Follow up to design thinking

In our workshop, we covered ways to define and frame the problem and arrived at a creative brief, comprised of a user profile and HMW question. Today, we will recap and add to the Ideate phase of DT.

The "Yes, and" Mindset

While Define required us to be prickly to narrow down the context of our design process, the Ideate phase will require us to be pliant again. In addition to the metaphor of the pliant and prickly blowfish, we can also think in terms of "Yes, and" and "No, but."

"Yes, and" is a mindset borrowed from theatrical improvisation. Performers who are improvising need to just go with the flow of their fellow performer's choices. That means working with the material that you are given, no matter how unusual, and adding your own twist to connect with the audience.

"No, but" is the opposite. It means being a wet blanket and saying "no" to ideas, no matter how early stage they are. For example:

"Oh, that will never work from a technical standpoint."

"Don't bother. Our leader and IT will never approve that."

These may be legitimate concerns, but the point is that they will be given their place later in the process. Sometimes, completely wild ideas can inspire more practical but unexpected solutions. Stay pliant.

Group Ideation Techniques

Ideation is usually a team sport. Assemble a diverse team. Share the creative brief. Be pliant and open minded. Tap into the power of "Yes, and" to build on each other's ideas. Go for quantity rather than quality at this point.

Name your ideas, give them a short description, and complement them with a simple icon or sketch when appropriate.

How Might We Ideate for the User's Needs

Let's get back to the creative brief that we created for our user. The HMW question is: "How might we design a post-security check airport experience that provides customers with tranquillity and privacy?"

Imagine we are a group working on ideas to address this question. We might start with the obvious ideas and build on them to get more and more innovative. Remember that we are documenting these ideas on sticky notes as we come up with them.

- "How about privacy pods for passengers to take calls? Like a hybrid phone booth/rest booth?"

- "Like a vending machine? Passengers can pay to use them."

- "You can pre-book a rest pod using a mobile app, so you know you definitely will have a space."

- "Or could the booth be a cocoon or sleeping bag thing? Something soft."

- "Or maybe we don't need to do anything architectural. How about noise-cancelling headphones paired with a privacy hood or screen or something. You could enjoy VR, take a call, or just take a nap."

There are some potentially good ideas and some potentially problematic ideas here. Now isn't the time to evaluate. The group can continue building off of each other in a stream-of-consciousness way until the end of the sprint.

How would Steve Jobs solve this?

What if we had unlimited budget or magic?

Ideation is often the most fun part of Design Thinking. Go with the flow and don't be afraid to be ridiculous. Go out and convening a group to Ideate together.

From Brainstorming to Prototyping… AKA Pretotyping

Once we have brainstormed the many possibilities, we settle on the most likely idea and create a pretotype to test. Pretotyping is a set of tools, techniques, and tactics designed to help you validate any idea for a new product quickly, objectively, and accurately. The goal is pretotyping is to help you make sure that you are building The Right "It" before you build "It" right.

Testing your Pretotype with Users

- What worked?

- What about the prototype effectively addresses the user's needs?

- What needs work?

- In what ways does the prototype not adequately address the user's needs?

- What questions or concerns does the user have about the prototype?

- What ideas does the user have that could improve the prototype?

Just engage the "Silent Sponge" and listen. You do not need to "defend" your prototype.

Finally, while we have presented DT in this course as a linear progression of steps; in practice, DT is iterative, which means that you will go through the steps of DT multiple times in the process of innovating a new product or service. Once you get a hang of the DT method and process, you will find yourself jumping between different phases and mindsets throughout the course of a project. This messiness is a natural part of the design process. Learn to embrace it and be comfortable with the uncertainty.

In some ways, the design process never ends. Most products and services can be tweaked with and improved upon over time. For an innovation team practicing DT, we will have to decide when it is time to move from prototyping and testing to full implementation, deployment, and of your new product or service offering in the marketplace.

As a parting thought, remember that DT is meant to be a shared vocabulary and common method to bring together professionals and experts from diverse disciplines to innovate together. It is just a starting point, not an end in itself, and it is certainly not a magic bullet to solve all business challenges and problems.

If we can leave you with just two key takeaway they would be the following:

1. Design Thinking starts with empathy as a key to understanding user needs.
2. Maintain a dynamic mindset to maximise your creative potential. Defer judgment so unconventional ideas can blossom into potentially transformative innovations.

Good luck with your creation and innovation!

Want to take your learning and understanding to the next level?

Recommended reading:

Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation by Tim Brown