

Design Thinking@SAP: Theory and Practice

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Creating innovative solutions and products that deliver customer value is rooted in the ability to understand customer needs and what will enable them to reach their goals. Successful products and services appeal to both the rational side as well as the emotional side of human intelligence. Design Thinking provides an approach for balancing these needs. The idea of Design Thinking will be presented together with some insights in the currently ongoing Design Thinking Initiative at SAP.

END-USER AND CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT FOR INNOVATION

For building usable and useful products it is necessary to understand what users and customers really need. At SAP there are several approaches to involve end-users and customers in product and portfolio definition. Examples for this are User Centered Design or the Customer Engagement Initiative. In 2011 the Design Thinking Initiative has been established at SAP. It aims at the evaluation and the roll-out of the Design Thinking methodology for collaborative innovation involving the complete project team as well as customers and users systematically.

DESIGN THINKING METHODOLOGY

The Design Thinking methodology which is initially coming from IDEO and Stanford (Brown, 2009; Plattner, Meinel & Weinberg, 2009) was supposed to provide a systematic approach for problem solving in general and product innovation in particular. It consists of a set of team values, recommendations, and methods that are supposed to support a collaborative and iterative problem solving process with the goal of innovation. Brown (2009) mentions desirability as one of three important aspects that have to be balanced in an innovation process which means that innovation has to be meaningful and attractive from user's and customers' point of view. The other two aspects are feasibility (technology perspective) and viability (business perspective).

Process Steps

The design thinking involves several steps, including multiple iterations wherever necessary or useful:

- Scoping
- 360° Research
- Synthesis
- Ideation
- Prototyping
- Validation
- Implementation

All steps from Scoping to Validation keep users and customers systematically in the loop.

Advantages

The methodology provides innovating teams who do not necessarily incorporate experienced designers with best practices and tools that have been known and used by designers, market researchers, user interface design and requirements engineering experts for decades. It enables multidisciplinary teams to collaborate systematically and take advantages of the diverse knowledge that is available in the team, and not leave the innovation work to a small group of dedicated innovation experts only. The aspect of desirability can be addressed by systematically involving end users and customers throughout the whole process until the implementation phase begins.



DESIGN THINKING INITIATIVE AT SAP

In 2011, the Design Thinking Initiative at SAP was launched, implementing two tracks of activities in parallel:

Awareness Track

Awareness Track activities aim at the creation of awareness of the method's potential within the company – including in particular executive and senior management – and at the preparation of a corresponding mind shift. One example activity was to invite executive and senior management to participate in DT workshops themselves in order to experience how DT works and if they believe that projects following this methodology could be successful.

Execution Track

The objective of the Execution Track is to evaluate the potential of the Design Thinking methodology for the company in a first wave of pilot projects. Project teams could apply for being a pilot DT project if they met some criteria regarding the scope of the project, the setup of the project team, involvement of actual customers, and the commitment of all involved persons including senior management. The teams selected for the pilot phase were provided with extensive initial trainings and continuous support by experienced DT coaches. The results and experiences of this first wave of pilot projects are currently evaluated, in particular regarding the effectiveness and the scalability for SAP development.

POTENTIAL OF DESIGN THINKING FOR LARGE SOFTWARE COMPANIES:

The implementation of Design Thinking at software companies like SAP is a promising option to involve end-users and customers systematically and intensively in the product innovation process, bearing in particular the following advantages:

- Innovation methodology skills and understanding gets spread within the development organization, not being limited to specific job functions.
- Systematic coaching, training and piloting can create a sustainable cultural shift within the company.
- Involvement of customers and end-users forms an integral part of innovation and development projects.

REFERENCES

Brown, T. (2009), Change by Design – How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation. New York: Harper Collins.

Plattner, H., Meinel, C., & Weinberg, U. (2009), Design Thinking. Munich: mi-Wirtschaftsbuch.

