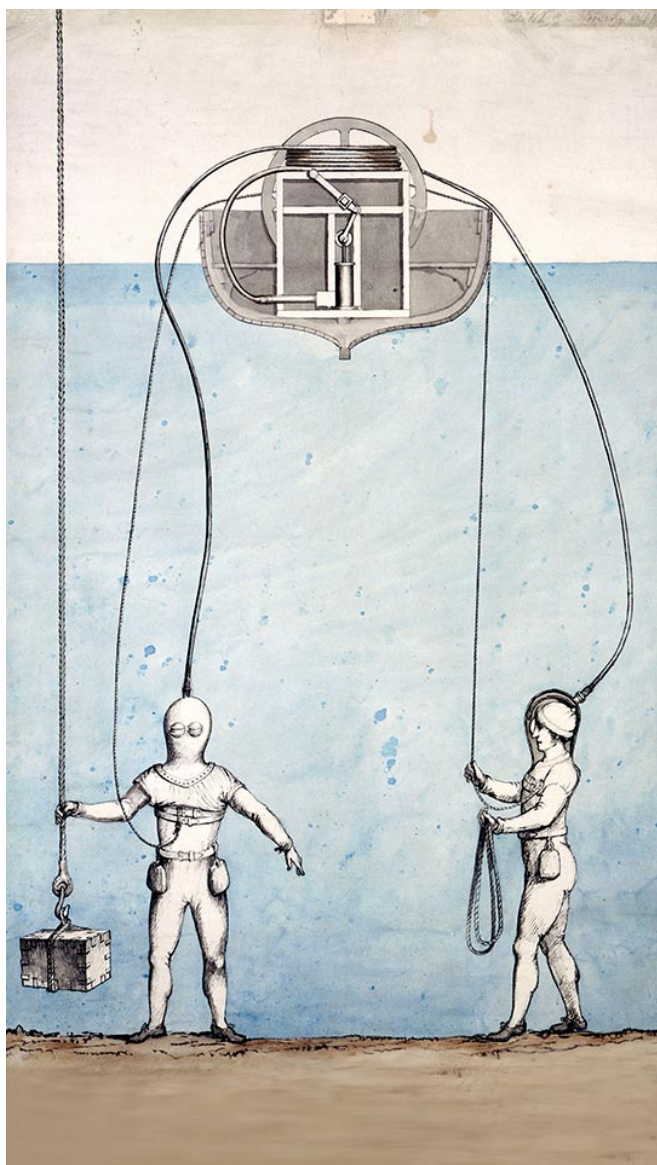


When Everyone Is Doing Design Thinking, Is It Still a Competitive Advantage?

by Tim Brown

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Design thinking has come a long way since I wrote about it here in 2008. The most valuable company in the world places design at the center of everything it does. Designers are on the founding team of countless disruptive startups. Domains such as healthcare, education, and government have begun to prototype, iterate, and build more nimbly with a human-centered focus.

Now that design thinking is everywhere, it's tempting to simply declare it dead—to ordain something new in its place. It's a methodology always in pursuit of unforeseen innovation, so reinventing itself might seem like the smart way forward. But in practice, design thinking is a set of tools that can grow old with us. And I'd argue that in order to

create sustained competitive advantage, businesses must be not just practitioners, but masters of the art.

Adapting from William Gibson, the future of design thinking is here, it's just not evenly distributed. Some complex and large-scale systems are adopting the practice in holistic ways. The Innova School System, for example, with 23 schools thus far, is applying design thinking across its platform, from how the classrooms are built to the curriculum. Likewise, the UK's Design Policy Unit has shown how taking an agile, iterative approach across a broad range of government services can make the whole system feel more open, transparent, and easy to participate in.

But I can count such examples on one hand, and that unevenness in distribution is due to a lack of creative mastery. For organizations that haven't invested in a sustained way, the end results can be incremental and short-lived. Customer satisfaction and sales might see a bump, but incremental ideas are easy to copy. True competitive advantage requires non-obvious solutions executed in elegant ways.

One company that's going for creative mastery is Umpqua. When the bank acquired Sterling Financial Corporation over a year ago, doubling its size and creating the West Coast's largest community bank overnight, CEO Ray Davis seized the moment to reinvest in design thinking across the organization. Umpqua created and set up an exhibition at its headquarters in Portland, Oregon, focused on designing human-centered experiences, products and technological tools. Teams large and small, from executives to associates, walked through the exhibit, and Davis invited them to sign their names at the end only if they sincerely believed in the approach. Company evangelists handed out Moleskines with tips on "how to be better-makers," and an internal tool (built on IDEO's OI Engine) helps teams master design thinking through open-platform challenges. Design thinking even shows up in the questions asked during reviews, when employees are evaluated on how successfully they're building its principles into everyday work.

Getting to that kind of mastery is our challenge for the next decade. How might organizations build deep design thinking skills and creative leadership at all levels? Lucky for us, there are a host of resources to turn to: Udacity and Khan Academy, executive

training at the d.School and Rotman, and new courses offered at our own IDEO U.

Whenever I'm faced with a tough business challenge, rather than trying to use some prescribed CEO logic, I tackle it as a design problem. That's not an inborn ability, it's a skill—OK, a mastery—learned over many years of doing.

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Tim Brown is the CEO and president of the international design consulting firm IDEO and the author of *Change by Design* (HarperBusiness, 2009).

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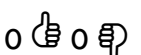
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yes,this is very interesting to know about the design thinking and also good information to share you

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