

## Article: The power of design thinking

Tim Brown's article in Harvard Business Review opens with the following teaser: 'Thinking like a designer can transform the way you develop products, services, processes – and even strategy.' Brown introduces the concept design thinking through a description of Thomas Edison's working methods. Edison had the vision to look beyond the technical side of his innovations, and also consider how people would use the products he was inventing, and how they could be introduced into the market. Brown defines design thinking as follows: *Design thinking is a discipline that uses a designer's feeling and methods to devise a product that is technically feasible, meets customer expectations and is viable in a business sense because it provides added value for the customer and manages to stand out in the market.*

Brown provides various examples where design thinking made all the difference. One concerns shift handover by nurses at a hospital. Shift handover at this hospital took about one hour every time. This process was assessed using design thinking, which ultimately led to significant reduction of the time spent on shift handover, giving nurses more time for patient care. One insight offered by the design thinking approach was that shift handover would be sped up if information on one patient would be handed over from one nurse to the next while standing by the patient's bedside.

Brown's article also contains a description of the design thinker's personality profile. Brown lists five character traits:

- Empathy: design thinkers have an ability to observe the world from different perspectives; that of colleagues, intermediaries, customers and users. By viewing a problem through different eyes, they see things that others don't.
- Integrative thinking: design thinkers do not think in a linear fashion, but have the ability to combine contradictory aspects in their search for a solution to a problem.
- Optimism: design thinkers work on the basis that every problem has a solution, and that there is always one solution that is better than the other.
- Experimentalism: innovative thought enables design thinkers to find solutions in unexpected places.
- Collaboration: many design thinkers have gained experience in different disciplines. That gives them good grounding for collaboration with people with backgrounds that differ from theirs.

Brown's article also focuses on the process underlying design thinking. Brown identifies three process stages:

- Inspiration: this stage in the process takes stock of the following: What is the business problem? What do people think? How do they behave? What do they want? What are the limitations from a business point of view? This stage should see extensive involvement of many different disciplines, with special attention going to 'extreme' users, such as children, and information and ideas should come together.
- 'Ideation': this is when solutions are thought up and tested. When testing ideas, the end user's perspective should be assumed.
- Implementing the vision: the most suitable solution will have to be implemented, and some serious thought should go into how the product must be marketed (taking possible failure factors into account).

And finally, Brown also has some handy tips on how design thinking can be implemented in a company. These include: involve designers in troubleshooting exercises, place the customer centre stage, and get project input from people from outside the company.

*Reference(s)*

Brown, T. (2008), Design Thinking. Harvard Business Review, vol.86, no.6, p.84-92. \*

\*: available in the EURIB library.