

Overcome Change Management Challenges With Design Thinking

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November 7, 2017

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Organizations are beginning to see the value of thinking like designers. Design goes far beyond aesthetics — design thinking can be used as an approach to solving problems in virtually any industry. Science, government, education and especially business stand to benefit from principles of design thinking. Similar to [lean design](#), design thinking helps businesses fail fast and cheap in order to ensure long-term success. As disruptive forces sweep corporate landscape, change initiatives become a staple in most companies. The agile, adaptive lens of design thinking is a perfect tool with which to tackle change management challenges.

Change Management Challenges



For enterprise organizations, implementing effective and lasting change is a tall order. Even in the most favorable conditions, change professionals struggle to gain approval, align leadership, manage conflict and handle [employee resistance](#). More often than not, [change is not a singular project](#), but many simultaneous and ongoing initiatives. In addition, the speed of change is changing. Implementation of new technology, for example, has grown in recent years. To retain their digital edge, many businesses find themselves in a near constant state of change. Change can take a toll on employees, resulting in overwhelm, pushback and disengagement. These many change management challenges make processes slow and ineffective for change professionals.

4 Stages of Design Thinking for Change:

Empathize



To begin solving a problem with design thinking, it is important to gain an empathic understanding of the problem you are trying to solve. Step into employees' shoes, familiarize yourself with their daily workflow. The first step in design thinking is all about gaining a holistic understanding of the situation. Remember that change deals with people first — processes, procedures, and strategy second. Employees are the most crucial part of any change initiative, and treating them as such means using empathy and compassion to understand their needs and wants. Making this switch in mindset is not easy, but makes all the difference in overcoming change management challenges. Consider this stage as research — collect as much information as possible. Talk to as many people in different roles and document these conversations thoroughly. This will serve to help tackle the following stage.

Define Your Target

Poor change management can have a wide range of effects on an organization. It is crucial to nail down what problem you are looking to solve. To do this, analyze your research from the empathize stage and ask questions. Don't rule out anything as too basic or too obvious, great designers aren't afraid to break down fundamental assumptions and remove the parts that no longer serve them. Are employees failing to adopt newly implemented platforms due to digital fatigue? Is low trust affecting change projects? Is [organizational culture](#) unaccepting of impending change? While all the above might be true, pick a single target, or change management challenge, to focus on at each given time. By the end of this stage, you should have a problem statement that is human-centered.

Brainstorm



Now that you have defined your main pain points, it is time to brainstorm. Design thinking advocates collaboration and creativity. In this stage, a group session is used to create a free flow of innovative ideas. Start by discussing the change initiative at hand, and the change management challenges of the project. Then, once everyone is on board, start asking "what if." Don't veto any ideas at this point, regardless of how out-of-the-box. Get everything down in black and white, and then review your findings. Board meetings can be intimidating. It can be helpful to use design thinking tactics to help get ideas flowing. 'Worst possible idea,' for example, is exactly what it sounds like. By removing the

pressure of coming up with brilliant solutions, team members can exercise creative thinking in a safe space. This release from the usual constraints of strategy meetings allows executives to arrive at new and innovative solutions.

Implement and Test



Once ideas have been discussed and objectives have been redefined to put the human in the center, it is time to implement the new strategy. For this stage to be successful, people must be the central part — involved in the creating and leading the new change. Technologies and methodologies should be adapted to people’s needs, as observed in the empathize stage. Allowing employees to co-create change gives them a sense of ownership that will help shift company culture in favor of change initiatives. Each initiative that is implemented is then tested and tracked to ensure success. Agility is a big part of design thinking, rather than waiting for some “end result,” the solution is constantly being altered and adjusted. Designers often cycle back through certain stages to redefine the problem or refresh the solution.
