Reflections on Design Thinking for Business Innovation by K'Kaweewut Temphuwapat

A Critique with Personal Bias and What Comes Next

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It's been over six months since the class, and things are clearer now. Below is my honest take on K'Kaweewut's views, biases included. I don't agree with everything he taught, but his ideas offer a unique look into the mindset of top Thai business thinkers. Even if you choose not to adopt them, you may do so with thoughtful consideration.

Introduction: Design Thinking, but Make It Real

Design thinking is a subject that both universities and the private sector love to teach because the key idea is easy: *understand the customer*, *have empathy*. It doesn't sound difficult at all. Anyone can teach it, right?

At Chulalongkorn University's engineering program, it is a required subject in the first year. But to be honest, it's not a very good subject. They let us follow the framework like robots: collect checklist 1, 2, 3, 4, and write weekly worksheet reports. That's it.

There are probably hundreds of students per year who think like I do, that design thinking is useless business nonsense. And if I hadn't had the chance to read more or take better courses later on, I might have never changed my mind.

Brainstorming: A Judgment-Free Zone

When brainstorming ideas for group projects, it's crucial to keep the idea generation and critique stages separate. Letting one person write down ideas while others suggest might seem harmless, but it creates subtle pressure. Participants feel judged and hesitate to share potentially "crappy" ideas.

Solution? Play a game called "Hey, That's Cool." The rules: no matter what the person before you says, respond with *"Hey, that's cool"* and build on it, regardless of how silly it sounds. Also, stick a post-it when you say that. Everyone should have their own stack of post-its and a pen to write down their ideas.

Example:

- "If we all help each other not use air conditioners, we can help solve global warming."
- "Hey, that's cool. What if every house had a swimming pool instead?"
- "Hey, that's cool. What if we cut off electricity in every house to reduce heat?"

Silly? Yes. But absurdity is essential. It sparks spontaneous laughter and unlocks breakthrough ideas. Our class goal was to come up with 200 ideas in 20 minutes: quantity first, quality later. A hundred absurd ideas and a fun, free-flowing brainstorm might just lead to one golden, practical solution.

Don't Think Like Robots

K'Kaweewut mentioned that, to be honest, it's tough to train engineering or accounting students. Many of them tend to act overly smart, complicate things unnecessarily, and think like robots. They also have a fear of rejection and don't want to be seen as stupid. It's a habit of thinking, "I'm proud when listeners don't fully understand what I'm saying, because that means I'm clever."

He has a clear **positive bias toward psychology students**. Businesses need more people who study people, not just robots. The higher your education level, the more fascinated you are by abstract ideas. But it's not useless unless you can explain the benefit clearly, like selling grilled pork to your neighbor.

Interviews Over Surveys

There are many overlooked pain points, like wallet-related ones: losing wallets, cards, etc. The best way to understand them deeply? **Interviews. Not surveys. Not market research.** Good interviews feel like casual conversations, not stiff, formal ones. Start with: "Who are you? How many children do you have? How have you been these days?" Then slowly explore topics like their family's financial situation. (I recommend reading The Mom Test to avoid common pitfalls in interviews.)

Sincere interviews reveal deep insights.

Do whatever it takes to truly understand your user. Follow them for an entire day, role-play, or anything else that helps you get closer to their real experience.

Don't Love Your Idea

Never fall in love with your idea. Believe in **prototyping and testing**. Otherwise, you're like someone selling a chair to a caveman who's only ever sat on a rock. They won't get it until they try it.

Example: Want to test a T-shirt business? Make a website with a real order button that pops up saying: *"Not available yet."* It's realistic but costs little.

Don't teach users how to use your product. Let them struggle or enjoy it naturally. Your job is to watch, listen, and say **"thank you"**.

Cross-Faculty Friendships

The best thing about this class wasn't the lecture. It was the deep conversations with friends from other faculties. Everyone I met was doing something above average.

When explaining your project to someone from a completely different field, you'll realize that your "cool" idea might sound either diplomatic or like a red flag. That's humbling. (I recommend reading *Ego is the Enemy* to anchor this mindset.)

I also had the chance to speak with many top business leaders in smaller settings, as the class invited them every week. It wasn't just about passively listening to them like in a typical business session. This setup had the potential to change one path.

On Consulting and Action

K'Kaweewut is biased against the consulting world. He thinks it's about sounding smart without doing anything. Consultants often become scapegoats when things fail.

Further Resources

If you want to continue this mindset practically, I highly recommend the **Skills to Satang** class by Ajarn Pakpoom. He teaches what to actually do. Check it out here:
`https://www.facebook.com/share/18yWB22XcK/`

Curious about the outcome of students who took this class? Look here:
`https://www.facebook.com/share/198YNcqRx2/`

However, since this subject is at Naresuan University, you'll have to manage things on your own. Ajarn Pakpoom mentioned that the top performers in this class are usually solo students. So, it's probably a good idea to get started without waiting for your friends.

One-Person Businesses and Startup

This class made me realize something else: the idea of a one-person business, as talked about by people like Dan Koe, Pieter Levels, Naval Ravikant, or Sahil Lavingia. It's about bootstrapping, finding leverage, and building small businesses that matter.

And I think this design thinking class is a very good introduction to do exactly that.

But if you think being a startup founder is cooler than this, I recommend you watch these lectures by Y Combinator. Check it out here:
`https://youtu.be/CBYhVcO4WgI?si=P9OyQRxvc1iHIaUU`

Summary of Key Takeaways

I think, for practical usage, design thinking is more about what one shouldn't do than what one should do, and below are the rules of thumb I got from this class.

- **Don't overlook it.** There are always small annoyances around us, things like manhole covers that don't close properly or uncomfortable chairs. If you get used to them, you won't see them anymore, and you can't fix what you don't notice. Aim to spot at least 10 small pains each day.
- **Don't assume people will use your product just because it solves your own problems.** K'Kaweewut often reminded us in class that, as lucky Chula students, we're in a better position than most people in Thailand. So, if we design something for "Thai people," it might not be successful, because our life experiences are different from those of the majority.
- **Don't think you fully understand a pain.** Even if you think you get it now, your understanding will change. It's crucial to guess your user group and talk to them. Interviews are a must.
- **Asking for an interview isn't hard.** If someone's busy, email them or wait for a better time. Don't be afraid to approach someone and say, "Can I have a minute of your time?"
- **Don't rely on questionnaires alone to understand customers.** The answers you get will be too surface-level. Instead, ask open-ended questions and gradually dive deeper into their experiences.
- **Don't settle for just plausible solutions.** When brainstorming, think of crazy ideas. The more fun you have with your ideas, the more creative you'll be. Focus on quantity, more ideas lead to better ones.

- **Don't let just one person write ideas on the board.** When in a group, everyone should jot down their thoughts on Post-its and share them. This way, no one feels judged, and everyone gets to contribute freely.
- **Don't ask customers if they like a solution before it's real.** Build a prototype and get their feedback. Just explaining something to a person doesn't work; they need to try it out themselves to understand.
- **Don't defend your work when you get feedback.** If people think your work isn't great, accept it. The important part is understanding what's wrong and improving it. Don't get attached to your ideas.
- **Don't teach users how to use your product during testing.** Let them figure it out. If they struggle, that's valuable feedback.
- **Don't stop after receiving feedback once.** Test and retest until you're confident that you've made improvements.
- **Keep practicing these principles after the class.** If you don't use them regularly, they'll fade away, and the class will be useless.

General Advice (not related to design thinking)

- **Don't learn from retellings.** Reading about a company's failure isn't the same as actually trying to solve the problem yourself. It's easy to find reasons for failure after the fact, but real-world problem-solving is tough.
- **Don't copy the paths of successful people.** Just because someone else succeeded doesn't mean their path will work for you. Think for yourself and choose your own direction.
- **Don't be afraid of rejection.** Seek opportunities to get rejected often. It'll help you grow. Try doing something uncomfortable, like sales, to learn how to handle rejection.
- **Don't ignore people who warn you about your ego.** If people say you have a big ego, take it seriously. It's important to recognize this and work on it.
- **Don't waste time in college.** As a college student, you have more free time than you will once you start working. Time becomes much more limited as an adult, so make sure to use your college years wisely.

- **Don't get too caught up in frameworks.** Frameworks like empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test, these are helpful for learning, but they don't guarantee success. In the end, design thinking is about truly understanding your customers, not just following steps.

What I Really Think

I walked into this class a little skeptical. Honestly, I only joined because I heard it was competitive, and in my experience, that usually means you'll meet great people. I'd listened to K'Kaweewut's podcast before, and while I liked it, I didn't like it that much. I've always seen myself more as a researcher than a business person.

The first few lectures felt like your typical business talk, kind of boring. But as the class went on, everything started to change. The experience kept getting better. By the end, I can confidently say this: I don't think there's any other course at Chula that impacts students as deeply as this one.

Nithiwat Sirirattanachaikul has been DMing me for the final version of these lecture notes for months, so here it is!