

Design the Conversation - Unlock Better Outcomes (Podcast overview of the book Designing Design Conversations by John Ungar)

6mins

Transcript

Speaker 1

the deep dive. Today, we're getting into something pretty common, I think. Making design conversations actually work better.

Speaker 2

Yeah, we're looking at John Ungar's Design Conversations. Right. He's got some really practical frameworks inside.

Speaker 1

Right. So the source is this book, and our goal, our mission really, is to pull out things you can actually use. Frameworks, ideas...

Speaker 2

They help you have more productive design chats, basically. Doesn't matter if you're deep in design or just occasionally involved, we wanna make it actionable.

Speaker 1

Okay, so the book highlights this core problem. Ungar calls it waffle. What's that about?

Speaker 2

Well, it's like conversations either get super tangled and complex jargon. Nobody understands, or as they swing the other way and just focus on, you know, I like that blue, just surface level visuals.

Speaker 1

And that leads to problems, right? Misunderstandings, maybe the design doesn't quite deliver.

Speaker 2

But Ungar flips that. He says if you structure these conversations well, it's a win-win-win.

Speaker 1

Okay, break that down. Win, win, win.

Speaker 2

Yeah. So designers feel heard, which is huge. The organization runs more efficiently, maybe sees better revenue and customers. They get better products and interactions.

Speaker 1

Makes sense. And the flip side, bad design communication.

Speaker 2

Well, stakeholders kind of check out. They don't get it. Design starts to lose influence. You know, that seat at the table might be there, but.

Speaker 1

But it doesn't mean much if you can't communicate effectively.

Speaker 2

precisely. And you end up with weaker design, even if everyone says they're customer-focused.

Speaker 1

So, Ungar's answer is these three frameworks.

Speaker 2

Yeah, three specific conversation frameworks. And importantly, they're not about how to design something. OK. They're about how to structure talks about the design practice itself, about individual designers' growth, and about specific design.

Speaker 1

Ah, okay, so it moves beyond just like, does it look good?

Speaker 2

Totally. It brings in things like what's the business impact here? What are the commercial sensitivities we need to consider? It gets you past just gut feelings.

Speaker 1

which feels way more productive.

Speaker 2

and he puts the onus on designers, really. Says they need to lead these conversations, proactively bridge that understanding gap in the organization.

Speaker 1

So just having the title or the role isn't enough.

Speaker 2

Nope. A seat at the table is not enough, as he puts it. Influence comes from, well, designing the conversation itself.

Speaker 1

like that framing. And are these rigid frameworks?

Speaker 2

He stresses they're adaptable whether your team is centralized distributed all over or kind of fragmented you can make them work

Speaker 1

You know, it makes me think about how design teams sometimes go through those boom and bust cycles in companies.

Speaker 2

Mm-hmm. Yeah, and having these regular well-rounded conversations could actually help smooth that out. Yeah, it demonstrates ongoing value makes the work visible and understood

Speaker 1

So the big gap Ungar's filling is we have models for doing design like the double diamond process. Great lots of those. But maybe not enough for talking about the health of the design practice or design or development or evaluating the work consistently.

Speaker 2

That's exactly it. Think of it like this. You might have success metrics tracking impact, right? These frameworks help you figure out what to actually talk about to achieve that impact. And crucially, measuring success against what the organization really cares about.

Speaker 1

He also mentions visuals, doesn't he, how they help?

Speaker 2

Yeah, visuals are key. They create a shared picture, cut through the waffle we talked about, makes complex stuff like that double diamond process way easier for everyone to grasp.

Speaker 1

And it's not a one and done thing, these conversations.

Speaker 2

Hopefully not. They need to be ongoing, revisited, especially if the company's changing. And realistic too, acknowledging trade-offs is part of it.

Speaker 1

So just to recap the three types, the design practice overall, the individual designer's contribution and growth, and the specific design being worked on.

Speaker 2

of the pillars. And as we kind of move towards wrapping up, a key thing Ungar emphasizes is evidence.

Speaker 1

Right, not just gut feelings or vibe checks.

Speaker 2

Exactly. When you use these frameworks, you're not aiming for a perfect score. The goal is to visualize and discuss the trade-offs. Make them explicit.

Speaker 1

and scoring, how does that work?

Speaker 2

It's less about arbitrary numbers and more about looking for tell-tale signs, actual visible activities that show a certain maturity level.

Speaker 1

Okay, concrete examples.

Speaker 2

Yeah, and for the practice in individual frameworks, he suggests maybe using stakeholder surveys to get wider perspectives.

Speaker 1

That makes sense. So if you claim you're customer focused.

Speaker 2

You need evidence. Like show the feedback loops you actually have in place, it standardizes things.

Speaker 1

These frameworks are really a starting point then, the conversation itself will vary.

Speaker 2

For sure. And don't try to fix everything at once. Pick one to three areas for improvement. Keep it focused.

Speaker 1

Good advice. Avoid overwhelm.

Speaker 2

And once you've worked through them, update them, share them, keep them alive. The language is flexible to use terms your org understands.

Speaker 1

He even mentions external consultants using them.

Speaker 2

Yeah, for like, independent reviews, but remember, the framework structure, the what. You still need good communication skills. The how, the tone, the timing, that's still vital.

Speaker 1

The book obviously goes deeper into each one with barriers and examples.

Speaker 2

Loads more detail. Yeah, those telltale signs are really useful.

Speaker 1

OK, so let's leave our listeners with this. Think about just one of these, practice, individual, or design. How might adopting even just one framework start to change how design is talked about and maybe valued where you work right now?