Driving Innovation Through Design Thinking: A Case Study on a Leading Footwear Company (Company X)

In the fiercely competitive landscape of the modern fashion industry, innovation and adaptability are paramount. In the dynamic Indonesian fashion landscape, **Company X has emerged as one of the most famous local shoe companies over the last two years**. However, this rapid growth presents significant challenges in aligning operational capabilities with market demand. Recognizing this urgency, my team from design thinking class undertook a comprehensive project to develop a strategic solution for Company X. Our role was to apply the Design Thinking methodology to diagnose the root causes of the company's challenges and deliver an innovative, actionable blueprint for sustainable growth and efficiency.

A Human-Centered Approach to Business Innovation

This extensive project involved a multi-faceted, human-centered approach to solve complex business problems. Our responsibilities spanned the entire Design Thinking process, from immersive user research and problem definition to creative ideation, rapid prototyping, and user testing. The objective was to create an integrated solution that addresses Company X's core operational inefficiencies and enhances its ability to respond to market demands effectively.

I. Empathize: Understanding the Core Challenges

The foundation of the project involved a deep, empathetic dive into the operational environment of Company X to understand the needs, motivations, and frustrations of its stakeholders. Through direct site visits to the factory, observations of the production process, and in-depth interviews with management and employees, our team gathered critical qualitative data.

Initially, we identified several surface-level issues and pain points across the organization:

- **Production & Operations:**
    - An inability to meet high demand, especially during peak periods like holidays, leading to significant *lost sales*.
    - Limited factory floor space, which hampers the ability to scale up production.
    - An inefficient production methodology, a remnant from when the company focused solely on men's leather shoes, which is now ill-suited for the high variety of new *lifestyle* shoe models.
    - Workers expressed that their jobs often felt monotonous.
- **Supply Chain & Materials:**
    - Inconsistency in the quality of raw materials from suppliers, necessitating a more detailed and time-consuming inspection process.
    - Long and unreliable lead times for specific imported components, such as for the popular "loom sandals," which disrupts the entire supply chain.
- **Marketing & Brand Perception:**
    - A controversial "marketing kiri" (left-wing marketing) approach that, while targeting Gen Z, led to the brand being viewed as a copycat and resulted in legal challenges from other brands.

Initial Problems Identified at Company X: A summary of the key challenges faced by the company, including production, marketing, and material sourcing.

Our analysis synthesized these symptoms into three interconnected core themes: a rapid

increase in demand, constantly **changing product trends**, and a **stagnant production capability** that could not keep up.

II. Define: Pinpointing the Root Problem

In the Define stage, our team analyzed the insights from the Empathize phase to formulate a clear and actionable problem statement. We concluded that the identified issues were merely symptoms of a deeper, more fundamental challenge.

The **Main Problem** was defined as: Company X needs to execute a fundamental **change in its business processes and objectives** to align its internal capabilities with its new market reality.

Failure to do so would lead to severe consequences, including production backlogs, increased overtime costs, and the risk of losing customers to competitors who can fulfill demand faster.

To guide our solution-finding process, we formulated a

Reframed Problem: There is a critical need to **increase production capacity and streamline processes effectively and efficiently** to respond to high demand surges and capitalize on market trends.

III. Ideate: Generating Innovative Solutions

During the Ideate phase, our team focused on generating a wide array of creative solutions. Using techniques like

Crazy 8 and collaborative *brainstorming*, we explored numerous possibilities. After discussing and refining the initial pool of ideas, we converged on a final, integrated solution by consolidating the top three concepts:

1. **Outsourcing Production (Makloon):** This idea proposed producing certain models elsewhere, potentially in collaboration with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), to create exclusive products and quickly adapt to fast-changing trends without overloading internal capacity.
2. **Targeting New Markets:** This concept was based on data showing Company X's popularity in smaller cities with lower fashion exposure. The idea was to focus R&D and marketing efforts on these regions to become the "top of mind" affordable fashion brand.
3. **Integrated Digital System:** This was the most comprehensive idea, aiming to create a transparent and flexible production and prediction system by connecting all departments via the internet to address coordination and forecasting issues.

The final selected idea consolidated these concepts:

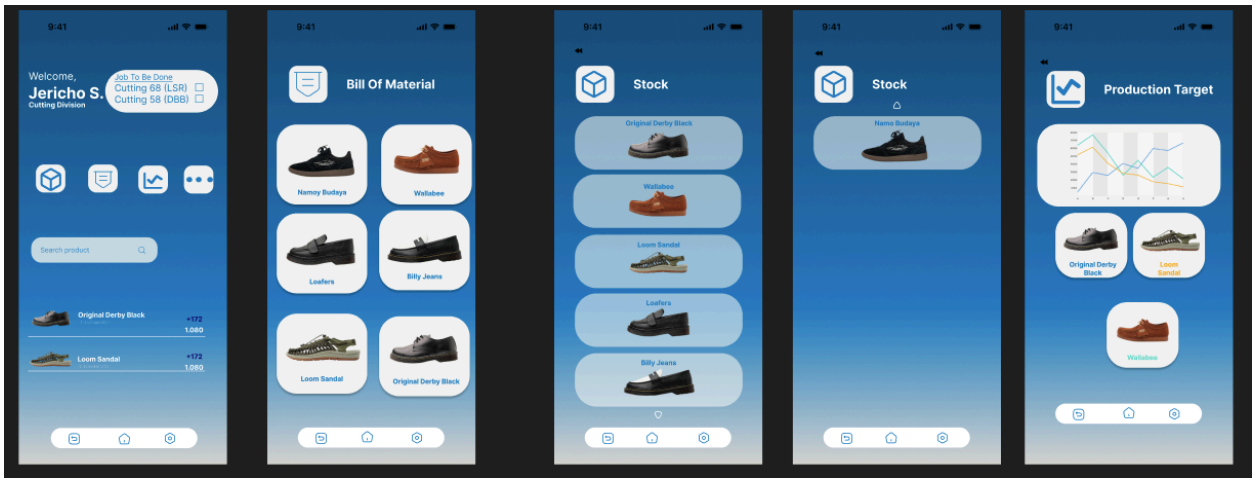
To create a transparent and flexible production and prediction system by integrating all internal departments and external partners (like outsourced factories) through an internet-based platform.

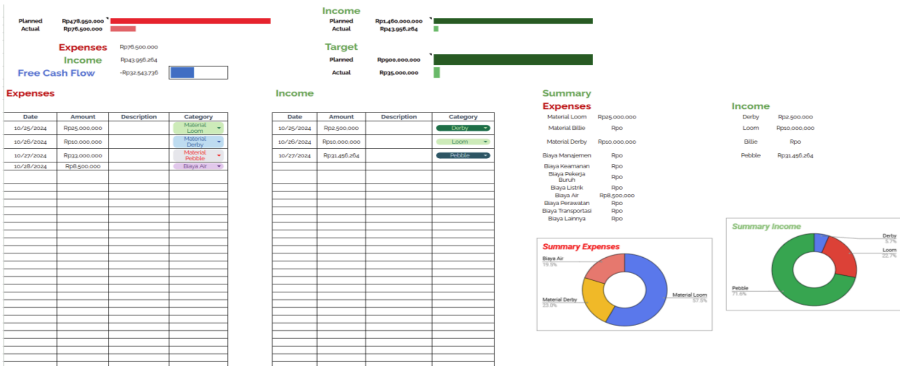
IV. Prototype: Visualizing the Solution

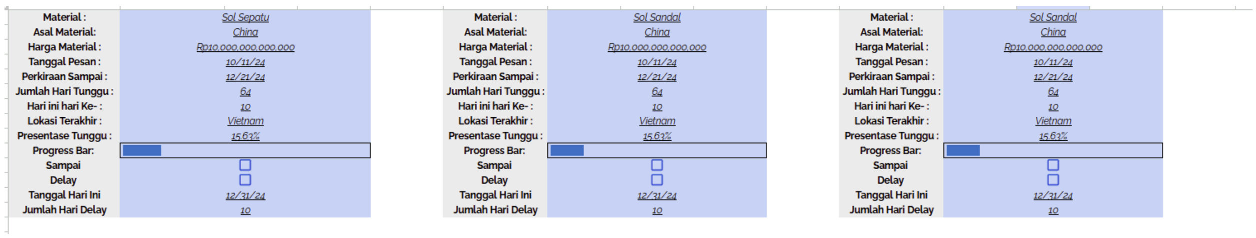
To transform our idea into a testable concept, we developed tangible digital prototypes. Our solution was manifested in two distinct but interconnected tools, built using Figma for the user interface and Spreadsheets for the data backend:

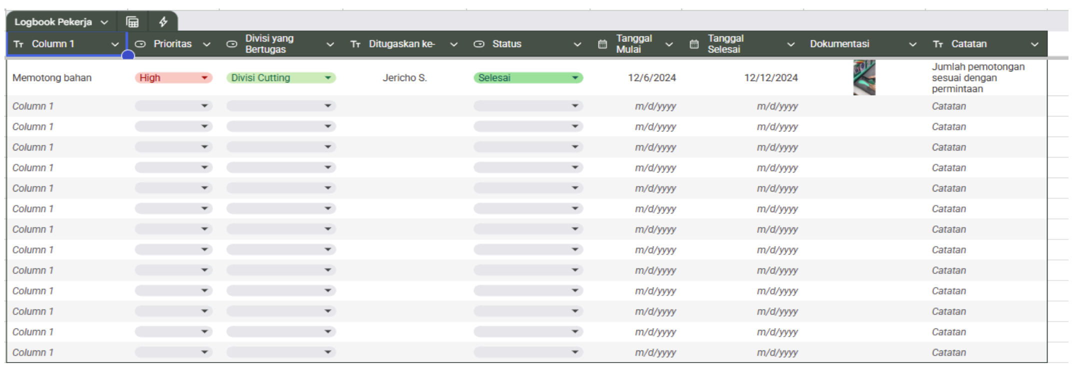
1. **Employee Mobile Application:** An interactive app designed to streamline daily tasks for production floor employees. Its key features included a personalized "Job To Be Done" list (e.g., "Cutting 68 units for Loom Sandal"), direct access to the Bill of Materials (BOM) for each product, and visibility of overall production targets.
2. **Management Dashboard:** A comprehensive spreadsheet-based dashboard for the management team to enable data-driven decision-making. It included modules for real-time tracking of:
    - **Cashflow & Finances:** Monitoring expenses and income.
    - **Inventory Management:** Tracking stock levels, value, and location for each shoe model.
    - **Customer Demand:** Comparing target vs. actual customer demand to identify shortages.
    - **Raw Material Tracking:** Monitoring the status and estimated arrival of material orders from suppliers.
    - **Employee Attendance:** A digital logbook for workforce management.

Prototype of the Employee Application and Management Dashboard: Screenshots showcasing the user interface of the mobile app and the data visualization within the management dashboard.









V. Test: Validating with Users

The final stage involved testing the prototypes to gather user feedback for iterative improvement. We conducted usability tests with 11 respondents. Each participant was given a specific brief: "You are an employee in the cutting division. Use this application to find the details and projections for your upcoming work," and was asked to complete several tasks, such as finding stock data, locating high-demand products, and accessing the BOM.

The feedback, captured in a grid, was primarily focused on user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) enhancements:

- The "Home" icon was difficult to locate and should be placed in the center of the navigation bar.
- The stock graph needed clearer labels for each shoe type.
- A dedicated "Back" button in the top-left corner was considered essential for intuitive navigation.
- Users requested a "Dark Mode" option for better visual comfort.

This feedback was crucial for refining the prototype to ensure it was intuitive and effective for its intended users.

Project Conclusion and Professional Development

The overarching conclusion from this Design Thinking project is that the implementation of an integrated digital system—comprising a management dashboard and an employee application—is the optimal strategic choice for Company X. This solution directly addresses the company's core problem of misaligned processes by fostering transparency, improving inter-departmental communication, and enabling data-driven decision-making to better manage production and meet market demand.

This project provided a profound lesson in consultancy: effective solutions extend far beyond mere numbers and projections. We learned firsthand the importance of listening to every stakeholder—from the factory floor to the management office—and truly "feeling" the day-to-day operational realities. This human-centered perspective, gained through direct observation and interviews, revealed nuances and unspoken needs that quantitative data alone could never capture.

Furthermore, the application of the Design Thinking methodology was a key learning experience. It provided a structured framework to move past surface-level symptoms and uncover the deep-seated pain points within the company. By understanding not only the current problems but also the company's future aspirations, we were able to craft a solution that was not generic, but highly tailored and strategically aligned with Company X's long-term vision.

From this project, our team gained and honed the following skills:

- **Design Thinking & Human-Centered Design:** Applied the complete five-stage methodology to analyze a real-world business case and develop a user-focused solution.
- **Root Cause Analysis:** Skillfully distinguished between surface-level symptoms (e.g., lost sales) and the underlying core problems (e.g., misaligned business processes).
- **Stakeholder & Empathy Mapping:** Conducted interviews and observations to build a deep understanding of the perspectives and pain points of different stakeholders.
- **Prototyping & UX/UI Design:** Gained proficiency in using digital tools like Figma to create high-fidelity, interactive prototypes for user testing.
- **User Testing & Feedback Synthesis:** Designed and executed usability tests, gathering qualitative feedback and translating it into actionable improvements for the prototype.
- **Integrated Problem Solving:** Demonstrated the ability to connect disparate business challenges—including production, supply chain, marketing, and finance—into a single, cohesive strategic recommendation.