www.rsm.nl/discovery

RSM DISCOVERY

Management Knowledge

29

1st Quarter 2017

ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

- Eco-transformation: a global sustainability wake-up call
  Kevin Titman talks with Eva Rood and Steve Kennedy
- Leadership communication in times of crisis
  Chris Murray talks with Daan Stam
- Design thinking: making user happiness the metric for success
  By Dirk Deichmann
- Developing capabilities through strategic alliances
  By Korcan Kavusan
- How best to market a crowdsourced product?
  By Christoph Fuchs
- Does remote working really work?
  By Nick van der Meulen
- Performance evaluations and control system design
  By Stephan Kramer

The business school that thinks and lives in the future

RSM Erasmus ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

Design thinking: making user happiness the metric for success

By ***Dirk Deichmann***

Design thinking is a human-centred approach to problem solving. You see it being applied across all industries. Everything centres on the user, the customer, and his or her needs and feelings. At its very best, you closely observe users and identify problems they were not able to express, problems they didn't even know they had.

Although design thinking began as a customer-first approach, we are seeing it more and more among businesses. Consultancies are buying entire design firms. There have been some big acquisitions in recent years by McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group and PricewaterhouseCoopers in order to bring design thinking in-house, to reshape their own processes and then to consult with *their* customers in a different, more in-depth way that puts the user first.

> *"Apple is often used as an example of good design thinking. Their designers observe users at every step of their experience…"*

Designers know that solutions are not always simple. They have to assess the diversity of stakeholders and conflicting needs. A designer will bring everybody to the table and try to map a bigger challenge by figuring out what the root cause of the issue is. I would say you can apply design thinking to everything but some would say that it's when you have these grand challenges that design thinking really works best.

A response to human emotion

Healthcare is a large complex bureaucracy with so many actors, but in the example we studied at the Rotterdam Eye Hospital the root issue is simple – the patient is afraid of going blind. It seems so logical once you know it and maybe the identification of that fear isn't very difficult, but what can be difficult is to always remind ourselves that whatever we design, change or reinvent, it must address this problem. The designer's job then, is to first identify the root problem, then rank all the surrounding issues according to how helpful they can be in improving the patient's experience.

Trials in design thinking by the Rotterdam Eye Hospital were deliberately iterative and agile, building on small successes. One of the problems many hospitals struggle with is keeping equipment within a sterile area. By observing how Schiphol Airport helps airplanes navigate their way to the right gate, the hospital innovators came up with an inexpensive way to solve this problem: mark lines on the floor to indicate where medical equipment needs to be kept. A recent initiative is a virtual tour of the children's de-

Making connections...

In one trial at the Rotterdam Eye Hospital, Dutch artist Rob van Mierlo designed beautiful t-shirts. Children receive a t-shirt printed with a specific animal in advance of their stay and were asked to wear it on the day of the operation. Just as football fans wear the t-shirt of their club in the stadium, kids are encouraged to wear theirs to give them a feeling of community. The ophthalmologists consulting with the child wears a button badge with the same animal and other staff wear the same t-shirts. The matching badge and t-shirt give the staff a way to immediately connect with the children: 'Look, you are wearing the same t-shirt as me!'

partment of the hospital. On this tour kids can see the examination rooms of the orthoptists and doctors, take a seat behind the welcome desk, and explore pieces of art positioned throughout the department.

Good and bad design thinking

Traditionally when building a product or service offering, technical key performance indicators (KPIs) have driven the process. That's understandable – deadlines have to be met, certain metrics of success means the engineer keeps their job. It's not that the engineer is being inflexible, it's that somewhere in the whole process the user has somehow slipped away. You end up with something that is easier for the company than for me, the customer.

A prime example of this is the experience of having a parcel delivered. I understand that a system like this is very complicated, but no matter which delivery service I choose I am *told* when my package might be delivered. I am never asked: 'When will you be home?' or 'What time would work best for you to receive this package?' The process is built around what is practical for the business. Even the irrelevant marketing emails in my inbox remind me that the user is not always the most important person in the value chain.

Apple is often used as an example of good design thinking. Their designers observe users at every step of their experience, starting with the most fundamental question 'How enjoyable is it to open our product packaging?' There's a good reason why Apple doesn't use that annoying unbreakable plastic packaging you need a machine to open.

I am amazed by Amazon's customer experience. They make it so easy to return a product. When I changed my mind about a Lonely Planet book my money was refunded and they told me to keep the book as well. They even design the packaging to be re-used when returning goods. Amazon knows that returning something is a hassle so they do everything they can to take that hassle out of the experience.

Amazon uses a lot of algorithms to determine the best ways to improve their customer experience. Other companies will use customer surveys, conversations, and close observation of a user, right down to their body language and facial expressions when using a product. Good design thinking means a good user experience and measuring that experience is the most important metric for success. When user happiness is a KPI, everything changes. ■

This article draws its inspiration from *How Design Thinking Turned One Hospital into a Bright and Comforting Place,* written by Dirk Deichmann and Roel van der Heijde and published online in *Harvard Business Review*, December 02 2016.

Dirk Deichmann *is Assistant Professor, Department of Technology and Operations Management, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.* EMAIL *ddeichmann@rsm.nl*