

Unleash! Design Thinking e-Forum 2020: Managing VUCA with “Vision, Understanding, Courage and Adaptability” Through Design Thinking



4 Aug 2020, Hong Kong – Hong Kong Design Centre (HKDC) organised the “Unleash! Design Thinking e-Forum” 2020 on 30 and 31 July to look into how design thinking can help private and public sector organisations navigate a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. The virtual forum was attended by over 600 participants across different sectors, showing that design thinking has gained increasing recognition in Hong Kong as a valuable approach to creative problem solving.

Design Thinking: Preparing Us for the Next New Normal

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended nearly every aspect of our life, from the personal to the professional, from how businesses interact with consumers to how supply chains deliver goods and services. **Prof. Eric Yim, JP**, Chairman of BOD at Hong Kong Design Centre, concluded the forum by underscoring the value of design thinking in preparing us for the next new normal. “Whilst we grapple with everyday challenges, we need to start thinking today what kind of future we would like to build. COVID-19 has accentuated our appreciation of what it means to be human and what are our basic human needs. It is high time we make design thinking an integral part of our organisation and our city.”

In preparing for the ‘next normal’, Prof. Yim said that design thinking can be a potent approach in helping organisations:

- Discover and rediscover what really matters most to customers
- Define and redefine the core purpose of the organisation
- Explore potential new growth areas in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders
- Manage the costs and the risks of innovation through a rapid prototyping process
- Win the hearts and minds of employees and customers during the innovation journey

The two-day event presented a mix of panels on pressing topics under the new normal, with society as focus of Day 1, business on Day 2. **Dr Bernard Pak-li Chan, JP**, Under Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development of the HKSAR Government opened the forum and shared how design thinking is increasingly adopted in the government to inject more innovation in the public procurement process, as well as improving the user experience of public services. “The Hong Kong SAR Government has been advocating the adoption of design thinking as a problem-solving tool both within the Government and in the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic when economic activities plummeted, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau is also using design thinking to explore with the trade, for example on how to enhance support to our SMEs to more effectively address challenges from the external economic environment. Design thinking is certainly a valuable tool for us to manage the VUCA environment,” said Dr Chan.

Rethinking Medical and Health Services

The pandemic has accelerated the need and urgency for health care innovation. The forum kicked off with a case study panel on “**Rethinking Medical and Health Services**” facilitated by **Dr Fan Ning**, Chairman at Health in Action.

Mr Roel van der Heijde, Former Health Care Consultant of the non-profit Rotterdam Eye Hospital, shared how they used design thinking to reduce the fear of patients. The hospital’s managers have transformed their institution from a rather grim place into a bright and comforting showcase, resulting in a significant increase of patient intakes. As for the factors of success, he highlighted the importance of establishing a global learning network with peers, engaging employees to get new ideas, starting small and celebrating success. “Using design thinking is a way to experiment in small forms immediately. If you have an idea in the morning, we can test it in the afternoon,” said Roel.

Mr Alexander Ng, Vice President at Tencent Health Care, illustrated how Tencent supports the fight against COVID-19 using the principles of “Value for Users and Tech for Good”. Its health platform helps users access authoritative, reliable information and medical guidance. Its COVID-19 Toolkit helps provides online access to doctor services, psychological examination and hotline as well as pre-ordering masks through WeChat mini-programs. The Tencent case shows the increasingly important role of technology to address human needs, and the process of co-creation and iteration with users. “Be prepared to be wrong and fail...If getting things wrong was going to paralyse what we do, we would never have done what we did,” he said in explaining the innovation culture of Tencent.

Ms Doretta Lo, Senior Nursing Officer at Outpatient Department, Adventist Hospital, demonstrated their patient-first care approach and how design thinking can improve the experience of patients and their carers using a bottom-up approach. In particular, the hospital values patient insights from new staff. She also shared how they use technology - Ally the robot - as a personal health assistant to accompany patients through every touch point in the consultation process, and connect patients with their family members when they cannot be the companion.

The panellists concluded by stressing the importance of bottom-up innovations in the health care system, as the system is too big to start changes from the top. **Dr Fan Ning** underscored the importance of a community approach to improve our wellness. “Investment in the medical system only can guarantee 20% of our health, the rest is largely social determinant factors.”

Co-Creating Innovation

The panel “**Co-Creating Innovation**”, hosted by **Ms Patti Hunt**, Founder and Director of MAKE Studios, comprised design thinking experts from Denmark, Singapore and Taiwan. The panellists shared cases and discussed how the collaborative approach of design thinking can address the wicked problems of our society to turn ideas into practice.

Ms Julie Hjort, Programme Director of Danish Design Centre, talked about how they combine scenario planning and design thinking to create the future in a more tangible, playful and actionable way with different stakeholder groups.

Ms Debbie Ng, Principal at ThinkPlace Singapore, shared how they tackled Singapore’s food security issues with multiple stakeholders, from foodies, farmers, manufacturers to governments and NGOs. By using Singaporeans’ love for Nasi Lemak as a way to identify what they can do, Debbie’s case showed how we could define a problem in an engaging way with its stakeholders.

Mr Kevin Yang, CEO of 5% Design Action, illustrated how they leveraged the wisdom of the crowd to bring quality of life to dementia patients and their caregivers. “It is a co-seeing, co-learning and co-creating process,” said Kevin. He also stressed the value of cross-disciplinary collaboration in the process.

The New Meaning of Wellbeing

Day 1 of the forum concluded with a dialogue between **Mr Charles Hayes**, Executive Managing Director, Asia and Partner at IDEO and **Ms Ada Wong**, Director of Ednovators and Supervisor at HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity. Charles and Ada took a deep dive into how people's mindsets, values, behaviours and priorities are changing in the wake of the pandemic. Charles talked about the changing consumption patterns around safety and personal improvement, the concept of multiple identities shifting between the private/personal and public/professional, and us coming to terms with the notion of constant change. He shared how industries, global and local economies are transforming with corporate collectivism, open source ecosystems, hybrid workspaces and workforces and public-private partnerships.

Day 1 panellists who joined the conversation shared these as their biggest takeaways from the pandemic:

1. Importance and urgency for all of us to take action in the community
2. Go experimenting, make mistakes and learn from them
3. Technology makes collaboration and providing solutions for all a lot easier
4. Take care of our emotional needs
5. Stay positive

“Behind process and a deeper level of what design thinking tries to advance is this notion of how we can, much more on a human level, understand one another, be curious about what is going on, try to make sense of the things around us, recognise our own vulnerabilities and assumptions, and learn to be as highly adaptive and as open and collaborative as we can,” concluded Charles on what design thinking should be all about.

Managing VUCA with Design Thinking

In the opening keynote of day 2, **Mr Chris Pacione**, Co-Founder and CEO of LUMA Institute, explained why design thinking has become more urgent and relevant than ever in helping businesses to stay competitive. “Design Thinking is a mindset that helps you design solutions for your challenges that increase your chances of success,” said Chris. He likened design thinking to martial arts for business, comprising these 6 core skills: empathy, questioning, being visual, imaginative, iterative and collaborative. To foster and champion design thinking in the organisation, Chris highlighted the importance of commissioning everyone as designers, teaching it to everyone but not as a process. Peer-to-peer and hands-on applications are the most important.

The Digital Transformation Imperative

Facilitated by **Ms Elaine Ann**, Founder of Interaction Design Association Hong Kong Chapter, “**The Digital Transformation Imperative**” panel featured speakers from EY, HSBC and South China Morning Post. The panellists highlighted at the outset the importance of communicating very clearly the value of a people-centred mindset to everyone in the organisation, by whatever terminology. “To get internal buy-in, one should start working with a problem that people can relate to. It does not have to be a customer problem to start with – It can be an internal stakeholder issue,” said **Mr Dwayne Serjeant**, Executive Director - Experience Design of EY.

Mr Gary Liu, CEO of South China Morning Post, said “the accountability and responsibility of understanding the customer and innovating should belong to everyone”. And it should be an iterative process of communication. But it is not necessary to get the buy-in for everyone all at the same time.

Mr Nico Guiridlian, Customer Experience Lead of PayMe at Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (HSBC), believes that it is important to speak the language of others in the organisation. And the process should be measurable in terms of the business outcome and customer satisfaction.

Dwayne highlighted the fact that design thinking is not so much about training but applying and exposing people to see the benefits. Responding to the question on how we could tackle the fear of failure culture of Hong Kong, Nico said we should create a framework to learn from failure, fail fast and fail forward.

Nico said they involved HSBC customers (known as PayMe Insiders) as much as possible in the design and development process. Gary provided an emerging perspective on the role of data in getting user insights. With AI and machine learning, he believed quantitative research is transforming itself from being descriptive (a report on the past) and prescriptive (suggesting improvements) to predictive of customer needs and preferences. Dwayne and Nico believe that a blended approach of qualitative and quantitative remain important. Organisations have to look for “early signals that lead to a longer-term perspective. It’s not just about automating what they are. A lot of businesses are starting to think about transformation ... because a large traditional part of their business has completely fallen away,” said Dwayne.

Building a Human-centric and Innovative Workforce

Building a resilient business and loyal customers starts with caring for staff and developing their capacity to learn and grow. **Mr Stephen Wong**, Founder and Lead Curator of Design Thinking In Action, hosted a panel with talent development professionals on how their organisations have built a human-centric and innovative workforce.

Ms Miko Cheung, HR Director of LAWSGROUP, introduced the HIT (Happiness, Integrity and Teamwork) culture of their company. After their CEO attended the Unleash! design thinking roundtable in 2018, they incorporated design thinking into their culture to become HIT Plus (Human-Centric, Innovative, Think without the Box). Their design thinking journey comprises 5 steps: Understanding (attending training courses), Development (selecting and adopting certain design thinking processes and tools), Implementation (applying design thinking to improve work flow and in CSR activities), Follow-up and Reinforcement and Celebration and Review. “We need to transform ourselves on a daily basis. The goal is to make small changes every day,” said Miko.

Ms Lena Low, Senior Director of Customer and Business Development at CLP Power Hong Kong, said that design thinking was a strategy to align their business objectives, build an innovative culture and stay relevant to customers. They run a 5-badge accreditation system from Apprenticeship, Practitioner, Assistant, Coach to Fellow, with e-learning for general staff, induction course, in-depth training and management support programmes. Lena echoed other speakers and stressed that design thinking training is really about applications in day-to-day work. They have trained over 2,200 staff in the previous year and it did not actually require a lot of resources.

Mr Teddy Liu is a member of the People Development Management Committee, Hong Kong Management Association. He shared his experience in engaging staff members to learn and practice design thinking. To get internal buy-in, he highlighted the need to start from the pain points of colleagues and align design thinking with their interests. “Take other people’s goal as your starting point,” said Teddy. He also believes design thinking is a mindset. Once colleagues understand the need for innovation and see its value for themselves, they will enjoy applying it in their work.

All three panellists can see the impact of introducing design thinking into the culture of the organisation. Colleagues can think more critically, become more collaborative, innovative, agile and are more willing to experiment and learn from mistakes. “Design thinking is not just for understanding customers but good for staff development,” concluded Stephen.

How to start the design thinking journey: 10 Takeaways from Speakers

- Align with the organisation’s objectives
- Communicate clearly and iteratively
- Start small

- Involve everyone in the organisation and speak their ‘language’
- Focus on the benefits and make them measurable with both financial and non-financial metrics
- Bring in the voice of the customer
- Don’t get fixated on the process
- Learning by doing
- Maintain a sense of playfulness and light-heartedness
- Fail fast and fail forward

From VUCA to VUCA 2.0

Dr Edmund Lee, Executive Director of Hong Kong Design Centre, said in his welcome remarks that “The human lens of design can help us make better sense of our challenges, empower us to re-strategise and innovate with purpose and impact.” Perhaps, as one audience member suggested, design thinking can help us turn VUCA into VUCA 2.0, with Vision, Courage, Understanding and Adaptability.

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About Hong Kong Design Centre

Founded in 2001, the Hong Kong Design Centre promotes the wider and strategic use of design and design thinking to create business value and improve societal well-being. The ‘Unleash! Empowered by Design Thinking’ programme, sponsored by Create Hong Kong, was launched in 2018, pursuant to the Chief Executive’s policy directive to propel the application of design thinking across different sectors in Hong Kong.