Integrated and holistic project assessment for a library website redesign

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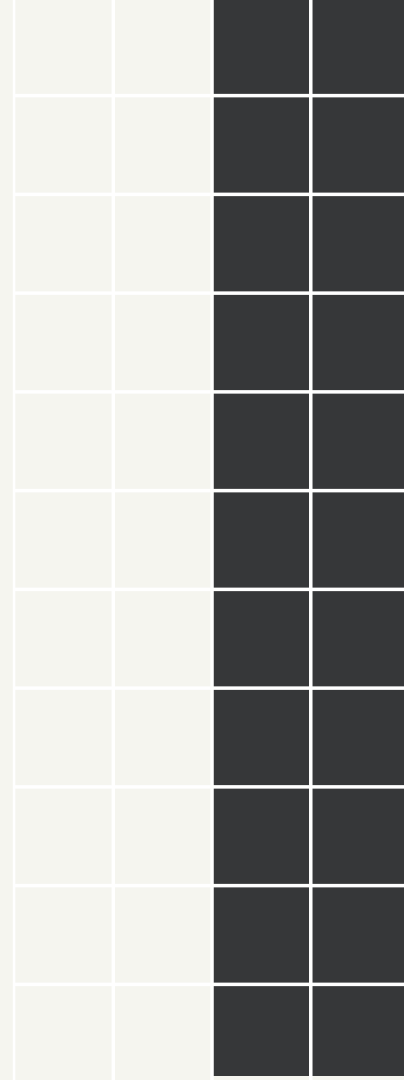
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PROJECTS.

Constant in libraries.

Valuable to assess.

Often multidimensional and do not fit into a single method.

What I'll cover

- Some context
- Assessment plan structure and examples
- Overall results
- Three lessons learned
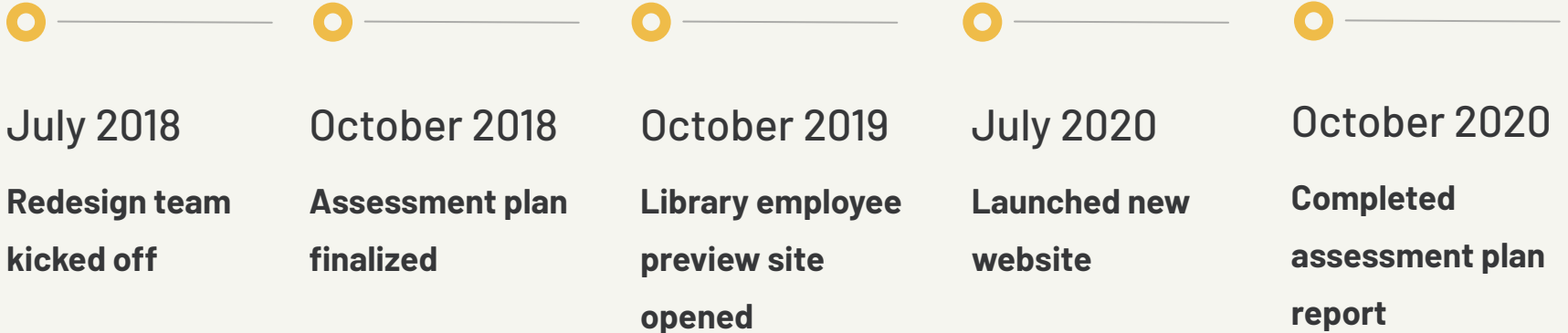
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Website redesign project

Started from scratch! That meant:

- Deciding on and building new technical infrastructure
- Researching and developing a new information architecture
- Creating all new interface designs
- Touching every page of content: edits, combining, or writing new
- Shifting our content authoring and strategy from a distributed to a centralized model

Project timeline

July 2018

Redesign team kicked off

October 2018

Assessment plan finalized

October 2019

Library employee preview site opened

July 2020

Launched new website

October 2020
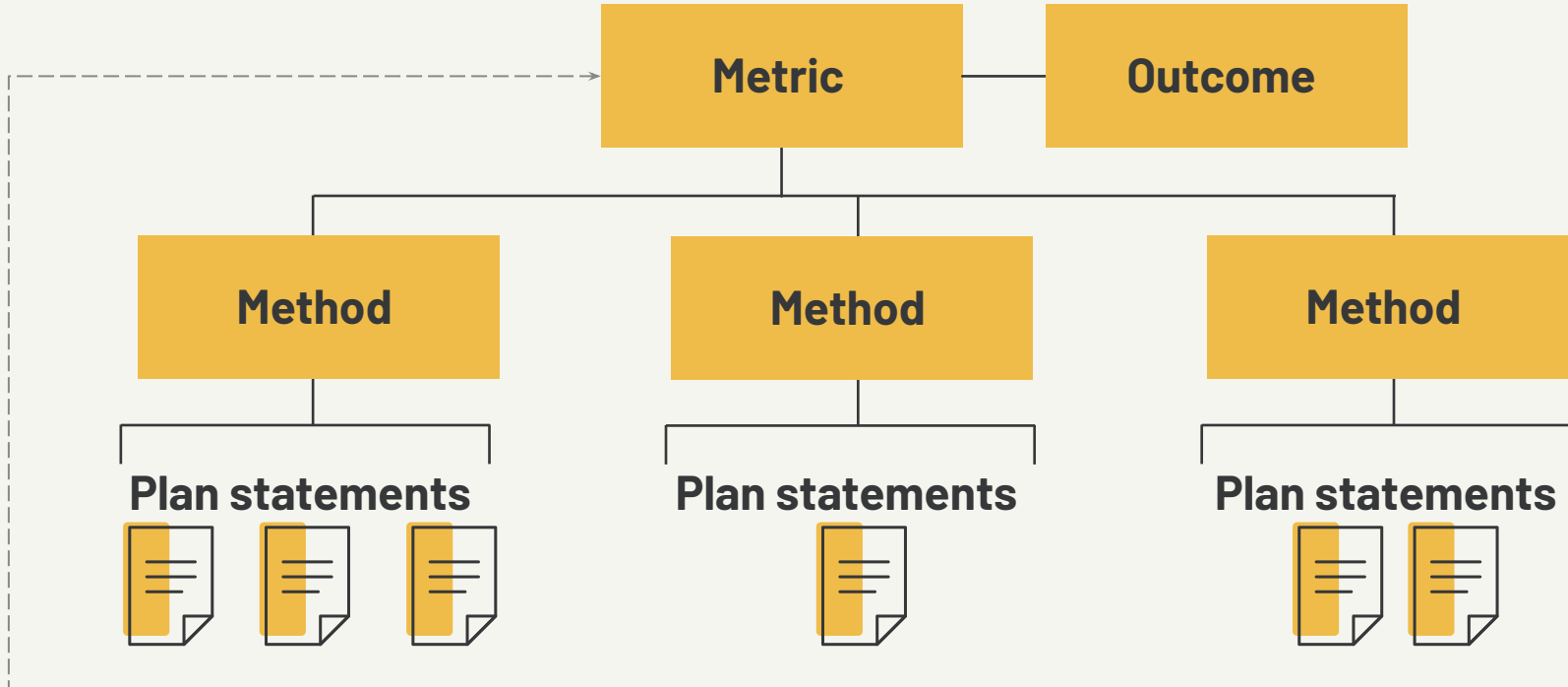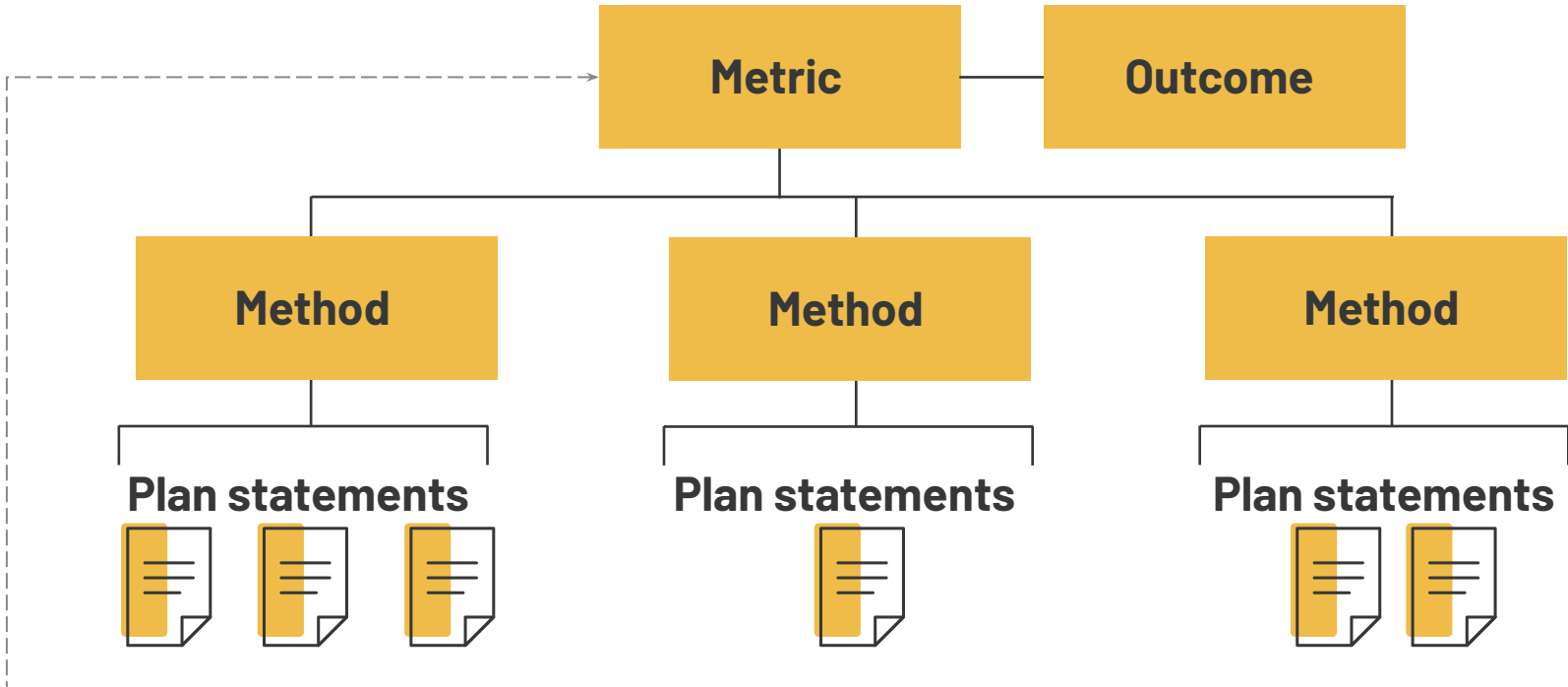
Completed assessment plan report

Seven assessment metrics

1. Usability
2. Accessibility
3. Mobile experience
4. Content authoring experience
5. Site performance
6. Project management and structure
7. Internal communication and outreach
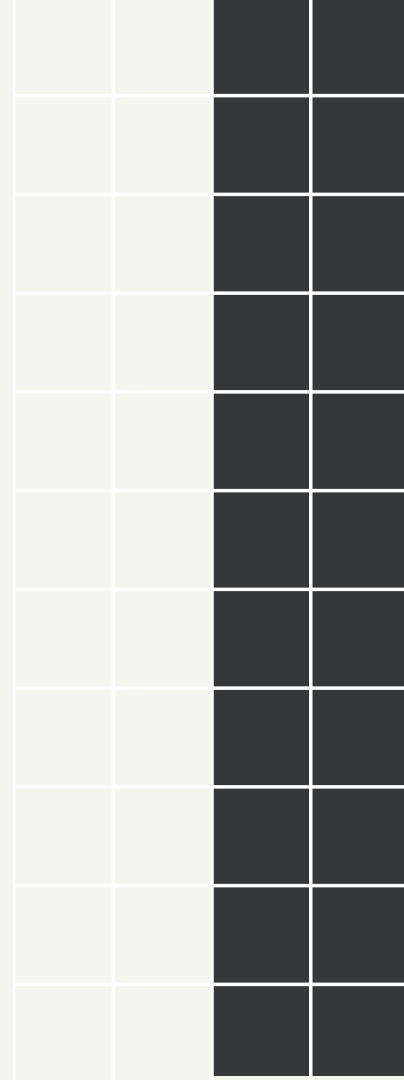
Assessment plan structure

Metric 1: Usability

Outcome: The library website has intuitive navigation, is easy to learn, and is efficient and enjoyable to use.

Methods:

1. Understand primary audiences top tasks and expectations
2. Pre and post first click testing
3. Extensively test information architecture
4. Ongoing usability testing

Metric 1: Method 1

Method 1: Understand primary audiences tops tasks and expectations

Plan statement: Conduct U-M User Priorities Survey using targeted sampling to better understand our primary audiences top tasks and expectations when using the library website.

Results:

- Survey completed in October 2018.
- Core Personas created based on these results combined with findings and insights from previous user research efforts.
- Work informed future research, testing, design, and content work.

Metric 1: Method 4

Method 4: Extensively test information architecture (IA)

Plan statements:

- Conduct closed card sort on draft content groupings to validate work and support iteration before moving on to tree testing.
- Conduct tree testing on draft IA, iterate and re-test as needed to finalize.

Results: Card sort findings informed draft IA, which we validated with tree testing. Additional card sort and tree test rounds completed on one specific site section that needed more research. Wrote findings reports for each.

Metric 7: Internal communication and outreach

Outcome: U-M Library staff were informed throughout the course of the redesign and prepared for the change when the site launched. They also felt their voices were heard throughout the process.

Metric 7: Internal communication and outreach

Methods:

1. Provide regular, timely, and relevant communication
2. Conduct a Listening Tour
3. Convene and engage with Website Redesign Champions
4. Conduct all staff surveys

Overall results

The **usability** of the website is backed by foundational user research and extensive testing.

Accessibility audit scores are excellent and best practices became ingrained within the project team.

The site works on **all screen sizes** and is built using **responsive design**, where the old site did not and was not.

Overall results (cont.)

Site performance has improved, though not within the measures we originally anticipated.

Content authoring threw us curveballs (technology stack choices changed our approach), but we were thoughtful at every step.

The project demonstrated **best practices in project management, stakeholder engagement, and internal communication**, not only in what we did, but also how we learned and adjusted throughout the project.

Sample praise

"You delivered what was needed and what you promised and did so on time and on budget. You delivered a beautiful, functional, and accessible website, and you did so in a thoughtful, user-focused, and inclusive manner."

"The collaborative and collegial process that you all coordinated is truly remarkable. Your hard work is evident in the final product. I love the new site and look forward to using and sharing it with the communities with whom I work."

Lessons learned #1

Building in assessment beginning early in the redesign project made the work feel very **intentional** and allowed us to more **seamlessly make it part of planning**.

This also meant assessment **informed decision making** along the way and increased our **confidence** in what we were creating.

Lessons learned #2

Assessment metrics and methods are varied and that's OK.

We leaned in to how nebulous many of our goals were to assess and didn't try to force formal methods where they didn't make sense.

There are lots of ways to measure success.

Lessons learned #3

Be prepared for **change** and **being wrong**. Desired outcomes might shift as you learn more and a project progresses.

Projects are far often more nuanced than a timeline or list of tasks can ever capture. It's better to acknowledge adjustments that should be made and take action then ignore them to the project's ultimate detriment.

Thank you!

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