DESIGN THINKING -
FIND THE MISSING HUMAN FACTOR

Abstract

Design Thinking is a huge term and can be applied in every aspect of life, from day-to-day activities to building complex solutions.

In today's world, everybody knows or talks about applying Design Thinking and design solutions for the Humans of the system.

In this paper, we are going to talk about today's world challenges in applying design thinking across industries and possible ways to address those.

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A brief introduction to Design Thinking

While we are moving towards modern digitization, there is one thing around which it revolves and that is "Human". So, we always need to keep humans at the heart while designing our solutions. That is why Design Thinking is used interchangeably with "Human Centered Design"
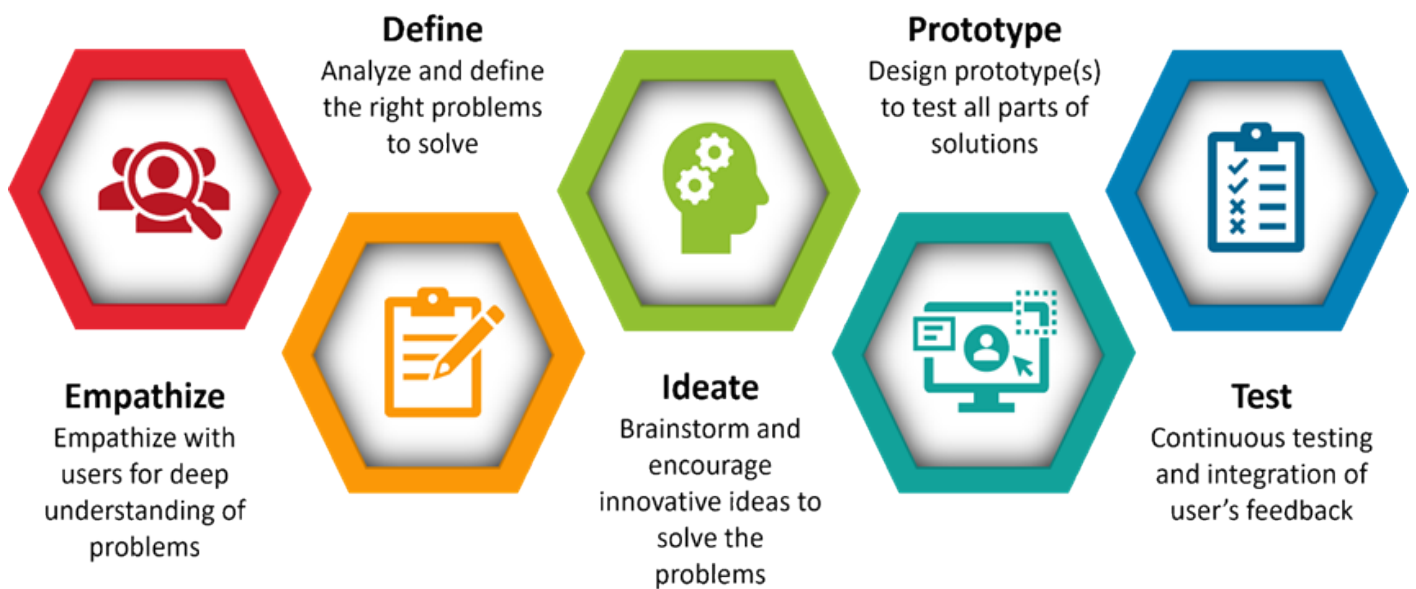

Empathy

Empathy is the core attribute of Design Thinking. We need to understand all direct and indirect personas, their behaviors, and their need that might be unlikely told explicitly.

Creativity

Brainstorm to bring creative ideas to the table, prototype the solution, validate and iterate until we arrive at the final solution.

Let us take a quick glance at phases of Design Thinking process:

Define
Analyze and define the right problems to solve

Prototype
Design prototype(s) to test all parts of solutions

Empathize
Empathize with users for deep understanding of problems

Ideate
Brainstorm and encourage innovative ideas to solve the problems

Test
Continuous testing and integration of user's feedback

Why Design Thinking is important?

"Companies that integrate Design Thinking into corporate strategy can outperform other industry peers by more than 200%"

Large organizations worldwide put their clients and their needs and desires at the center of the creation. These companies are employing design thinking as a strategy for fostering creativity and innovation in their operations.

An American multinational technology corporation is transitioning from a technology-centric to a user-centric company. The corporation has begun to shift its product focus to make it more people-oriented.

By placing people at the center of the process and beginning to understand their desires and new habits, one of the biggest electronics company realized that it could not only gratify existing customers but also begin to foresee market and societal trends.

After struggling to gain new consumers, an American Multinational Investment bank began investing in bringing a human-centered perspective to an industry. They worked with design firms to research and comprehend the company's human service objectives.

A leading food and beverage company was struggling before investing in bringing ideas to market through Design Thinking. They brought on a separate Chief Design Office to instill the culture of Design Thinking. It provided users with an entirely new experience and aided the company's growth.

According to Microtrends, the Japanese multinational automotive manufacturer achieved 8% growth just by redesigning the customer contact center with Design Thinking. AI has generated a wide range of business concepts.

The emphasis an American multinational technology company places on creating products that people want is widely recognized. It has registered a 10% growth projection. They focus on the product's human users and use design thinking methodologies to match user expectations.

Source: Fabrica360

However, applying Design Thinking may not be easy or straightforward due to various challenges that occur. Design Thinking is all about changing mindset which is not an easy task. We will discuss some common challenges faced while applying design thinking and possible solutions to overcome those.

Common challenges faced while applying design thinking and ways to address:

Typical Patterns	Challenges that we faced	How did or how can we handle it?
Enabling project teams	Enabling in this context does not only limit to training the employees with design thinking techniques but also provides an environment where they can easily apply these techniques while providing timely solutions to customers. Most of the time people understand these techniques, but do not know how to apply these to software projects	The first step is to arrange workshops to make project teams aware of these techniques. Design the workshops in such a way that they are relevant to the nature of work being done in an organization. Make sure to enable management as well as technical teams, so that they work in a symphony towards the common goal of focusing on front-line workers or end users
Buy in from customers	The traditional approach involves getting the defined requirements from the customer. But this often results in solutions that do not address the untold needs of humans who will use the system	Design thinking helps to bridge this gap. To achieve this, we need to take a step ahead and get buy- in from customers about applying design thinking (techniques) by emphasizing on how it will be beneficial to them. Start with discussing your plan with customers at the very beginning of the project
No additional time to carry out techniques	You will often hear this from the project teams	To address this challenge, let us make sure that the overall project plan has the bandwidth for carrying out these techniques and is approved by customers. It also means extra time and so may be extra cost to customers. Be ready with justifications for why it is important
Dilemma on when to Begin	When do we introduce the role of the Design Thinker	The earlier the better. You need to empathize with end users while you do the requirement gathering. This may even start as early as during the proposal phase in some scenarios
Getting hold of all humans of the system	Many customers will have their own IT teams. They will receive requests from business users and will communicate the needs to the project teams. So, there is no direct connect with business teams or in fact with the end users of the system for whom we are designing the solutions. Customers may have their own reasons but try to understand all humans in the system	Understand the reasons, try to get buy-in from customer IT teams and empathize with end users with keeping boundaries (reasons) in mind
Finalizing the technical solution already	There are many valid reasons to know the technology ahead like customers want to leverage the platforms they have invested in or when it comes to project teams, technology is already defined	Accept the situation but still try to make sure the solution is being designed by keeping end users in mind. Designing a technical solution still can involve empathizing with customers, understanding if users are well versed with technology and, also how can we give the best human experience while using the system
Fear of being judged	During the ideation phase, people from project teams may not open up to share ideas if they have a fear of being judged. It has been observed best ideas come from the most silent people on the team	We need to design the techniques or create the environment so that we can get even the wild ideas that have the potential to create revolutions in the industry. Some people may not like to talk in public, so find ways where people can share ideas anonymously
Working in silos	Most often all the teams, project management teams, project technical teams, developers, customer IT teams, customer business teams, and front-line	Design thinking expects to break the silos so that we can empathize with all humans of the systems and design solutions they want and try to involve all the teams wherever needed

Key takeaways for successful Human Experience

We have seen some common challenges and possible solutions to those. Let us look at the key takeaways to make Design Thinking successful in-service industry. Design Thinking can be a value-add if done precisely and mindfully.

Design Thinking is nothing but improving Human Experience

Always keep the Humans of the system at the core. Whatever techniques or processes we follow; keep in mind we are doing it for improving the Human Experience. Once you empathize with end users, it will change the way you look at their needs and how you design the solutions and the chances of these solutions failing will be very minimal. This is going to save a lot of time, effort, and cost and increase satisfaction.

Change mindset, inculcate empathy in culture

Design thinking is more than a set of techniques, it is a mindset. If everyone starts seeing customers with empathy, we will design the products customers want. A company that inculcates design thinking in culture, moves towards the path of satisfied customers and happy employees (due to challenging environments) and ultimately success.

Successful Design Thinking

Do not insist for a "Perfect Idea" or a "Perfect Solution"

There is no perfect solution to any problem. While ideating or designing prototypes do not wait for the perfect ideas or create a perfect prototype. Start with simple and small prototypes that will give an idea about the solution, it can then evolve according to feedback from humans of the system.

Do not fall in love with your prototype

With due respect to the efforts, you and your team have spent on building the prototypes, do not fall in love with them. It will again limit your creativity. Do not insist on or force prototypes on customers, they know what they want. Start again, remember with this you might start clearing gaps between your understanding and the real expectations of the current world. This is very important for any organization to become successful.

Abstract of Design Thinking

Design thinking need not be seen as a process to be carried out with some set of techniques. Rather, it can be seen as a concept that emphasizes Empathy & Creativity.

Empathy cannot be achieved by only using certain techniques it can be as simple as putting yourself into customer's shoes and understanding the pain points. Once you feel their pain, it becomes easy to design the solutions they want. You also need not worry about creativity, end users often prefer simple solutions to complex problems.

Let us look at an example of Designing a Microsoft PowerApp for a customer need. You may need to remember these points from the end user's POV. To start, try to put yourself in their shoes:

- Would I like long forms with scrolling or small sections across pages?

- Would it be easy for me to read bigger fonts or smaller fonts, fancy fonts, or readable fonts?

- I am not able to understand the information being asked, would like to see an example or text to guide me

- I would like the app to interact with me well for my actions

- I am a front-line worker who has recently started using computers/mobile apps and am not a tech -savvy

Just knowing the end user and empathizing well will solve half of the problems and make it easier for you to design.

Again, the best part could be prototyping your idea or solution. A prototype helps to fail early and learn faster.

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She has 16+ years of experiance with vast experience in O365,PowerApps and Sharepoint. She is proficient in Design Thinking, driving implementation with Power Platform. She has worked with clients across industries like Manufacturing, Food, Healthcare, Finance, and Retail.

Reference

https://www.mindhatchllc.com/design-thinking-organizational-culture-change/

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