Change by Design

By Doug Williamson

The fact is – Organizations need to change the way they think, if they want to survive.

The Problem is – Too many organizations are under the impression that the answer to their future success is their ability to analyze their past results, and count on the answer they can project from that data.

The Outcome is – Organizations are losing ground to more innovative and creative competitors who are willing to adopt the principles of design thinking in their organizational processes.

The Solution is – To understand that the future of business focuses equally on “what” your organization does and “how” it does it. That’s the power of design thinking.

The Importance of Design Thinking

A fundamental shift is underway. Many businesses have found out that doing the same old things, in the same old way, just isn’t working. In recent years, they have been forced to reinvent themselves. Enter design thinking, a fundamentally new approach to management that has been used by designers, engineers, and creative agencies for years. The underlying premise is that using a creative approach, versus an academic or business approach, is the best way to secure the future. While business thinking involves the use of current methods, paradigms, and information, design thinking takes on a different problem. It focuses on the problem in a way that unshackles creativity from the burden of current thinking and leads to truly new outcomes.

Tim Brown, author, and CEO of the worlds’ foremost design shop IDEO states:

“The reason for the iterative, nonlinear nature of the journey is not that design thinkers are disorganized or undisciplined, but that design thinking is fundamentally an exploratory process; done right, it will invariably make unexpected discoveries along the way, and it would be foolish not to discover where they lead.”

If your organization is going to be successful, you must focus on redesigning your thinking process.

Three Components to Design Thinking

Design thinking is a systems approach. In other words, the process has a beginning, a middle and an end, which for most business executives, is a reassuring proposition. It also looks at the problem holistically. The three main areas that design thinking forces one to consider are:

People – Will they like it? This focus area areas that the thinker can concentrate on the desirability of what is being redesigned

Technology – Does it work? This focus area covers the feasibility of the redesign in question.

Business – Will it help the bottom line? This focus area helps thinkers redesign something to ensure that it produces a truly viable end result.

By combining these components, organizations can reap the benefits of many different types of innovation, from functional innovation, to emotional innovation to process innovation.
Get T-Shaped

Design thinkers are different. According to IDEO, the best design thinkers are "t-shaped". This means they are both technically savvy across a broad spectrum of topics (the horizontal axis), and they bring a tremendous amount of experience to the table (the vertical axis). By seeking people who have great aptitude on both of these scales, your ability to excel at design thinking, and then implement the innovation will be far more successful.

Keys to Effective Design Thinking in Organizations

Balance – Design thinking is a proven approach, however, it takes a certain skill set and mindset to pull it off. If your organization isn't ready to adopt this concept yet, then create a balance. Use design thinking for key programs that need a big thrust and continue to use business thinking for the more day-to-day activities.

Get outside - One of the most important parts of design thinking is the initial research phase. In the early stages of tackling a problem, it states that the best approach is to get people out of the office to meet with "experts". This will speed up the learning process.

Seek diversity - Challenge your HR group to rethink (redesign) its hiring process. Break the current mould if you feel it doesn't bring you the right mix of people to generate diverse ideas for the future.

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