

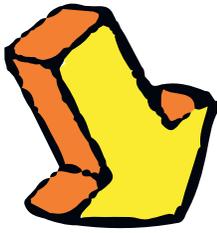
1. **FRAMING**

5. **Collective CURIOSITY**

2. **EMPaTHY**

4. **PRoToTyPiNg**

3. **SToRY**



Energizing Innovation Through Design Thinking

If your employees aren't as creative as you'd like, you can help by setting the stage for creativity.

by **Cindy Tripp**

ARE YOU CREATIVE? When most adults are asked this question, their knee jerk reaction is to quickly answer, 'No'. Why? Because somewhere along the way, we were trained to no longer expect or deem ourselves to be creative.

For my own daughter, this happened early on, when an elementary school art teacher informed her that she must fill up the entire page with her art. What she 'learned' from this exchange was that she is not creative—and in different ways, most of your employees and colleagues have learned the same thing. The sad result: they are reluctant to offer up new ideas or to try to find a better way.

Complicating matters further, **Gallup** has estimated that 71 per cent of employees in the average organization are not en-

gaged in their workplace and therefore, are less productive than they could be. Imagine what would happen if you could a) reach out to this majority of employees and b) engage them by unleashing their creativity?

In my own experience as a leader at **Procter & Gamble**, I found that you can take a few simple steps to energize peoples' innovative spirit and get their creative juices flowing. Like my colleagues at the Rotman School and Stanford's d.school, I call this approach Design Thinking, and it is one way to unshackle the talent within your organization so that anyone — in any department — can contribute to innovation, in big ways and small.

As developed at P&G [with the help of former Rotman Dean **Roger Martin**], Design Thinking is an umbrella term for



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the methodologies that designers use to tackle problems, and virtually anyone can learn it. I have personally used these methodologies to develop new, business models, products and services, and along the way, have seen employee value and satisfaction grow. Design Thinking is a flexible approach that delivers not because of its inherent brilliance, but because of the inherent brilliance of the people in your organization — brilliance that, perhaps, you don't see most the time, because they believe they are not supposed to offer it up.

In this article I will highlight the five key Design Thinking concepts that I have found to be most useful in unleashing creativity and innovation:

- Framing a challenge or opportunity through different lenses;
- Developing deep empathy for stakeholders;
- Understanding the user and other stakeholder's stories and constructing a coherent picture;
- Prototyping possible solutions and iterating; and
- Leveraging collective curiosity throughout the process.

Let's examine each concept in turn.

1. Framing the Challenge or Opportunity

Simply put, framing means 'how you look at a problem'. Oftentimes in business, we try to frame the exact, precise problem before we tackle it; but this approach greatly limits the opportunity to discover unexpected solutions, or to understand whether what the problem we are framing is a symptom or a root cause. Spending some time on framing enables you to consider a problem through various lenses and at different levels of abstraction.

For example, say one of your most successful products has recently become unpopular. Is the problem related to the way the product functions, or does it require a more pleasant overall user experience? These are vastly different ways to frame the same challenge, and choosing one over the other will lead to very different solution considerations.

It is useful to frame a problem from different stakeholder views. You can even go beyond different categories of users to

consider others in the value chain, such as the distributor. One time, my team and I were working in Peru when we discovered that what we thought was a consumer problem had linkages to distributor issues. Had we not looked at the context more broadly, we would have completely missed out on the root cause of the problem and worked only on one of its symptoms. The bottom line is, when you 'try on' many different frames for a problem, you will discover opportunities and get to more creative solutions.

EXHIBIT A: Daniel Kish literally re-framed what it means to see. Does it mean 'seeing through the eyes', as you and I do, or does it mean 'navigating the world'? The former was not an option for Daniel, who has been blind since the age of 13 months; but the latter framing of the problem held possibilities, via 'echolocation' — which certain species (including bats and dolphins) use to navigate the world.

Echolocating animals emit calls out to the environment and listen to the echoes of the calls that return from various objects near them. They then use these echoes to locate and identify objects. Kish and his organization have now taught echolocation to more than 500 blind children around the world. What frame are you using to define your current business challenge? Do you consider other potential frames, and encourage this skill in your people?

2. Empathy

As you attempt to see a problem through varied lenses, empathy is a critical concept to consider. Do you view your customer as a combination of 'data and value', or as a human being with desires and fears that go beyond what your product can offer? I have met countless junior marketers who can quote endless statistics about their target market, yet they don't know enough about the actual people within it to care one iota about them. Design Thinking entails reaching out into the world for wisdom about your users and building empathy for them.

At one point, working in Japan, my team and I could not figure out why our cleaning products were not attracting more users; until we realized that our users' dreams went way beyond

‘a clean home’. We spent some time understanding our target consumer’s life and began to understand how alone she felt in maintaining a harmonious home. This crystalized into the insight that she was, in one consumer’s own words, “a seldom-rewarded, lone fighter Mom,” and that what she needed wasn’t ‘more clean’, but “a little magic, to help in the battle against chaos.”

This clarity about our customer and her story inspired a very different approach to our innovation strategy, and in turn, led to a renewed innovation master plan that began to deliver real growth. This was a huge moment for the team, as it made us realize that there were other legitimate places for us to innovate, beyond just a product’s function.

EXHIBIT A: Kristi Zuber and Kaiser Permanente are using empathy to reveal deep insights that help them to innovate in the health care realm. By observing real-life patients, they noted that when a baby is in the neonatal unit, his or her parents feel the need to be in close physical proximity at all times. However, having the required equipment transported to a private room is far too expensive. Kristi and her team found a solution that involved sharing of expensive equipment and space, enabling constant parental presence. Do you understand your consumers emotionally? Do you know what brings them real value?

3. Leveraging Story

With empathy comes deeper understanding and the ability to see the larger context — or ‘story’ — of the person you are serving. To do this right, you need to put aside your business goals for a moment (don’t worry—you will come back to them!) and spend some time looking at the world from your user’s perspective.

Doing this can inspire all sorts of opportunities for innovation. In my experience, this is the most provocative concept of the five, and the hardest for business people to accomplish, and that is because ‘leveraging a user’s story’ requires the acknowledgment that your product is not the hero or the star of the show: your user is. If this person is the hero of the story, where does your product fit into her story? Perhaps your product can serve as a ‘mentor’ or a ‘secret weapon’ that helps her achieve her goals.

Rarely will your product deliver the absolute goal itself; rather, it will be something that can help users on their journey to achieving broader goals.

For example, in the realm of feminine protection, P&G’s products aim to help teen girls feel as free and confident as possible. The protection itself — while critical — is simply a product function; it is not the teen’s ‘end game’. Teens have much larger aspirations, which is why we created beinggirl.com. This content-heavy website includes sections for ‘my relationships’, ‘my style’ and ‘ask the experts’, serving a vital role for the Tampax and Always brands and the teens that they serve.

Embracing your user’s story means moving beyond the functional aspects of your product or service to help your customer achieve his or her dreams. Once you have a clear picture of your user’s dreams and goals, ideas will begin to emerge, and you will start to see opportunities for monetizing value.

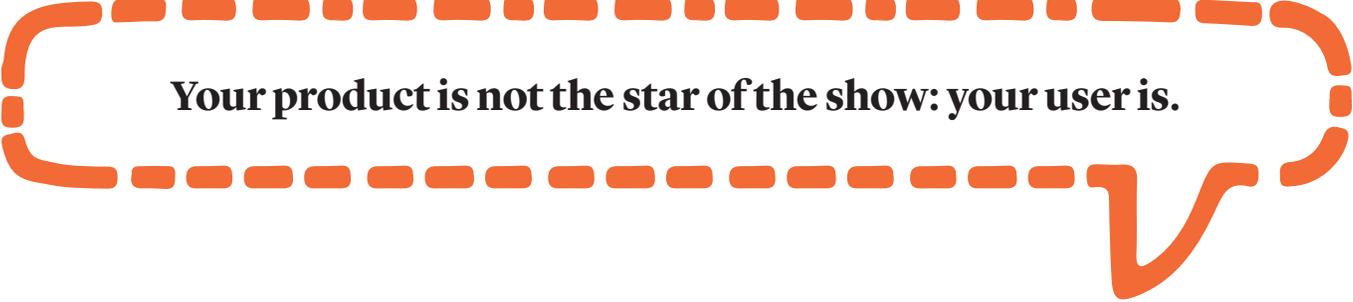
EXHIBIT A: In his recent book, *Grow: How Ideals Power Growth and Profit at the World’s Greatest Companies*, **Jim Stengel**, the former Chief Marketing Officer at Procter & Gamble, introduces us to the Stengel 50, a group of ideal-driven businesses that grew three times faster than their competitors over the decade of the 2000s. As he details in the book, this is what **Coca-Cola** has done as they look to help their consumers have ‘moments of happiness’ every day of their lives.

In my experience, your odds of getting to a relevant purpose that connects with your user are greatly enhanced if you understand your user’s desires and where you fit into his or her story. Have you spent any time lately thinking about where your product fits into your user’s life?

4. Prototyping

In my own experience and that of designers everywhere, ideas emerge and can be accelerated and understood best if they are ‘made real’. Enter ‘low-resolution prototyping’, whereby you use humble materials to make an idea tangible and share it with actual stakeholders and users for feedback and iteration.

The digital realm has done this well for years, creating beta versions prior to launching a product; but don’t be fooled, you can do it in the bricks and mortar world, too. I have worked with



Your product is not the star of the show: your user is.

teams to prototype all kinds of things: products out of Legos and pipe cleaners, services via sketches and skits, and even organizational designs out of tinker toys. The key is to create something tangible that people can react to. The reactions you receive will provide insights that help you see what works, and what needs more work.

EXHIBIT A: 13-year old Long Island, New York resident Aidan Dwyer prototyped his way to a better way to collect solar energy. In 2011, Aidan won a national science competition when his research appeared to prove that solar panels that are arrayed like the leaves on a tree collect sunlight more efficiently than traditional linear setups. Perhaps, Aidan postulated, trees naturally arranged their branches to improve the collection of sunlight. He used a Mathematical function called the ‘Fibonacci Sequence’ [whereby the first two numbers in sequence are 0 and 1, and each subsequent number is the sum of the previous two] to imitate that design, with solar panels replacing leaves.

Aidan did chores to earn the money to buy about \$75 worth of materials. With help from his father — and after many mistakes—he ended up with two models: a traditional flat-panel array and a tree-shaped solar collector designed to mimic the branch sequencing of an oak tree. Over the course of several months he compared measurements; and to his delight, the tree structure’s numbers were higher.

While the legitimacy of his findings remains unsettled (many scientists are skeptical), Aidan’s embracing of prototyping is inspirational either way, and he has filed a provisional patent application for his research. Do you encourage your people to explore what might be possible in your business?

5. Collective Curiosity

All of the concepts described thus far will be enhanced by creating an environment where curiosity — and not always knowing the answer — is valued, and where seeking the perspectives of people who are different from yourself is celebrated. Are your employees open to considering alternatives outside of their comfort zone? Are you?

On many occasions, I have seen the power of creativity that comes from diversity when it is empowered and encouraged. In

fact, one of my Human Resources colleagues once told me that in her experience, Design Thinking was the top diversity initiative at P&G, because it worked to bring *diversity of thought* into so many conversations. In one case, by consciously taking a learning stance regarding ‘story’, P&G executives opened up and listened to former employees who had left the company or who were considering leaving, and saw things from another perspective. This led to a very tangible action: the creation of a program called Mainstream Flexibility for all employees.

Perhaps the hardest part for a leader is keeping in check your own need for reliable, predictive measurement while leveraging Design Thinking. You have to ask yourself at the outset, are you interested in measuring or are you interested in *learning*? The fact is, if you want breakthrough innovation, you have to want to learn. As a leader, the key is to maintain a stance of curiosity, to be willing to fail and to engage people in the process with passion, curiosity and no agenda. Then, step back and watch as the momentum takes off.

EXHIBIT A: Curiosity is encouraged in some unexpected places. At **Nucor Steel**, for instance, they have an organizational design and policy that encourages all employees to explore how to make their customers more satisfied. According to the company’s website, “At Nucor, workers excel because they are allowed to fail. Our managers at all levels encourage their employees to try out their new ideas.” As a result, Nucor has innovated over the past few decades in an industry that was widely believed to be declining, creating innovations like Thin Slab Casting, Flat Rolled Steel and Thin Strip Casting, which removed expensive processes from production and thus increased profitability. As a leader, do you celebrate learning and exploration? What would happen if you let your people try and fail?

In closing

Back in 2005, my eyes — and those of my P&G colleagues — were opened to the power of Design Thinking, thanks to the mentoring of three individuals: Roger Martin, **David Kelley** [of IDEO and the Stanford d.school] and **Patrick Whitney** [of the Illinois Institute of Technology’s Institute for Design]. Today, just a few years later, I see evidence of its power everywhere I look.

Many people are eager to codify Design Thinking, but I believe that by trying to do that, you lose much of its power. The concepts discussed herein do not need to be followed in any particular order: you can start anywhere, and you don't have to get it perfect the first time out. My advice is to try something, learn, and apply that learning going forward.

In the end, the goal is to shift Design Thinking from a method into a mindset and, eventually, into a key part of your organization's culture. **R**



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Women of New York for her lifetime achievement in mentoring.

ENERGIZING INNOVATION : GETTING STARTED

Framing: Write your problem statement up. Does it assume the solution in the problem definition? Brainstorm alternative ways to express the problem without solutions assumed.

Empathy: Take five minutes to sketch your customer or stakeholder. Write descriptions on the sketch relating to his thoughts, feelings, actions and speech. During the meeting at key decision points, refer to your sketch... what would his vote be?

Story: Thinking of your customer, look at her life as a story: if she is the heroine of her life story, what is it that she desperately seeks in her life (not from your offering) and what is blocking her from getting it? Brainstorm how your product or service could help her advance towards her goal.

Prototyping: When you are 'blocked' on an idea you are developing, stop, physically express your ideas with paper, tape, string, etc. and share it with someone to get feedback.

Collective Curiosity: Ask a colleague you typically disagree with to grab a coffee with you and bring up a topic: simply listen and seek to understand it from their point of view.

THREE EXERCISES

- Watch the video at youtube.com/watch?v=CRA-asTuP_Y and discuss what limits have you put on your problem definition. Have you framed it too narrowly?
- Watch the video at youtube.com/watch?v=QleRgTBMX88 and discuss how open your team is to other perspectives different from their own. How can you encourage this openness?
- Be inspired by Volkswagen's 'transparent factory': watch the videos at youtube.com/watch?v=nd5WGLWNIIA and the 'fun theory': www.thefuntheory.com