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An Evaluative Framework for Legal Design Outcomes

Glen Byrne[*]

Abstract

Relying on existing literature and discussion, this article explains legal design as 'human-centred design in the context of law'. The article then distinguishes between the methodological understanding of this statement and the evaluative understanding of this statement. The former focuses on the input and practice of legal design and is the subject of most legal design discussions. The article makes the argument that the evaluative understanding is less discussed but is nonetheless important. This understanding relates to legal design's outcomes, and the article argues that a shared understanding of the outcomes of legal design benefits it in practice. The article then dissects the definitional statement of 'human-centred design in the context of law' as: (1) design as problem-solving; (2) human-centredness, assessed through function, usability and perception; and (3) application within the context of law. Drawing from various relevant theories and models, the evaluative framework offers a structured way to assess whether a legal outcome is meaningfully 'human-centred design' in law, even when full design methodologies are not used. The article explains how this evaluative approach can accommodate flexibility in methodologies, support clearer disciplinary boundaries, enable reflective practice and promote legal innovation in a way that remains grounded in legal legitimacy. It concludes by acknowledging the framework's limitations, noting that the proposal may help shape and define legal design as a concept, and proposing an empirical next step on structuring legal design outcomes.

Keywords: human-centred design, evaluative framework, legal design outcomes, function, usability

1. Introduction

'Legal design' is still a nascent field of law and legal innovation (Hagan, 2020, p. 4; Le Gall, 2021, p. 28) and subject to different interpretations (Imperiale, 2025, p. 6). Nonetheless, its value has been increasingly recognised across legal contexts, from private sector businesses to public institutions (Bazzi, 2021). As awareness of legal design grows and literature increasingly explores its methodological approaches, the concept itself remains "fuzzy" or "ephemeral" (Brunschwig, 2021, p. 180; Perry-Kessaris, 2019, p. 187). This article argues that such vagueness stems from a lack of critical analysis of what legal design seeks to achieve. The current focus has primarily been on what legal design looks like in practice. Instead, this article turns to what the products of these practices ought to achieve. This focus on outcome, rather than method, seeks to provide a connective tissue between the myriad ways and means of

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[*] Simmons & Simmons LLP. glen.robert.byrne@gmail.com

practicing legal design, and, therefore, will support the field of legal design in avoiding conceptual fragmentation, friction with legalistic principles, and limited endorsement in both legal and design disciplines.

First, this article looks at the existing literature and discourse in legal design and attempts to find a commonality in position. While legal design is pluralistic and evolving, by distilling a range of explanations of legal design the article intends to capture the prevalent current understanding of legal design: "legal design is human-centred design in the context of law".

Then, the article analyses this understanding of legal design in order to develop an evaluative framework which can be used to reflect on legal design outcomes, provide flexibility to legal design practices and more effectively delineate the contours of legal design as a field. Finally, this article will present the framework succinctly and address some of the limitations of its practical use.

The framework is intended to act as a lens through which we can assess and discuss legal design outcomes. This is complementary to a practice-orientated (or, 'methodological') explanation of legal design, which is focused on legal design as a set of tools and applied methods. An understanding of legal design that is outcome-focused and evaluative allows for flexibility in practice, inclusive of variations in the legal design methodologies where they meet outlined criteria.

2. Explaining legal design

2.1 Human-centred design in the context of law

Many legal design authors have explained legal design by reference to "human-centred design" (Santuber & Edelman, 2022, p. 2). Hagan, one of the first proponents of legal design as a discipline, describes it as 'the marriage of a human-centred design approach to the challenges and structures of the legal system' (Hagan, 2020, p. 3), and Davis as 'the application of human-centred design principles in the practice of law' (Davis, 2021, p. 39). The Legal Design Alliance (a community of legal design authors and practitioners) explains legal design as the application of 'human-centred design to the world of law' (Legal Design Alliance, n.d.).

There are three key, recurring elements consistent in explanations of legal design in its current understanding – legal design has: a foundation in design; a commitment to human-centredness; and an application within the legal context. These recurring dimensions form the basis for the abstractive explanation advanced in this article:

"Legal design is human-centred design in the context of law."

This explanation is intended to encapsulate the current prevailing understanding of legal design in both theory and practice. While there may be instances where the term is applied differently, such outliers fall outside the scope of this article because they do not represent the majority understanding (for example, '*environment*-centred design in the context of law'). Attempting to accommodate every variation obfuscates the meaning and boundaries of legal design – 'If everything is legal design, then nothing is legal design' (Imperiale, 2025, p. 7). If legal design evolves toward one of these outliers, any such shift in focus should be made consciously and deliberately. This is explored further in section 7.3 It helps define legal design practice.

2.2 Two distinct modes of explanation

Deeper explanations of legal design tend to focus on the methodology of legal design rather than its outcomes. Legal design is: 'an approach with three main sets of resources – process, mindsets, and mechanics – for legal professionals to use' (Hagan, n.d.); 'the use of design

methods, tools and processes when applied to the legal sector' (Allbon, 2024, p. 24); 'multiple practices and studies concerned with the creation of novel – or the redesign of existing – legal related socio-technical systems (people, processes and technology) with a purpose driven by a public service bounded by agreed upon values such as access to justice, and the rule of law' (Santuber & Krawietz, 2021, p. 93). These methodological explanations are useful for exploring the processes and tools involved in legal design – like co-creation, user input, participatory methods – recognised as the 'heart' of legal design (Hagan, 2020, p. 6).

What remains underdeveloped is an explanation that complements the methodological understanding, which would enable us to assess if the output of a legal design process meaningfully achieves legal design objectives (Brunschwig, 2021, p. 180). This would further help to define legal design in concept. As explained in section 4.1 Function, we often define something by its principal purpose(s). While the depth of this point is not fully explored in this article, a more robust understanding of the outcomes sought through legal design methods can assist in an understanding of legal design as a concept.

However, there is no unified statement of the outcomes that legal design seeks to achieve. Some authors refer to legal design's purpose of making 'legal products, services, and systems more straightforward, engaging, and user-friendly' (Legal Design Alliance, n.d.); some refer to its purpose as 'making the legal system more accessible, understandable and usable' (Ducato & Strowel, 2021, p. 16); or 'to make legal systems more accessible, understandable, and user friendly' (Imperiale, 2025, p. 6); and others state that 'legal design ought, if anything, to be about improving efficiency' (Perry-Kessaris, 2019, p. 11). These explanations are similar, but not unified, and in a sector in which semantic differences can hold significant consequence, it is important to seek a shared understanding.

Furthermore, a shared purposeful understanding could provide coherence in delineating the conceptual boundaries of legal design. An evaluative framework for legal design would empower practitioners to engage more rigorously with the concept of legal design and more clearly communicate its distinctiveness within the broader landscape of legal innovation.

We can view 'legal design' in two complementary ways:

- Methodological: Legal design as the application of design methods within legal contexts. This includes process-based tools, techniques and practices associated with design-thinking or designerly ways of working. The focus is on legal design as input.

- Evaluative: Legal design as a conceptual purpose or quality. This refers to whether a legal design output or solution aligns with the outcomes of legal design and whether it effectively meets pre-determined human-centred design attributes within the legal context. The focus is on legal design as output.

Both modes of explanation are valuable. The methodological understanding offers the tools and practices to create change; the evaluative understanding ensures that these methods are oriented toward clear, meaningful outcomes. The interrelationship between the two can be utilised throughout the legal design process to evaluate, iterate, and reevaluate the legal design process in order to achieve objectives. This is explored further in section 7.1.

2.3 Elements of the legal design explanation

"Legal design is human-centred[2] design[1] in the context of law[3]."

This explanation comprises three key elements:

1. a foundation in design;

2. a commitment to human-centredness; and

3. an application within the legal context.

This explanation applies to both the prevailing methodological and evaluative understandings of legal design. What follows is a dissection of these elements in turn, with the aim of clarifying their individual meanings and their significance within an evaluative framework for legal design. A deeper understanding of these elements is intended to help practitioners and theorists determine when and how legal design is meaningfully achieved by reference to shared criteria for legal design outcomes.

This is not the first proposal of evaluative criteria for legal design outcomes. Hagan has proposed a set of criteria that could be used to evaluate legal design prototypes and outputs: usability, procedural justice, engagement, legal capability, resolution, administrative burden (Hagan, 2020, p. 14). This article will show that these criteria are captured in the proposed evaluative framework, further explained where applicable. Hagan has recognised that more work is needed to develop a standardised set of metrics for legal design evaluation. While the framework presented in this article does not fully define such metrics, it is intended to serve as a foundation upon which more concrete and consistent evaluative metrics can be developed.

3. What is meant by 'design'?

Typically, 'design' is associated with creativity, aesthetics, or visual style. This association stems largely from fields that are explicitly labelled as design, such as graphic design, product design, interior design and architectural design. But the concept of design reaches beyond these creative industries. The term 'design' has spread into a growing number of other domains and fields (Buchanan, 1992, p. 5). In this sense, design is not focused narrowly on visual appearance or artistic expression but is instead about embracing a certain mode of thinking (Cross, 2001, p. 49). The increasing use of the term across different domains and fields suggests that these design practices share a characteristic approach even where they are not traditionally associated with 'visual' design. There is something more fundamental that makes a practice 'designerly'.

3.1 Design as problem-solving

While design is a broad concept to define, design theorist Herbert Simon has described it as "changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon, 1996, p. 55), underscoring its transformative nature. This view has become foundational in design studies, marking design as a purposeful activity that extends beyond aesthetics. Nigel Cross describes design as a distinct form of constructive cognition – a 'designerly way of knowing' that is 'solution-focused' and tackles 'ill-defined problems' (Cross, 1982). These perspectives support a broader, modern approach that understands 'design' as a concept of problem-solving using certain practices (Hernandez et al., 2017).

In the context of legal design, Hagan similarly describes 'design' as a means of solving problems: 'Both the lawyerly focus and designerly focus share a core similarity: to strategically improve people's outcomes in a system, to solve complex problems, to be in service' (Hagan, 2020, p. 4). For the purposes of an evaluative framework for legal design, we can understand 'design' as a structured movement from a current or undesired situation to a preferred one. The fundamental element that makes a discipline or concept 'designerly' is its capacity to identify problems and develop solutions. This problem-solving focus is a defining feature of design across disciplines.

3.2 Orders of design

How design develops solutions is context-dependent. Richard Buchanan's four 'orders' of design (Buchanan, 1992) are intended to provide a heuristic device for the types of solutions that design disciplines can provide:

1. Signs and symbols: Focusing on communication, for example: graphic design

2. Material objects: Focusing on physical objects, for example: industrial design

3. Actions: Focusing on user interaction with a design, for example: UX/UI and service design

4. Systems and institutions: Focusing on systemic structure and social environments, for example: social innovation and organisational design

These four orders of design offer useful categories for understanding the scope of legal design practice, particularly in highlighting the need for an evaluative framework alongside methodological approaches. Legal design may operate at the level of first-order solutions – for example, by redesigning legal court forms to enhance clarity and accessibility for readers.[1] It may also operate at up to fourth-order challenges, such as reimagining the structure and delivery of justice systems through a human-centred design approach.[2] While some orders are more commonly relevant to legal design than others (communication, service design), the 'ordering' of design approaches is useful when considering the context of law in which legal design acts. While methodology may vary across these orders, the work can remain recognisably 'legal design'. This continuity is grounded in a more purposeful understanding of legal design, one that can be articulated and assessed through an evaluative framework.

3.3 Design is not 'human-centred'

The concept of design is not inherently human-centred. While many instances of design involve human needs and preferences, this is not an essential feature of the concept or practice of design. Problems can arise in contexts that are not human-based, or design can be used to produce solutions that do not prioritise human users: "life-centred design" is a design practice that de-centres humans, considering the design of all living beings that can be affected by a design solution (Tomitsch et al., 2024). Don Norman recently has taken a broader, more holistic approach to human-centred design, coining "humanity-centred design" for design solutions with stronger emphasis on sustainability, society and the environment (Interaction Design Foundation, 2021). In future, these more holistic design approaches may become the focus of legal design. Currently, however, the prevalent understanding of legal design is as a form of 'human'-centred design.

Human-centred design adopts a broader perspective than 'user-centred' design, considering the needs and experiences of all human stakeholders (or, "extreme" users) involved in or affected by the design (IDEO.org, 2015; International Organization for Standardization, 2019). By contrast, 'user-centred' design typically focuses on the end-user of a product or solution (Steen et al., 2004). However, for the purposes of this article, references to 'users' are intended to encompass all human users of a design, not just the end-user.

'Human-centred' therefore represents a particular orientation of design. It is a way of approaching problem-solving that explicitly prioritises the needs, experiences and values of people. It cannot be assumed that all good design is human-centred. Rather, human-centred

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[1] For example, more visually-designed court forms to help guide court users (Stanford Legal Design Lab, 2021).
[2] For example, the US Department of Justice's Office for Access to Justice exploring how to use human-centred design to improve access to justice in the US legal system (Slogeris & Lopez, 2024).

design must be recognised as a deliberate and distinctive form of design. In order to evaluate whether a design is human-centred, it is necessary to examine the particular features of 'human-centredness'. The following section explores these features (or, 'attributes') and considers how they contribute to an evaluative framework for human-centred design in the context of law.

4. What is meant by 'human-centred'?

Having established that human-centredness is not inherent to all design, the next step is to examine what specifically characterises a design as 'human-centred'. The human-centredness of a design is what guides its direction. If a solution fails to sufficiently prioritise identified human needs, behaviours and experiences, it is unlikely to be considered an example of human-centred design. Because human-centredness informs the outcome of a design, it can provide a metric for evaluation. By identifying the properties that make a design 'human-centred', we can develop a clearer framework for assessing the quality and purpose of a design outcome.

The focus on human-centredness is fundamental to the objective of legal design. It appears frequently in definitions and discussions of practice and purpose. It is often explained by reference to the human-centred nature of design tools and processes that are used in the practice of legal design, where users are active contributors in the design process and provide insights that inform early-stage developments. This methodological understanding of human-centred design is intimately connected with 'design thinking', an active process of designing (Berger-Walliser et al., 2017, p. 356). But there has been little dedicated analysis of how the term can be used as a metric to evaluate the outcomes of these processes – how can we determine whether a legal design output is 'human-centred'?

Distinguishable interpretations of 'legal design' in our definition are drawn from the distinguishable interpretations of 'human-centred'. We can understand 'human-centred' in terms of design processes (methodologically), and we can understand 'human-centred' in terms of design outcomes (evaluatively). This distinction is beneficial in practice: interpretations of human-centred design processes vary, and so the use of a human-centred process does not guarantee that the design outcome will meet an independent standard of 'human-centredness' (Sankowski & Krause, 2023). Instead, using human-centred as a standard of judgement can enable us to reflect on 'human-centred' processes and tools and determine if the output is sufficiently 'human-centred'.

This distinction between the methodology of 'human-centred' design and the evaluative attribute of 'human-centredness' has been recognised by Sankowski and Krause. They describe two interpretations: first, as a design approach in which information is collected from or with users during the development process; second, as a mindset (valuing human needs) and a lens for evaluation. Predictably, their research indicates that human-centred methodologies correlate with more human-centred outcomes as assessed by user groups.

The distinction is helpful. The former interpretation concerns how a solution is created by reference to human-centred techniques, whereas the latter interpretation considers whether a particular outcome possesses the quality of being human-centred ('human-centredness'). We can use the latter interpretation of human-centred design as a standard of judgement to assess the extent to which it addresses human needs, preferences and goals. This standard or metric can form the basis of an evaluative framework for human-centredness, and by extension, legal design outcomes.

Some explanations of human-centred design provide some clarity on the attributes of human-centredness in design. For example, ISO defines human-centred design as the creation of systems that are 'usable and useful' (International Organization for Standardization, 2019). Norman (speaking then about user-centred design, but later adopting human-centred design) described it as a philosophy concerned with the needs and interests of users, with a particular emphasis on 'making products usable and understandable' (Norman, 2013). Sankowski and Krause propose a metric assessing usability, accessibility, user experience and avoidance of use-related harm. These attributes can be considered determinable outcomes of human-centredness – if the output does not have these attributes, it is not sufficiently human-centred. However, different authors and practitioners across and within different design disciplines offer different factors for human-centredness: usefulness, usability, understandability, desirability, efficiency, satisfaction, and more (Zhang & Dong, 2009). There is no unified standard for measuring human-centredness, even within legal design.

In order to assess 'human-centredness', it is necessary to identify component attributes of human-centredness. This article proposes that human-centred design can be evaluated in terms of three component attributes: function, usability and perception. A design can be considered human-centred when it works as intended (function), when it can be used effectively by those for whom it is intended (usability), and when it is received, emotionally and sensorily, as intended by its intended users (perception).

Each of these three attributes will be considered in the following sections, to provide a clearer understanding of how they contribute to a human-centred approach within legal design. These three attributes of human-centredness align closely with Patrick Jordan's hierarchy of consumer needs (Jordan, 2000): functionality, usability and pleasure. Jordan's model suggests that good customer design must first ensure functionality, then support ease of use, and finally offer pleasurable or meaningful experiences. Jordan's hierarchical structure could also be applied to our attributes of human-centredness. However, Jordan's model is consumer- and product-focused, whereas we are dissecting human-centredness with reference to legal design, where the users cannot be equated with consumers in the commercial or retail space.

Nonetheless, Jordan's hierarchical structure offers a useful parallel for evaluating the layered dimensions of human experience in legal contexts (Curtotti et al.,2015, p. 456). The evaluative framework we are proposing here can be used to assess legal design outputs for reliability and accuracy (function); ease-of-use, accessibility and user-friendliness (usability); and emotional or psychological resonance with users (perception).

4.1 Function

The first proposed core attribute of human-centred design is function. Function refers to whether something works as intended. When we create, construct or devise something to address a particular problem, we assign it at least one function. A design can be considered functional if it performs as expected and achieves its intended purpose(s) (Interaction Design Foundation, 2020; Jordan, 2000, p. 6).

Function is a unifying characteristic between the forms that an object can take. It is such an essential attribute of an object that it is often a basis on which we define the object (Grabner et al., 2011). Psychologist Albert Michotte described functional relations as giving 'the things around us their significance, since it is by coming to know what things do that we learn what they are' and '[w]hat they are for us is much more than their shape, their size, and their colour; it is above all what they are capable of doing, or what can be done by means of them' (Michotte, 2017, p. 4).

Our understanding about an object's intended function informs our understanding of what the object is: "a coffee [cup] is capable of containing liquids because that is what the designer intended" (Kelemen & Carey, 2007, p. 214). While objects can have different actual functions (for example, using a coffee cup to hold pencils) the meaning underscoring the design of the object is to achieve an intended function (to hold coffee, and holding pencils was not the reason it came into existence). Research shows that users will discern an object's identity by its intended function over factors like its appearance or form (Kelemen & Carey, 2007, p. 215).

This article proposes function as the foundational attribute of human-centred design. Jordan similarly places function at the base of his hierarchy of user needs, illustrating its importance in design. Katerina Kamprani's work effectively illustrates how the role of function shapes our perception of human-centredness in design (Kamprani, n.d.). Kamprani's deliberately dysfunctional everyday objects demonstrate how the absence of function leads us to perceive a design as lacking human-centredness.

Function not only relates to objects, but to all forms of design. If the design cannot achieve the problem-solving purpose for humans for which it was developed, then it is not sufficiently functional. If a design is not sufficiently functional, it cannot meet the primary needs of human users. Function is therefore a necessary consideration in evaluating whether a design is human-centred.

For example, in the legal context, a contract document must be able to communicate the rules that apply in a set of circumstances to the parties who would be bound or affected by those rules. This is one of the primary functions of the document. If it fails to communicate these rules by, for example, not containing all the rules that one or more parties believe applies, or if it applies to an entirely different form of agreement, then it is not sufficiently functional. If it cannot function, it cannot meet user needs and it cannot solve identified problems. In this situation, it cannot be considered a human-centred form of legal communication.

4.2 Usability

The second attribute of human-centredness is usability. While function addresses whether a design works, usability considers how people interact with it. Function and usability have been shown to be highly correlated in design (Han et al., 2021): 'Having appropriate functionality is a prerequisite of usability, but it does not guarantee usability' (Jordan, 2000, p. 7). But, while function is concerned with whether a design or solution achieves its primary purpose(s) absent a thorough consideration of the user, usability focuses on the user's interaction with the design. This interaction is shaped by a number of factors, including the physical or social environment, the temporal setting, the user's expectations or prior experiences, and more. In response to these variables, designers may adjust, add or remove features of the design to improve usability.

It is acknowledged that usability is a complex area, and efforts to define it are challenging: 'Attempts to derive a clear and crisp definition of usability can be aptly compared to attempts to nail a blob of Jell-O to the wall' (Gray & Salzman, 1998, p. 242). It is nonetheless a focal point of 'human-centredness' in design: IDEO refers to human-centred design as whether something is 'useful, usable and desirable' (Zhang & Dong, 2009, p. 2); Norman explains human-centred design as the quality of being 'usable and useful' (Interaction Design Foundation, 2022); and in the context of legal design, Hagan suggests 'the usability of a new innovation is a central criterion' (Hagan, 2020, p. 12).

Usability cannot be easily measured (Lewis, 2014). Attempting to propose a single metric for evaluating usability across all types of design, or even within legal design, is beyond the scope of this article. However, this article tries to offer some insight into how usability is

distinguishable from function and perception as an attribute of human-centred design, and, therefore, what legal designers can look out for when interpreting legal design outcomes.

Usability is shaped by the diversity of users and contexts in which the design is used. Designers may develop a solution for a prototypical user, but a more thorough consideration of usability will take into account variations in user abilities, experiences and environments. Therefore, when we are considering aspects of 'accessibility' or 'ease-of-use', we are considering usability. But usability is also affected by utilisation of the solution. In this respect, designers consider how well a solution achieves its purpose (or, function), referring to terms like 'effectiveness' and 'usefulness'. The ISO defines usability as the 'extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use' (International Organization for Standardization, 2019) – a definition that straddles across dimensions of usability. The following explanation of the ISO's definition of usability is a helpful framework: 'effectiveness' represents the accuracy and completeness with which users achieve certain goals; 'efficiency' is the relation between the accuracy and completeness with which users achieve certain goals and the resources expended in achieving them; 'satisfaction' is the user's comfort with and positive attitudes towards the use of the solution (Kulyk et al., 2007, p. 17).

Understanding these factors of usability involves interrogating the user experience. Designers must apply empathy and ask a range of questions, for example: Are users able to complete the task without errors (effectiveness)? Do users understand how to use the interface without external help (efficiency)? Does it take a long time for users to reach the solution (efficiency)? Do the users feel intuitively comfortable using the solution (satisfaction)? Answers to these questions are often gathered through participatory, ethnographic and co-creative methods in the development of a solution. Information gathered from these interactions informs and feeds back into the design to ensure it is more usable, and, consequently, more human-centred.

Continuing an earlier example, we can see usability factors affecting the design of an everyday object: a coffee cup. The coffee cup should be able to retain heat to keep the coffee warm, therefore it is typically made from ceramic. It should allow the user to lift the cup without burning their hand; therefore a coffee cup will often incorporate a handle. These are usability features of a coffee cup in a domestic context. However, when we consider the usability of a coffee cup on-the-go, these usability features are no longer beneficial to the user and factors of effectives, efficiency and satisfaction are reconsidered: ceramic is too heavy and delicate, and handles are not convenient when transporting a coffee cup in a travel bag. So, travel coffee cups incorporate different materials and features to meet the changed usability needs and preferences of the user in that particular context. In both cases, the core function of the coffee cup remains the same, to hold hot liquid (coffee) for drinking, but the usability features vary based on factors relating to the users' needs, expectations and their environment.

Usability is not limited to physical object design. Considering usability is important when considering human-centredness in legal design outcomes. 'Usability' in this article is not only similar to Hagan's criterion of "usability" for prototype evaluation, but it also encapsulates "legal capability" and "administrative burden" (Hagan, 2020, p. 14). For example, if the user of an official legislation website is trying to identify the law applicable to a specific situation, but the website fails to consolidate statutes or present them in an accessible format, the task becomes unnecessarily time-consuming, inefficient (affecting efficiency and satisfaction) and, for some, effectively impossible (impacting effectiveness). Poor information architecture, lack of clarity and lack of accessibility features undermine usability, legal capability and administrative ease, creating barriers for many users. This low usability can be frustrating for a

range of different users: legal practitioners, laypeople and civil servants.[3] Conversely, high usability in a design output contributes to a more human-centred design.

4.3 Perception

The third attribute of human-centred design is perception. This refers to the way a design is experienced and interpreted by its intended users or audience, by reference to emotional and sensory reactions. Perception also concerns whether the design is suited to its context, both in purpose and in form, as judged by the user.

The perceived quality or appropriateness of a solution can have a significant influence on how it is received. In visual design, elements such as colour, typography and layout can influence how users interpret and engage with content (Peak et al., 2014). These features can be used to draw attention, communicate tone and influence mood. In object design, certain materials or shapes might be used because of the response they intend to evoke in the user. Designers tailor the expected emotional and sensory stimulus of a design to create the intended user perception.

Perception is intended to be understood more broadly than aesthetics, as the latter is a subset of the former. Aesthetics typically refers to beauty or stylistic appeal, whereas perception includes any intended emotional or sensory response. This can include intended responses of indifference, alertness or discomfort. For example, the design of a warning notice should prioritise visibility and urgency rather than visual appeal, and, in such cases, a less 'aesthetically pleasing' design may be more effective and more appropriate to its purpose.

Perception has an impact on usability, as users' understanding of usability is further shaped by how they perceive its use. This phenomenon is known as the "aesthetic-usability effect", where visually appealing designs are often perceived as more usable than they actually are (Norman, 2004). However, perception and usability remain distinct concepts. Jordan argues that "usability approaches" to measure a product's emotional response in the consumer is insufficient, because of the unique personalities of individuals that cannot be accounted for in a usability framework (Jordan, 2000). Perception is inherently subjective, dictated by individual preferences, expectations, past experiences and cultural norms. While designers cannot fully control or account for these variables, they should consider them insofar as possible. Designing for users involves engaging in empathetic practices that allow the designer to better understand the perspective of the intended user group. A well-designed outcome is one that anticipates how it will be perceived and works to ensure that perception aligns with the intended use.

While perception is a key attribute of human-centred design, it is more difficult to measure than functionality or usability because it deals with subjective, individual experiences, which is less determinable than functionality or usability. Norman's concept of "emotional design" offers a model for understanding perception. He argues that users evaluate products on three levels: (1) the visceral (immediate sensory reaction), (2) the behavioural (usability and interaction), and (3) the reflective (meaning and personal significance) (Norman, 2013). These layers shape how a design is experienced, remembered and trusted. Designers can assess perception by asking questions about how a design solution meets each of the levels: (1) What does (or, would) the user feel when presented with this design? (2) Does the user 'feel' like the solution is intuitive and easy to use (which is different from whether it is, in fact, easy to use)? (3) Does it hold a deeper meaning for the user (lifestyle, beliefs, or aesthetic sensibilities)?

In legal design, these levels of emotional design can meaningfully affect a user's perception of a solution. For example, receipt of a court summons can be an emotionally-charged event. If a recipient (the user) receives a court summons that is intimidating or bureaucratically dense, it

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[3] A case study for this: Irish Legal Blog, 2018

may exacerbate negative emotional responses, which can affect user judgement: (1) if the summons is visually and textually dense, it can trigger a negative visceral reaction from the user; (2) if the user believes it is structurally complex and unclear (vague next steps, jargonistic language), it can trigger a negative behavioural reaction; and, (3) if it fails to provide answers to the user's legal questions in a meaningful way, it can trigger a negative reflective reaction, such as worsening their confidence in interacting with the legal parties, and their sense of faith in the rule of law. Perception furthermore encapsulates Hagan's evaluative criteria of: 'engagement' (effect on people's willingness to engage with legal tasks), an instance of 'behavioural' emotional response; and 'procedural justice' (sense of fairness, transparency), an instance of 'reflective' emotional response (Hagan, 2020).

Perception is a key consideration within human-centred design in all contexts, complementing both function and usability. It contributes to the overall human-centredness of a design, offering benefits beyond technical performance and practical use. Feedback and user insights gathered throughout the design process help designers anticipate how users will perceive and experience the design, enabling informed adjustments and refinements. Resultingly, a design solution that works well (function), is easy to use and useful (usability), and is received positively by users (perception) is more likely to be considered human-centred.

5. What is meant by 'the context of law'?

The third dimension of our definition of legal design currently is 'the context of law'. This article does not attempt to define what law 'is' – a complex jurisprudential task. Instead, it argues that, for the purposes of legal design, the context of law should be understood broadly yet systemically, encompassing the structures, institutions and environments in which legal interactions occur.

Law may be considered a normative system shaped by abstract principles and codified rules,[4] not merely experienced through documents, processes, or interactions. But, the focus of legal design is on user interactions, and these interactions typically occur within the context of law as a system. For the purposes of legal design, this 'system' is inclusive of 'doctrine, jurisprudence, decisions, social norms, contractual provisions, policies' (Legal Design Alliance, n.d.). In practice, law regulates our actions in society and is developed and enforced by human institutions. Its systemisation is a social, human construct, with people and institutions creating, developing and enforcing rules on human behaviours (Santuber et al., 2019, p. 49; Perry-Kessaris, 2019, p. 11). Interactions with the legal system by humans can be seen as a form of user interaction, in which individuals engage with the law to achieve a particular purpose.

'User interactions' with the law refer not only to the formal structures of justice systems and legal institutions, but also to the many informal or routine ways that individuals encounter legal information, obligations or services. These user interactions can cover a wide range of 'legal' activities: agreeing to online terms and conditions, participating in litigation, consulting a legal professional, studying legislation, or seeking guidance from public institutions. In all of these situations, people are using the law, either directly or indirectly, to achieve an objective, and success requires moving through systemised processes.

The 'users' of law vary widely in terms of their background, legal literacy, social roles and personal circumstances. Some users are legal professionals, while others may have no prior experience of legal systems. This diversity of legal users results in a diversity of user needs,

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[4] There are many legal theorists who have discussed this, notably: Kelsen, 1967; Hart, 1994

preferences and expectations. It is important that when designing legal solutions, this diversity in users is meaningfully considered.

In practice, the law is often not designed in a meaningfully considerate, empathetic way for those that may be most affected. For example, legislation is often drafted for a narrow audience of parliamentarians and judiciary, even though its effect is much wider than on these user groups (Curtotti et al., 2015). The existing system of formal and informal legal interactions are built to achieve a function but are not designed with a human-centred focus on usability and perception for the layperson. For example, the function of a set of terms of service may be to inform users of their rights and responsibilities relating to a service. Yet these terms are often dense, inaccessible and poorly presented. They may technically fulfil their function but do so in a way that lacks usability and is negatively perceived by the consumer. As a result, those most affected by the legal outcomes may find the legal contractual system confusing, inaccessible or alienating. Further barriers in law, like esoteric language, high litigation costs and long delays in court systems reinforce the perception of law as opaque and exclusionary. If we view legal interactions through the lens of the evaluative framework for human-centred design, focusing on problem-solving, function, usability and perception, we can identify and assess the areas in which the law fails to be human-centred. Legal design seeks to correct this through the application of human-centred design within the context of law.

Applying Buchanan's 'four orders of design' model can help us understand how to assess human-centred design in the context of law. A 'legal interaction' can occur as any of the four orders: improving written and visual communication of legal text as first order legal design;[5] building better legal physical or digital environments as second order legal design;[6] developing legal processes to be more effective and efficient as third order legal design;[7] and applying legal design to create more inclusive, iterative and user-centred public policies or institutions can be considered fourth order legal design.[8] Legal design can have a role to play in problem-solving legal interactions from a micro to a macro level. Furthermore, legal design methodology encourages multidisciplinary problem solving, so the subject matter of legal design can be wide ranging, from digital legal processes to physical environments. In a broad view, legal design acts as a 'network' between systems, 'facilitating the interaction between the human being, the normative, institutional social process and the Law' (Santuber et al., 2019, p. 52), and therefore the outcomes of its approach are just as important as the methods of its approach to these systems and institutions.

Because we are viewing law in a broad, systemic sense, legal design has a role to play in both the private and public legal sector. In the private sector, legal design can benefit professionals who use the system to contract, litigate and conduct business (Hagan, 2020, p. 4). Design-thinking methodologies offer structured ways to consider user needs and test solutions. However, these methodologies may not always be fully available, may take different forms, or may be only partially adopted. In these cases, the evaluative framework for legal design is valuable. It allows for legal services to be assessed based on whether they offer solutions that solve a problem, are functional, usable and positively perceived by their users, even when a 'full' legal design methodology cannot be applied. Furthermore, an evaluative framework provides a means of assessing the human-centred quality of a solution between diverse stakeholder groups, including employees, clients, suppliers and leadership.

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[5] For example: Haapio & Passera, 2013
[6] For example: Al Haider & Stănescu, 2020
[7] For example: Hagan, 2017
[8] For example: Kimbell, 2015

Legal design has an important role within the public sector. There are many legal design studies into means of applying legal design to improve the public legal sector for its users.[9] A more human-centred public legal sector can provide a justice system that is fairer and more equitable. For example, the courts system is an area of the public legal sector where legal design principles can provide many benefits for court users. Current court environments tend to be shaped by procedural and institutional needs, such as tradition, hierarchy or legal formality, while user needs are often overlooked. From the initial application process to the final delivery of a judgment, users face a wide range of interactions with legal documents, officials and environments – interactions in which user needs can be neglected. Though the system may function in providing an end result, these neglected needs include accessibility, waiting times and ease of navigation (usability), as well as broader concerns around fairness, clarity and trustworthiness (perception). Research has shown that when human-centred design methodology is applied to the courts system, it can result in a public legal service that is seen as more trustworthy by its users, and as a result, the system has improved legitimacy and improved compliance with legal sentencing and associated outcomes (Karpen & Senova, 2021).

The 'context of law' element of our explanation of legal design is to be understood broadly. The evaluative framework proposed in this article is intended to be applied across the different design orders that can arise in through different legal interactions, and support design methodologies in reaching a more human-centred solution and a better system of law.

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[9] See, for example, work done by the Legal Design Lab: Legal Design Lab, n.d.

6. Summarising the evaluative framework for legal design outcomes

A summary of this evaluative framework of 'human-centred design in the context of law' is set out in this table. While the order below reflects designer's typical approach in a legal design project, the designer can review each element non-linearly, returning to different elements as appropriate.

Table 1 – a summary of the evaluative framework for legal design outcomes
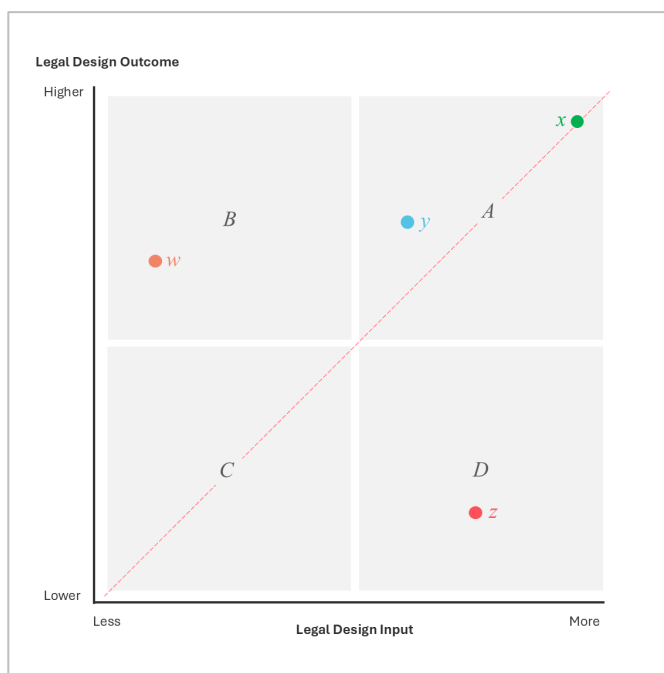
Element	Outcome	Useful models	Factors to Evaluate	Example Guiding Questions	Example Application
Context of Law	Human interactions with the law	–	Relevance to legal structures, institutions, rules or consequences	How does this design respond to, align with, or challenge existing legal process, rules or institutions?	An organisation's retail customer terms & conditions agreement is a legal document, therefore exists in the context of law
Design	Problem-solving	Orders of design (Buchanan, 1992)	Identification of a problem, identification of the order of design, ability to move from a worse state to a better state	What specific problem is being addressed? How clearly can a solution be defined?	The identified problem is that customers are not reading and understanding the terms they are signing in the terms & conditions. A solution would create something more engaging and understandable.
Human-Centred	Function	–	Purpose, reliability, accuracy	Does the solution effectively and reliably achieve its intended legal purpose?	The output should maintain the accuracy of the legal rules and consequences of the terms & conditions for each party.
	Usability	Usability factors (International Organization for Standardization, 2019) (Kulyk et al.,2007)	Accessibility, usefulness, ease-of-use, adaptable to user profiles	Can the diverse range of users understand, use, and apply the solution?	The output should be written in an understandable language and presented in an easy-to-use, accessible format based on diverse user profiles.
	Perception	Levels of emotional design (Norman, 2013)	Emotional response, visual design, contextual appropriateness	How is the solution perceived by its users: does it feel trustworthy, empowering, contextually appropriate?	The output should communicate the terms in a friendly tone and visual form and in line with the organisation's brand, building better customer trust.

7. The value of an evaluative framework for legal design outcomes

7.1 It complements the methodological understanding of legal design

The evaluative framework proposed in this article is intended to be complementary, rather than antagonistic, to the prevailing methodological understanding of legal design. With a unified evaluative framework, we can more coherently assess the outputs and outcomes of legal design methodologies. Moreover, this evaluative framework can be applied throughout the process of a legal design methodology. For example, we can assess a legal design prototype through the rubric proposed here – an earlier stage in the process than the final legal design 'solution'. This provides two benefits: prospectively, the process can be reorientated to better meet criteria like 'usability' if lacking in the prototype; retrospectively, legal design practitioners can evaluate the methodologies used to develop the prototype by their ability to achieve the legal design criteria, and therefore the methodologies themselves can be iterated upon and evolve.

Fig. 1 – diagram of the correlation of the methodological (input) and evaluative (outcome) understandings of legal design

The relationship between the input and outcome dimensions of legal design is shown in Fig. 1. This diagram is intended to be illustrative, rather than prescriptive, about the relationship.

The X-axis represents legal design input: the methodology of legal design. Input includes practices such as co-creation, ethnographic study, surveys and user workshops. The X-axis moves from "less" to "more" legal design input – projects can involve few or no methods, or involve methods that are wide, deep, more diverse, better matched to the problem, or other more effective improvements.

The Y-axis represents legal design outcomes: the criteria of an evaluative understanding of legal design. Outcomes can range from "low" to "high" – from a low level to a high level of human-centred design.

The diagram is intended to be indicative of how legal design input (methodology) and legal design outcome correlate. We would expect, as shown by the dashed line, that as we put more into a legal design project (in the form of human-centred design methods), the output will have a higher level of intended human-centred design outcomes (Sankowski & Krause, 2023).

It is important to note that this article does not attempt to dissect 'input' – there are articles discussing the methodologies, practices and processes of legal design. A scale of 'less' to 'more' methodology is, explicitly or implicitly, the subject of those discussions. Therefore, the input scale is not necessarily measured by a quantitative 'more' – it may be that the legal design input is deeper, wider, more diverse, more holistic, more heavily resourced, or just more intentional. The point illustrated by Fig. 1 is that the 'more' that goes into legal design practice, the more likely the product of that practice will meet higher standards of legal design outcomes. The evaluative framework herein provides a structure for the standard of outcome.

The points *w*, *x*, *y* and *z* represent different types of legal design outputs. These 'outputs' are the more tangible products of legal design methods, such as iterations, prototypes, or finalised solutions:

- *x* represents the ideal legal design project. Many diverse and well-suited legal design methodologies have been applied effectively, and the output solves an identified problem in a way that is functional, usable and perceived well by users.

- *y* represents a project for which legal design inputs were more limited in amount or maturity (perhaps constrained by resources, time or access to users), but which nonetheless produced an output with a good level of human-centred design outcomes.

- *z*, conversely, represents a project that had more legal design input but produced a disappointing level of human-centred design. This is rare, but where it can happen it prompts reflection as to input, as discussed further below.

- *w* represents a project with very little legal design input that nonetheless produced an output that was somewhat human-centred. For example, a lawyer drafting a contract may apply empathy and clear structure, resulting in something more user-friendly, even if only a minimal set of methods was used. The output (the contract) delivered human-centred outcomes.

A key difference between *w* and *y* lies in the amount and maturity of input on the X-axis. In *w*, input is minimal; in *y*, input is present but limited, and typically better targeted or executed. Both can yield positive outcomes, but *y* may also be able to be consistent and repeatable because more elements of legal design methodology are in place.

It is also worth noting that Fig. 1 acknowledges that a level of human-centred design may be achieved without intentional legal design. Imperiale notes that in workshops, commonly people respond 'Oh, but we're already doing legal design. We just didn't know it.' (Imperiale, 2025, p. 7): two projects can occupy the same coordinates even if one explicitly applies legal design methods and another arrives at a similar result unconsciously; what matters for placement are the observable inputs and outcomes. Ultimately, it is likely that 'more' legal design input – in this case, more intentional legal design – would lead to higher levels of human-centred design outcomes. But as in our example of the lawyer drafting a contract with empathy and clarity, they may be ignorant of legal design yet achieve positive legal design outcomes.

Four key, broad areas can be identified in Fig. 1:

- A: This is the "full expression" of legal design. It represents legal design as a discipline as it is currently understood. Legal design practitioners apply effective, diverse and insightful methods to produce human-centred solutions in the context of law, where 'more' effective input correlates with 'higher' levels of human-centred design. The discipline of legal design involves the application of human-centred design principles, often through participatory methodologies and designerly ways of working. Where such methods are used to produce outcomes that also meet the evaluative criteria, we can describe this as a full expression of legal design in both practice and concept.

- B: This zone indicates legal solutions produced with low legal design input that nonetheless meet the evaluative criteria. The evaluative approach here is deliberately outcome-oriented: it recognises human-centred qualities wherever they are meaningfully realised, regardless of the volume or breadth of methods used to produce them.

- C: This is the zone in which much of the legal sector currently sits, where little to no concern is given to design methodologies and, correlatively, outcomes are often not fully human-centred.

- D: This zone is relevant for reflective purposes. When, for example, co-creation methods are used to develop a prototype, but the prototype is evaluated to have a low level of human-centred design, this is a cause for reflection on the methods used. It may help identify issues with the methodology – for example, insufficient participant diversity to account for different user groups' needs, inadequate iteration, or poor fit between methods and the problem. The extent to which D may need to be considered depends on the approach taken to measuring 'input'.

We would expect that as more legal design input is conducted, a higher standard of human-centred design is outputted. However, Fig. 1 also indicates that input and outcome may not always correlate in legal design. The area [A + D] represents the application of legal design input (the practice). It recognises in D, though likely seldom, that applied input may still fail to produce desired outcomes. The area [A + B], on the other hand, recognises how human-centred objectives can be achieved with substantial input, as in A, or, though less commonly, with low input, as in B. It is unlikely points will arise in the extremes of either B or D. This is because the overarching argument of legal design as a discipline – that the more effective legal design methodologies inputted, the more likely the output will be higher in human-centred centred design, and therefore, the point will fall within in zone A.

Nonetheless, Fig. 1 does illustrate how an evaluative framework is complementary to these methodologies. Without an evaluative framework with which to measure the Y-axis, legal design methods do not have a shared frame of reference or a means to evaluate their own efficacy. Therefore, this framework should provide a means of self-reflection on the way in which we practice legal design.

7.2 It creates space for flexibility and adaption

By separating the qualities of legal design from any single legal design methodology, it creates space for different practices, tools and contexts in legal design methodology. It invites designers and legal professionals to consider how well an outcome responds to human needs through attributes like functionality, usability and perception. This adaptability is particularly important in environments where traditional design methods may be difficult to fully apply. Legal professionals working under resource constraints, time pressures or institutional limitations may still produce legal design outcomes that are human-centred, even if they do not fully follow an idealised design methodology. The evaluative framework enables practitioners and designers to adapt without losing sight of the core objectives of legal design.

This also allows room for development and iteration in legal design methodology itself, giving designers tools to assess whether the outcomes from these methods are meeting legal design expectations, and if not, amending as appropriate. It enables reflective practice, which more likely occurs when an output, solution or iteration falls within zone D in Fig. 1. If a legal design fails to meet one or more of the established standards of legal design outcomes, we can interrogate why: Was the solution misaligned with user needs? Were certain users excluded from the process? Was functionality neglected in favour of perception? These questions help refine future work and support a culture of ongoing improvement.

Conversely, we can review non-conventional methods used to produce effective legal design outcomes to learn and adapt methodologies. In Fig. 1, where an output scores highly along the Y-axis, but low on the X-axis, then this provides an opportunity to learn what about how the development of the output ultimately provided a more human-centred design.

7.3 It helps define legal design practice

An evaluative framework provides clarity and a shared basis for critique, which support the continued development of legal design as a distinct and credible field. Legal design, as a nascent discipline in the legal industry, can benefit from a clearer conceptual boundary between related and similar disciplines. While the methodological explanation can distinguish legal design by reference to particular methods employed, the evaluative, purposeful explanation of legal design distinguishes the field by reference to its own aims in contrast to other fields.

While legal design is often categorised as a part of legal innovation (Hagan, 2018), from an outside perspective, the lines between the different fields of legal innovation can blur. Resulting confusion may hinder the growth of legal design by limiting understanding and engagement from external stakeholders. An evaluative framework for legal design can more clearly demarcate legal design from other areas of legal innovation.

For example, where 'legal operations' can be described as existing in order to build outcomes for efficiency, technology, and strategy to support legal teams in delivering more value, 'legal design' can be distinguished by its outcomes focused on the users, usability, emotional response, accessibility and other aforementioned factors. Both practices can exist and support one another in the same project but are distinguishable with reference to their outcomes.

This clarity is important for interdisciplinary engagement. Without a shared understanding of what legal design seeks to achieve, collaboration between designers, lawyers, technologists, and policymakers risks becoming difficult. It may be challenging to explain legal design if it cannot be differentiated by non-legal designers from other practices. The evaluative framework set out in this article hopefully allows for more focused conceptual inquiry, more coherent practice and more meaningful debate about the role and scope of legal design.

It may also bolster legal design as a discipline. As the methods of the discipline of legal design are developed, they can be assessed by reference to the evaluative framework and iterated upon. As aforementioned, the methods can be adapted and optimised (relative to different project aims) with the purpose of achieving the most human-centred design in the context of law.

A shared understanding of legal design outcomes is important for the field's evolution. This article has focused on human-centred design in law because 'for all its definitions and dimensions, one idea remains constant – legal design is a call to return to the user' (Imperiale, 2025, p. 7). This article has, however, mentioned differently-centred design theories that have emerged: humanity-centred design, life-centred design, and more. Legal design may, in the future, develop into a field of design with one of these as its outcome, instead of 'human'-centredness. But, it should do so consciously. The shift should be intentional and reasoned, so that the discipline and practice can move collectively. The alternative is legal design practitioners practicing legal design with differently-centred design methods, and as a result, the contours of legal design become blurred by its attempt to design for every stakeholder and thus losing coherence. This article does not attempt, nor should it attempt, to provide a distillation of factors that can be used as criteria for, for example, 'humanity-centred' legal design. If there is a movement toward a different focus from human-centredness, then there should be a conscious effort to explain what types of outcomes this new focus seeks to achieve if different from function, usability and perception – and that is the subject of a different article.

7.4 It can coexist with legal practice

Legal design does not enter a neutral space. It encounters a professional culture that often operates through a different mindset: legal practice tends to favour precedent, clarity and

procedural stability ('lawyerly ways'), while design methods embrace iteration, prototyping, informality and creativity in problem-solving ('designerly ways') (Doherty, 2021). There is an underlying tension between these two disciplines, where the former values tradition, but the latter embraces change. These differences can generate further dissonance when participatory or speculative design processes seem to challenge established norms or introduce perceived legal risks. Concerns about liability, consistency and professional authority may lead some legal actors to resist unfamiliar methods.

A benefit of the evaluative framework offered here is a focus on outcome rather than methodology. Demonstrating the value of a legal design solution by reference to outcomes creates an opportunity for wider understanding and buy-in from actors in the legal sector, which can encourage deeper consideration of users' experiences and design potentials. It is easier to engage across disciplines when there are shared objectives, and so different means can be negotiated and applied to achieve those objectives. It is easier to collaborate with practitioners of lawyerly ways of working when the beneficial outcomes of designerly ways of working can more easily be explained, discussed and demonstrated.

8. The limitations of an evaluative framework for legal design outcomes

8.1 A tool, not a panacea

Design practice is encouraged to be empathetic, focusing on users' needs and preferences rather than designers' own expectations and objectives. Human-centred design in the context of law can therefore act as a corrective action against decisions that may be institution-centred, technocratic or over-reliant on tradition and precedent. However, authors in design justice have pointed out that design can nonetheless reflect the values of the designer and perpetuate blind spots and power asymmetries (Costanza-Chock, 2020). This is especially at risk in the law, where these structures can be constructed by and enforced by dominant social groups. An evaluative framework for legal design must recognise its limitations: that assessing design, function, usability and perception will inherently hold the values and biases of the designers making that assessment.

The evaluative framework presented here should therefore not be seen as sufficient in itself. It offers a tool for assessing whether legal design outputs achieve legal design outcomes, but it must be complemented by critical scrutiny of who was involved in the assessment and whose needs were prioritised or overlooked. Without such scrutiny, the evaluation risks reinforcing existing biases or privileging dominant perspectives. This article has provided an evaluative framework for assessing legal design outcomes, but it does not offer methods for mitigating these potential biases. However, applying a human-centred methodology to the evaluation process itself may help avoid unintentional biases, provided that methodology is inclusive, expansive and participatory.

8.2 Finding a balance with legal principles

The tension between design and law has already been touched upon: while legal design prioritises human needs, preferences and experiences, it is important to acknowledge that legal systems are also built on principles like justice, equality before the law, impartiality and the rule of law. Legal design aims to make the legal system more human-centred by addressing the diverse needs and preferences of individual users, while the law traditionally operates from a broader societal perspective. In legal contexts, individuals may not be fully aware of the implications of certain processes or outcomes, nor if those outcomes align with their preferences due to broader societal values or legal obligations. There is a risk that overly narrow objectives of human-centredness may prioritise ease and satisfaction at the expense of legal accuracy, objectivity or justice (Doherty, 2018).

Legal design, as a discipline, must recognise and respond to these users' needs, but also exercise judgement about how they affect or are incorporated into the legal system. It could be argued further that solutions should be legal-led, rather than design-led, in order to achieve meaningful transformation and deeper engagement (Bhatnagar, 2022). For example, drafting legal contract text into more readable, vernacular language can risk simplifying the meaning of the text to the point of distortion. In this example, legal designers must be able to balance (or work with those who can help balance) the meaning of the text to be more understandable, but also as legally accurate as the original text. Legal design evaluations must be conscious of this tension and seek to humanise the law but with respect to its precise and normative nature.

As mentioned in section 7.4, an evaluative framework can be helpful in achieving a balance. A clearer explanation of legal design in outcome, not just in practice, provides legal designers with the capability to assess design choices through defined lenses, while remaining attentive to institutional, procedural and normative legal constraints. In many contexts, full legal design methodologies may not be feasible due to systemic limitations, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach (Santuber & Krawietz, 2021). Here, an evaluative framework enables designers to assess the effectiveness of an output through a human-centred lens, even when traditional design processes cannot be fully applied.

The evaluative framework should be understood as a means of ensuring that human experiences are meaningfully considered and accounted for alongside legal systemic values. For example, a redesign of court hearings might propose more private, informal sessions to enhance individual comfort. However, this could conflict with the principle that justice must be seen to be done, which requires public, in-person hearings. In this example, the evaluative framework supports designers in identifying meaningful human-centred improvements while preserving core legal values by allowing designers to reframe the legal values through the lens of a legal design evaluative framework: How can we retain the principle of justice being seen to be done, while solving the problem with respect to function, usability and perception? This structured approach helps ensure legal design remains grounded in both human experience and legal legitimacy.

9. Conclusion

The article explains legal design as 'human-centred design in the context of law', which supports both the methodological and evaluative understandings of legal design. The evaluative framework proposed here focused on the latter understanding of legal design, dissecting the elements of 'design', 'human-centred' and 'context of law'. While methodologies provide the tools and processes for change, the evaluative framework developed offers a means to assess whether legal design outcomes meaningfully solve human-centred needs in legal interactions. This evaluative framework aims to benefit the field of legal design through: structured assessment of outputs, support for different methodologies, flexibility in approach, clearer boundaries, and improved interdisciplinary collaboration. However, the framework is not without limitations: it must be applied critically, with attention to biases and institutional values, and with a balanced view of against legal norms and values.

As legal design methodologies continue to develop, it is important to have a shared understanding of what legal design is seeking to achieve. The plurality and iteration of legal design methods would benefit from conceptual clarity around the intended outcomes of those methods. Similarly, as legal design itself evolves, this evolution can occur consciously and intentionally when there is a common acknowledgement of the legal design's intended outcomes. The evaluative framework set out here intends to provide that clarity through a shared, structured understanding that has both flexibility and rigour. This shared understanding also helps define the contours of the discipline itself.

As discussed in this article, the purpose of something is often the basis on which we understand and define it (Grabner et al., 2011; Michotte, 2017). It is hoped that, in seeking to articulate the purpose of legal design practice and establish a shared understanding of its outcomes, this article contributes to a more unified understanding of legal design as a concept. Knowing what legal design means, both in method and in outcome, can help provide a foundation for defining this still-nascent field.

But, this is an initial step in analysing and structuring the outcomes of legal design. A next step would be empirical research – demonstrating these outcomes in legal design outputs consciously created through legal design methods. While empirical research would be insightful, the proposal in this article nonetheless hopefully and consequentially provides more shape to legal design in purpose, practice and discipline.

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