

SOLVING PROBLEMS WITH DESIGN THINKING



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Preface

The Story Behind Our Stories

For those of you who don't read prefaces, feel free to continue on without remorse—the stories you are about to hear will be just as satisfying. But for those who like to know what is going on backstage, we thought a bit of detail about the origin of our ten stories might be of interest.



In the spring of 2010 the Design Management Institute (DMI) and researchers at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business (a team that included us) launched a multistage research program to assess the prevalence and impact of design thinking in business organizations. Sponsored by the Batten Institute, a center for the study of entrepreneurship and innovation at Darden, the study set out to develop an understanding of the extent to which the methods, techniques, and processes traditionally associated with design and designers had been adopted within established business and social sector organizations.

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Preface

Spurred by burgeoning attention to the topic in the popular business press, we set out to assess the *actual* impact that design thinking was having. We wondered: Was the increasingly prominent role for design in business just *talk*, or could we observe it in action? To what extent was design thinking just the latest fad, destined to fade away as quickly as it had arrived, or was it really driving some fundamental changes in the way managers saw and interacted with their world? But since design has been around in organizations as long as there have been products, we wondered to what extent design—and designers—had been embraced by corporations *beyond the traditional design functions*?

By gathering information about the pace and process of the adoption of design thinking in business organizations, we hoped to inform designers and practicing managers about how to improve their collaboration and elevate and accelerate the recognition of design's capability to enhance innovation within their organizations.

We began Phase 1 of the study by conducting a series of interviews with design and innovation executives across a variety of industries. The idea was to start with design advocates who occupied roles at the interface between designers and managers and who, we felt, would be best positioned to help us understand the relationship between the two and how it was evolving in their organizations.

A fascinating thing happened as we progressed through the Phase 1 interviews: Our conversations with the design executives surfaced a different set of issues than those we had anticipated (perhaps not a surprise at all to designers), which sometimes seemed to have little to do with our hypotheses and more to do with organizational politics. Rather than talking about the prevalence of design thinking per se, interviewees wanted to talk about questions such as, Who owns design? How much design thinking should managers be encouraged to do? How do you sell design to business executives? Even the definition of design thinking itself emerged as a contentious issue. We heard neither inspiring stories

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about how design thinking was in fact permeating new spaces in organizations, helping designers and managers work together in new ways, nor confirmation of the competing hypothesis, that design thinking was mostly smoke and mirrors with little output resulting from it.

As *researchers* we were perplexed by what we heard in these initial interviews and unsure of what made sense for the next stage of the study. What we were learning might make for some great business school cases about how organizational structure and politics challenge the introduction of new approaches to business, but we didn't think it would help practicing designers or managers on the front lines figure out how to work together to meet the challenges they faced more creatively and successfully. However, as *educators* we saw an opportunity to help organizations and individuals sort this all out. Our feeling was that we could do more to aid managers interested in learning about how to use design thinking by profiling success stories than by detailing political battles. We hoped that by gathering examples of the adoption of design approaches to solve problems in various kinds of organizations, we could identify the ways in which it was enhancing organizational performance beyond traditional incremental product development.

So we wrote to a wide range of DMI and Darden stakeholders to ask for their help in identifying examples in which design thinking was affecting organizational performance in ways not traditionally seen as “design.” We wanted to explore the adoption of design thinking across a range of organizations and geographies through interviews with those involved in pioneering efforts to extend the influence of design beyond formal, established design groups or traditional research and development (R&D) functions. We created a website that made it easy for people to nominate organizations they knew about.

The response to our request exceeded our best hopes. The stories that people sent us were truly inspirational. The breadth and

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richness of the ways in which design thinking tools and approaches were being used to innovate around a varied and important set of problems and opportunities were impressive. So we tossed out our original plans for Phase 2 of the study, which had focused on identifying the variables that would indicate the prevalence of design thinking in organizations that we could use to survey a larger and more diverse group of people. Instead, we opted to go the best practice route—to do a deep dive into situations where design thinking *was* working, sometimes despite the politics going on around it but more often because these forward-thinking organizations were doing it right.

In the end what we discovered was so inspiring that we decided to write this book, in the hope that we could help the people we cared most about—managers and designers—see new possibilities to break through inertia and politics to use design thinking to accomplish the things we believed it was capable of, if we could only get it into the right hands.

And now maybe we're ready to go back and try that survey as Phase 3 . . .

Acknowledgments

First things first: Our profound thanks to the managers and designers who have shared their stories with us, for their generosity with their time, the candor with which they told their stories, and the insights that accompanied them. They were nothing short of remarkable. They inspired us to write this book: We felt a keen obligation to pass on to a broader audience all that they shared with us.

We also want to acknowledge the support and involvement of the Design Management Institute and, in particular, Tom Lockwood, who participated in many of our initial interviews.

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From Andrew

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*Solving Problems
with Design Thinking*

Dispelling the Moses Myth

MOST OF THE MANAGERS we meet harbor a deep, dark secret: They believe in their hearts that they are not creative. Picasso they know they are not. They also know that being seen as short on talent for invention in these days of innovation mania is almost as bad as not knowing how to populate an Excel spreadsheet.

It all seems so unfair. After years spent focusing on prudence and proving the return on investment of any new idea, years spent trying not to look stupid, now all of a sudden we are also expected not to look—what would the word be—*unimaginative*? And each time some “creativity” consultant asks us to imagine ten novel uses for a paper clip, it confirms what we already know: We are no Steve Jobs, either. For most of us there will be no Moses-like parting of the waters of the status quo that we might safely cross the Red Sea of innovation. Drowning is more likely our fate.

But despite popular misconceptions, innate genius isn’t the only way to solve business problems creatively. Those of us who can’t part the waters need instead to build a bridge to take us from current reality to a new future. In other words, we must manufacture

our own miracles. And a technology for better bridge building already exists, right under our noses. What to call it is a matter of some dispute, but for lack of a better term we'll call it *design thinking*. Whatever label it goes by, it is an approach to problem solving that is distinguished by a few key attributes:

- It emphasizes the importance of discovery in advance of solution generation using market research approaches that are empathetic and user driven.
- It expands the boundaries of both our problem definitions and our solutions.
- It is enthusiastic about engaging partners in co-creation.
- It is committed to conducting real-world experiments rather than just running analyses using historical data.

And it *works*. Design thinking may look more pedestrian than miraculous, but it is capable of reliably producing new and better ways of creatively solving a host of organizational problems. Best of all, we believe that it is teachable to managers and scalable throughout an organization.

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Dispelling the Moses Myth

Our goal in this book is to push the visibility of design thinking in business and the social sector to new places and to demonstrate that design has an even broader role to play in achieving creative organizational and even civic outcomes. This book is built around ten vivid illustrations of organizations and their managers and design partners doing just that—using design thinking in ways that work. Each story showcases a particular new use of design thinking. And each provides palpable examples of how organizations and individuals can stretch their capabilities when they approach problems through the design thinking lens. Using the voices of the managers and designers involved, we illustrate the value of a design thinking approach in addressing organizational challenges as diverse as reenvisioning call centers, energizing meals on wheels for the elderly, revitalizing a city’s urban neighborhoods, and rethinking strategic planning.

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Though we didn't set out to find stories that specifically featured partnerships between managers and designers, that was, in fact, what we found. Rather than battling for ownership of the process, these designers wanted to share design, and the managers involved were eager to learn new ways of thinking and acting. The stories they told us were inspiring, diverse, and global. Here is a preview of what we heard:

Some organizations were applying design thinking to internal process redesign: We learned about Suncorp, Australia's second-largest insurance firm, driving a postmerger integration process with design thinking (chapter 3); about SAP imbuing its strategic planning process with a design approach (chapter 5); and Toyota

using design thinking (coupled with change management) to redesign its West Coast customer contact center from the ground up (chapter 6).

Others were leveraging design thinking to deepen customer engagement: We learned that IBM was transforming its approach to trade shows through design (chapter 2); 3M saw in design thinking a chance to reimagine the sales process in the materials science business (chapter 4); and a group of financial service executives from the largest banks and insurance companies in France were using it to explore how to restore public trust (chapter 8).

Some organizations were bringing design thinking to management development and individual skill building: Healthways' MeYou Health social networking application (chapter 7) and Intuit's story of embedding designing for delight into its DNA (chapter 11) are both about using design thinking to create communities of people helping one another to develop their capabilities and learn more effective behaviors.

Outside of the for-profit sector, other organizations were bringing design thinking to address social issues: In Denmark, The Good Kitchen transformed meal delivery service for the elderly using a comprehensive design thinking process from end to end (chapter 9), and the city of Dublin, Ireland, embraced it as a way to improve civic engagement in revitalizing urban spaces (chapter 10).

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You will also notice the diverse ways in which the design process plays out. This, we discovered, is one of the best aspects of design: You don't have to buy the whole enchilada to have a taste. As Ryan Nichols, Matthew's colleague at SAP, told us, "It doesn't need to be intimidating. You can take bits and pieces of this and bring it to whatever you are doing in the traditional process just at the parts where you get stuck. These are just very simple tools that can help break logjams." We find a lot of the managers in our stories doing just that.

At the outset of our study, we had no intention of writing a book. But as we heard these stories, we came to believe that their diversity, creativity, spirit of partnership, and global reach made them deserving of a wider audience and a more detailed telling. We became convinced that we needed to share these stories of the many ways in which design thinking was working to help organizations solve problems in new ways—around the world.

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Rethinking Subsidized Meals for the Elderly at The Good Kitchen

THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

Improving the nutrition of the elderly

THE CONTEXT

A program in Denmark's Municipality of Holstebro for delivering subsidized meals

DESIGN'S CONTRIBUTION

Using the tools of design thinking to develop deep insights into both customers and employees to reframe the possibilities for improving the nutrition and health of the elderly by creating a more appealing meal service

THUS FAR WE HAVE looked at the power of design thinking in a variety of business contexts. But we believe that the approach has as much—and maybe more—to contribute to solving “wicked” problems in the social sector. This chapter focuses on a success story from Denmark, a country so well known for its product design prowess that perhaps it should not be surprising that the Danes are also leaders in using design thinking to drive innovation in public-sector-service delivery. In this story the Municipality of Holstebro and the Danish idea and design agency Hatch & Bloom team up to work with stakeholders to use a comprehensive set of design thinking tools—from ethnographic research and mind mapping to analogies, trigger questions, and co-creation—with dramatic results.

The Danes, like citizens in most developed countries, recognize that the aging of their population presents many challenges. One of these is serving the more than 125,000 senior citizens who rely on government-sponsored meals. Danish municipalities deliver subsidized meals to people who suffer from a reduced ability to function due to illness, age, or other conditions. Many of the seniors have nutritional challenges and a poor quality of life because they simply do not eat enough. In fact, it is estimated that 60 percent of Denmark's seniors in assisted living facilities and residential care units have poor nutrition, and 20 percent are actually malnourished. The result is a higher risk of health problems and a low quality of life for the elderly and a greater economic burden on the government. The problem only looks to intensify as the number of senior citizens grows and future generations of seniors expect greater choice and better service.

In response to this growing social problem, the Municipality of Holstebro applied for an innovative program, offered through the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority, that provides funding to municipalities and facilitates partnerships between them and Danish design firms. The firm Hatch & Bloom signed on to be part of the effort to improve meal service for seniors. Innovation director Lotte Lyngsted Jepsen led the six-month project.

As Lotte recalled it, both Holstebro officials and the leaders of the Hospitable Food Service (the municipality's meal preparation and delivery organization) saw the project as straightforward at its outset: The current menu just needed some updating. In their view they already offered high-quality food and service, so Hatch & Bloom would just need to ask elderly clients about their menu preferences. As the project progressed, however, this view shifted. The result was the design of a wholly new meal service

that offered higher quality, more flexibility, and increased choice. This dramatic reframing of the opportunity emerged from the user-centered design approach that Hatch & Bloom brought to the process.

Learning to See *What Is?*

The Hatch & Bloom team began by digging deep into seniors' behaviors, needs, and wishes, using a comprehensive ethnographic-based research process that focused on identifying their current situation and unarticulated needs. Team members rode with food service employees who delivered the meals to the elderly clients, accompanied them into the homes, and watched as clients prepared the food, added ingredients, set the table, and ate the meal. In addition to observing current customers, they studied those who had discontinued the service and people close to retirement age who might soon qualify for the subsidized meals.

They also interviewed the supervisor of the food preparation process in her workplace. What they saw in the kitchen surprised them. "The people who worked in the kitchen were a major factor that needed to be addressed," Lotte told us. "We realized only by being there that the

DESIGN TOOL

Ethnography in Social Services

We find the ethnographic focus of design thinking to be especially powerful in the social services sector. Despite the best intentions, when leaders of agencies that serve the indigent or the elderly base solutions on their *own* views of the needs and wants of those clients, the quality of the solutions suffers. We simply cannot be sure that we understand the details of their lives when we don't *observe* and *ask*, as Hatch & Bloom does here.

atmosphere was not what we would expect to find if the food service was as good as they said it was.”

Working in a public-service kitchen was a low-status job in Denmark. In addition, there had recently been negative press about poor or even old food being served in these kitchens. “There was a general perception that the people who worked in public

DESIGN CHALLENGE

Changing Scope

When we set out to explore an opportunity, we often find that our initial scoping of the issue was flawed. Here, as in our Toyota story, a problem that we thought had an obvious solution—an updated menu or better search software—actually requires the redesign of an entire experience. It’s not easy to reframe an issue or problem. But it can help to think of the initial scope of the project as a hypothesis that you must revisit and refine along the way. This does not indicate a *mistake* in our early scoping; it is a sign of important *learning*.

kitchens didn’t know how to cook and were sloppy, and that the kitchens were dirty and so on,” Lotte explained. “We found that the kitchen staff was sick and tired of being *told* that they should do something differently. But nobody ever *asked* them how they would like to do things differently.”

It was not going to be enough to focus on the needs of the consumers, team members realized; they would need to address the problems of the employees producing the meals as well. The team decided to broaden the scope of the project beyond just improving menus and helped the government clients under-

stand why this was necessary. As a result, the Hatch & Bloom researchers also conducted interviews with and observed the kitchen workers to understand their needs and work processes. From this dual focus—on the people preparing the meals and on the seniors receiving them—a set of interesting findings began to emerge.

Understanding Kitchen Employees

As team members observed kitchen employees and interviewed them about their jobs, they were surprised to find that one of the workers' major frustrations was that they were not empowered to do what they loved. They had chosen to work with food because they enjoyed creating things out of food, but they were forced to prepare the same meals from the same menu month after month. The decision to use one menu for three months made sense from an operational logistics point of view, but it was terribly corrosive to the morale, motivation, and commitment of the kitchen employees, and, the team learned, it wasn't good for customers, either.

During the interviews, another important thing happened: The kitchen employees realized that someone was listening and trying to help. Catering officer Birgit Jespersen noted that this generated tremendous goodwill for the project. "At first, we were a little skeptical, but the project was handled in a good way," she said. "The designers and management listened to us, and everyone's opinions and ideas carried equal weight."

The more the team from Hatch & Bloom got to know the kitchen employees, the more it became apparent that this was a skilled workforce. Public perception and reality were quite different. The workers were making boring, low-cost meals because of perceived economic and logistical constraints, not because they faced a skills gap.

Understanding Seniors

The seniors receiving meals also suffered from feelings of disconnection and stigma, the Hatch & Bloom team learned in interviews with them. The social stigma of even having to receive such assistance weighed heavily: Help for cleaning was considered

acceptable in Danish culture, but help for more personal needs was much less so. It also mattered who was providing the help. In Denmark a senior hoped to receive it from a relative or a friend. If that was not possible, one would perhaps hire someone. The last resort was government assistance.

Also very painful to seniors was the loss of control over their food choices. “We discovered that deciding what kind of food they put in their mouths was the second most important thing for the elderly, after taking care of their own personal hygiene,” Lotte explained. Furthermore, they often disliked eating alone because it reminded them that their families were no longer around. All these factors, Lotte pointed out, were linked to the underlying problem: “The less you enjoy the situation, the smaller your appetite.”

On a more positive note, the team also discovered that this generation of seniors was very responsible and capable in the kitchen and had a keen sense of the seasons and positive associations with seasonal food, such as apples in the fall and strawberries in summer. They also often tried to customize their meals by adding spices or using their own potatoes or vegetables.

As Hatch & Bloom began integrating what it had learned from both seniors and kitchen employees, the news was good. Lotte explained: “A lot of the findings in the kitchen actually worked very well with the findings from the users. So, for instance, the fact that it’s incredibly boring to choose from the same menu three months in a row: That is a typical leader’s decision because it makes logistics easier. You can buy more of the same food at one time, and so forth. But it’s not a chef’s decision, *and* it’s not a user’s decision, either.”

Stakeholder Workshops: Hatching & Blooming

Once team members had finished their ethnographic research, they enlisted a broader group of stakeholders in understanding the

nature of the challenges and participating in creating solutions. The goal was to solicit a wide range of ideas for developing a new and better meal service. To accomplish this, they held a series of three workshops.

Workshop 1

The first workshop brought together municipality officials, volunteers, experts in elderly issues, kitchen workers, and employees of residential care centers. This group of roughly twenty-five people gathered for the first daylong workshop to review the ethnographic research and develop insights that would later facilitate the creation of innovative ideas when they transitioned from *What is?* to *What if?*

The Hatch & Bloom facilitators began by serving food from the actual kitchen to give participants an experience similar to that of the customers. As Lotte noted, “A lot of the politicians who talked about this food had never eaten it themselves.” The researchers also presented their findings. The purpose of the workshop was strategic: to build awareness of the issue and a shared vantage point as the group proceeded to address it. No solutions were discussed yet.

DESIGN TOOL

Co-Creation in Social Services

As with ethnography (and for many of the same reasons), co-creation is especially powerful in social services. This has to do in large part with the complexity of the stakeholder network. Unlike business initiatives, where we often find a single decision maker, social services projects generally involve multiple decision makers, each of whom must support a proposed solution. Enlisting them in the design of solutions is both effective and efficient.

Workshop 2

During the second workshop, facilitators and participants used a mind-mapping approach, first grouping the key findings and observations gathered during the *What is?* process into

DESIGN TOOL *Trigger Questions*

Trigger questions provide structure and inspiration for the brainstorming process. The infamous “What are ten uses for a safety pin?” type of trigger question has done much to give brainstorming a bad name among managers. Truly useful trigger questions help people think more creatively about future possibilities by giving them something specific to work with. Questions often involve the use of analogies, as with our example in this chapter: “What if this public-service food-delivery organization were a restaurant?”

categories—for instance, the delivery of the food or the composition of the menu. They then delved further, exploring the insights that flowed from each category and what these might indicate about the design criteria of an ideal solution. They then moved into *What if?* and began generating ideas. Facilitators used analogies as trigger questions to help shift participants’ mental models of food service. They asked participants to think of the kitchen as a restaurant, an analogy that triggered a creative rush. “Just thinking about themselves as a restaurant instead of a public kitchen changed their percep-

tions completely,” Lotte explained. “Because they said, ‘Okay, so we must be chefs. And if we’re the chefs, who are the waiters?’”

Hatch & Bloom had invited a well-known chef to observe the kitchen in action and then to attend the workshop. He was surprised, he told the participants, by the kitchen workers’ skills,

which were almost at the level of professional chefs. But they had different results, and that, he argued, was because of their different focus, not a lack of skill. As they prepared meals, the kitchen employees concentrated on maximizing economy rather than food styling or seasoning or other details that professional chefs would focus on. Being compared with chefs shocked the people who worked in the kitchens. It also boosted their confidence and sparked an increased passion for the project because they were being told that they were actually good at something.

The workshop participants continued exploring the restaurant analogy as they considered the menus. Until that point the menus had been minimalist factual descriptions of the food, perhaps detailing how it was prepared. For example, one item read, “liver, potatoes, and sauce.” “That is not exactly a description that will make your mouth water,” Lotte pointed out. “They just printed these menus and never gave a thought to how they should look. But now they wondered, ‘Maybe they should look like actual menus; maybe we should describe our meals in a completely different way.’”

The group also began to focus on the fact that many of the vehicles used for meal delivery were in poor condition. “Some customers asked drivers to go down the street a bit because they were so embarrassed by the car,” Lotte told us. “They really thought the neighbors would think, ‘Oh, now she’s having a funeral’ or something like that because the vehicle was really, really sad.”

Workshop 3

The third workshop, which was much more hands-on, moved into the *What wows?* phase, prototyping and beginning to test the co-created solutions. For example, Hatch & Bloom worked with participants on three different versions of the menu and asked them which they liked and how they felt about various aspects, such as which colors they favored and whether they preferred photos or illustrations.

Prototyping with Customers

Hatch & Bloom took the results from the workshops and moved into *What works?*, testing prototypes with different combinations and ways of presenting food with the customers they had been observing since the beginning of the project. Again, they tested the prototypes not only with current customers but also with people who had stopped using the service and with those nearing retirement age.

The learning from this initial set of experiments resulted in a second project with some quick design changes that allowed for meals in which the components were packaged separately. Lotte explained: “Instead of having a tray where there’s potatoes or rice or pasta, some meat and some sauce, and then some vegetables, we implemented a solution where you pack these things separately if you prefer to do your own potatoes or if you prefer some kind of specific pasta or if you have some of your own vegetables. So you can order potatoes and vegetables on the side, but then you can add what you prefer instead of having someone else decide that for you.”

From Public-Sector Food-Service Employees to Restaurant Chefs

In order to change the negative kitchen culture at Hospitable Food Service, the gourmet chef Hatch & Bloom had involved earlier came in to work with employees. This generated more than a little nervousness among them. “Here was this really competent chef, and we were concerned that he might criticize us,” catering officer Birgit Jespersen recounted. “But he praised our food and said that we had a very high technical level. That was a real boost, and today we feel like chefs ourselves.”

The chef inspired the kitchen employees to introduce seasonal ingredients and offered ideas for improving presentation. This has

made a real difference. “Now we take the time to make an appealing presentation,” Birgit said. “We also are thinking more about colors. For example, we toss carrots with parsley to add some color to the tray. And we are putting an emphasis on seasoning the food well.”

Kitchen employees also received new uniforms that were much more “chef-like.” This was a symbol of their dignity and status, and it signaled a sense of pride and care to their customers as well. “The old uniforms were like nightgowns,” Lotte recalled. “They were very sad to look at, not aesthetically pleasing. Just by having these new uniforms, we gave them a level of authority they were not used to.”

From Hospitable Food Service to The Good Kitchen

The process of ethnographic observation, mind mapping, co-creating with stakeholders, and iterative prototyping and experimentation yielded a host of dramatic changes: a new menu, new uniforms for staff, a new feedback mechanism (we’ll get to that in a bit)—an overall new experience for both customers and employees. Employees’ images of themselves and the services they provided changed, and this itself seemed to improve customer satisfaction levels.

The process also yielded a new name: Hospitable Food Service became The Good Kitchen. “We wanted a name that internally and externally showed that the employees were committed to their work,” Lotte explained. “They were doing exactly what you would in your own kitchen, just on a bigger scale. So we changed the name; we changed the identity.” As Paula Sangill, the head of office in Holstebro’s Department of Health and Social Services, observed, “It’s an ambitious name, which was exactly what we wanted, and we are working hard to live up to the expectations.”

The new menu looked like a real restaurant menu. Instead of a list of dishes, it presented categories such as entrees, desserts, and so on. Items were also explained in greater detail. Paula described

the new experience: “We write about the ingredients in a way that gives the senior citizens a sense of tasting the food. Before we would write ‘fried liver with gravy, potatoes, and vegetables.’ Now we write ‘pan-fried calf’s liver with onions and gravy, potatoes tossed with thyme, and butter-roasted vegetables.’ We now have about eighty people a week choosing liver, when we used to have ten.”

The Good Kitchen employees also made changes to the menu based on what they heard from seniors. For example, they learned that a lot of their clients were still very social, so they added a two-course guest menu. They also introduced individual snacks, such as pastries and chocolate, to enable seniors to adapt their meals to their lifestyles and behaviors.

In addition, at the request of customers and with the assistance of a consulting chef, The Good Kitchen began to offer high-quality additions. Some of these were inspired by the finding that the elderly clients had positive associations with foods that had been available, in their past, only at certain times of the year. The menu emphasized traditional dishes with familiar taste experiences but now included dishes such as “lemon spaghetti with mushrooms and parsley” and “soup with Jerusalem artichokes and grilled cockerel.” There was also a “weekly surprise,” which allowed for more creativity by The Good Kitchen employees and greater variety for customers.

The Good Kitchen Becomes Part of the Family

Employees in the kitchen had not been accustomed to communicating with the people they served (this gets back to the “Who are the waiters?” question). The drivers who delivered the meals, who were all kitchen employees, would enter the seniors’ homes and leave without reflecting on what they saw. So the team developed simple comment cards that drivers began to carry with them and hand to customers, who wrote reviews of their meals and

suggestions for how to prepare them. This immediate feedback enabled the staff to gain insights into the seniors' thoughts and reactions to their food. The comments were read aloud at staff meetings and pinned up in a central kitchen location. The cards motivated employees and gave seniors the ability to influence their meals. Both groups loved them.

This direct contact was reinforced with indirect contact. For example, large photos from home visits were hung on the walls of the kitchen, bringing employees closer to their customers. The Good Kitchen also began publishing a newsletter that included posts from kitchen employees, information about and pictures of new hires, and other important events such as employees' birthdays and the birth of a grandchild. This gave the elderly a better understanding of what happened in the kitchen and communicated that there were real people standing in front of the stove who took pride in what they did.

Today, Holstebro's seniors "know who is shaping the meatballs and preparing the gravy in the municipal kitchen," as Lotte described it. The relationship between the kitchen staff and the customers, which is both personal and professional, has increased the satisfaction of both. Lotte explained the benefit of this improved communication: "It's great that we're in touch with the customers every week through the drivers who deliver the food. Many private companies would pay good money for that degree of customer contact, because it offers a unique opportunity to keep tabs on what's important."

Results: The Proof Is in the Pudding

Once the transformation from Hospitable Food Service to The Good Kitchen was complete, the results spoke for themselves. Reorganizing the menu and improving the descriptions of the meals drove a 500 percent increase in certain meal orders in the

first week alone. Within three months, the number of customers had increased substantially.

One of the most important elements of the transformation has been the shift in employees' perceptions of themselves and their work. Kitchen workers are now much more satisfied and motivated. As a result, customers are happier with their food. "If you have professional pride, you'll also cook good food," Anne Marie Nielsen, the director of The Good Kitchen, told us. "Good food has to come from the heart! This experience generated so much positive energy. We have received positive reactions from everywhere—from users and partners and colleagues in other municipalities." Moreover, The Good Kitchen now receives many more unsolicited job applications as word of the improved reputation has spread.

The changes in mind-set were the most significant indicators of success to Lotte but were difficult to pinpoint precisely: "When you do this kind of culture-changing redesign of services, it is very challenging—are the results about our *solutions*? Or about me looking somebody in the eye and showing interest in their work?"

The Good Kitchen's success was noticed outside of Holstebro as well. The Good Kitchen and Hatch & Bloom shared the Danish Design Prize for Service Design as well as the Local Government Denmark Prize for Innovation in 2009.

What Do We Take Away from The Good Kitchen's Story?

By identifying a public challenge to the health of seniors and a fiscal challenge to the state, and using an arsenal of design tools to address both, the Municipality of Holstebro dramatically improved the service experience and quality of life for both customers and employees. This project comes as close to providing a truly win-win solution as we are likely to find, transforming a vicious cycle of malnourished seniors, unhappy employees, and

increased health care costs into a virtuous one with healthier, happier seniors (and employees) and lower costs for the state.

The ideas and actions discussed in this chapter are especially near and dear to us because they highlight design thinking's ability to produce not just better business results but a better world for all of us. They are so simple, so powerful, so inspiring—using design to change the world, not just make it pretty. But accomplishing this requires us to act in new ways:

Be Willing to Engage the Entire System

It is worth noting that this chapter is as much about *system* design as it is about *service* design. It reminds us of a lesson that Peter Senge taught us long ago in *The Fifth Discipline*: Put the whole system in the room. In business, we have gotten much better about the customer part, but we still often neglect employees and communities. Design thinking gives us a detailed suggestion about what to *do* with the system once all parts of it are in the room: share the findings from the deep ethnographic exploration of the stakeholders we want to serve, build an aligned intent around making their lives better, and then invite everyone to derive insights, generate design criteria, and co-create solutions.

Be Willing to Redefine the Problem

Even with the problem definition (much less the solution!), where you *start* is not where you should expect to end up. And that's good news. You didn't get it wrong—you *learned*. So many of our flawed solutions can be traced to having stuck with a limiting question. One of the most significant contributions of design is to help us live longer in the question. It is our willingness to revisit the question we asked at the outset that allows us to reframe the way we see the world and discover new possibilities. It allows us to go places that we never suspected we'd visit at

the beginning of the process. But doing this requires bravery, as Lotte reminded us:

If you use design thinking, you must realize that it might lead you to places you didn't expect to end up. And if you have the courage to embrace that, you can go tremendously far, and you can try out different methods, and you can ask, "Do they work for me? Do they work for my organization?" But that requires a certain level of courage and a willingness to change. If you're not brave enough to face these consequences, and if you don't have the mandate from your leaders, then it's very difficult to do innovation. Innovation requires space—mental space and financial space and organizational space.

*Design Feedback Into the Solution So You
Won't Have to Fix Big Problems So Often*

Why do we spend so much time trying to create dramatic, wrenching change? Usually because we ignored the signals that would have allowed us to adapt more gradually. If we build those signals into our design of the offering or service, the odds that we'll see them before the crisis go way up. That is what those simple feedback cards do for The Good Kitchen. They create a seemingly mundane but very valuable ongoing conversation about daily hits and misses that helps employees get to know their stakeholders better along the way and greatly reduces the need for cataclysmic change later on.

Appreciate the Awesome Power of Ethnography

We sound like a broken record by this point. But if you take only *one* thing from this book, this should be it. The story of The Good Kitchen reveals more powerfully than any other why this is true.

Most of us reading this chapter are not now elderly (despite what our children think). Most of us can't recall the sweet pleasure of having strawberries only in summer. We cannot really know what it means to lose, one by one, the freedoms the young and healthy take for granted: to choose our food, to control our personal hygiene, to be able to have dinner with those we care about. Without ethnography, we will not know these things until it is too late to improve the lives of the elderly. We'll throw strawberries on everything all year long, wasting their ability to conjure up memories of summers past. We will dictate meal choices that are economical or that make sense to us and package them in servings of one so that they can only be eaten alone. Without the deep insights produced by ethnography, how many opportunities to do something truly special for an elderly person—something that probably costs little or no additional money—will we fail to see?

We recall a legal aid attorney's comments to us about the challenges that she and her colleagues faced in providing truly useful legal services to the poor: "We are, and I will make a broad generalization here, ivory tower babies. We're very privileged. We have telephones and good incomes. And we have transportation. We don't face a lot of the problems that these clients are facing every day. And so we don't understand what they go through."

But at least design thinking gives us tools to help us try.