



HIGHLIGHTED BOOK

Change By Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation by Tim Brown

Review by Paul Johnson, board member of MEA

Innovation is an overused, under-applied principle in organizations and systems. Spiritually based organizations like MEA and even Mennonite Church USA tend to seek but not always find innovative ways to engage those we serve and the mission to which we are called. Tim Brown proposes that the definition of innovation “as the fully formed, brilliant ideas of geniuses” is false thinking. Innovation in reality emerges from rigor and discipline. He proposes that breakthrough ideas do not emerge by chance. By studying and embracing the immediate challenges we face in our work, we don’t simply realize good solutions; we design them.

This notion requires new ways of thinking, interacting and processing. Design thinking requires thought leaders to match “necessity to utility, constraint to possibility and need to demand.” While this sounds like good advice for a secular entrepreneur, it is also instructive for the private sector.

Change by Design outlines the blueprint for creative leaders seeking to integrate design thinking into all the facets of the organization and to discover new ways to instill energy. Design thinking is an approach for creative problem-solving and the invention of new ideas not yet existing to address the ill-defined, complex problem of growing the church across communities and across this nation, perhaps even across this world.

The following is a brief summary of key components that appear to align to or

inform the thinking. A more exhaustive summary could be added upon consultation with an organizational design team.

Brown proposes that innovation is not a singular, isolated work of individuals. Most innovation comes from discipline and rigorous processes, providing what is called “breakthrough ideas” which emerge by studying the local and immediate challenges encountered every day by our clients. Solutions are not crafted whole; they emerge from a six-stage, disciplined framework (paraphrased):

1. observation
2. data collection
3. analysis
4. *then*, the synthesis of new ideas
5. prototype to test the solution
6. *and finally* full implementation of the breakthrough idea

The design thinking process may be most easily described in the contexts of the “5-*i*” (again paraphrased). These five components of the process or framework include:

1. innovation (*requires the structured process of #2*)
2. inspiration
3. insight
4. ideation
5. implementation

Design thinking as opposed to design and engineering—its elite predecessor that is a much more mechanistic, 20th Century model—is most effective and powerful

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when applied to abstract, complex and multifaceted problems like illiteracy. It uses the notion of matching necessity to utility and in the marketplace of ideas, the matching of need to demand. Fundamental to this process is a qualitative function called observation to collect data.

Rigorous *observations* of how congregations and conferences support the larger educational effort is the essential first step when moving to a successful design outcome. This process has sometimes been called a “needs assessment,” “program evaluation” or “needs analysis.”

The *collection of data* and the discovery of patterns is the next step in the design thinking process and is most effective with clients who are decision-makers and later with the “end users” of the service.

Analysis occurs with a small focused group establishing the overall framework at the pre-production phase (inspiration). Insight occurs when this small design group determines which clients or those in the general population is “flourishing at the margins of the Bell Curve” (p. 42). These groups or individuals could be characterized as the “fast adopters.”

The *synthesis* of data and new ideas occurs in design thinking spaces or “project spaces” dedicated to the innovation of new ideas. This is actually an experimental design which was called the “studio model” of design and development. This project space changes the traditional cultures of most organizations of hierarchy and efficiency to another culture of nimble risk-taking and exploration.

Prototyping is the ability to move projects to usable prototypes that can move an

organization to new levels in 12 to 24 months. Because of the rapid expansion of various good ideas, efforts may be less than focused until a number of excellent prototypes have moved to the final phase of the design thinking framework. This block is typical in most organizations.

Full *implementation* can only be initiated once the most successful prototype has been identified and refined by trial and error. Tolerance and time frames of the larger system and clients must be considered in this process

Summary

True design thinking includes collaborative processes where clients are a part of the experience and ultimately of the design process. Experimentation is a hallmark of this process. Ordering of the data patterns and the resulting clarity for few, clear, focused goals and concept prototypes is essential.

Design thinking is fundamental in design practice. The elements strongly recommended (p. 37) include a collaborative culture and activities that amplify creative powers of individuals. Also recommended is focused, flexible and responsive structures to embrace unexpected opportunities.

Viewing the complex issue of promoting comprehensive Mennonite education as a design problem is most helpful. It is not necessarily a problem of individuals or of single leaders, it is much larger. Fundamental to this definition is the sharp focus on observation before, during and after the innovation with the intent to become design thinkers. Observing all behaviors and actions at the implementation sites are meaningful and informative, whether or not they are considered right or wrong.