# Psychedelic Learner Decision Tree
## *Which Psychedelic?*

Nicole Leaper, MS

**audience**  learners, practitioners, and clinicians who are curious about the therapeutic uses of psychedelics

**roles**  learning experience (LX) design, information design, user experience (UX) research, graphic design

**tools**  Lucid, Adobe InDesign

## Problem and Solution Approach

Oregon adopted Ballot Measure 109 in 2020, and is creating the nation's first regulatory framework for psilocybin services. Learners across Oregon and the world are starting a journey into an emerging subject territory that they are drawn to for personal, clinical, or therapeutic reasons. As an Oregonian and a life-long learner myself, I wanted to expand my own knowledge and assist others by adapting existing information about psychedelic medicine as a re-emerging therapeutic paradigm into a learning experience for those who are curious about therapeutic uses of psychedelics.

My solution approach was to first identify a need through creating a **point of view statement**:

*Potential psychedelic therapy learners need to understand the risks and benefits of using psychedelics because their specific situations are unique.*

Next, I posed a **guiding question** for the research and design process:

*How might we support self-directed learners exploring the psychedelic risks and benefits unique to their situation?*

## Design Process

The first challenge of the process was identifying source material that could benefit from adaptation into a learner-friendly format. Through research on Google Scholar, I selected a [peer-reviewed study containing a table of psychedelic agents with potential benefits as adjuncts to psychotherapy](#). The information was important for learners but dense. I also attended the 2022 *Horizons NW: Perspectives on Psychedelics* conference in Portland, Oregon, to check my assumptions and hear diverse ideas from leaders in the field.

## Learner Research and Concept Design

Learners drawn to this subject are curious, and often looking to engage with something new because their existing paradigms are not working. They come from many backgrounds, including religious, counseling/therapy, medical, and research. They need clear, trustworthy information in order to understand an emerging, potentially unfamiliar topic. Their common thread is one of seeking change or growth, either for themselves or others.

To better understand potential learners, I created a **collaborative empathy map** using Lucid. I envisioned building this as a team effort that could include a wide range of stakeholders.

Next, I created a **research concept table** in order to identify the data collection opportunities. In the next iteration, I expanded the table into a **low-fidelity prototype concept table** to include possible prototype opportunities.

### Psychedelic Learner Empathy Map
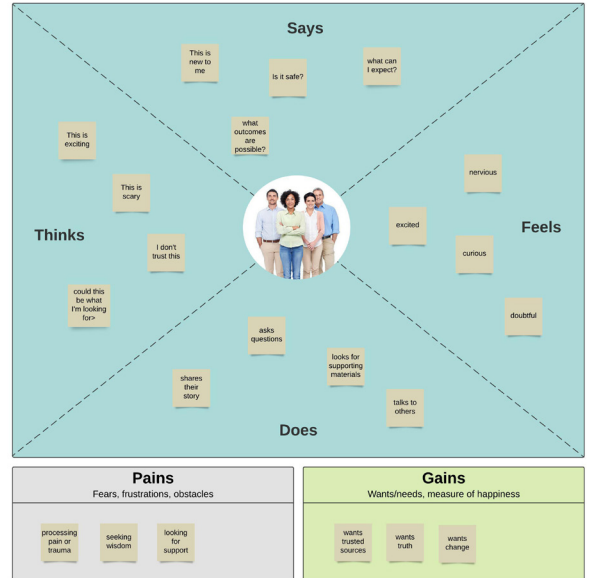


*The empathy map can be used collaboratively, with stakeholders adding their own insights as virtual "sticky notes".*

### Low Fidelity Prototype Concepts

**Design Scenario/Narrative**
Adapt existing information about psychedelic medicine as a re-emerging therapeutic paradigm into a learning experience (utilizing learning design software) for those who are curious about therapeutic uses of psychedelics. Learners are starting a journey into a new subject territory that they are drawn to, for personal, clinical, or therapeutic reasons.

| Design Questions | Learner Questions | Learner Concerns |
|---|---|---|
| *Hypothesis/Question* (problem) | What **questions** do learners have about psychedelics? | What **concerns** do learners have about psychedelics? |
| *Evidence of the Problem* (what I need to know and how I plan to use it) | Like any other drug, psychedelic substances have risks and benefits. Learners should understand these before deciding whether psychelic therapy is a good fit for them. | Psychedelics use has been illegal and underground for many years but is now being made legal and more acceptable in mainstream society. Learners may have fears or concerns based on fact or fiction. |
|  | [prototype to test] *Prototype Concept #1* **Risk/benefit decision tree** Create a visual decision tree to guide new learners about the risks and benefits specific to their situation. | [prototype to test] *Prototype Concept #2* **Common misconceptions/myths table** Create a shareable table outlining the common misconceptions and myths about psychedelics. |
| *Data collection* (how I plan to capture user research data and store data gathered) | **Generative (Strategic)** Attend support circle for new users to observe questions. Distill observations into key questions. **Formative (Design)** Focus on key questions in learning design, and assess if questions are answered during prototyping and testing. **Summative (Assess)** Survey requesting learners to submit unanswered questions after learning experience. | **Generative (Strategic)** Attend support circle for new users to observe concerns. Distill observations into key concerns. **Formative (Design)** Focus on key concerns in learning design, and assess if questions are answered during prototyping and testing. **Summative (Assess)** Prompt asking learners to draw/sketch their emotions before and after learning experience. |
|  | [prototype to decide] *Prototype Concept #3* **Questions survey** Offer list of potential questions to testers, with additional open-ended response area. Use prototype responses to generate list of questions for learning experience. [prototype to decide] *Prototype Concept #5* **Data sharing** Collect common concerns from public data sources and share with testers to validate. | [prototype to empathize] *Prototype Concept #4* **Drawing prompts** Prompt prototype testers to to draw/sketch their emotions about psychedelics. Use prototype responses to drive design of learning materials and inform design of drawing prompt inside the learning experience. |
| *Action* (how I plan to use this data as evidence for the user experience and design) | Assess if key questions have been answered sufficiently during user testing, iterate until learner testing shows positive learning outcome. Continue to collect learner feedback during learning experience, periodically reviewing, analyzing and updating learning experience. | Assess if key concerns have been addressed sufficiently during user testing, iterate until learner testing shows positive learning outcome. Continue to collect learner feedback during learning experience, periodically reviewing, analyzing and updating learning experience. |

*The prototype concept table notes potential prototype applications inside a research framework driven by design research questions, learner questions, and learner concerns.*

## Prototype

I created a **prototype concept map** to identify potential **objects**, **tasks** and **terms** for the prototype and note potential **affordances**.

Next, I designed a **high-fidelity prototype** mapping dense information from the academic article into a learner-driven visual format, which can be accessed in a self-directed or facilitated context. Ongoing prototyping will include testing the decision tree with learners and stakeholders, and continuing iteration based on feedback.
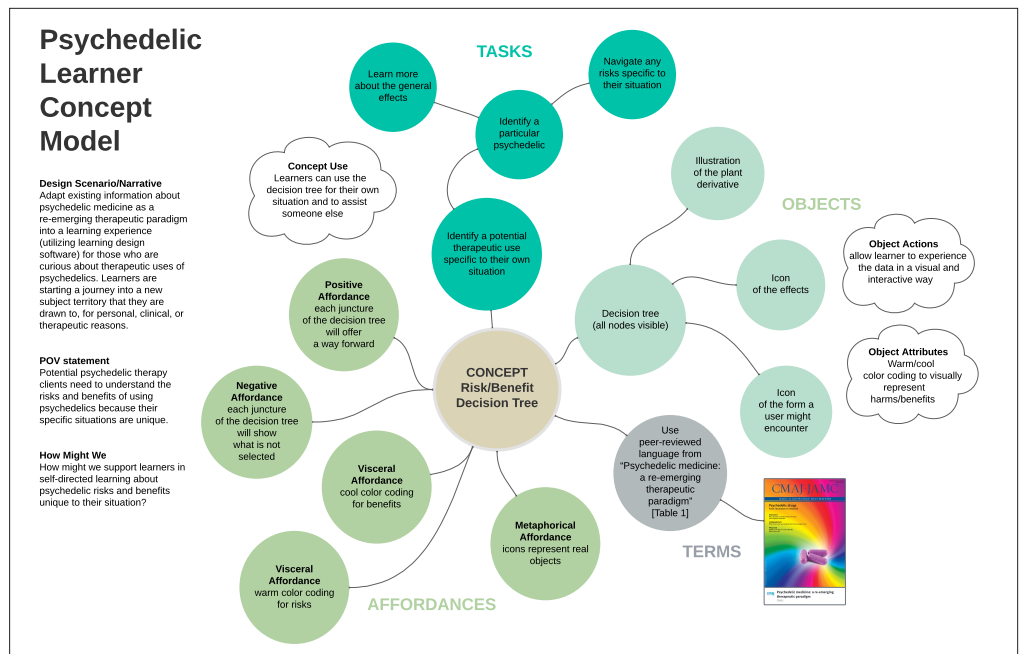
## Insights and Next Steps

A major insight that emerged from this project is how rich this subject area is for learning design. Learners are starting a journey into a new subject territory that they are drawn to for personal, clinical, or therapeutic reasons, and need **well-designed, engaging, visually-rich learning experiences** to achieve their learning goals.
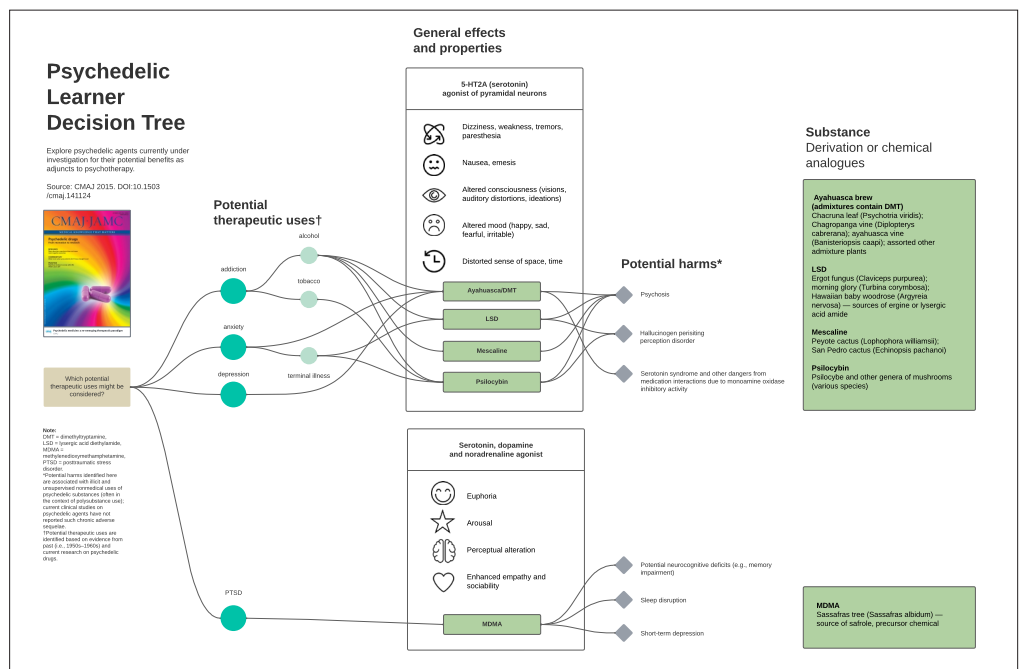
Learners in this area come from many backgrounds and experiences, so **additional research and design could offer unexpected insights** driving additional learning experience opportunities. The process Oregon is going through to legalize access to psychedelics offers many opportunities for learning materials; new research information emerges frequently on this topic.

Peer **feedback was helpful** at each stage of the iteration process, from concept through prototype. I thrive in a team environment and look forward to critical review that guides a project to improved outcomes.

The psychedelic learner

decision tree is just one potential aspect of a complete learning experience, and the concept could be applied to or updated with additional peer-reviewed research information. My research and design process revealed **a framework to guide additional learner research and prototypes**. I look forward to continuing this research and design work in collaboration with subject matter experts and learning stakeholders.



*The concept model helps to identify important prototype characteristics (tasks, objects, terms) in order to spark design discussion and work towards consensus before prototyping begins.*



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I'm an experience design director, design strategist, and learning experience (LX) designer. I hold an interdisciplinary master of science degree in information theory, information design, and business strategy, with a focus on user experience design for arts and learning environments.

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