

Current Position Description and Information

Name: Kathleen Kremer

Title: Engagement Lead and Principal User Researcher, Consumer Wellness Division

Current Affiliation: Bose Corporation

Highest Degree Obtained: Ph.D.

Field or sub-discipline (i.e., I/O Psychology, Neuroscience, Social, Clinical): Experimental Child Psychology

1. Please provide us a short description of your current position, and the work you do on a daily basis. This will be made available to the attendees on a handout as part of the webinar resources (no more than 250 words is needed):

Kathleen Kremer, Ph.D. is an Engagement Lead and Principal User Researcher in the Consumer Wellness Division at Bose Corporation. In this role, she defines and oversees qualitative and quantitative user research, technological efficacy studies, and scientific claims research focused on the design and development of products, new technologies, and services aimed at improving people's health and wellbeing.

2. In your current job, are there other titles/roles for people doing similar work at other organizations, universities, or companies? If so, what are those titles/roles?

There is a lot of variety in titles as well as where those jobs are housed in industry. This can make it at times challenging and overwhelming to find positions.

Examples of different titles include User Researcher, User Experience Researcher, Design Researcher, Human Factors Engineer, Usability Researcher or Engineer, Consumer Insights Specialist, Research Scientist, etc. Each title has a slightly different meaning but a shared skill set.

In addition, these jobs can be housed in different divisions in a company. For instance, at Bose, User Research and Design are under Design. Sometimes these roles can be under a broader research umbrella or under engineering. Consumer Insights can be under Marketing.

Finally, keep in mind that user research is not just done in industry. A lot of work is also done in other kinds of organizations, such as consulting companies and agencies, the government, nonprofit organizations, health care organizations, and even universities.

3. What skills and abilities did you learn in your training (i.e., graduate school, postdoctoral experience), do you find are most useful in your job/career?

Some important things I learned in school:

- Fundamentals of experimental design (key)

- Statistics and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Problem identification, framing, and solving
- Psychology broadly defined (key)
- Human development, including capabilities and constraints (important for design)
- Perspective taking (a defining aspect of being good at user experience – being able to take other’s perspective)
- Perseverance (which you need to get the Ph.D.)
- Communication of results, particularly writing (e.g., scientific articles, grant proposals)
- How to become an expert in things quickly and the confidence to do so
- Curiosity (not really learned but graduate students often have it and is one of the hallmarks of a good researcher)

What sets people with a psych background apart from people coming from other disciplines doing user research is (a) the strong background in research/stats as well as (b) understanding of psychology. This is really important for two reasons. First, the strong background in research means we know how to answer questions and not through studies and think critically about evidence. Second, understanding of psychology means knowing the “why” behind design. People from other backgrounds will sometimes learn certain general principles such as what text or contrast to use, yet design is contextual. For every “rule”, there are exceptions. By understanding the user and his/her needs, abilities, and constraints, you know how to truly design for the person and their context.

On the flip side, there are skills people need to learn that aren’t often taught in psych grad school:

- It’s one thing to do great research, but you also have to be able to get people to act on it in applied setting or else it isn’t useful. That includes:
 - Talking to different audiences
 - Persuasion
 - Knowing how to frame the results
 - Being able to see the broader picture
- The nuances of doing applied research – e.g., often smaller n, when to deviate from guide (but helps to know scientific research first)
- How to handle the messiness of real world research
- Moving quickly and knowing you’ve hit the law of diminishing returns (as time is money)
- Design and/or technical skills
- Knowledge of business (or government or other sectors)

Career Pathway and Past Experiences

4. **How did you get the job you are currently in? Please provide a brief history of your career path/journey. Our attendees are interested in knowing more about how one achieves a current position like yours, and what opportunities or experiences help open doors or create opportunities.**

Around midway through graduate school, I realized I eventually wanted to do applied work outside of academia. The challenge was that my doctoral program was very theoretical. It provided a great background in research and psychology but little applied experience. Most professors were

encouraging, but really didn't know at the time what kinds of positions were available and how to obtain them.

So I approached it as a research project. I did a series of internships while in graduate school in different sectors (Children's Defense Fund, Educational Testing Service, Twin Cities Public Television) which helped me both realize what I wanted and didn't want. I worked with the APA Science Directorate to come up with nonacademic career options for scientific psychologists. I also was helped in that I had relatives who had made the transition and had worked in different sectors including industry and the government so they always encouraged me to think more broadly of my skillset and how to apply it.

When searching for my first job, I originally had thought I was going to go into television research and unfortunately there just weren't positions open in that area. I had done work showing that TV and reading comprehension use similar skills, and so reframed myself as a reading comprehension expert knowing it was a heavily funded area of education at the time. This led to several offers, and ultimately I was hired as a Developmental Scientist at Educational Testing Service.

I mention this reframing because it illustrates several important points to keep in mind.

- You have much more to offer than the narrow area in which you did your thesis work – in fact you probably won't even end up doing work in that area.
- It helps to know current trends and to think broadly about how your skill set can be useful in that area to solve certain needs.
- It also helps to understand who you are and what you want – people have different career desires, and it's a personal journey.

The three full-time industry jobs I've held have been acquired three different ways – in one case through an internship, in another case (FP) through just applying to the company, and in the third case (Bose) through contacts and the position was not yet advertised. There are different ways to obtain jobs, but personal connections are often important and more so as you continue in your career.

5. If someone wanted to follow a similar career path to your own, how would you suggest going about it? Please offer specifics/examples whenever possible: (Example: Networking is key. You should join XXXX LinkedIn groups, go to XXXX Meetups and attend XXXX meetings)

- If possible, get some applied experiences in graduate school such as through internships. They build your resume and applied skills, help you figure out what you want and don't want, and foster connections. They also will help you make the transition.
- Networking is really important. There is something called the hidden job market – 85% of jobs come from networking and informational interviews. Meet people through professional organizations or just contacting them and ask them about their career and for advice. Realize that a lot of jobs opportunities are not advertised.
- Go to professional conferences if you can and attend their job fairs or go online to their job boards. For user experience, some examples are HFES, UXPA, CHI, IXDA, and EPIC.

- Target some companies that you are interested in, link to them on linkedin, and search their job boards. Look at the profiles of people who work there to see what kinds of backgrounds they hire.
- Search more general job boards such as LinkedIn, USAjobs (for government), Indeed, and Glassdoor using keywords.
- Use campus placement centers.
- Apply if it is about a 70% match – you don't have to wait for the position to be a perfect match in terms of level or skill set to apply.
- Create a portfolio of your research (you likely will be asked to give a presentation).
- Know yourself and what is important to you.
- Think outside the box in terms of what might be available – for instance, hot areas right now include data science, the IOT, and medical device development.
- Establish a presence on LinkedIn, including following companies, reading trends, receiving recommendations, searching jobs, sharing articles, etc.
- Look for jobs about 2-3 months before, as when you get it you need to be ready to take it.
- Realize a CV is not a Resume.
- Realize that interviewing is a two-way street. It's not just about competency but also cultural fit. At the same time, you are interviewing the company.
- Don't take rejection personally – it's not a bad thing. It could be that the position was already filled by an internal candidate or not a great cultural fit for who you are. Any interview is a learning experience.
- Realize you are the CEO of you. The average job tenure is 3-7 years. Stay active in the field and keep learning.

6. Are there specific resources for open positions in your career field, and if so what are they?

See above.

Another point you might want to bring up is how academia differs from applied work just as industry. Overall, there are some fundamental differences (recognizing that both environments include a range of experiences);

Academia:

- Rewards specialists – professors are promoted for being an expert in their area of study.
- The research is often aimed at increasing general knowledge and is rewarded with publications.
- The research is often empirical and done in controlled settings.
- Research learnings are freely shared with others.
- Researchers have more autonomy in terms of what they research and over their schedule.
- Academia provides more job stability through tenure.
- Researchers spend more time trying to procure funding, such as via writing grants.

Industry:

- Typically rewards at some level generalists who have broad research background and knowledge.
- The research is more often conducted to make specific business decisions, with the end stage being a tangible product or service.
- The research is not always empirical and is more often conducted in the real world.
- The research learnings are often considered proprietary and less likely to be share outside of the company.
- It involves working with a broader group of people who may not have much background in psychological science.
- Research activities stem from the goals of the company, providing researchers with less autonomy over what to work on
- Less job stability but sometimes higher monetary reward.

Ultimately it's a personal decision as to which path will be most fulfilling.