Tweaking Design Thinking for Strategic and Tactical Impact

Carola Fellenz Thompson

Chief Experience Officer

Splunk Inc.

San Francisco, CA 94107, USA

cthompson@splunk.com

Janaki Kumar

Head of Design & Co-Innovation

Center (DCC)

SAP Labs

Palo Alto, CA 94304, USA

janaki.kumar@sap.com

Julie Stanford

Principal, Sliced Bread Design

Lecturer, Stanford d.school

julie@slicedbreaddesign.com

Ben Syverson

Product Designer

IDEO

Chicago, IL 60661, USA

bsyverson@ideo.com

C. Todd Lombardo

Chief Design Strategist

Fresh Tilled Soil

Watertown, MA 02472, USA

ctodd@freshtilledsoil.com

Abstract

Much has been written and discussed about design thinking over the last 13 years since IDEO brought its methodology to the mainstream with its cover story in Business Week. A key part of design thinking has been design workshops and intensives. More recently, we've seen Design Sprints surface. The goal of the panel is to provide design leaders, designers, students, educators and researchers with insights from the various business contexts as to the evolution of design thinking and to provide a forum for discussing the challenges faced when putting design thinking into practice.

Author Keywords

Design thinking; design sprints; ideation, brainstorming; innovation; design strategy.

ACM Classification Keywords

A.0; D.2.2; D.2.10; H1.2; H.5.0; I.3.6

Introduction

Much has been written and discussed about design thinking. There has been criticism of the disconnect between the theory and the practical value of Design Thinking. While the authors have personally experienced design thinking practices that have been largely untethered from the practical realities of

running businesses, we have in our own settings found practices that increase the likelihood of having a real impact on product design and product strategy.

Design Thinking

Design thinking has long history. Some say you can trace the history as far back as Herbert A. Simon's 1969 book *The Sciences of the Artificial* [1] and in design engineering to Robert McKim's 1973 book *Experiences in Visual Thinking* [2].

Rolf Faste expanded on McKim's work at Stanford University in the 1980s and 1990s, teaching "design thinking as a method of creative action."[3] Design thinking was adapted for product design by Faste's Stanford colleague David M. Kelley, who founded the design consultancy IDEO in 1991.
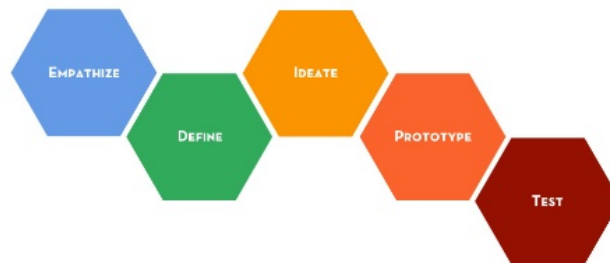

Figure 1: Design Thinking – Stanford d.school

In the 2000s, IDEO did more to codify and bring design thinking to the attention of businesses than any other entity. The Stanford d.school and business school have embraced the methodology from IDEO and created a curriculum around this for both design students and

business executives. Figure 1 shows the visualization of that process.

Design Sprints

Over the last few years, design sprints have surfaced as a key method for applying design thinking, especially in an agile context. Much of the work on design sprints is derived and adapted from the process IDEO calls Deep Dives [5]. Deep Dives were created at a time when most product design was still physical. As we have moved to a time where digital design is much more prevalent, even IDEOs practices have changed.
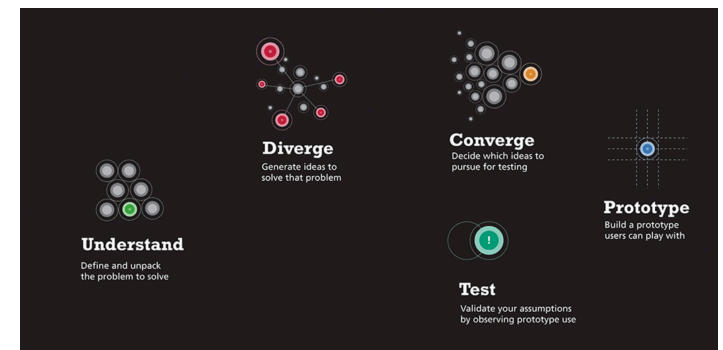

Figure 2: Design Sprint Phases – Richard Banfield [6]

In the last year, two books were published on the topic of Design Sprints. The first book to be released was *Design Sprint: A Practical Guidebook for Building Great Digital Products* [6] and encapsulates experience by designers at several agencies working with both startups and established clients.

In the second book *Sprint: Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days*, Jake Knapp and team capture the evolution of design sprint methods used at

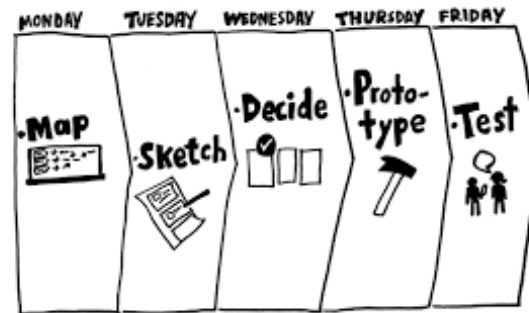Google Ventures which ultimately cross-pollinated to Google proper in the form of mass design sprints [7].

Figure 3: Design Sprint Phases – Jake Knapp [7]

Many companies have embraced design thinking and design sprints, but the ability to have strategic and tactical impact lies in the details and often in adapting these processes and methodologies to the specific business context.

Goal

The goal of the panel is to provide design leaders, practitioners, students, educators and researchers with insights from the various business contexts as to the evolution of design thinking and to provide a forum for discussing the challenges faced when putting design thinking into practice.

Approach

We will take a slightly different approach than a traditional panel. We will engage the audience early in the conversation making it a highly-interactive session.

The moderator, Carola Thompson, will seed the conversation with questions to create a little controversy.

We will start the discussion with observed high-level trends, then move to stories from the trenches applying design thinking in the various contexts represented by the panelists. We will close with predictions for the future.

We hope to have an engaging discussion and have some fun while we learn from each other.

Issues to be Discussed

The issues we intend to discuss include:

- Disconnects with execution. Great workshop, everyone feels great, nothing gets done.
- Disconnects with strategy. Great workshop but are we solving a problem that matters to the business?
- Getting the right level of support. To have real impact, key stakeholders, often executive leadership, need to play a role.
- Danger of using toy problems. Great workshop on a demo problem, but hard to put into practice.
- Who should be doing it. People say anyone can do design thinking, but it's unclear that everyone can do it well.
- Disconnects with performance. Let's focus on innovation, but by the way your performance will be evaluated based on other factors.

Panelist Positions

The panelists were chosen to represent diverse points of view on the topic:

- Design Agency – IDEO – Ben Syverson
  - Shift from designing physical product to digital product and the impact on the Deep Dive process
- In-House Product Design – Splunk – Carola Thompson
  - Hacks to design thinking to connect strategy to execution
- Co-Innovation – SAP - Janaki
  - Using designing thinking in a co-innovation setting with customers
- VC/Incubation – C. Todd Lombardo
  - Applying design thinking and design sprints in startup and corporate environments
- Design Schools –Stanford d.school – Julie Stanford
  - How the d.school expects students to apply what it teaches in the workplace

Intended Audience

The audiences that will likely get most out of this panel are:

- Design practitioners in industry including designers, design managers, executives, strategists, and those responsible for decision making processes in their companies
- Design practitioners in design and management consultancies with a focus on business development and strategy.
- Students, both industry and academic-oriented, with an interest in design process evolution

- Professors and educators who teach design classes with an interest in aligning their teaching with industry practice
- Researchers extending the field beyond its current perceived boundaries into product and requirements definition, and corporate and product strategy
- Anyone passionate about the future of design thinking and user experience as a discipline and its positioning and empowerment in corporations

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