

Welcome!

The Dimensions of Fidelity

A different way of thinking about prototyping





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What is a prototype?



**A deliberate tool created to test and understand
a specific problem and its related user needs**

**A prototype is an
interrogation tool,
and should be used
to learn something**



Too often, designers fall into the High-Fidelity Trap,

portraying prototypes as visually polished, realistic appearing screens or coded artefacts.

As a result, we build beautiful looking solutions that are not focussed on testing the *right* problems.

There are **two**
important
aspects to
improving the
way we **prototype**



Expanding our definition and language around fidelity

It is not a singular linear scale, but rather has several dimensions



Using our testing or learning goal to determine the usage of the different dimensions

The Five Dimensions of Fidelity



- 1 Visual refinement**
- 2 Breadth of functionality**
- 3 Depth of functionality**
- 4 Richness of interactivity**
- 5 Richness of data or content**

1

Visual refinement

Refers to the **visual aspects of the prototype**

Are elements hand-drawn?

Are components represented by blocks or other abstracted elements?

Is the prototype fully styled?

How realistic does the visual aspect of the design look?

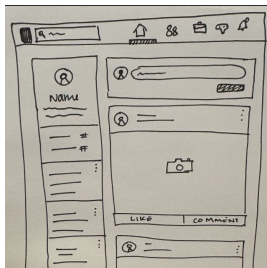
1

Visual refinement

LOW

HIGH

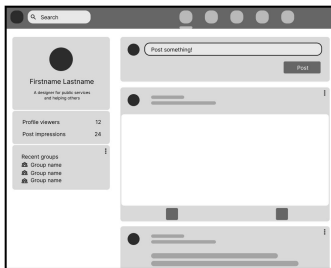
Hand drawn
sketches



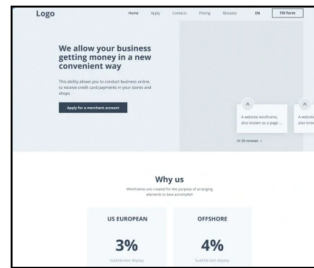
“Blocked”
wireframes



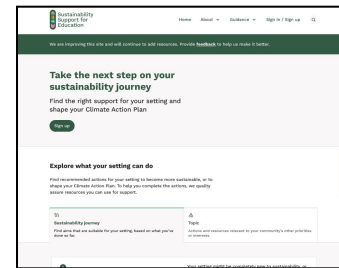
Mixed
wireframes



Semi-
realistic



Fully styled
designs



2

Breadth of functionality

Refers to **how many functions or features** are represented

How many of all the possible functions that could be provided are represented?

Are there points where a user may attempt to use something that is non-functional?

3

Depth of functionality

Refers to the **level of detail of each interaction, feature, or sequence** represented

How far can a user proceed through a particular flow? Are some steps skipped?

3

Depth of functionality

LOW

HIGH

Existence of the task is represented, with no user flow represented (ex. A button or link)

A few major steps of the task are represented

Multiple paths of the task are addressed, skipping some steps

Most steps and paths of the task are represented

Task has a complete path, with all steps and variations addressed

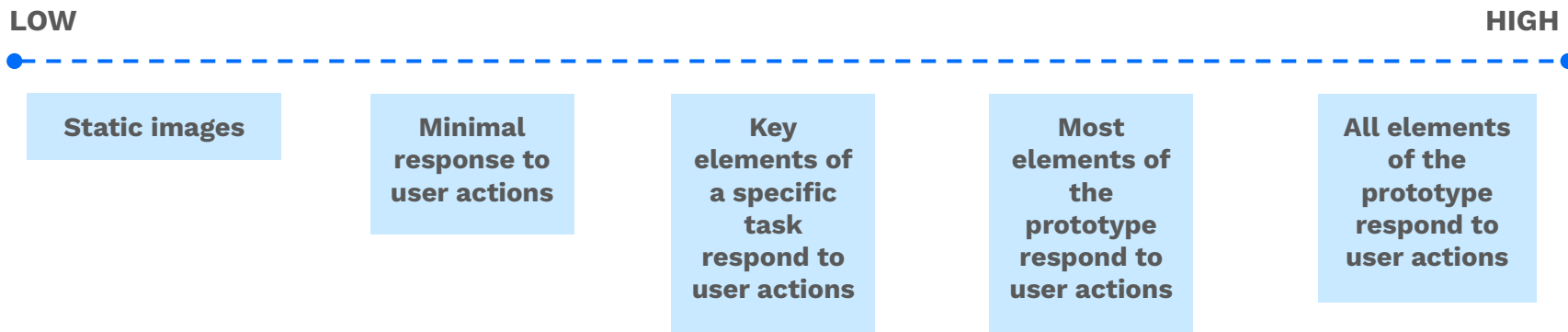
Richness of interactivity

Refers to the **level of interactivity and responsiveness** of the elements represented

Do they have transitions or different states?
Do they respond to user inputs?
Are they static?

4

Richness of interactivity



5

Richness of data or content

Refers to the **representativeness of real world data or content**

Are you using filler or dummy text?

Are you using dummy data that is representative of real data?

Where legally and ethically appropriate, are you actually using real world data?

5

Richness of data or content

LOW

HIGH

Content blocks



Labels or
iconography,
with content
blocks

Name



Description



Dummy or
filler text

£££

Heading name

+44 #####

#####

Dummy data
that is
representative
of real data

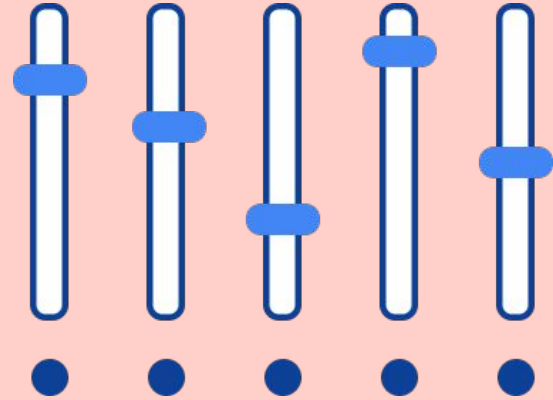
Fake names, fake
addresses, etc. that
use correct
formatting and
realistic data

Real world
data

Real finalised
content or actual
data (where legally
and ethically
possible – no PII)

The power of mixing fidelities

Not all five dimensions need
to be at the same level!



PUTTING THE DIMENSIONS
INTO PRACTICE

How do I choose the dimensions for a prototype?

- 1 What is the core question you are trying to answer?
- 2 What is your riskiest assumption?
- 3 How much time or resource do you have for this prototype?

Now dial in your dimensions

Dimension	Level	Why?
Visual refinement	☐ L ☐ M ☐ H	Are we testing the core logic? Are visuals important to our goal?
Breadth of functionality	☐ L ☐ M ☐ H	Does the user need to explore the whole app, or just one specific flow or feature?
Depth of functionality	☐ L ☐ M ☐ H	Are we testing the “happy path” or complex edge cases?
Richness of interactivity	☐ L ☐ M ☐ H	Are animations or states critical to the way the user moves through a task, or are clicks enough?
Richness of data/content	☐ L ☐ M ☐ H	Will dummy data break the user’s focus? Do they need to see real data?

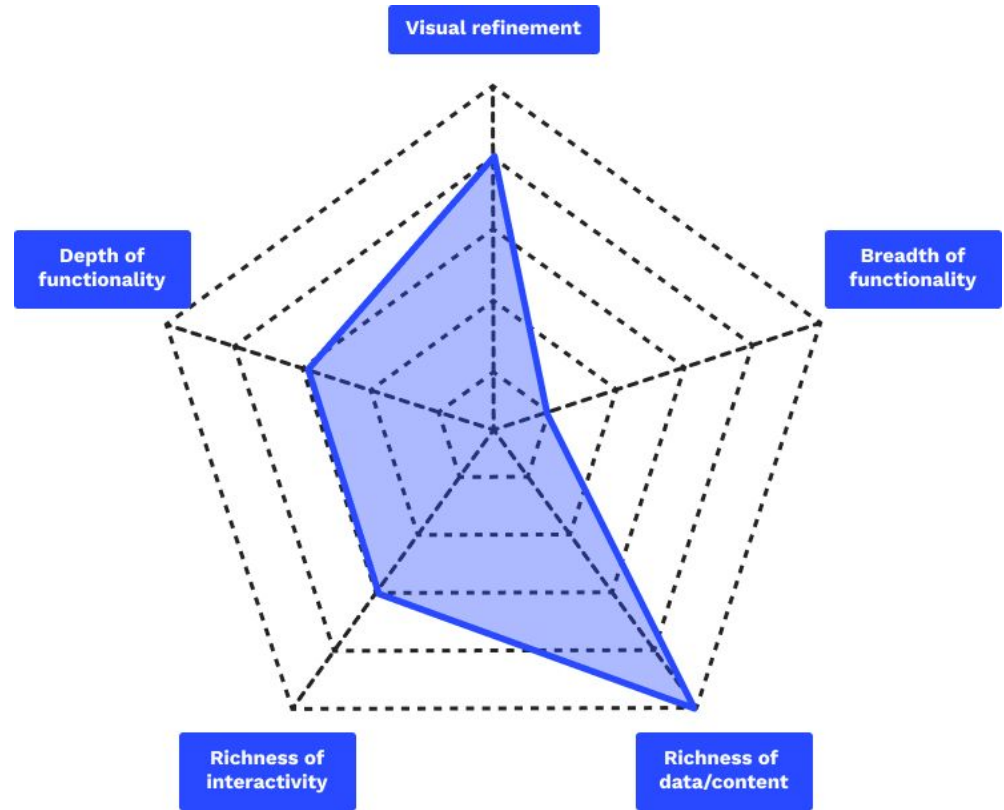
**Now let's look at some
examples...**

GOAL

Understand if users find the **steps of the task reasonable** and the **information to be accurate and useful**

METHOD

Detailed wireframes that **represent a few key steps** of a task, using **real data and content**

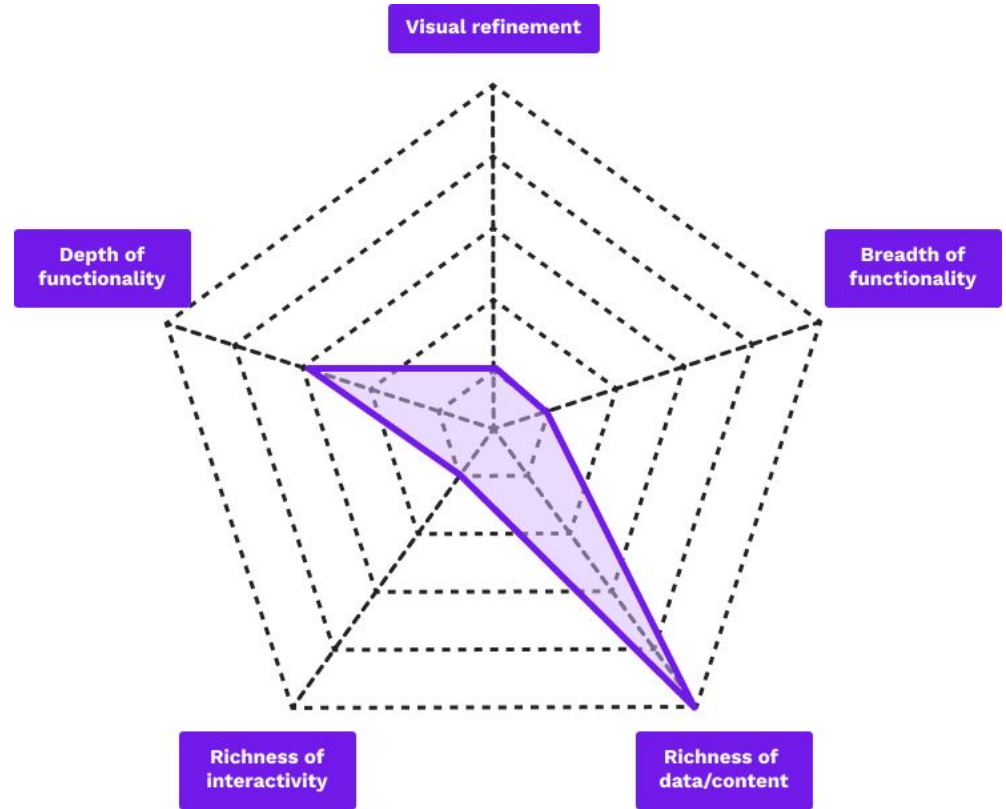


GOAL

Understand if **the content** written for technical documentation is **clear, understandable and actionable**

METHOD

Real content formatted in a **Word document** for testing
(when a Word document is not the intended format for final delivery)

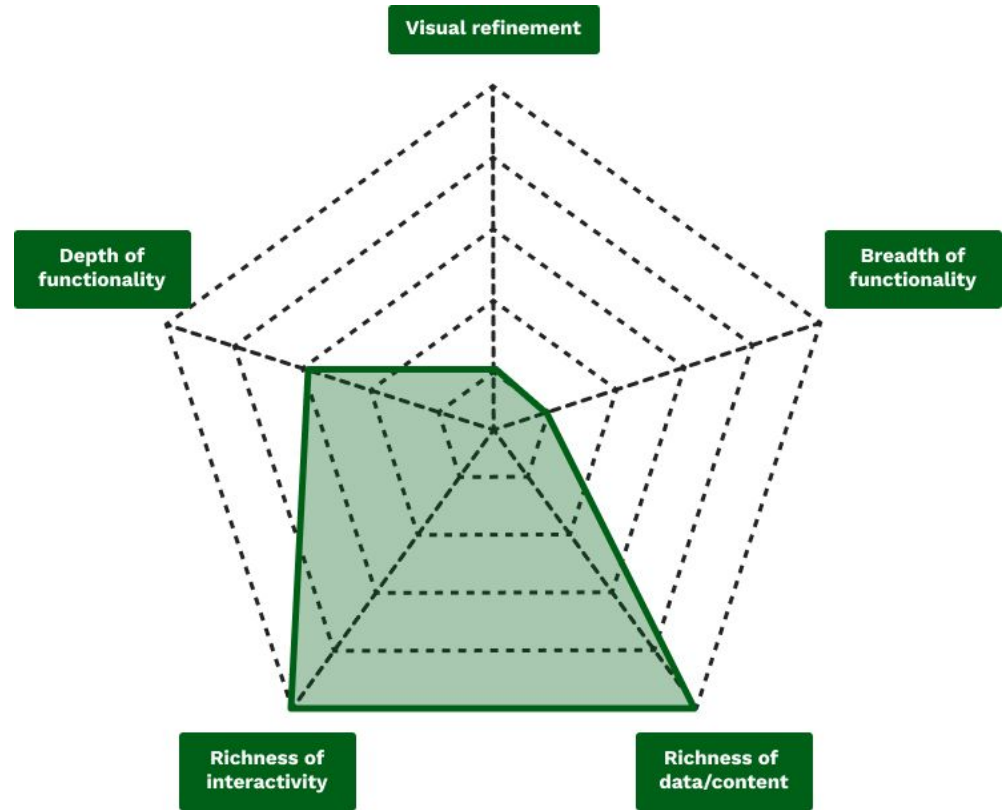


GOAL

Understand how a mobile messaging or notification system **fits into a user's day-to-day routine** and if it would be well-received

METHOD

Utilising **Whatsapp to manually send “notifications”** to users with **real notification content**



BEFORE WE GO...

Some final things to keep in mind



Is any dimension set to high just because it is your default setting?



If you lower the fidelity of one dimension, can you spend the time saved in another to get feedback that better meets your goal?



Based on my selected levels, do I need to prepare stakeholders or users for?

Thank you!



Further reading: Breaking the fidelity barrier - [request a copy here](#)