

In searching for alternative ways to tackle these open, complex, dynamic, and networked problems, leading innovators in different fields have increasingly been turning to “design” for help. These individuals, companies, institutions, and governments are interested in design because expert designers deal with the new types of problems in their professional field without too much trouble. Under the flag of “design thinking,” businesses and business schools are seeking inspiration from design-based case studies (Brown 2009; Verganti 2009; Carlopio 2010; Plattner, Meinel, and Weinberg 2009). Yet recent experience has shown that it is not easy to effectively transpose these lessons from design into other domains. The application of some cool design tricks and techniques, although liberating and inspiring, doesn’t often lead to the results we really need. I will argue that this is because the interest in “design thinking” mostly focuses on the designer’s abilities in generating solutions, rather than on the key ability of expert designers to create new approaches to problem situations (“framing”). The creation of new “frames” to approach problem situations is the key and special element of designers’ problem-solving practices (Whitbeck 1998). While this framing of problems is a universal human ability (Gardner 1983, 2006), and thus cannot be claimed to be special to the design professions, it is particularly important (indeed, central) to the design professions. We will find that expert design practitioners have developed unique, sophisticated multilayered practices for creating new frames. After taking a very close look at the way these design practices work, this book will use these professional practices as the basis for developing an alternative to conventional problem-solving methods. Nineteen case studies will show how these design-based practices and strategies for frame creation can be extremely valuable for dealing with open, complex, dynamic, and networked problems in a broad range of domains. We will then explore how these practices can be introduced and implemented into organizations to achieve frame innovation.

The fresh practices that will be presented in this book are based on lessons learned from studying the activities of top designers, and build on the very detailed and subtle understanding of design that has emerged from over fifty years of design research. This research is a veritable treasure trove of approaches and insights. In creating the vital link between top-end design practice and conventional problem-solving, we will wander into philosophical territory every now and then—because the issues we are seeking to resolve turn out to be quite fundamental. But in the end this book is written for practitioners, it is about practices, and it is always fundamentally practical in nature. It