

# Compassionate Care in Humanitarian Settings

Using Human-Centered Design to Unleash Compassion and Create Experiences of Connection and Meaning in Rwanda



## The Challenge

Redefine Alight’s operations to make it the first humanitarian organization to systematically build compassionate care into its culture, operations, and services, and ensure that the compassionate care solutions resonate with diverse populations across geographies, cultures, and roles.

## BACKGROUND

The scope of the global humanitarian crisis is unprecedented. Over 70 million people in the world have been forcibly displaced by conflict, persecution, or natural disasters—more than any other time in recorded history.

Those who provide care to refugees and internally displaced people are drawn to the field due to their compassion for their fellow humans, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Yet, compassion is largely missing from the vocabulary, action, and values of the global humanitarian system, making it difficult for humanitarian organizations to go beyond providing basic, lifesaving services.

**“The humanitarian system – the governing bodies, guidelines, the sector as a whole – takes compassion for granted. It’s neither articulated in the humanitarian system values nor in the metrics used to measure the services delivered. Because of that, compassion gets pushed aside, sucked out of people,”** said Heather Howard, Senior Global Health Advisor at Alight.

Alight is a humanitarian organization focused on going beyond delivering survival essentials to rebuilding a life of meaning with and for the displaced. It is accomplishing this by systematically building compassion into its organizational culture and into the services it delivers through Amandi, its compassionate care initiative.

Heather, who also leads Amandi, and her team approached Medtronic to leverage the Innovation Lab’s experience in human-centered design to better understand compassion in different settings and to design ways to unleash compassionate care at all levels of the organization.

“Our clients – the refugees and internally displaced people – are people like you and me, who have encountered a difficult situation. People everywhere deserve dignity, respect, and kindness. That’s why it’s important to deliver humanitarian services and to deliver them compassionately,” said Heather.

## Our Human-Centered Approach

In this multi-phased project, the Innovation Lab used human-centered design to better understand compassion in different settings, from refugee camps in Rwanda to a head office in Minnesota, then define and refine areas of opportunity for unleashing compassionate care.

WINNER

2019

Partnership of the Year  
Medtech Insight Awards

## COLLABORATOR

Alight  
Formerly the American  
Refugee Committee (ARC)

## DEVELOPMENT PHASE

Phase 0  
Voice of the Customer

## BUSINESS QUESTIONS

How can compassion be instituted at all levels of the organization to improve outcomes for the community members, employees, and the organization?

## HCD OPPORTUNITIES

How is compassion defined in different settings?

To whom do we need to demonstrate compassion and why?

Do the compassionate ideas generated in a co-creation session resonate in the field?

## SERVICES

- Challenge Definition
- Co-Creation Workshop
- Ethnography

# Phase 1: Co-Creation Workshop

In April 2019, the partners planned and executed a co-creation workshop at Medtronic's Applied Innovation Lab in Mounds View Minnesota. Human-centered design experts from Medtronic's Innovation Lab facilitated the gathering of Alight staff from refugee camps, the central office in Rwanda, and from headquarters (Figure 1). Global experts in compassion and advocacy, as well as employees across Medtronic (IT, Medtronic Labs, and the Cardiovascular and Restorative Therapies Groups), participated as co-creators to define and refine areas of opportunity for delivering compassionate care.



FIGURE 1 | Co-creation session participants at Medtronic's Applied Innovation Lab

**“The diversity of perspectives in the co-creation session was astonishing and unlike any other session we’ve facilitated. Our participants represented diversity of circumstance, language, and experience. Having a group like that come together truly was the ideal setting for using human-centered design to innovate and create new ideas,”** said Dipanjan Chatterjee, Innovation Lab team member and Amandi co-lead.

Developing new ways to unleash compassion across geographies and cultures was a complex challenge, especially while doing so from a lab in Minneapolis and not in the field in Rwanda. Using techniques such as the “How Might We” ideation exercise, the Innovation Lab transformed the nebulous challenge into defined problems that helped frame compassionate care focus areas and facilitate the group’s thought process toward potential solutions.

As an outcome of the April 2019 workshop, the group identified four areas of opportunity to unleash compassion within the organization along with concepts to prototype and assess in the next phase of the project. The four areas were: with community members, with staff, at the central office in-country, and at a systems and organization-wide level.



FIGURE 2 | Compassion focus areas defined by the co-creation session participants

Examples of compassionate idea prototypes included:

- Understanding that many community members have low levels of literacy and putting **pictorial labels** on prescriptions to improve comprehension
- **Compassion cultivation training** – including self-compassion and care for staff
- Compassion **badges of honor** and a compassionate staff award at the in-country offices
- Prepackaging medicine and **providing group-based care** to reduce community members' waiting time and improve clinic efficiency through a lightened patient-load

Each concept originated from a shared understanding of compassion developed through each co-creator's eyes. This output would not have been possible if any group had simply brainstormed alone.

“The Innovation Lab team process was straightforward and easy to understand,” said Heather. “Even though they are the human-centered design experts, they did not tell us what they thought we should do. Rather, they displayed compassion by inviting others in and listening to their perspectives. They gave us permission to be open and facilitated the formation of those wild, bold ideas that eventually formed the basis of our prototypes. **After the co-creation session, participants told me that it was the best-facilitated event they'd ever attended.**”

# Phase 2: On-Site Ethnography in Rwanda

In phase two of the project, the Innovation Lab team traveled to the Gihembe refugee camp in Rwanda to conduct ethnographic observation, contextual inquiry, ideation, and storyboarding sessions with community members, Alight staff from Rwanda and HQ, and a diverse group of co-creators from the US and UK. The group conducted interviews with community members at service sites and in the community to understand their perspectives and experience receiving humanitarian services. The entire group engaged in activities to discover each person's concept of compassion and co-create a common definition and operating principles.

"It's so important to build solutions with the people who are impacted. Often, we find that what we think is the right answer is not even in consideration for them. Having people help create a solution that will impact them is powerful," said Mark Powell, Innovation Lab team member and Amandi co-lead.

The Innovation Lab team facilitated the diverse group of participants in processing what they learned from community interviews and began to produce ideas for how to increase compassion in the delivery of humanitarian services.

The team focused on staff and client compassion focus areas (*Figure 3*), using the human-centered design process to arrive at four areas for further prototype development:



FIGURE 3 | Staff and client compassion focus areas

In addition to these defined ideas, the immediate impact of the team's work was the message to the community members and local staff that their voices are important and that they can have influence on their own lives.

"Our goals were to create an inclusive, safe environment for the community and to come up with ideas that they can test and measure," said Mark.

"Even though we were working with translators, we constantly asked 'do you feel heard?'" When the community said yes or shook their heads in agreement, it was a memorable moment, because that's what we set out to do," said Dipanjan.



FIGURE 4 | Community members provide their perspectives on the compassionate care idea prototypes

## Our Human-Centered Approach

# Phase 3 & Beyond: The Future of the Amandi Compassionate Care Initiative

In continued partnership with the Medtronic Innovation Lab, the Alight team and co-creators will select a few prototypes to refine and test in early 2020. The testing phase includes gathering feedback and iterating on the prototypes until they best reflect the needs of the community. Alight Amandi lead Heather Howard believes in the power of human-centered design to address challenges like unleashing compassion in humanitarian settings.



FIGURE 5 | *The Amandi team gathers after a communal lunch*

Heather Howard believes in the power of human-centered design to address challenges like unleashing compassion in humanitarian settings. **"You're always going to have a better product or service when you start with the customer. By unburdening yourself of the constraints of feasibility and viability, you can truly unleash creativity."**

For more information and updates about the Amandi Compassionate Care Initiative, please visit <http://amandi.global/>

Want to know more about the Medtronic Innovation Lab?  
Contact us at [rs.innovationteam@medtronic.com](mailto:rs.innovationteam@medtronic.com)