design research

Products live inside cultural systems. This work trained me to notice the invisible rules behind behavior: who feels recognized, what counts as legitimate participation, when people self-censor, and how institutions quietly define who belongs.

The goal is not just to describe behavior — but to understand the social conditions producing it.

A researcher who can move between **field depth** and **strategic action**.

Ambiguity

Comfortable entering fuzzy problem spaces and defining what actually needs to be learned.

Culture

Deep training in intercultural communication, identity, meaning, power, and social systems.

Innovation

Experience researching emerging AI behavior where norms and mental models are still forming.

Activation

Translate evidence into product requirements, frameworks, stories, workshops, and decisions.

Selected tools

- Figma
- FigJam
- Dovetail
- Miro
- NVivo
- Qualtrics
- SPSS
- Canva
- ChatGPT
- Claude
- Gemini
- NotebookLM

Domains

- AI / emerging tech
- Public health
- Education
- Culture + identity
- Community systems
- Digital behavior

LET'S BUILD THE RIGHT THING

Good research does more than explain people. It changes the decision.

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Focus

Generative research • Ethnography • Emerging technology • Research synthesis • Strategic frameworks
• Insight activation