

DESIGN THINKING IN DISTANCE LEARNING

WHAT IS IT?

Design thinking is a problem-solving approach used when a complex, human-centered issue cannot be easily solved. More than just a process or series of steps, design thinking is the collaborative approach of framing and re-framing a problem while looking to outside sources to develop a holistic solution to the problem. Over the past half-century, design thinking has branched out from the traditional design studio and into other fields. The approach gained popularity from its implementation in design firms such as IDEO and has subsequently grown into educational initiatives started at prestigious institutions such as Stanford's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design aka "d.school." Furthermore, business and institutions have found immense value in empowering non-design people to solve complex issues encountered in their job functions.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Unlike traditional frameworks and theories, there is no one approach to engage in a design thinking session. Depending on the school and implementation, a variety of approaches and techniques can be utilized to promote design thinking. In Stanford's d.school, the design thinking model based on IDEO's approach consists of five steps including Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. In a distance learning solution, the students will need an online studio environment to share their ideas and develop prototypes for commenting. At the Open University, they found the addition of a program to track the thinking process helped the students demonstrate evidence of the thinking process in action.

WHO IS DOING IT?

Being an approach to problem-solving, design thinking can be implemented anywhere a complex, human-centered problem may arise. Utilized by both design professionals and non-design professionals alike, design thinking is present in many different institutions including businesses and educational settings. In the Ideate phase, ideas can come from any source, empowering everyone to contribute and share in the design thinking process.

STEP 1. EMPATHIZE

To Empathize means to observe and understand the experience of the users.

STEP 2. DEFINE

To Define means to build an action statement that encompasses a personal vision of the problem based on the Empathize session.

STEP 3. IDEATE

To Ideate means to explore all ideas no matter how outside the box they seem.

STEP 4. PROTOTYPE

To Prototype means to explore concepts from the Ideate session and interact and explore different design solutions.

STEP 5. TEST

To Test means to gather feedback and work through an iterative process to build a final solution.



SOLVING COMPLEX, HUMAN-CENTERED PROBLEMS

BUILDING CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVERS OUT OF DESIGNERS AND NON-DESIGNERS ALIKE!

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

Design thinking is democratizing design and applying the label of “designer” to all of those who participate in the design thinking process. Given the technological advances over the past century, combined with the constant connectivity the Internet provides, the problems encountered in businesses and institutions are growing more complex. By empowering non-designers to embrace design thinking processes, a company or institution can develop and explore potential solutions without having to rely on outside professionals to run the process.

WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES?

Design thinking is a creative process that can take time to implement successfully. It requires the participants to embrace the process of framing and re-framing the problem to explore potential solutions and then developing multiple prototypes and running through many different iterations of the same design to find the correct solution. The first three steps in the d.school approach can be energizing for the participants. Whereas, the Prototype and Test steps may become tedious for non-designers, causing them to rush the process before exploring all available solutions. Finally, some critics argue it may be challenging to build the student/teacher relationship through distance learning.

WHERE IS IT GOING?

Design thinking is here to stay. It is one approach in line with other user-centered design approaches for design. Design thinking is growing in popularity with design firms such as IDEO touting its usefulness, even having a cover story in the September 2015 Harvard Business Review dedicated to how design thinking can change business strategies. As more schools implement distance learning, the challenges of communicating and developing a distance studio environment will become lessened with new technologies and platforms.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION?

Design thinking is changing higher education in many different ways. Both design and non-design classes are embracing design thinking approaches to help students develop design skills and communication skills. Furthermore, it encourages students to empathize with others and embrace other viewpoints to help frame problems. Finally, it encourages students to develop prototypes and embrace an iterative process to develop effective solutions. All of these implications are possible whether the class is offered on-campus or through a distance learning method.

Additional Resources:

<https://medium.com/@szczpanks/design-thinking-where-it-came-from-and-the-type-of-people-who-made-it-all-happen-dc3a05411e53>
<https://medium.com/the-many/the-problem-with-design-thinking-988b88f1d696>
<https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/design-thinking-bootleg>

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