

DESIGN THINKING: AN APPROACH THAT GIVES A BREATH OF FRESH AIR TO PROJECTS AND RESTORES CREATIVITY TO COMPANIES

EXPERT OPINION



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With digital, the world is changing, and faster than ever! We cannot rely on old design methods if we are to keep up the pace of innovation dictated by today's rapidly changing expectations and practices. Design Thinking is fun and participatory, and is revisiting the way we design transformation strategies and digital set-ups, centering them on the user experience.

Everyone has at least heard of Design Thinking. There is now extensive IT and management literature devoted to this approach. It consists of tackling an innovation problem by applying to it design tools that have long been used by designers. Even though the theoretical principles behind it are well known, and its benefits generally recognized, it has to be said that Design Thinking has not yet really worked its way into companies. Traditional project design and management methods, relying on detailed specifications being drawn up, and a clear separation made between project ownership and project management, are still predominant within companies.

The problem is that these methods are conditioned by the project's technological complexity, much more than by issues of use and benefits to users. For that reason, these methods are unsuited to the demands of the digital world, in which you have to move fast, and where the user experience takes precedence over all other considerations. Design Thinking, in contrast, makes it possible to approach project design in a collaborative, decompartmentalized, and fun way. Whether it be to do with digital set-ups, customer journeys, public policies or transformation strategies, Design Thinking tools help generate ideas and give concrete shape to creative solutions, by placing those people for whom they are intended – users, employees, citizens, customers... – back at the center of the process.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGN THINKING

- Stay centered on the human being and user experience
- Work in multidisciplinary mode
- Take a systems approach so as to understand the user experience end-to-end
- Prefer images/visuals over text
- Work to limited time frames and in short iteration loops
- Do not try to achieve perfection on the first go

BREAK THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

It is impossible to think "differently" if we do not change the frame of reference - the one in which the old, reflexive, and behavioral rules were forged. To get a team to adopt a Design Thinking approach, you need to create a sort of "time zero": a moment in time when you break the old codes and routines to open up new horizons. This time of "awareness" takes the material form of a two - or three - hour seminar. That seminar will be more effective if held off the premises, preferably in an out-of-the-ordinary venue, set up, moreover, in an unusual way that alters how the bodies within it relates to space, and to each other.

Why is this important? Quite simply, because altering spatial reference points induces new forms of behavior and other ways of interacting, and helps the participants feel able to speak freely.

The "awareness" event, which is also referred to as the scoping phase, aims both to explain the approach, and "open up the chakras"¹ of the participants to the challenges posed, and possibilities offered, by digital, so as to kickstart the ideation process. It is also about creating momentum, and drumming up support for an end result to be achieved within a limited time. This type of seminar ideally brings together between 10 and 15 people. It is entirely possible for there to be more, but that requires more time. However, to be effective, a Design Thinking approach must be short: 2 to 3 months maximum between the launch and the validation of the prototype or formalization of the strategy.

A FEW APPLICATION EXAMPLES

- ✓ Imagine and design the future Customer gateway for an industrial group, from the digital promise stage, to its materialization in the form of a prototype
- ✓ Imagine the future digital working environment for employees of a major banking group around different sets of practices: communication, collaborative working, organizing of time, nomadic working
- ✓ Re-think the B2B services strategy of an industrial group by involving resellers/installers in the process
- ✓ Working with salespeople, imagine and design an application for monitoring their sales activities in real time

SERIOUS GAMES TO ENCOURAGE IDEATION

If it is conducted well, the awareness phase arouses in the participants a desire to act. Whilst everyone agrees that creativity is important, it is often difficult to lead individuals to be creative, all the more so since they generally do not even imagine just how creative they can be. It is for this reason that Design Thinking uses role-play exercises and serious games as much as it does. These involve collective, visual, and fun activities. Within a limited time frame, such activities enable ideas to be unleashed and expressed, and a form of consensus to be reached, whether it be to determine

a new policy for B2B services, imagine a customer experience, or conceive a mobile application intended for the general public. Here are three serious games commonly used in Design Thinking initiatives:

- **The allegory of the boat** – Each group draws a sailboat whose anchors represent the brakes on moving forward today; the sails, those things that enable progress; and the rudder, the course ahead/levers for the topic under consideration. The "speedboat" variation focuses on the motors and brakes. For 20 to 30 minutes, the participants position on this image post-its corresponding to each of these categories, the rule being 1 post-it = 1 idea.
- **The product box** – This exercise consists of having a group take hold of a physical box and then define, formalize, and market its project using each face of the box to represent a particular theme: the name, features, user benefits, etc. This method can be used with the IT management committees of large groups to define and formalize strategic roadmaps. The physical box crystallizes the participants' ideas and gives them something concrete to latch onto.
- **The identity pyramid** – This questioning exercise makes it possible to imagine a web or mobile application concept by creating a pyramid ranking of its various aspects, such as the values on which it is based, its mission, the promise it carries, etc., right up to its name.

These serious games, which primarily aim to generate and rank ideas, all have in common the fact that they do not involve any technology. The tools employed – paper and pencil – are the most accessible and least burdensome around. This is not down to chance: even today, when it comes to finding and formalizing their ideas, the majority (64%) of designers and digital creatives discard their digital tools in favor of pencil and paper².

The second point to emphasize is that the effectiveness of these brainstorming and ideation techniques depends on how well the workshops are conducted. With experienced workshop leaders, who master the dynamics of the Design Thinking cycle and all its aspects, between 3 and 5 serious game sequences are generally enough to reap 80% to 90% of the material and summarize it, without going over time... Be careful, though, that the workshop leader does not play too big a role and destroy the participants' creativity. He or she clearly has to lead the workshop, but at the same time, and above all, they must keep it based on two-way action.

¹ This is the expression used by Gilles Babinet, France's "Digital Champion" with the European Commission.

² 2015 survey among 4,000 digital creatives on the tools used in the various phases of their work. <http://tools.subtraction.com/index.html>

WHY GIVE PREFERENCE TO DRAWING?

Sketching has a special place in Design Thinking. It allows ideas, concepts, and processes to be translated into drawings (even if they are awkwardly executed). It pushes participants to focus on the essentials, and makes it easier to share and rank ideas.

The impact that drawings have is greatly superior to that of text. The brain needs only 150 milliseconds to assimilate a symbol and associate a meaning to it. It interprets visual information 60,000 times faster than it does text³.

GIVE MATERIAL FORM TO THE RESULTS QUICKLY, THANKS TO PROTOTYPING

To keep up the momentum, it is essential to move swiftly from the phase of generating ideas, to one in which you take what was imagined and give it a material form. This is the purpose of the prototyping phase. Prototyping is relevant to all forms of subject matter and all types of projects. Thus, for example, regarding a project to achieve a strategic transformation, the formalization of such project in a graphic rendering can be seen as a prototype, showing the project's direction, compulsory steps, interim objectives, etc. to all its stakeholders. The design of the rendering is very important, as much to valorize the collective work undertaken, as to create a reference object symbolizing the convergence of points of view and intentions.

In the case of digital set-ups, formalizing the interface and user journeys is now made considerably easier by tools such as Invision, allowing creatives to take the results of their work and create "clickable mock-ups" from them, without writing a single line of code. These prototypes are made up only of images of screens linked together, but they allow users to test the application directly on the smartphone, tablet or PC. Since nothing is hard-coded, the mock-up can easily be altered, based on users' remarks, up to the point where it meets their main expectations in terms of use and navigation.

This iterative process makes it possible to quickly arrive at an initial operational version, which is often referred to as the MVP (for "minimum viable product") or, in more "positive" terms, as the MLP (for "most lovable product"). This initial set-up generally meets only part of all requirements, but corresponds, in its principles, to the desired user experience. This "fit" leads users to be

really taken with the set-up in terms of its use, thereby guaranteeing that they will adopt the new tool. In digital transformation projects, we talk about the "most lovable roadmap". This refers to the roadmap defining the pace and phasing of the transformations that are to be carried out in order to meet the major challenges facing the company concerned.

DESIGN THINKING AS A DRIVER OF TRANSFORMATION

Every individual and every team having participated in a project that used Design Thinking methods comes out of it transformed. In most organizations, the discovery they make is threefold: not only is it possible to work differently, but it is also possible to work faster, and to bring in to the design process those concerned by the project – employees, customers/end users, partners, citizens... – without losing effectiveness, quite the contrary!

This "discovery" is, in itself, a first stage of transformation, which makes itself felt initially at the level of the individuals involved. Each one of those individuals (once again) becomes a – often enthusiastic – player in those great moments of ideation, design, and prioritization in which they did not use to participate, having been prevented from doing so by existing silos, processes, and working habits. At the collective level, this translates into a greater degree of implication and a "de-demonization" of change: once one becomes an agent of it, change ceases to be feared and becomes desirable. In terms of generating support for it, there is a big difference between having a new tool or organization imposed on you, and participating actively in its creation.

BE DONE WITH SPECIFICATIONS

One of the things that surprises project organizations and IT teams that try out Design Thinking is discovering that you can still arrive at an effective result, without going through the long and tedious process of drawing up standardized specifications.

Given how volatile practices are in the digital sphere, traditional specifications are often already obsolete by the time they are finalized. Instead of fostering the emergence of factual and creative responses to requirements, they just become a hindrance.

³ Thorpe, Fize & Marlot. Speed of processing in the human visual system, Nature, Vol 381 (1996).

Those who have had a taste of Design Thinking are won over by it, and tend not to want to work any other way. However, this enthusiasm calls for a warning: whilst the serious games and other tools that we have outlined seem extremely simple, their effectiveness fundamentally depends on how well the sessions and the whole approach are conducted. The know-how of the session leaders is crucial, as much for preparing and documenting the sessions, as for feeding and stimulating the creativity of the participants. The role of those leaders is also to formalize the renderings of the results obtained, and manage the sequence of stages. This is not something that can be improvised, and, to thwart the bias that exists in all organizations, it is preferable to call upon experienced, external session leaders who master the method's multiple domains, and are able to pass on their know-how, if so required.

Finally, we should note that using Design Thinking, and acclimatizing internal teams to these new methods for designing and conducting projects, are of crucial importance to those companies wishing to attract young talent. The young generation is schooled in collaborative working; it has integrated the codes and reflexes associated with digital and does not identify with traditional, sequential methods. Today, when a company opens itself up to Design Thinking, it is not only reviving creativity and regaining agility, but is also giving itself the means to engage those very individuals who will enable it to complete its digital transformation.

J.P.C.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1999, **Jean-Philippe Clair** was involved in setting up the editor Knowings, which, over the years, was to become a major player in collaborative solutions. In 2011 he joined the SQLI Group to run its Enterprise Content Management (ECM) unit, after which he managed the Digital Consulting hub of Wax Interactive in Lyon. He joined **Keyrus** in 2014, heading up digital operations in the regions, and also managing various consulting assignments related to Mobile and Digital Transformation. In 2016 he took over as head of the **Keyrus** Group's Digital Agency.

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