

Design Thinking for Business Innovation

Lecture Notes Version 1.2

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Abstract

This is continuously updated lecture note for the Design Thinking for Business Innovation class by Kaweewut Temphuwapat at Chulalongkorn University. Each version might have new content, revisions, or added details. Please note that these notes are unofficial and contain my personal opinions. I created these notes because the lecturer asked us to update our learning on social media weekly.

1 Introduction to Design Thinking

Design Thinking is often viewed as a cool framework (which is becoming a bit outdated in 2024). The issue with frameworks is that people assume they can use them instantly because they're ready-made. In reality, Design Thinking is more like a skill that needs to be developed and refined over time to be truly effective. It is a cool buzzword for something as simple as 'understanding the customer'. Everyone knows we need to talk to customers to understand them. The problem is we also need to ask good, non-leading questions. If we don't, we'll get bad answers, leading to poor product development—garbage in, garbage out.

2 The Most Important Lesson

One key takeaway from this class, especially for fields like engineering and accounting, is that truly understanding the consumer is a complex task—so complex that lecturers often hire psychology experts to help. For instance, consider a child's toothbrush, which is designed larger than an adult's. You might think the reason is obvious, like "a child's hand isn't strong enough to grip a regular toothbrush." But that's an oversimplification. In reality, solving these kinds of problems is challenging for us. This concept also applies to understanding why major companies like Kodak fail despite their initial success. It's easy to determine what is right or wrong "after the event has already ended."

3 The Importance of Practice

Students who have practiced interviewing, such as through History Taking in medicine or counseling in psychology, are likely to be more proficient. This is because the skills needed to gain insight from consumers during the empathize phase are quite similar. There's a fascinating experiment where a teacher graded two groups of photography students differently. One group had to submit just one great photo to get an A, while the other group had to submit lots of photos, with more submissions leading to a better grade. In the end, the second group produced many of the best pictures because practice makes perfect. The first group, which focused on just one photo, is like someone who reads about riding a bike but can't actually ride.

4 Questioning the Status Quo

Brushing our teeth is a daily habit. We get up in the morning and brush our teeth before leaving home, and we do the same before going to bed. But consider this: when you're 80 years old, will you still use a toothbrush? Some might confidently say yes, while others might think something new will replace it in 20 years. Some may be unsure. Now, ask yourself: why do you brush your teeth today? Many would say it's necessary, to avoid tooth decay. It's just what we do. I started brushing my teeth because my mother told me to when I was under five, and I've done it ever since without much thought. But oral care isn't just about toothbrushes, there's mouthwash and other solutions too. If we don't pay attention to these small details in our daily routines, problems can go unnoticed, and we can't solve issues we aren't aware of.

5 Sharing and Prototyping Ideas

Everyone has a moment when they suddenly think of something cool and have to quickly find a piece of paper or get out of the tub to write down the idea. But the problem for many of us is that we write it down and leave it like that, never doing anything with the cool idea we came up with while relaxing. What can help with this is having good people or communities. You should have a close friend who, no matter how stupid you say something to them, will not judge or laugh at you. When you think of something good, tell your friend about it! And that friend will probably give you some feedback. But the problem with talking like this is that sometimes the images you see are not the same. Imagine trying to explain the features of a chair to a stone age person, how it's different from sitting on a rock. It's a piece of plastic with four legs that can be moved easily and sat on. Whether or not they nod at you, the tendency is that they won't be interested until you actually make the chair for them to sit on. The point is, if you want good feedback, you shouldn't just share ideas; you should also make prototypes for them to try out. And prototypes don't mean something big that costs thousands of dollars to build. Get some paper, pens, string, scissors,

tape, popsicle sticks. These simple materials are usually all you need to create a simple prototype that can be used to communicate your idea to others.

6 The “Good Student” Paradox

Many of you reading this might be successful students. However, being a good student often comes with a downside—it can indicate that you’re playing it safe. Getting good grades is usually straightforward: you study hard, attend classes, and prepare for exams. The issue isn’t with being prepared; it’s with the effects this mindset can have. It can lead to an excessive attachment to your achievements, inflating your ego to the point where you believe you’re always right and stop listening to others. This fear of looking foolish may cause you to stick to actions that seem smart, like using technical jargon that others may not understand, or offering critiques without proposing solutions. Instructors often see this behavior in fields like engineering and accounting, where students sometimes develop a sense of superiority. They end up doing only what they believe clever people should do. I’ve realized that I, too, have exhibited this ego in conversations with students from other departments. One book that has helped me address this issue is *Ego Is the Enemy* by Ryan Holiday, which provides valuable insights on managing and overcoming our ego.

7 Workshop 1: The Ideal Wallet

The first workshop that the student had to do in the classroom was design thinking from start to finish. First, design an ideal wallet. Then, design a wallet for the friend sitting next to you. Begin by interviewing the friend (who must not know each other beforehand). Ask questions, observe their current wallet, and avoid asking the user for solutions on what a good wallet should look like. Use the keyword “Why” to explore promising points. Next, spend four minutes brainstorming 20 ideas (though realistically, no one in the class reached 20; most had 10+) about what could solve problems for the friend. Finally, take these ideas and create a prototype using materials provided at the back of the room (straw ropes, post-it notes, markers, scissors, cloth tape, etc.). You have seven minutes to create the prototype. Then, show what you’ve made to your friend (without trying to sell it!). If you want to say anything, you can only explain the features of what your creation can do.

8 Workshop 2: The In-Building Diaries

This 30-minute workshop requires students to form pairs and interview two of the following three individuals: a janitor, a security guard, and a motorcycle taxi driver. The aim is to understand their current financial status. Students are encouraged to ask any questions needed to gather this information. Each pair should conduct their interviews in a single conversation without relying

on pre-listed questions. If the interviewer connects deeply with the interviewee and resonates with their personal stories, it's possible that the interviewee might become emotional.

9 Assignment 1: Table Talks

Try to organize at least two group meals with four to five friends from different fields of study, either for lunch or dinner. During these meals, engage in meaningful conversations by asking everyone to introduce themselves and share their responses. Follow up by asking each person about their dreams and fears, and actively listen to their answers. Use this opportunity to discuss how you might be able to support your friends in achieving their dreams. This activity is one of my best experience as a university student, as it's rare for students from different faculties to engage in meaningful conversations about their aspirations and challenges. What might seem cool to one department can be entirely different for another.

10 Assignment 2: Hospital Insights

Create a group of three people, making sure to include individuals you haven't worked with before. Your task is to observe and interview at least five individuals during a minimum three-hour session at one of the following locations: Lerdsin Hospital, Siriraj Hospital, Ramathibodi Hospital, or Queen Sirikit National Institute of Child Health.

Revised by

The secret Minecraft character 'ob' helped revise version 1.1.