

THE 3 KEYS TO INNOVATING EVERY DAY

How to Build a Culture of Collaborative Creativity

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Introduction

“Culture eats strategy for lunch.”

We love that quote. It belongs to the management consultant Peter Drucker. He means that you can make all the plans you want, but it’s your corporate culture that will ultimately drive success.

We’d like to propose our own version of the quote:

“Process eats great ideas for lunch.”

It means that you and your team might have brilliant ideas, but unless you have a process to grow and sustain a creative culture, those ideas will die for lack of nourishment.

It makes sense, then, to talk about process before we get into ideas and how to generate them. Let’s start by going 140 years back in time to another renowned figure: Thomas Edison.



It’s well known that Thomas Edison didn’t invent the lightbulb by himself. In fact, the British chemist Humphry Davy created the first electric arc lamp more than seventy years before Edison patented a commercially viable

bulb. In a two-year period, Edison led a team of designers in testing more than 3,000 designs before perfecting the carbon-filament version of the bulb, which preceded today’s tungsten filament. “I have not failed,” Edison said. “I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”



Nor did the idea of electric light come to Edison in a bolt of inspiration from the heavens. Anyone who has ever brainstormed a solution to a difficult problem knows that “Eureka” moments are more fiction than reality, and that luck is hardly a process. In fact, we might credit Edison with operating the first creative lab that employed a process of ideation, prototyping, and almost endless iteration.

Most breakthrough ideas, whether the light bulb, the iPhone, or

the space shuttle, are the result of this process in one form or another. Not to say you won't get lucky (and we wish you all the luck in the world), but if your goal is to build the skills required for ongoing, outstanding achievements, you'll need to have a great process in place first, and then you'll need to get everyone on board with it so that it becomes self-sustaining.

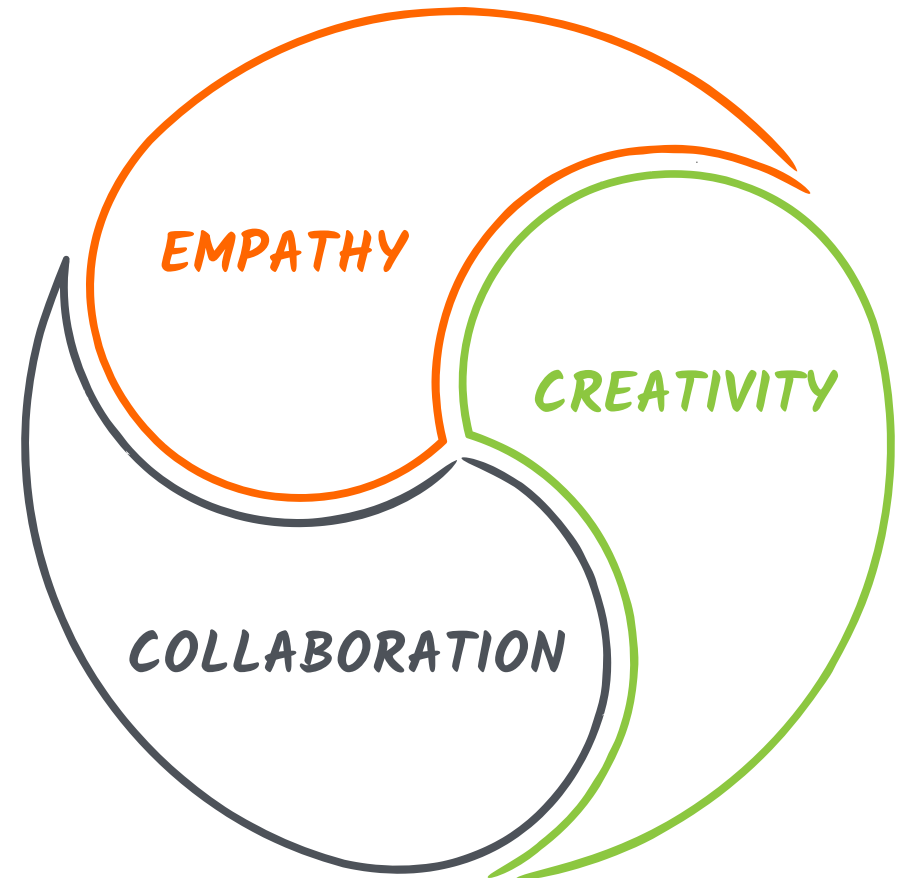
With this guide, we hope to give you an understanding of one such process, and how it will give you a framework for generating more ideas faster.

Why "faster?"

Because the faster you and your teams can generate ideas, the faster you can produce extraordinary solutions that will help your organization solve its toughest challenges, and stay relevant and competitive in the marketplace. "Faster" will also allow you to iterate more times—we can take a lesson from Thomas Edison of not "failing" but always moving towards a better solution.

Generating more ideas faster might sound like an overly ambitious goal. In truth, most organizations don't make enough time for the creative exploration and collaboration that innovation requires. Directors and managers encourage their teams to be creative, but let's face it: when most employees are firing on all cylinders just to get through the workday and managers have only next quarter's bottom line in sight, generating ideas becomes a bit unrealistic.

Not unrealistic, however, if a creative process—a culture—is in place to support ongoing ideation. How might you create that culture at your organization?



Enter design thinking

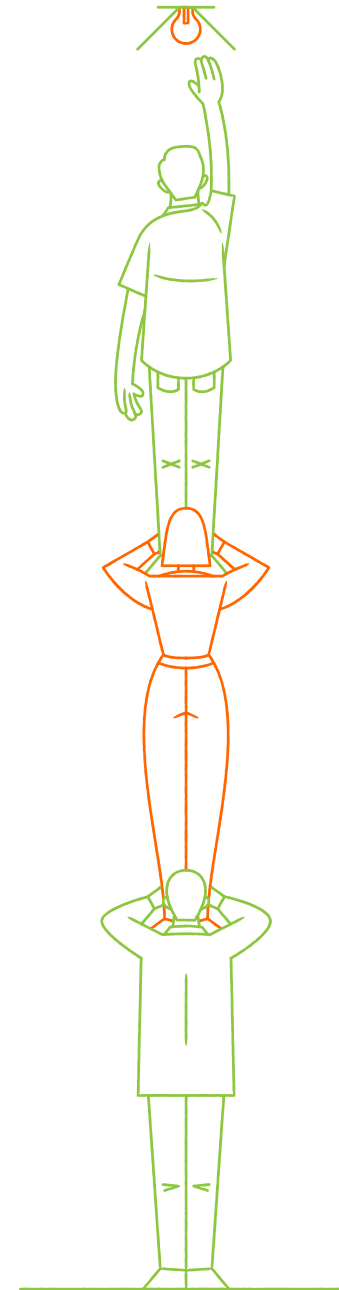
Design thinking is a powerful, human-centered process of tackling complex problems and finding useful and desirable solutions.

It's not a set of directions that you and your team can start following tomorrow morning. Sorry, but in our decades of work in the field, we've yet to come across anything as magical as that! Design thinking is different. It's a transformational way of seeing and thinking about the world and the people around us. Through training and practice, employees build their creative confidence, become more collaborative, adopt a new mindset, and ultimately build innovation into their daily work process.

To be clear, design thinking is not a shortcut to innovation. It's a process and a set of skills that take practice, guidance, and commitment. But we hope that this guide will help you understand why it is such an effective approach to innovation, how it will increase employee engagement, and why companies are embracing design thinking more and more as a way to engender a creative culture.

So let's jump into it with a joke:

How many designers does it take to change a light bulb?



Defining the Challenge

Answer:

Does it have to be a light bulb?

We'll explain in a minute, after we introduce you to Illac Diaz.

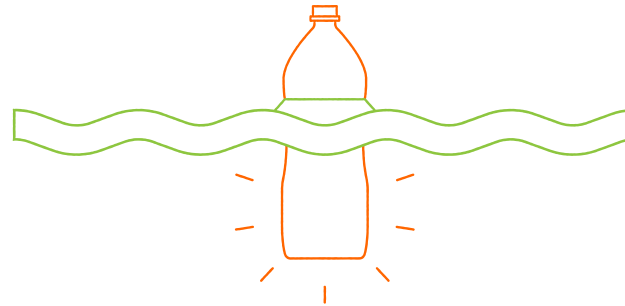
Diaz is an entrepreneur who used simple physics to bring light to poor communities in areas with limited or no access to electricity. He filled recycled plastic bottles with water to refract sunlight, each bottle in effect becoming a solar-lighting fixture that could be easily installed in the roofs of simple tin shacks.

His ingenious solution brings light to homes, businesses, and schools where previously people were forced to light fires and breathe in smoke.

Diaz's Liter of Light project illustrates one of the first key steps in design thinking: making sure we're defining the right problem before jumping to an easy or obvious solution.

Does it have to be a light bulb? Well, no.

In design thinking, we define the problem by seeing it through the experiences, needs, and desires of those we're innovating for—not only through the needs of the organization.



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Along the way, we question our own assumptions and identify predefined constraints. In Diaz's example, the problem to be solved was not how to bring light bulbs to a poor community.

It was how to bring light that costs next to nothing, was environmentally non-obtrusive, and didn't require electricity.

Our point of departure for a design thinking mindset, then, is to shift our focus from solution first to understanding the problem and the human experience first.

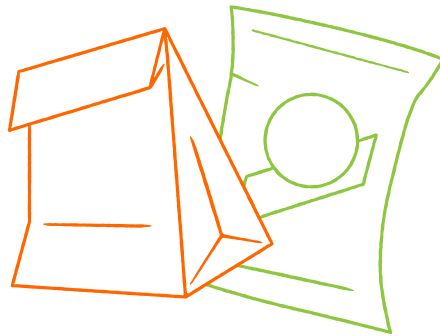
In other words, with *empathy*.

In fact, empathy is the first of three essential keys of design thinking.

Empathy

To understand people empathically, we must leave the confines of our own world and enter the realm of others. We must go beneath the surface to see what our customers see, hear what they hear, think what they think. In design thinking, empathy is the first step in truly understanding the problem.

The problem that confronted the San Francisco Unified School District was that kids at school were skipping lunch. It was a problem because hungry students—many of them poor—don't learn well. So why weren't they eating the subsidized lunches available in the cafeteria?



To find out, the SFUSD launched the “Future Dining” initiative. Students were invited to reimagine their lunch experience through a series of design workshops. The result: cafeterias were reconfigured as social hubs, with circular tables replacing benches, and new graphics and interactive wall surfaces. Suddenly, students were eating lunch together.



Framing a challenge empathically goes beyond having sympathy for someone else's circumstances. It means having a deep intuition for what it feels like to live their lives.

The solution was driven by a deep understanding of the students' needs. It wasn't different food choices they wanted; it was an atmosphere that enabled them to socialize and feel a sense of community.

Framing a challenge empathically, whether it's to serve the needs of the global poor or to serve school lunches in a different way, goes beyond having sympathy for someone else's circumstances. It means having a deep intuition for what it feels like to live their lives. It means having people on your design team who are advocates for your audience, who represent their needs and wants at every step of the innovation process.

The Real World of Human Beings

So how do we go about gaining that empathic understanding? How do we identify customer needs that customers themselves often can't recognize or express?

Not from crunching numbers or reading articles. Not from TV pundits.

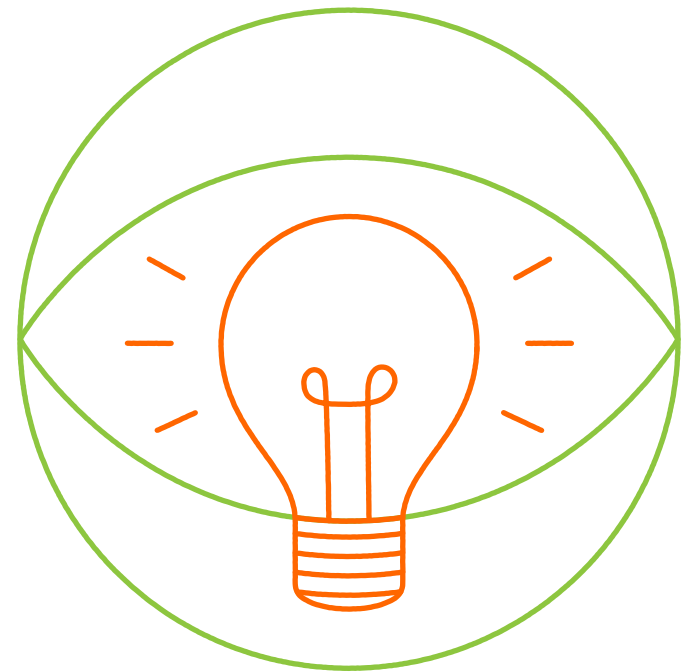
Empathy happens in the real flesh-and-blood world of human beings. That's why, at any design-centric organization, observation "in the wild" takes center stage. These organizations empower teams to observe behavior and draw conclusions about how people actually use products and experience the world. At the international design firm IDEO, experts in human behavior spend many days in the field, watching, listening, and

asking questions.

David Kelley, the founder of IDEO, says,

"Always ask yourself, 'What more can I learn about someone's experience, and how might I go about understanding that experience better?'"

Or, as we like to say when we encourage innovators and entrepreneurs to go out and observe: "Innovation begins with an eye."



Creativity

Johns Hopkins University physician Charles Limb is no ordinary doctor. He's also an experienced musician with a fascination for how creativity shows up in the brain. Limb designed a special keyboard that jazz musicians could both play and hear while inside an MRI machine. What Limb found was that brains behaved differently depending on whether the musician was improvising or playing something from rote memory. During improvisation, the lateral prefrontal lobes responsible for conscious self-monitoring became less engaged.

“Musicians were turning off the self-censoring part of the brain so they could generate novel [musical] ideas without restrictions,” he observed.



Design thinking gives us the confidence and skills to tap into our creative wellspring and generate more unexpected ideas.

Limb proved that there was a neurological connection between creativity and generating original ideas to solve problems. Unfortunately, our education system doesn't allow for much unstructured time, nor for asking many questions: we are rewarded for having the right answers, quickly. The creative potential of most of us is stymied at a young age. By the time we're adults, we've learned to censor our creative instincts of playing, riffing, doodling, improvising.

But to succeed in today's frenetic marketplace requires tapping into our creative wellspring often, and generating more ideas confidently. Design thinking teaches us the mindset and skills to do it.

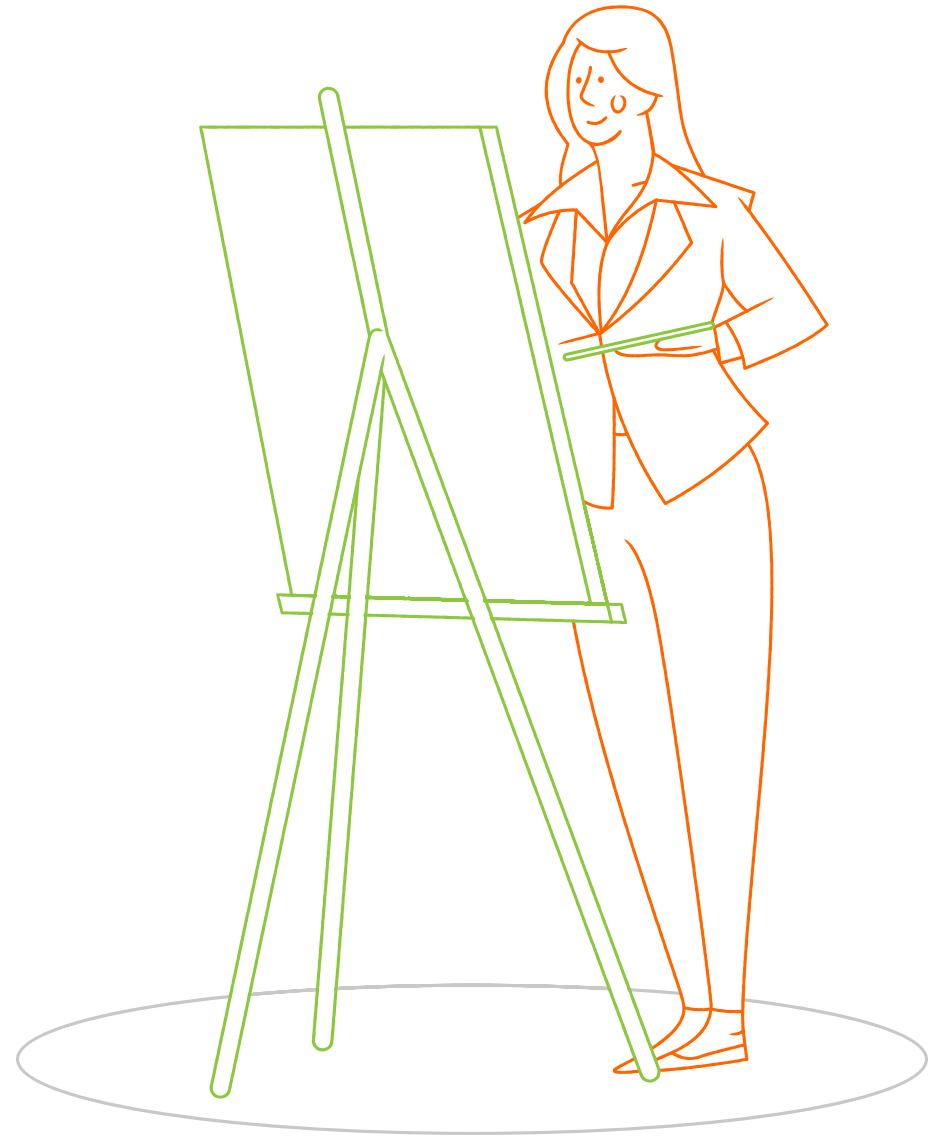
Creativity, Van Gogh, and Ourselves

We tend to see musicians, writers, and painters as “creative,” more creative than, say, a sales manager for an auto parts company. But in his well-known book, *The Path of Least Resistance*, Robert Fritz shows us that the creative process used by artists is the same as that used by business people to meet their goals. At issue is not the specific task or job, Fritz says. It’s how we think:

“When you are in the orientation of the creative, life is often interesting, exciting, and special. This is not because creators try to be interested in whatever they are doing, but because they are involved in life on a level where there is always the possibility of something new and wonderful happening that has never existed before.”

The psychologist Carl Rogers makes no distinction between creativity in small, everyday acts and big accomplishments:

“The action of a child inventing a new game with his playmates; Einstein formulating a theory of relativity; the housewife devising a new sauce for the meat; a young author writing his first novel; all of these are, in our definition, creative, and there is no attempt to set them in some order of more or less creative.”



Inventing a new game, a new sauce, or a new theory: they are all creative design projects. In fact, you complete at least one design project every day: getting dressed. Notice how each step of outfitting yourself correlates to a step in the design thinking process:

- Defining the challenge (“What kind of day will I have? Casual? Formal?”)
- Identifying constraints (“Which clothes can I choose from?”)
- Ideating (“What works well together?”)
- Testing (“How do I look?”)
- Iterating (trying other combinations)
- Sharing (“What do others think?”)
- Reflecting (“How did it go? What could I do next time?”)

In the words of Stefanos Zenios, Stanford Graduate School of Business professor:

“Creative doesn’t mean you’re Van Gogh or Picasso; they are creative in their own discipline. You can be creative in your own discipline. If you can solve problems, you can be creative.”

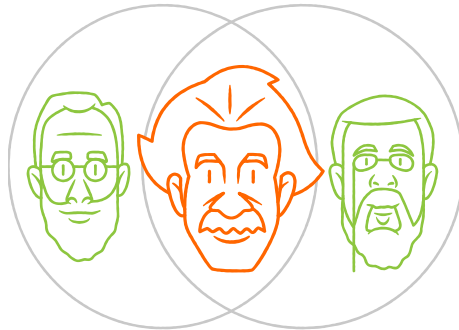
True—but there is a caveat: no matter how creative you are, great new things almost never come from a single mind.



Collaboration

Innovation is a team sport. It must be both creative and collaborative.

Albert Einstein's Nobel Prize in physics did not mention relativity. A likely reason was that the theory of relativity is partially credited to the French mathematician Henri Poincaré and the Dutch physicist Hendrick Lorentz. Even Einstein conceded that the theory (to which he added $E=mc^2$) was a collaboration.

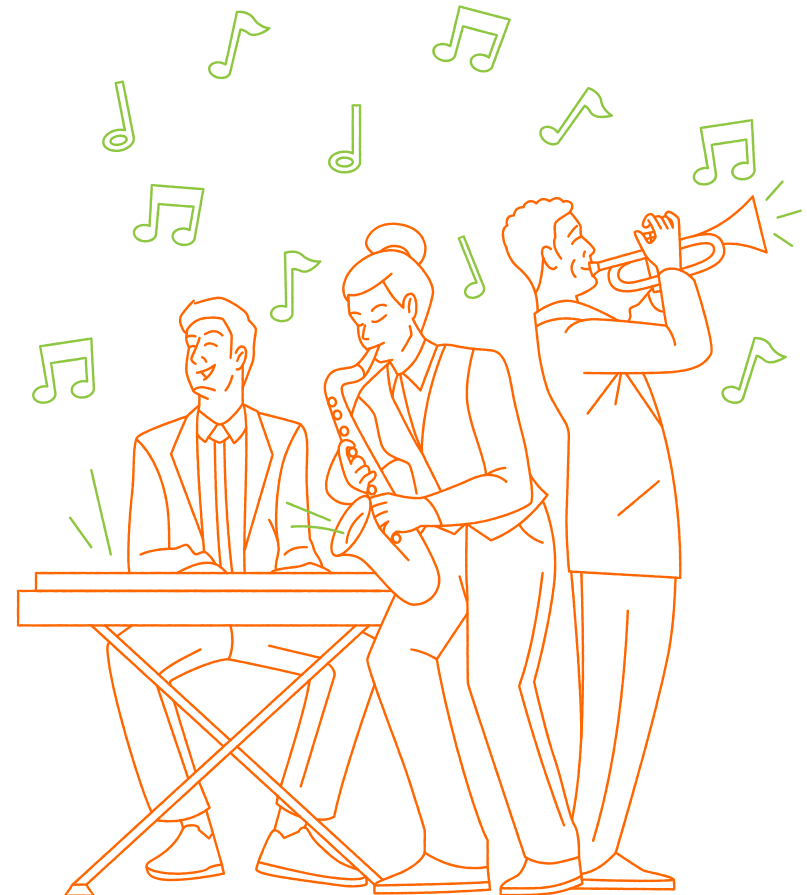


People are creative by nature, but in order for inspiration to ignite, they need an environment rich with ideas and perspectives that diverge and combine in unexpected ways. When different sources collide, surprising combinations result, and from those combinations, great ideas are born.

There's a name for this process: collaborative creativity.

Collaborative creativity can only flourish in an open, curious environment that supports both individual and team thinking. We like to think of collaborative creativity as a form of improvisation. If you notice the musical conversation between

Collaboration is a powerful force for innovation. To solve big problems, you need many perspectives. When different sources collide, surprising combinations result and great ideas are born.



jazz musicians playing together, or how each player on a basketball team helps move the ball down the court to score a point, it's apparent that a collaborative team effort is essential to solving challenges of all types.

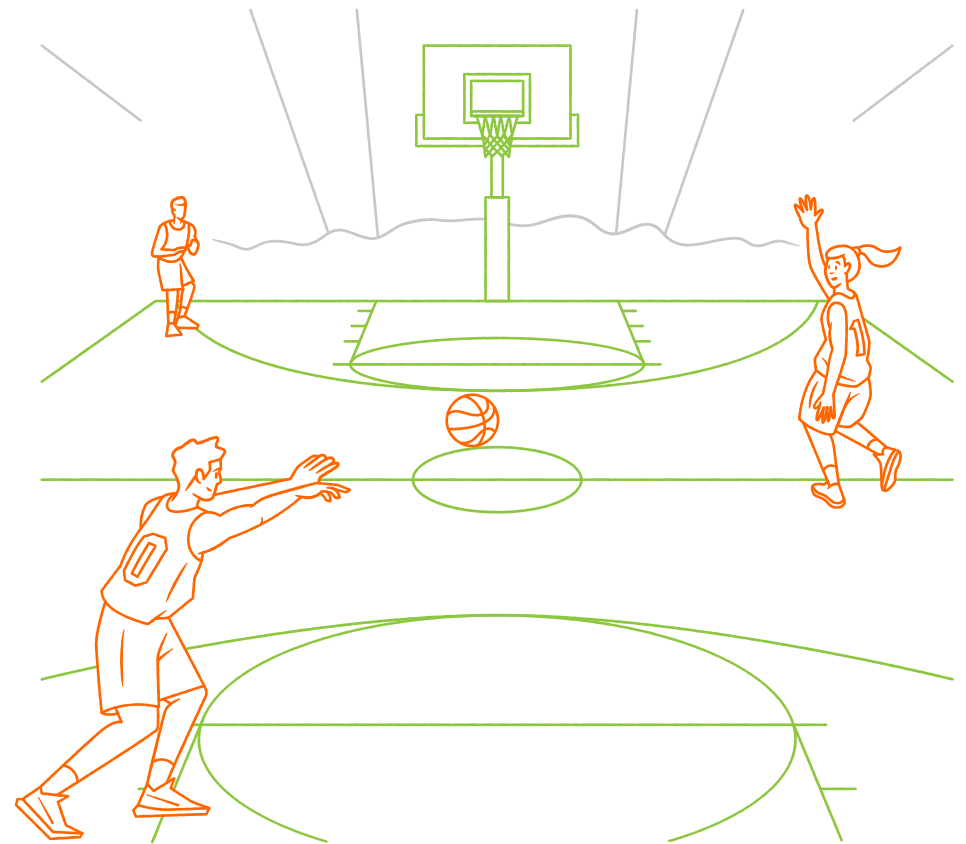
Check Your Ego at the Door

In order to ignite collaborative creativity, members of a team need to leave their egos behind. It's natural to want to hold fast to our own ideas and express them to others. But for the design thinking process to work, each team member must learn to listen to others and build on their ideas.

You know what you know. There's a unique opportunity for new ideas to emerge by collaborating with others who are being creative. Different team members will naturally empathize with different aspects of the experience. It's critical to really listen and consider these other perspectives in the design process without regard to anyone's role, position, or status. Simply put, the more perspectives you add to the mix, the richer the experience, and the better the ideas that result.

As the tech entrepreneur Douglas Merrill put it:

"All of us are smarter than any one of us."



Design Thinking & Innovationship

Now that you're familiar with the three keys of design thinking—empathy, creativity, and collaboration—you might be asking how and where to begin.

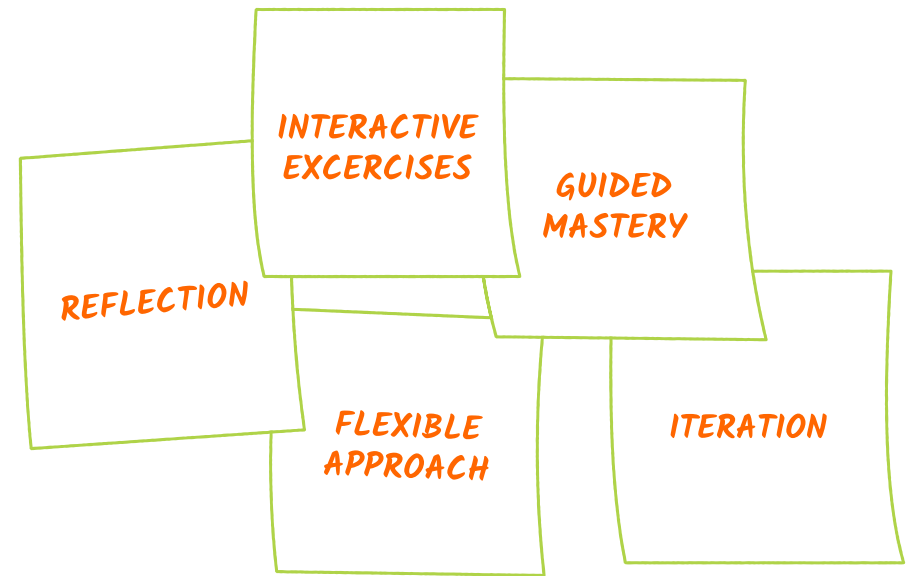
To re-emphasize an earlier point, learning and applying design thinking will take time, practice, and commitment. The good thing is, all you need to get started is curiosity, enthusiasm, and a readiness to participate.

Our approach is unique and highly effective. We combine learning the design thinking process with applying it to one of your organization's thorniest challenges. This way, teams build skills as they tackle current pressing issues, and, with experts guiding them through the tough sections, emerge with the hands-on experience that fosters real learning.

This approach stems from our work as pioneers of the original design process at IDEO. That was in the '90s, and we've been practicing, applying, and teaching it ever since. As such, we bring an authentic passion for design thinking to the organizations we work with. They include startups, midsize firms, multinationals and academic institutions all over the world.

We believe the most effective method of teaching design

With Innovationship, your teams solve your organization's thorniest challenges while they learn the design thinking process.



thinking is through hands-on experience, iteration, and guided mastery. And we focus on integration of learning over time, through ongoing coaching and mentoring that stretch the impact of workshops far beyond the event itself.

We are innovators at heart; our approach is creative and flexible. Clients and their audiences differ in their culture, specific needs, and current ways of innovating. So we always co-design our programs with our clients to create the best conditions for transformative learning and integration.

Not sure your organization needs to learn how to be more innovative through design thinking? Consider some of the reasons our clients shared with us:

*“We need to **do things differently** than how we try to innovate today.”*

*“We need our people to **be more creative**.”*

*“We need a process for innovation that will help us **get better results**.”*

*“We need a new way to come up with **new ideas and solutions**.”*

*“We need to **boost this project**. It’s stuck, we’re stuck.”*

We’d be happy to tell you more about how we can help you cultivate a design thinking culture that encourages original ideas, makes employees more engaged, creates more effective leaders, and brings you to a level where, as Robert Fritz says,

There is always the possibility of something new and wonderful happening that has never existed before.

That possibility awaits.

Call us
(415) 275-0950

For client stories and outcomes, [click here](#).

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