

Design Thinking for Business Innovation

Lecture Notes Version 1.1

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Abstract

These are continuously updated lecture notes for the Design Thinking for Business Innovation class organized by Kaweewut Temphuwapat. Each version may include new content, revisions, or expansions on previous topics. Please note that these notes are unofficial and may contain personal opinions.

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Design Thinking is often viewed as a cool framework (which is becoming a bit outdated in 2024).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 Importance of Practice

That's why we should practice following these processes to prepare for our work in the future. There's an interesting experiment: A teacher graded two groups of photography students differently. One group was to submit a single beautiful photo. If the photo was good, they would get an A. The other group was asked to submit many photos, with more photos leading to a better grade. In the end, many of the best pictures came from the second group because practice improves skill. The first group, who kept examining, is like someone who reads about riding a bike but still can't ride.

3 Questioning the Status Quo

Nowadays, brushing our teeth is part of our daily routine. When we get out of bed in the morning, we must brush our teeth before leaving home. When we get home and are about to go to bed, we must brush our teeth. But I'd like to invite you to think about it. When you're 80 years old, do you think you'll still use a toothbrush? Some people might answer confidently yes, some might say that in 20 years, something might replace it. Some people might be less certain. But there's another question: why do you brush your teeth today? Some people might answer that they have to brush. They're afraid of tooth decay. How can you not brush? Everything is like this. For me, I started brushing my teeth because my mother told me to when I was not yet 5 years old. And I've been doing it repeatedly without thinking that products trying to solve oral problems are not just toothbrushes. Mouthwash! Research says that mouthwash can solve oral problems better than using a toothbrush. But today, most consumers still choose to brush their teeth because they've been using it since they were babies.

4 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.

5 The “Good Student” Paradox

I'm sure many of you reading this are pretty good students. But one of the biggest trade-offs for being a good student is that it indicates that you're playing it safe. Getting good grades is pretty straightforward. You study hard, you attend lectures, you prepare for exams. But the problem isn't the behavior

of being prepared, the problem is the consequences. Sometimes it makes you become a person who is too attached, has an ego that is too high that you think you are good, to the point that you don't listen to others. You are secretly afraid that you will look stupid. And the fear of looking stupid will make you afraid to ask stupid questions that are sometimes necessary for doing something smart (but of course, there are stupid questions that lead to stupid things). Which is a perspective that blocks the creation of new things.

6 Design Thinking Workshop

The workshop that I had to do in the classroom was design thinking from the beginning to the end in one round. First, try to design an ideal wallet. Then, design a wallet for the friend sitting next to you. Start by interviewing the friend sitting next to you (they must not know each other beforehand). Ask questions, observe their current wallet, and don't ask for solutions from the user about what a good wallet should look like. The keyword we should use is "Why" to explore points that seem promising. Next, take 4 minutes to brainstorm 20 ideas (though realistically, no one in the class reached 20, most had 10+) about what could solve problems for your friend. Finally, take these ideas and create a prototype from materials provided at the back of the room (straw ropes, post-it notes, markers, scissors, cloth tape, etc.). You have 7 minutes to create a 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.

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