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Design Thinking 2.0: examining perceptions & current practices in Design Thinking towards the development of an innovation framework

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Design Thinking is recognised as a mind-set, a toolkit, a process, and a methodology, with debates over its definition and identity now widespread. As we continue to understand the impact of Design Thinking we can acknowledge opposing opinions on it, from a failed experiment to an enabler of innovation. It has been hailed as design's greatest export, yet there is increasing disquiet amongst the design community regarding the misuse and dilution of Design Thinking leading to the devaluing of design as a skilled practice. This workshop will aim to engage participants in constructive debate and activities surrounding the application of design thinking, it's positioning within design practice, and significance across non-design industries. By gaining a better understanding how Design Thinking is viewed, used, and evaluated, can we develop a more rigorous methodological framework for its application across a range of industries to 'unlock' innovation in answering complex issues?

Keywords: design thinking; design practice; design skills; non-design disciplines

1   Introduction

This workshop will aim to engage participants in constructive debate and activities surrounding the application of design thinking, it's positioning within design practice, and significance across non-design industries. Our hypothesis is that Design Thinking has reached a 'peak' in contemporary practice, and as the term 'design' is further adapted to suit a business function, Design Thinking needs reframing. This is informed by a previous study conducted by the organisers at the DRS international conference in June 2018, which revealed divided opinions amongst participants, suggesting (a) an unclear distinction between design and Design Thinking, (b) a lack of consensus regarding the role of the designer, and (c) Design Thinking's limited success as a prescribed process. This workshop will further contribute to an ongoing study of the topic. By gaining a better understanding how Design Thinking is viewed, used, and evaluated, can we develop a more rigorous

methodological framework for its application across a range of industries to 'unlock' innovation in answering complex issues?

The origins of Design Thinking can be traced back to scholarly activity relating to design methods between the 1960s and 1980s (Simon 1969, Jones & Thornley 1963, Rowe 1987) laying the groundwork for leading innovation companies like IDEO and IBM to develop methodologies used widely in business and design practices globally. From the perspective of corporations such as IDEO, Design Thinking is a human-centred approach to innovation that utilises a toolkit of methods to integrate people, technology, and business (IDEO 2017).

It is recognised as a mind-set, a toolkit, a process, and a methodology, with debates over its definition and identity now widespread. As we continue to understand the impact of Design Thinking we can acknowledge opposing opinions on it, from a 'failed experiment' (Nussbaum, 2011), to an enabler of innovative solutions across society and business (Brown, 2009). It has been hailed as design's greatest export and has moved the design profession forward by extending the focus of making on to designing services and systems for society. As design disciplines continue to evolve and respond to the changing demands of technology and social needs, business strategists have recognised the power of design thinking and are in a position to make claim to it (Martin, 2009), with the subject being taught widely in university business departments across the world. However, there is increasing disquiet amongst the design community regarding the misuse and dilution of Design Thinking leading to the devaluing of design as a skilled practice (Vinsel 2017). Jen (2017) sees Design Thinking as an over-simplification of a complex process…into a prescriptive, step by step approach. Common in the criticisms is a decoupling of design and design practice. As (Kolko 2018) suggests that "today's design thinkers lack craft, lack intellectual foundations, and can't make things."

In promoting dialogue and eliciting experiences from participants, this workshop will enable the identification of varying approaches in the application of design thinking, utilising a mixture of viewpoints from both design and non-design disciplines to generate insights for design research. For example, are there distinctions between design thinking as employed designers, versus non-designers? The workshop may reveal high levels of plurality in the application of design thinking amongst these different groups, and identify common elements in determining degrees of success or failure.

The proposed workshop aligns readily to the 'Thinking' track within the conference, with additional links to 'Value' as models of design potentially shape innovative thinking across societal challenges and business contexts, and also 'People' as a human centred approach promoting co-design and co-creation approaches.

2   Proposed Activities (workshop structure)

Introduction and framing of the research context, **20 mins**

Activity 1: A series of posters with quotations expressing views of Design Thinking will be displayed in the venue space. Participants will examine the posters, selecting them in alignment with their personal viewpoint. Organisers will use this to place participants into cognate discussion groups, enabling an un-packaging of views and experiences, **30 mins**

Groups' feedback, **20 mins**

Break, **20 mins**

Activity 2: A series of propositional questions will be posed to participants within their cognate groups, focusing attention on the application of Design Thinking, its value as a process and mind-set, and its capacity to promote innovation. These group activities aim to harness the collective skills, experience and views of participants, in prompting engagement in the physical making/doing process of Design Thinking, providing the opportunity to test, discuss, and perhaps find points of consensus to inform future research, **60 mins**

Review and group discussion, evaluating results, **30 mins**

Workshop length 3 hours

Outcomes: Data captured via the workshop will contribute to a larger evidence base of research being assembled by the organisers, providing a clearer understanding of the degree of success of Design Thinking processes being practiced, formulating a better understanding of the role of the designer within those processes, and revealing the impact of applying Design Thinking across a range of contexts. The studies aim to enable the future development of a methodological framework to guide businesses and education in the area of both design and Design Thinking.

3   Intended Audience

The workshop audience will ideally be an international mixture of academics from both design and non-design backgrounds (but whom are familiar with the application of Design Thinking), creatives and design practitioners from a broad range of disciplines, and representatives from organisations that have used or are interested in the application of Design Thinking. Participants will benefit from exposure to others experiences of design thinking from across a range of contexts, enabling participants to question and challenge how Design Thinking is currently applied, and may be applied in the future.

We anticipate 20 to 30 participants.

4   Workshop Organiser(s)

Jon Spruce lectures in product design and craft, his research interests focus on exploring how design education may be developed through increased dialogue and understanding between academics, the design industry, users of design services and consumers of design.

Dr Louise Kiernan is a product design lecturer at the University of Limerick. She has sixteen years of industry experience as a senior design engineer and product designer. Her research interests include, team collaboration, design education and design for health.

Michelle Douglas is a senior design academic with global experience. Her research interests are in design ecosystems and practice and the value of design in geographic regional contexts. She lectures on design thinking, collaborative practice and experience design at Masters level.

5   Special Requests

Large screen or projector, post-its, flip charts/white boards.

6   References

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