

ThisIsDesignThinking.net: A Storytelling-Project

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Abstract ThisIsDesignThinking.net was started in 2015 and is the first website dedicated to examine design thinking adoption in organisations. The blog is managed by an international network of editors-in-chief who contribute articles or advice authors.

When does design thinking fail? What is the “right way” of implementing design thinking? Where can I find stories about how design thinking has been introduced in organizations, which are similar to the one I’m working in? In what ways can design thinking be meaningful to my organization?

These are some typical questions that are asked by practitioners, managers and employees, but also by social entrepreneurs and administrative staff within the public sector. This is why the “Impact by Design Thinking” project team (Eva Köppen, Holger Rhinow, Jan Schmiedgen, and Prof. Dr. Christoph Meinel) launched the website *thisisdesignthinking.net* in February 2015. *Thisisdesignthinking.net* showcases stories from companies working with design thinking. It also publishes interviews with experts and practitioners. Many years of research and insights on design thinking in organizations has led us to the idea of sharing our knowledge by way of this format.

1 Background

In 2015 we finished our study “Parts without a Whole” (Schmiedgen et al. 2015), an examination of design thinking adoptions in organizations. The idea of creating a website first emerged as a side project.

Every qualitative researcher knows the following situation: Conducting many qualitative expert interviews we realized that within the study we could rarely make accessible the vast amount of insights and «leftover knowledge» that we gained in our research. Only a fraction could be used for developing concepts for our study.

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Additionally, we have to admit that our scientific papers are rarely read by practitioners. From what we know practitioners are primarily interested in the anecdotal story chunks of other organizations. But unfortunately it is oftentimes exactly these side stories that are neglected in our academic publications. They tend to end up as defunct interview transcripts in our filing cabinets.

This is why we started our experiment. After getting our interviewees' permission to use their material, we compiled design thinking stories from the leftover information we had. This is how the first design thinking-related case studies and interviews on our website came into being. They are intended to demonstrate the wide range of perspectives on design thinking.

2 Continua of Design Thinking Practices

Our research perspective leads us to the conviction that there are multiple ways of practicing design thinking—none of them are either “right” or “wrong.” Adopting a pragmatic point of view, we look for ways of integrating design thinking that either work for an organization or not. So instead of promoting the “right way” to practice design thinking, the website describes continua of organizational practices that are all outcomes of design thinking. These either make sense in their particular situation or have failed.

Because—more specifically—there is no explicit answer to the question of what design thinking is. As studies revealed, practitioners as well as academics have multiple interpretations in mind when it comes to defining design thinking (Schmiedgen et al. 2015). From a philosophy to a toolbox, from an innovation technique to an instrument for employee engagement—the range is so great that it would equal an inadmissible simplification to give a clear-cut definition.

This might be the reason why Kees Dorst, PhD. Professor at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia, demands from design research the articulation of “the kinds of design thinking and the ways they can be applied”. With the cases and interviews demonstrated on this website, we hope to take further steps in this direction.

The website draws a colorful picture of the multiple design thinking activities that are going on today. It serves the research community as well as design thinking coaches, practitioners and students.

3 Who Is the Reader of Our Website?

The dynamics in the field of design thinking are breathtaking. The inflation of publications may soon become overwhelming for someone in search of orientation. *Thisisdesignthinking.net* offers an easy, accessible overview on current developments. Furthermore, such a pool of examples, enriched with scientific explanations, may help to cool down the oftentimes heated debate within the design thinking

community and among practitioners. Such an overview helps localize all the existing kinds of design thinking with its pros and cons.

Practitioners searching for advice regarding design thinking get the chance to meet their “corporate twin” in organizations with similar preconditions, who may also function as role models. For educators, the website serves as a source for refreshing their exemplary materials, explanatory models and perspectives on current problems in design thinking practice.

4 The Future of Thisisdesignthinking.net

Do you know an interesting design thinking story that is worth telling the world? If so, please get in touch with us. Prospective authors are experienced students, young professionals, PhD candidates, etc., who volunteer to write an article. In turn, they receive attention (our newsletter goes out to nearly 1500 persons) and acquire valuable contacts in the industries they are interested in writing about. Not only do the chosen organizations receive free “PR,” but the people who are responsible for the design thinking initiatives are mentioned publicly.

Please contact us at: thisisdesignthinking@hpi.de

Reference

Schmiedgen J, Rhinow H, Köppen E, Meinel C (2015) Parts without a whole?—the current state of design thinking practice in organizations (Study Report No. 97) (p 144). Potsdam: Hasso-Plattner-Institut für Softwaresystemtechnik an der Universität Potsdam. Retrieved from <http://thisisdesignthinking.net/why-thissite/the-study/>