# Design(ed) for Change

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The Design Thinking way
towards co-creative change
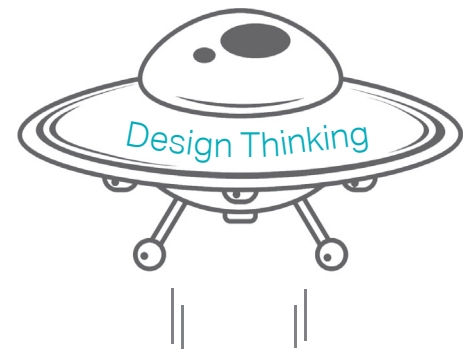
$$C = D \times V \times S$$

Change      Dissatisfaction      Vision      Steps

Originally, Design Thinking was created by thoughtful designers for human-centered innovation of products and services. But what happens if you transfer the basic principles of the methodology into a change management perspective? Welcome to co-creative change!
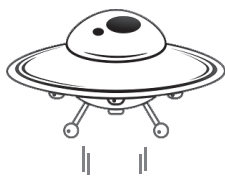
by Julia Jantschgi

»Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.«

Helen Keller

## A tool for change

Understanding the customer, creating meaningful products and services and selling them successfully – three items on probably every company's checklist for success. In order to achieve them, companies started to use Design Thinking as a methodology to find out more about the needs and wishes of their customers, hoping to bring exciting, high-flying products or services to the market. We asked ourselves what comes next. Can Design Thinking be a powerful tool for change processes, as well? With that question in mind, we travelled to the epicenter of Design Thinking – Silicon Valley.

Since Design Thinking always puts the customer at the center, the basic question to begin with would be the following: How often do you hear managers discuss the needs and wishes of »their« customers within change processes – the employees affected? The answer to it: Basically never. Innovatively argued, we would say why not copy a successful approach and start planning and executing change activities using Design Thinking to make change tempting and more successful.

## Where to start?

When bringing Design Thinking into organizational change processes, one could start by questioning the whole concept of the change architecture. In our opinion it's best to follow a basic rule of change: go for quick wins, start small and keep learning.

A success formula for change teaches us that nothing will happen without three ingredients: dissatisfaction with the current situation, an attractive image of the future and – very important – quick first steps in the right direction. In change architectures, a lot is considered to analyze the current status quo and create a meaningful picture of the future. But the concrete steps to start the movement sometimes miss attention regarding designing them in a human-centered way. In hopes that the initial thought was right and the first actions result immediately in quick wins, detailed actions are formulated and executed too quickly sometimes. When using Design Thinking, the success of your first steps can become predictable. How? By designing them with heart and mind, iteratively and together with and for your target group.

## The three cornerstones of co-creative first steps
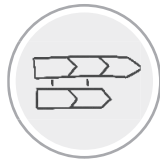
**Process**
Inspiration
Ideation
Iteration

**Teams**
Divers BUT
Similar

**Space**
Changing the
space changes
behaviour

### Needs on fire

Design Thinking follows some simple rules. Before you come up with possible solutions, you need to find out what bothers your customer/employees. It is not very often that we see a change team questioning the articulated problems. But only if you are tackling the right problem will your solution be successful.

The secret thereby is to dig deep until you touch on emotions and real needs. Afterwards, formulate challenges. Got it? Great! Then go on creating many solutions – from obvious to crazy. Download first ideas and build on them to develop real concepts. Continue by testing the most promising ones and collect lots of feedback. The more often you test your solution and improve critical aspects, based on the opinions of testers, the more likely it will be accepted and adopted by the system later on.

### Empowering teams

The most frequently asked question when we work with our clients is »Who should go for it?« The logical answer: a motivated team. Within Design Thinking, teamwork is a core element. If you are aiming for the perfect solution for a heterogeneous group, it's best to assign a heterogeneous team to come up with the solution. Successful companies teach us that building diverse teams is the most powerful tool to avoid and even break down silos, which is often on the action list during a change process anyway. But reality shows us that a team is not necessarily a team. Diversity is the catchphrase everybody uses when talking about successful teams. However, our experience shows us that besides functional, age- or gender-related and even ethnical diversity, two important elements need to be homogenous: an open mindset and the willingness to experiment. Without this, a common energy can't de-

velop and diversity becomes a handicap that inhibits change. And what about motivation now? The secret formula for empathizing with your target group is to be the target group! Nothing motivates more than being allowed to work on something that serves your own needs. What seems to be very challenging when developing products or services for external customers gets much more tangible when thinking about change processes where your customers are your employees.

Basically, it comes down to one simple task to enable co-creative change in the logic of Design Thinking: identify employees with the right mindset and empower small teams to take the first steps for change by solving personal needs that motivate them intrinsically. If you are thinking for example, about redesigning the meeting culture in your company as a step to unfreezing your culture, start by looking for employees that are hooked on that challenge. Then give them enough guidance to follow the process of inspiration, ideation and feedback – don't forget to provide them with space and freedom to work on it – and be surprised.

### Space for change

The third key element of Design Thinking is space. There is a reason why successful, innovative companies seem to be crazy about detail when it comes to their office spaces. The design of a working space can and will influence the behavior of your employees. But it's not about beauty here; it's about functionality. Only if the changed environment itself solves a challenge or problem that employees would articulate when asked is the investment worth the money. How does this relate to co-creative change? In our opinion, it might be the perfect starting point for any movement. Empower passionate employees to create an environment where change is seen as an opportunity to gain something more comfortable, functional and lovable. ●