

Design Thinking – How Do You Find The Time?

Time – the universal excuse for not getting anything done, and one of the hardest investments to convince senior leaders to make. How do you find time for a well-executed design thinking event? How do you convince people that it's an investment, not a cost?

We've all heard the adage that it takes less time to saw the wood if you take time to sharpen the saw, because a dull saw "you don't have time" to sharpen makes for a slow, frustrating job and a poorer cut. This reminds me of when I worked at a telecommunications firm and our lead technical guy (who was brilliant) was complaining about the long hours he was spending heads-down on technical problems. When I reminded him that he had authorizations to hire additional technical folks to help, his answer was (of course) he didn't have time to do interviews and bring someone else on with all the current work he needed to do! Talk about the never-ending cycle. When I did convince him to carve out time to find the high-quality team he needed, he quickly found his "sharper saw" not only made his workload manageable but improved the quality of his work by providing different perspectives and complementary skills. On a smaller scale, many of us have banged away in frustration on a new software product or business system that we "didn't have time" to get trained on, only to find that when we did finally make time to get the training—when we sharpened our own saw (sometimes under duress!)—that new system we'd been ready to toss out the airlock really did make our work better, faster, and more efficient.

So, if you recognize that old, worn approaches are no longer effective, but you need to convince your organization to break team members loose for a few days to go through the Design Thinking process in order to better tackle challenges or leverage innovation opportunities, how do you do so? Here are some thoughts on ways to help your organization (or client) devote the resources necessary for a successful Design Thinking engagement.

It's trite, but true: Design Thinking team member involvement is an investment in the company's bottom line. This is because:

- 1) Members come to understand the concerns and perspectives of different parts of the company with regard to a particular challenge. This "team building and understanding" aspect of the process may, in itself, be of immense value to the company by helping employees better understand the "big picture" and their role in it.
- 2) The co-creative aspect of Design Thinking builds ownership and buy-in among implementers, and improves "stick-to-it-iveness" during the tough aspects of implementing a major change.
- 3) This iterative, multi-stakeholder methodology also helps break down process-specific approaches and unrecognized assumptions that lead to "status-quo thinking" and hinder innovation. Participants learn how to view a challenge through multiple lenses that almost invariably provide new insights.

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- 4) Design Thinking reduces resistance to change and empowers the team members – “Change is painful when done to you, but powerful when done by you.”
- 5) The local networks formed during collaborative innovation exercises reap benefits down the road in daily ops and when tackling other challenges. Team members find connections across processes that help break down internal barriers, inform decisions, and speed problem resolution.

Helping my client partners understand these benefits has helped with shaping the entire Design Thinking engagement discussion as a bottom-line investment with a return from on-going benefits that's well worth the allocation of their peoples' most precious resource: time.

What are your thoughts?

Keep moving forward!