THINKING
IN TERMS OF
DESIGN

HASSO PLATTNER INSTITUT

HOW WILL WE FIND THE ANSWERS
TO COMPLEX QUESTIONS IN THE FUTURE?

Photos by JELKA VON LANGEN

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In design, interdisciplinary work processes are a natural part of idea generation. This means that design thinking is the logical name for the collaborative, systematic approach to idea development taught at the HPI Academy. We listen in on a discussion around the topic.

D I S C U S S I O N

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FLAVIA

How did you come to be involved in "design thinking"?

JOHANNES

A lot of people claim to have been doing design thinking before the concept had even emerged. And when I think back to my childhood and consider my penchant for design, it strikes me that I was a kid who would spend hours on a scooter, hanging around and looking into my neighbours' gardens just watching them go about their business. Some might have thought I was a Peeping Tom, but looking back I'd be more inclined to say that was the first example of my interest in humans, observation and what people get up to. Later on, the d.school introduced me to design. I studied there in my second year because I was on campus at the university in Potsdam anyway and found the subject interested me. That was six or seven years ago now, and I've been involved in design ever since.

FLAVIA

Yes, it's a really exciting subject. I want to get to the heart of the matter; to the roots of a design thinker. As you delved back in time, I will add that I also liked to observe people from an early age. I really enjoyed it. Walking along streets and looking through windows, seeing how people live their lives … even today, I still like to do this. Seeing people in everyday situations, even in stressful situations such as at airports —— essentially, just observing their lives. You learn a great deal about behavioural patterns and the potential for innovation presented by these.

JOHANNES

That's cool.

FLAVIA

I came across design thinking during my time working at UdK Berlin (University of the Arts). I taught a course in Societal and Economic Communication.

I was given the task of supervising communications projects over a period of six months, from user research and strategy, to concept and creation development. I looked for methods that enabled me to support students in creating user-oriented innovations. It was a process of trial and error.

JOHANNES

You recently started teaching at the School of Design Thinking, didn't you?

FLAVIA

Yes, that's correct. Christina, how did you first get involved in Design Thinking?

CHRISTINA

I'm going to start my story back in university, not quite so young. During my freshman year at Stanford, I visited a class where students were redesigning essential technologies to better serve people in developing countries. That was before the d.school existed at Stanford, but it was in the same vein as today's "Design for Extreme Affordability" class at the d.school. I was really impressed. I remember we looked at the wheelchair, for example, and our standard wheelchair is really unstable in many contexts. It's fine if you're going through really nice hospital corridors, but not if you're out in the countryside, not if the work you do is on floor level, and not if you can't find materials or parts for repair where you live. The class was saying: "This doesn't fit for so much of the disabled population in this world. How can we make it better for them?"

But it was later that I formally learned about design thinking. Actually, it was the famous embrace case that drew me in. I was working at the time in international development, specifically with breast cancer in middle income countries. Sometimes a company would come in and say: "We want to do something to help! We want to donate a mammogram machine and have a nice ribbon cutting ceremony." Too often though, the machines were already there, sitting broken or underused, or with no film, or no one to operate them, or too few patients wanting screening.

The machines were not necessarily the problem. We wanted to know what was, so in each town we did what we called community profiles, which were essentially "empathy research" to use design thinking parlance. It was a combination of quantitative and contextual research, which I would now call the "understand" phase. Following this, we conducted qualitative research, interviews and immersion to understand what was going on with women and their lives. This is the "observe" phase. It turns out that it's not just about health knowledge or access, but what the world is really like when seen through a woman's eyes. What are her priorities? What's her role in the family? What's the budget like? Who makes the decisions? And how do we make solutions that fit in with her reality? We didn't define the answers either, but rather we designed community granting programmes and made funding and networks available for local communities to propose interventions based on this empathy research. I think it was very much in the spirit of design thinking, so when I heard about design thinking as a formal concept, it just clicked. I thought: "That's what the world needs, that's what international development needs. That's what companies need too if they truly want to create value for people."

FLAVIA

Is it this aspect of design thinking which appeals?

CHRISTINA

Yes, exactly.

JOHANNES

I've also thought about this. What is it that I find so fascinating about design thinking? As you say, I believe we often see that people somehow believe something is intrinsically important, but are unable to pinpoint why exactly that is the case. For example, they long for something, or have the feeling that we don't understand our customers enough. Maybe even that we don't actually know what they want. When the concept of design is involved in this process, it can be a sort of "Eureka!" moment for many. Not because it's new, but because it hits at the heart of something

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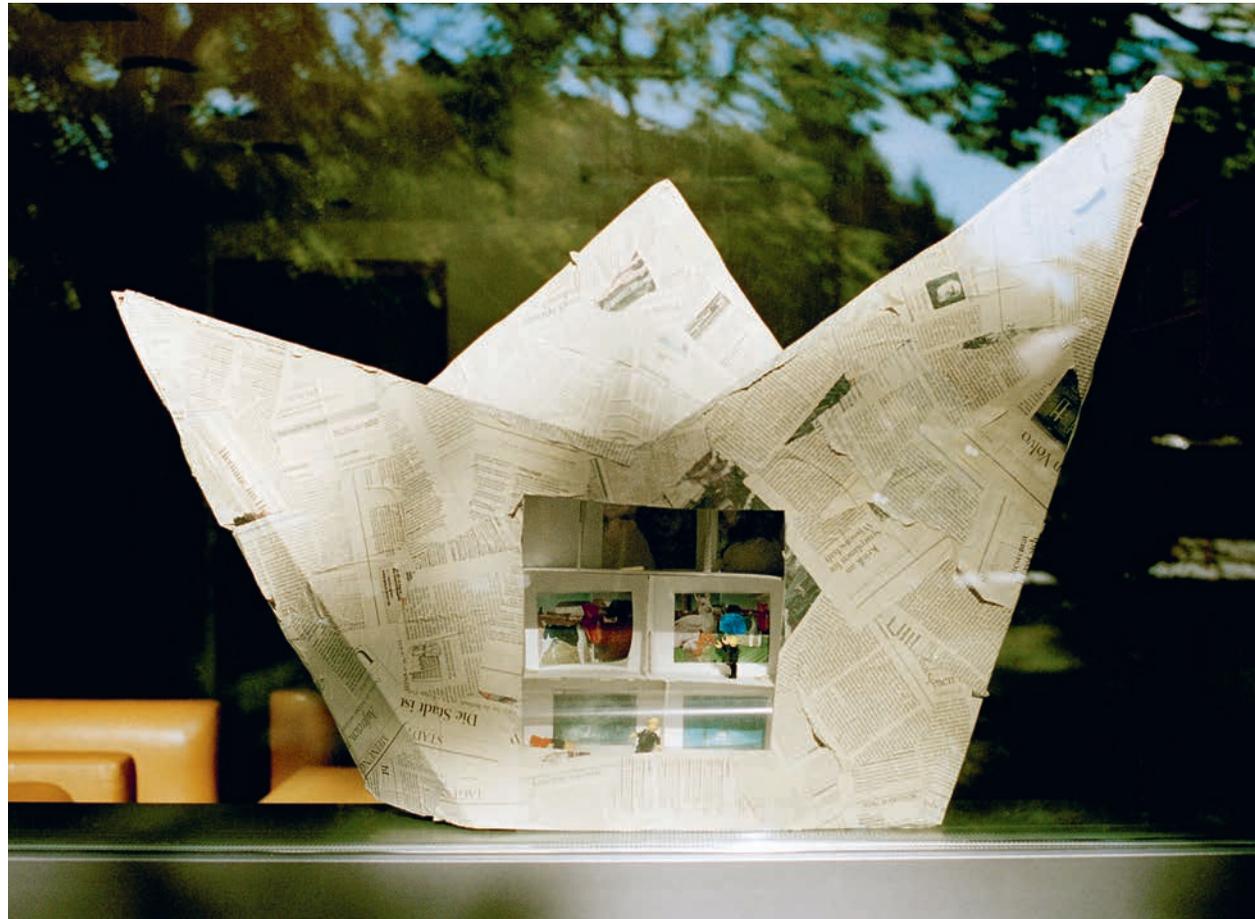
which is familiar to people. It's something they logically believe to be correct and is now incorporated within a formal setting.

FLAVIA

So this means that what I actually do is to bring gut feelings to life?

JOHANNES

Indeed. Something tangible. The other thing which I find fascinating is this fundamental hypothesis that everything can be changed. And this is something I believe that designers are aware of. A coffee cup looks the way it does because someone has thought about it. The cup could in fact look completely different. And in relation to experiences and more holistic service concepts there are simply far fewer people who recognise and see the fact that things can be changed. Nowadays, when I speak to someone at the tax office, they are likely to say: tax, that's just the way it is. They perhaps do not have the same perceptive ability, by which I mean they lack an ability to see or grasp that the tax system has been designed by someone who has thought about it in great detail or that this can all be changed and described. But this is the door which design thinking opens. It is here that a certain energy or confidence can be unearthed: you realise that anything can be designed or redesigned, from purely visual and haptic design all the way to a complete experience.

FLAVIA

What inspires me about design thinking is that you actively engage with something. The results are unknown. That requires courage. You do not know the end result when you are at the start of the process. To me, design thinking is an intuitive process. It is a process supported by an innovation team. However, the team must not restrict this process. The picture I have of design thinking in my head is something like this: you're swimming in a large lake of possibilities. There are many buoys to grasp hold of. They help to orientate you as well. This represents the phases involved in the design thinking process. Designers are presented with the opportunity to

access innovation flows, swim freely and gain a clear overview of a customer's exact needs and the requirements you want fulfil.

CHRISTINA

That's also the challenge of the process and trusting the process. You're going to go into a foggy space where you don't know what will come out. And trusting also that that's where you should be. If you really want to innovate something new or different, that's what you have to do by definition. But it's also uncomfortable for a lot of people.

FLAVIA

One experience, in particular, inspires me time and again: the change we see in people who get involved in our design thinking workshops. At the start of the process, they may describe themselves as uncreative personalities. But then, after an hour, they have built a prototype of their idea and can hold it in their hands. That is the opposite of uncreative! It's incredible. For me, it is a really great thing to be able to make people self-confident. Recently, I saw something in the park. A child ran towards their father with three sticks in their hand and proclaimed excitedly "Daddy, I have three swords!" The father responded dryly: "They are sticks, not swords." Suddenly, I was asking myself, what makes our society really tick? Why do so many people think that the creative design of experiences does not apply to them? Design thinking stimulates or gives people the courage to (re)discover this creative confidence (as Tom and David Kelley call it) in themselves.

JOHANNES

What are your backgrounds? I studied cultural sciences, linguistics, media, business administration. A little bit of everything.

FLAVIA

I studied communication sciences, media sciences, English linguistics and psychology.

JOHANNES

We studied almost all the same subjects then.

FLAVIA

Oh, and a semester of economics too.

CHRISTINA

I did my BA in International Relations and German Studies. So you studied me, I studied you! I also have an MBA.

JOHANNES

Nice. Ok. Key term: collaborative creativity. It's quite a neat phrase. I think that the first thing I noticed as being collaborative in design thinking is the fact that we are constantly searching for formats and ways to transfer ideas and thoughts from one brain to another, so from one person to another. This is pretty much everything in terms of collaboration, because several methods are in play here: visual work, prototyping, a strong desire for specificity which would always annoy our group: "Be even more specific!" "What does specific mean anyway?" This is what I personally identify as a collaborative element in this process. You move away from ambiguous PowerPoint slides to concepts which people are able to grasp and relay more easily.

FLAVIA

Yes, and that really helps. You're making ideas visible. This is a prerequisite for ensuring that everyone understands that the others may have envisaged this idea differently: "Ah, ok, he saw it like this." Brainstorming sessions and visualising ideas facilitates creative development. A simple idea quickly jotted down on a sticky note can provide the basis for the whole team to construct, complete and expand. Taking other people's ideas is often viewed with suspicion. It is misconstrued as plagiarism. However, it's really just about affording the creative potential of your team space in which to flourish and encouraging collaboration.

CHRISTINA

There's a lot of building on each other. And there's also sometimes a creative tension that's built. We're creating space not just for everyone to agree, either, but rather we really want different views to come together.

Maybe you throw something out there, maybe I don't agree in one case but it sparks us to think in a different direction so we can put multiple options on the table. It's about creating a space where a lot of different ideas can come in, and like you both said, where you also understand what other people mean with their ideas, too. This helps us get to better ideas and better solutions.

FLAVIA

In your opinion, how is a conventional design thinking process structured?

JOHANNES

I think they are structured similarly to all other problem solving processes. The key is to make sure you understand the question properly, empathise with the people tackling the problem and those confronted by it and then put forward various solution suggestions based on this understanding. All that's left is to repeatedly try these out. That's it!

FLAVIA

For me, design thinking is not conventional. Conventional would be to set up a project with a project name, a job number and several project milestones established in advance. In contrast to this, design thinking processes begin with a challenge, so the starting point is either a concrete question, or a chance to scrutinise something or pose questions.

JOHANNES

Exactly. And the question itself often contains the solution. Starting with questions is a huge difference to other methods, in my opinion. Why is design thinking so named and what does it have to do with questions of design? What do we have to say about this?

(break)

Well, I think I briefly touched on this before. Designers clearly have some really exciting skills and they also understand that the design of things is not down to chance. Rather, they are aware that it can be

influenced and depending on how things are designed, a wide range of feelings and experiences can be stirred up in users. So no matter whether you are a product designer or graphic designer, you will always have an innate understanding that if you choose a different font or construct a sentence differently, this influences the user experience. I believe that design thinking applies this principle to all human experiences, be they process experiences, service experiences, brand experiences, or complete product landscapes. That's my two cents on the matter.

FLAVIA

Design thinking provides scope for design. It does not place the sovereignty of design on the shoulders of a small group of experts, but instead reveals that design and discovery is something which everyone can do. It is most effective in multidisciplinary teams working to develop solutions to specific questions. Creating designs —— transforming ideas which exist in your head into a tangible service or product —— that is what it's all about.

CHRISTINA

The other thing is that we all are designing. Everything we do, the experiences that we have, the boring forms that we make other people fill out … we're always designing. It's just that with design thinking, you're bringing an awareness to what experience or environment you're creating through the things that you put out in the world for other people. Maybe that's where the thinking comes in, and thinking in a way that whether I'm purposeful about it or not, I'm designing these experiences or interactions, so why not be sensitive and design as well as I can for what I want to achieve and what my user wants to achieve?

JOHANNES

That's also a beautiful summary *(laughs)*. Really good.

FLAVIA

Is design thinking borne of a concrete understanding of design?

JOHANNES

Yes. Although I should just add that there are some designers who think that design thinking processes are a complete waste of time. We have several designers in our teaching team and coaches who can see both sides of the argument. They would say to us that design thinking and design understanding can be seen as two very different pairs of shoes, even if the methods used to make them partially overlap. However, I would say to these designers: we don't want to step on your toes. We also don't think that we are able to do your job better than you. I would just say that there are simply different types of problems which can be solved by pitting design thinking processes against pure design, or as I like to say, design-design. I believe that an understanding of design is something personal. I don't know whether there is consensus on this topic in the design thinking community. I understand design to be the construction of human experiences.

FLAVIA

Nail on the head. I second that.

JOHANNES

And just as Christina so eloquently put it, this applies to everything. Everyone who designs things experienced by other people is in sense a designer. It doesn't matter if you are in a retirement home, work in graphics, are an architect or a business consultant: at the end of the day, you're designing experiences for other people. This can be "purposeful" or not, it can be a conscious or subconscious process.

FLAVIA

Making design an experience which can be tested is the key to design thinking. We call this "method rapid prototyping". Using simple media (for example, paper or Lego), ideas become comprehensible and tangible. They can then therefore be tested. Iteration loops allow improvements and changes to made quickly, or even for the prototype to be discarded entirely. Each iteration loop produces a more specific prototype design. And this is where the individual experience of everyone on the team should be incorporated and

is of great value. So a designer offers his expertise, the technicians refine the technical components, and so on. Nobody is robbed of their role as an expert. Instead, expertise is linked up and the wealth of the ideas are broadened through this process. The challenge for some designers is definitely to share out this supposed design power.

JOHANNES

Absolutely, design thinking is less art and more of a craft. It isn't the kind of thing where you might suddenly have a flash of inspiration or where people go around wearing black turtle neck jumpers just being totally brilliant. Rather, it is more of a methodical process which a designer follows step by step. It's all very transparent. You sometimes have to admit: "I'm not sure what the solution might be."

CHRISTINA

It's not so often we have a chance to sit down and think about, or talk about what we do.

JOHANNES

Yes, this really has been a great opportunity.

FLAVIA

Let's talk about beginnings. Johannes, you spent some time before in Stanford and Christina you studied there, of course. Do you have the inside story on how design thinking came into being?

JOHANNES

I think it's always difficult in cases like this. Design thinking is a very diffuse movement. As soon as someone offers an explanation of its origins, somebody else contradicts them: "No we were involved even earlier on!"

FLAVIA

… the Egyptians invented design thinking thousands of years ago …

JOHANNES

Exactly. The Egyptians had already done it. I like to refer back to the Bauhaus movement. This was a

time when we in Germany were conducting interdisciplinary experiments. It was also a time when people were focussed on societal problems or user challenges. They worked in highly creative interdisciplinary teams to come up with solutions which were so far removed from what had previously been comprehensible to those on the outside looking in. I think that the fundamental question driving us in Stanford and also here in Potsdam is not necessarily "What is design thinking?" but rather "How can we teach design thinking?" This means asking how we can teach people to be more confident in their creativity and how design processes can be applied to various different questions. In my opinion, conveying this to people and allowing them simply to experience it for themselves is the major achievement for our colleagues in Stanford, who in turn influence the Potsdam team. They introduce people to the concept of design thinking and let them experience it for themselves.

(break)

FLAVIA

How has design thinking developed internationally?

JOHANNES

Design thinking is a major global trend. You can't deny that. Perhaps it's just the case that we more strongly perceive that innovation initiatives are everywhere now. We are fortunate that we can play a role in this, whether in China, Malaysia, South Africa, Dubai or Brazil. These places are hives of activity. Personally, I am more fascinated by why this is the case, because there is such interest from so many different directions. Companies are determined to operate somewhere, even if there are fewer price advantages to be achieved. This means places where companies have recognised that while they can attempt to keep lowering costs, they cannot really compete on price benefit, so must instead focus on bringing genuine innovations to the market. Here, there is a real thirst for design thinking or companies often stumble across it in some way. Furthermore, we also have demand from governments and the public sector. For example,
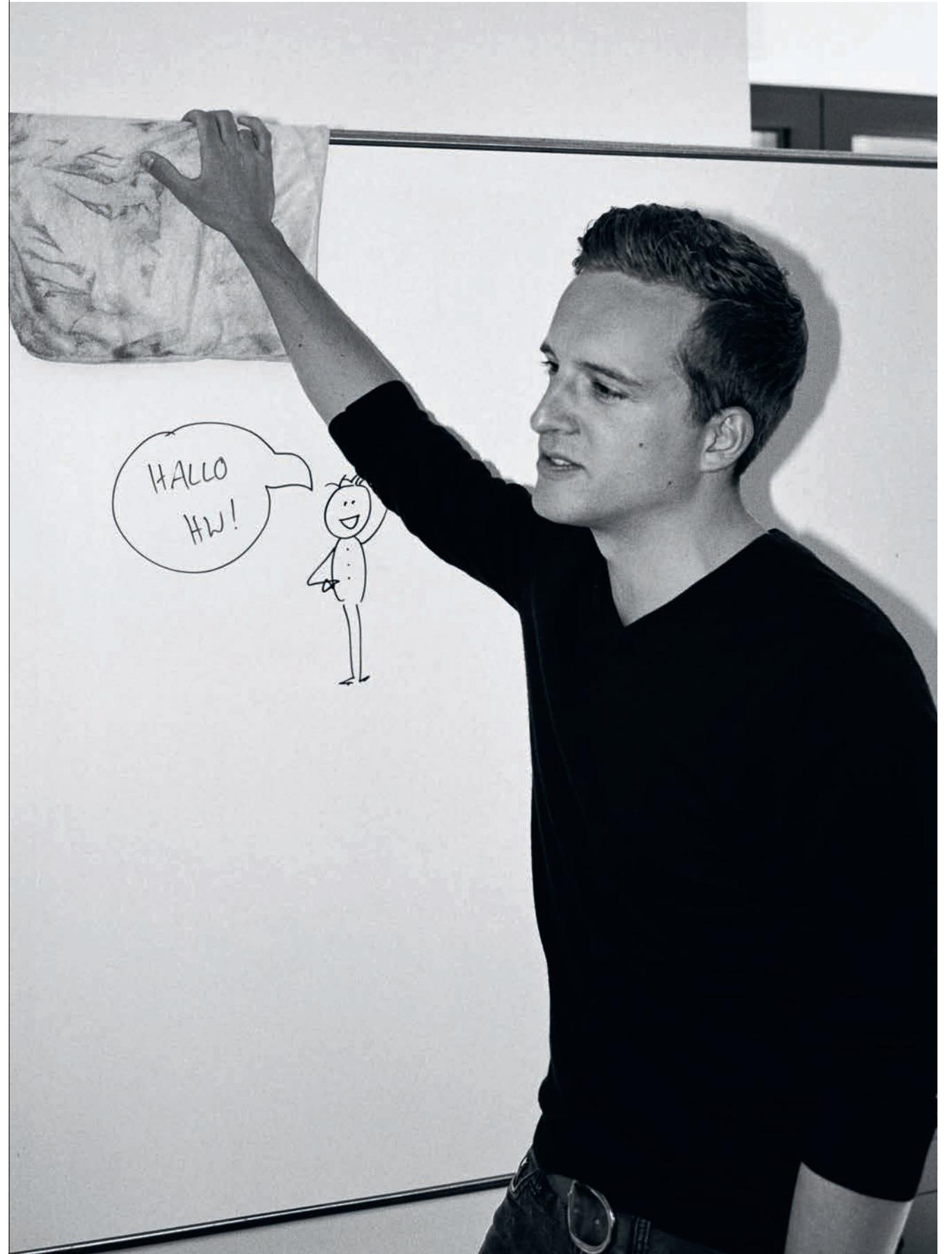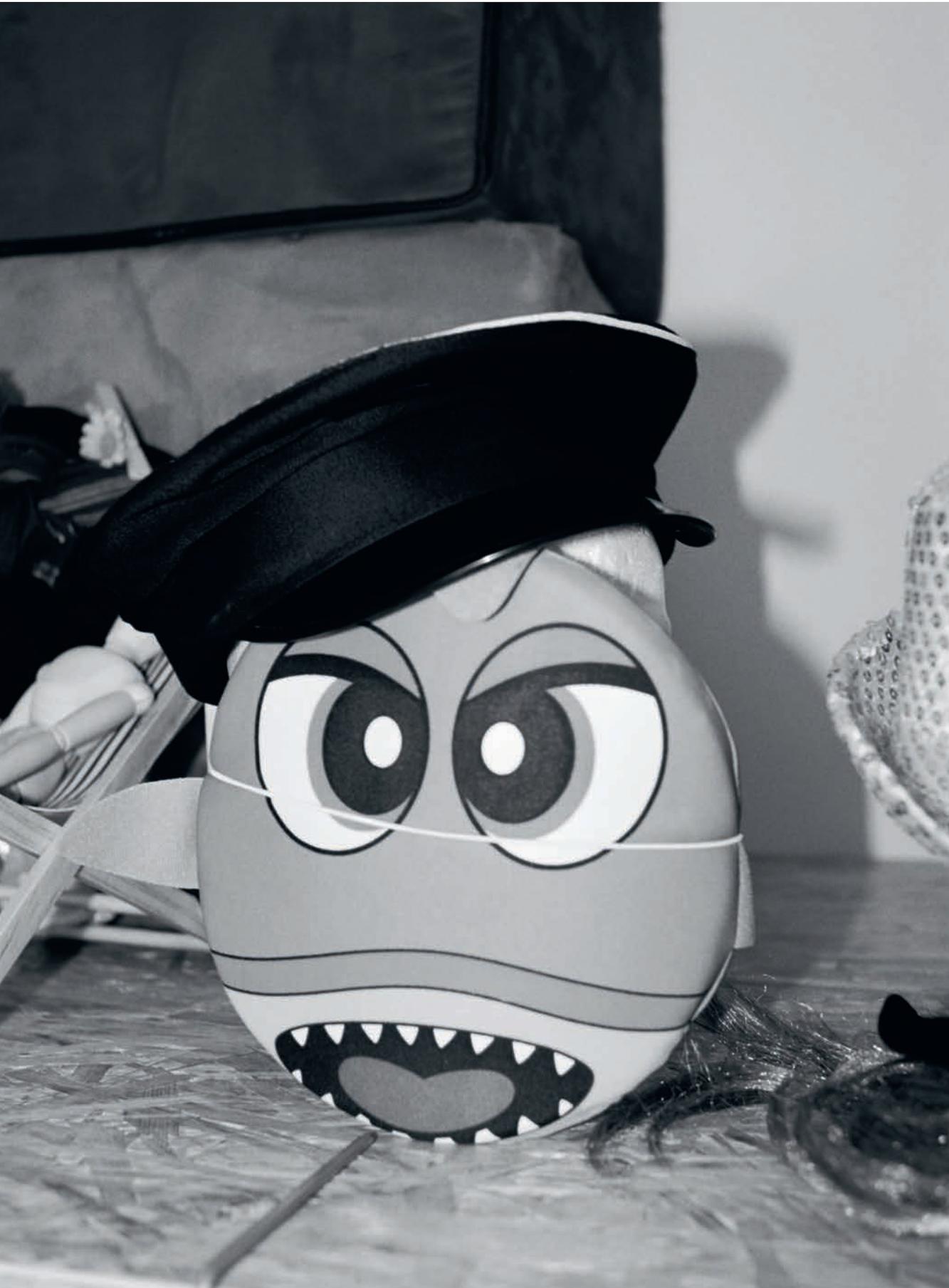
a prime minister may decide that design thinking is an exciting development, because creative confidence has the potential to help a country's development …

CHRISTINA

Yes, and some of our researchers are looking at these problems too. Particularly in the public sector you have such complex problems and so many different people involved, and design thinking is a method that can help tackle these problems. It brings the different stakeholders to the table to start working on the problems, systematically, and I think that's also the attraction for some on the public sector side.

JOHANNES

Spot on. These are no longer the kind of problems where we can simply wait for some ingenious inventor or professor to find a solution. These problems are incredibly complex. You know that you will need many different perspectives on the issue, so it's about finding a catalyst for these various perspectives. Design thinking is an exciting possibility in this process.

FLAVIA

I'm interested in discovering at what stage people come into contact with design thinking in their lives. For example, even young children at a crèche may experience design thinking. Stimulating changes, taking things in their own hands. With design thinking we can encourage qualities which children have instinctively, like empathy, fantasy, courage, development of ideas, experimenting with things (prototyping) and cooperative work, to name but a few. I would tend to ask the question: why is creative collaboration not supported, or not supported more, as the case may be, as a completely natural learning process in crèches?

JOHANNES

Exactly, yes! Below the age of 25, I'm not sure we would call it design thinking. If you look at modern educational concepts, there are huge parallels between these and design thinking. For example, exciting developments can be seen in the team-based learning concept known as the "flipped classroom", where children are allowed to discover subjects by asking interesting questions. Another question is to what extent companies can profit from design thinking. I believe that it is above all companies who recognise that it takes more than just efficiency benefits to get ahead of the game, but rather that this demands things which are truly new and innovative, as an answer to problems for which you need various perspectives. And I believe that many companies can benefit from this profound, open-ended customer understanding. Even if design thinking does not throw up any answers, I find that companies can begin to construct a very different customer relationship with this empathy work which is part and parcel of the design thinking process.

FLAVIA

And I also find that companies could stand to benefit if they actively put these working methods into practice. Simply consider something from a new angle, for example how to create space in companies. This means establishing physical space where creativity can flourish, neither getting stuck in offices which are too small nor lost in those which are too vast. But it also means giving employees the mental space to think about things, something which is not ordinarily factored in to a working day. Last but not least, collaborative work. Many companies curtail their own drive as they essentially attempt to bring about bursts of innovation with the handbrake on, bogged down by silo thinking and silo financing. Often, there's very little opportunity of coming into contact with other departments or working in mixed, intra-departmental teams. A total rethink is needed in this regard.

CHRISTINA

That's also interesting from an employee engagement perspective. Gallup does research on this globally, and employee engagement is surprisingly low, which is harmful for productivity and creativity, and ultimately expensive for companies. Having tools or a working culture like design thinking is something that, by its nature, pulls people in and puts the whiteboard marker in their hands, so to say. It asks people to be active and it asks people to create their own experiences. Companies can really benefit from this, and not just in developing products to be sold. Our colleagues actually saw in their research on implementation that a lot of companies today are using design thinking internally, so they look at things like "How can we re-design our accounting process?" or "How do we re-design the on-boarding experience for our employees?" Maybe the user is the person filling out expense reports in this case, if you're the accounting department. Design thinking has a lot to offer for a more engaged and committed workforce.

FLAVIA

Something else has just occurred to me, which applies especially to companies structured in a very hierarchical manner. If you have a team which consists of various hierarchies, an idea can take hold much more quickly, because everyone believes in it.

CHRISTINA

The voice in the process and in the development.

FLAVIA

Why is it no longer used so often? What stands in its way?

JOHANNES

I think Christina mentioned something about a "foggy space" which answered this question a little bit. There is an inherent uncertainty to design thinking because innovation means uncertainty. By this I mean that you are searching in areas where it is impossible to know exactly what will happen. It's hard to budget for this in the same way that it's hard to set a budget on innovations. And, of course, design thinking challenges hierarchies and management structures. I therefore believe that some think it's a waste of time and aren't interested in it at all.

FLAVIA

We say this so often. However, we can only reiterate: you must have experienced design thinking to form an opinion of it. The true power of the method, of its mindset and of the flexible space is only revealed once you have experienced it for yourself. People in decision-making roles should therefore consider trying design thinking for themselves.

JOHANNES

It also takes time to read a book! (laughs)

FLAVIA

Did you want to expand on your "fog" comment?

CHRISTINA

Sure, if you look at this month's Harvard Business Review, the feature is about design thinking, and actually it is becoming more and more used in companies. The question is, how and at what level of engagement? They make the argument that a lot of people have had some contact with it at this point, at least coming from an American perspective … maybe a little less so in Germany, although we're working on that. A lot of people have heard about it or have done a workshop, but really embedding it into the culture requires commitment and cultural change. You both were talking about some of the reasons it can be hard if you don't have commitment, because this really is something that you need to change and say, "We're going to do this" or "We're going to live with some uncertainty and some mess."

JOHANNES

Is design thinking as widespread in other countries as it is in Germany?

(break)

It's quite an interesting question. We spoke yesterday with a colleague from South Africa and he said that there is not much design thinking activity there. He also reckons, from his personal experience at any rate, that South Africans in general are not all that interested in design or objects which have been painstakingly and lovingly designed. So there's simply no national consciousness of or appreciation for the concept. I then thought about whether having an appreciation for design or well-designed things anchored in a country's culture is also a driver behind design

thinking. And I would say now, without any scientific evidence or basis, that northern countries seem to be a bit more advanced in this regard. For example, I know that design thinking is very prevalent in public projects in Finland. One of our colleagues with experience of working in Finland told us that questions such as "how can we reduce bureaucracy for Finnish farmers?" are dealt with using design methods. They get underway and conduct empathy studies, take stock of everything they need to do and then find creative solutions. The Danes are also very appreciative of good design, I think. I imagine there's a correlation here.

(break)

FLAVIA

In the Harvard Business Review, I read an article in which various types of decision-makers were compared. In South Africa, there are many who take decisions very intuitively. That could be a factor preventing design thinking from taking off in South Africa. So, let's just try it out. After all, it's a process of transition for society. Let's see! The future will reveal all.

JOHANNES

I think that design thinking is already widespread in the USA too. Why is that? I imagine it's because Americans are pretty flexible, they take to new methods and products quickly. Simply put, they're always quick to use innovative methods. Everything moves much quicker than in Germany.

FLAVIA

They simply trust themselves more.

JOHANNES

Exactly. When Uber is cool, then Uber is used. And then within two years, the whole market has been revolutionised. In Germany, we um and ah for a few years and question whether this is cool, whether it's legal, etc …

FLAVIA

We like to wait until it becomes mainstream, until the product or concept has really taken hold, before we get involved.

JOHANNES

And in my opinion, this represents an area where we as design thinkers can have genuine success. With new things, with innovations.

CHRISTINA

I think another factor may be that Americans like telling their stories. Not just in design thinking but also regarding new business processes, new frameworks, new thinking, or whatever. There's a culture of telling the world and selling to the world. TED Talks and business school articles on design thinking started coming out a while ago now. IDEO has been really great about telling stories about the impressive things that they've designed. I've noticed that German businesses seem to look a lot to the US for these kinds of trends. I did my MBA in Germany and I felt like I was always reading American cases, which in a way is too bad. We wanted to know more about the European cases, because things are happening here but I don't know if Germans are always so loud about what they're doing.

JOHANNES

Yes, you are right, if you imagine a classic German entrepreneur who runs a medium-sized firm based in the Black Forest and is the global market leader for some product or other, you just know they won't be a great storyteller. It wouldn't occur to them to hold a TED talk on the valves his company manufactures. Or something. How do you see it: is design thinking commonplace in Silicon Valley? I get the impression that design thinking has become shorthand for what successful entrepreneurs do in any case. Whether they actually call this design thinking is irrelevant. If we take a look at companies who have enjoyed great success in the past decade or remained successful, there are many elements familiar to us which have been methodically included in design thinking processes.

FLAVIA

If you go looking for design thinking, you will also often find various process-schemes in which the design thinking process has also been adapted within a company. It doesn't matter whether you take six steps to complete it or five ——— the important thing is simply that the user is our focus and our initial efforts are geared toward ascertaining what the actual requirements are and what is often overlooked.

How might a design thinking process be structured for a business concept? How can a company prepare for this and what are the initial steps?

JOHANNES

Yes, so … Well I have a view on this, but it is merely a hypothesis, which some may back up. I would say, as boring as it may sound, that my first step would be to design a physical space. By this I mean properly considering the spaces in which people are already working together. For example, "Are your meeting rooms actually cool? Do these rooms really invite people to interact with each other, share ideas and explain their perspectives?" Next, I think that companies or entrepreneurs have to ask themselves "How do we ensure sure that information is passed from one department to another and that people work with those from outside of their team or department?" So I think that the best scenario would be for teams all along the value chain to develop a product, i.e. the developer with the sales and marketing teams. Eventually, all those along the supply chain are involved in the development process: but how do we ensure that they cooperate together on the major issues? I guess we may need to create processes and formats for this purpose. Then, I think it's necessary to risk an innovative approach to a project with a strategic goal, so that something is not discussed enthusiastically by two people over lunch and then falls by the wayside on return to the office. Instead, there should be real space, projects and periods in which we openly respond to and explore questions without already having an answer.

(break)

And then you have to ask yourself, "How can we ensure that we properly understand our customers, that we learn as much as possible about them in addition to scrutinising them properly and honestly?" There really are loads of companies where people say: "We are actually our own customers, because we make shampoo." But that is not quite the same thing. Someone who makes shampoo is a very particular shampoo consumer. And it's a little stupid because they're going to the customer every two weeks as it is, prattling on during another presentation and you still don't really understand the customer because most companies don't ask enough questions. I believe that this is something which we could really improve. How can we design this process so that we actually learn about what inspires and worries them? For me, this is proper preparation. Then you can get started.

CHRISTINA

I'm going to jump in on the point about companies asking too few, and too narrow questions of people. A lot of companies do consumer research, but that means for them market research or sending surveys out. Often these are very "Yes/no" or "Did you like the shampoo? Would you prefer to see it in red?" It's not always that closed, but surveys tend to be fairly directed towards a certain aspect of a service or product feature. It's important to realize where market research helps, where traditional surveys help and where you really need qualitative, design thinking-style research to gain insights into your consumers and making sure that that's included as well.

I think you had a really good description of the design thinking process. I would emphasize that it's important that design thinking is not something extra. As soon as design thinking becomes the thing that's on top of all the other things you have to do, it's hard to make it successful. It should be integrated into what you do and, as you mentioned, into the strategy. Then it becomes "We work like this. This is the tool, this is the method, this is the mind-set that we use in our projects," rather than, "Oh, do I have to do this extra thing after 7 o'clock at night, because that's the only time I have?" Start small and pilot, try it out, adapt it to your context, and see what works on real projects. These successes help propel design thinking in an

FAIL early and often

organisation. Colleagues see it and think, "Oh that's cool what they're doing over there. They're doing something different, and it makes a difference!" and are drawn in.

FLAVIA

Yes, this is what I was going to add. You mentioned starting with a specific project and making it tangible as well. I believe that the pioneers involved in this project should be hailed. You should reflect on what hasn't worked too. It's also important to accept that mistakes happen, but that you have to allow this to be the case.

JOHANNES

What is your prognosis for design thinking, Flavia?

FLAVIA

Wait a second. I have to think whether or not I was finished … I wanted to say something else on how companies can prepare. I find that "change" is a heavy word which many people are afraid of. When you consider the guise of a design thinking process, it seems totally harmless. You simply try it out over the course of a couple of days. That's a first step: experimenting to see if it works for us as a company, because even a little change like that can have enormous consequences. Recently, something else occurred to me: I was in a company where the conference room was furnished in such a way that the tables were screwed in place, because of all the technology that was in the room. The room could not be changed. This means that the concept of change dies from the very first moment that you say to yourself "I want to try something a little different". Changing these things or, as you mentioned, creating space or giving people the opportunity of working together differently, these are supposedly small things which can kick things off and provide a project with a basis. To achieve this, a degree of candour needs to be developed. This must include people who do not deal well with uncertainty, not forgetting of course that uncertainty is the DNA of innovation. And what's your prediction: how will design thinking spread?

JOHANNES

I think it will continue. I don't know if it will still be called design thinking in a couple of years or whether someone will have thought up a new word for it —— to be honest, it's not important. I believe that pressure will be applied from several sides. First, because of the fact that customers are easily able to distinguish between a product and an experience. We buy globally and can exchange incredibly easily. This creates a pressure to design products and services and experiences with much more empathy. I therefore believe that this way of making things will not simply disappear.

(break)

Conversely, the work market is now populated with employees who are of a very self-confident generation. I think that workforces which have a desire to change things and want to be sure that they are having an effect on their business may represent another source of pressure. In the absence of hierarchies, methods and working cultures are being established in which people can have a creative influence on the output of a company. I think that design thinking gets to the heart of this and I therefore think that the fundamental elements of design thinking —— or whatever it may be called —— will be around and retain importance over the next few years.

(break)

FLAVIA

Design thinking is beginning to become popular in administration, particularly municipal administrations. This is always an indication that a new way of thinking is afoot, even if it is a slow process. My hope is that companies, administrations and societies understand design thinking as a mindset which helps to bring happiness to customers and users, but also to your own employees.

JOHANNES

I'm hoping for something very, very similar. I would also like for design thinking to be incorporated even

more strongly in societal design. We should know in future that our government is aware of the power of design and that there is such a thing as policy design and legislative design —— this should be totally empathetic for the people who will deal with the law. In my opinion, this would be another very exciting field and one which we need in Germany. At least we are yet to fully discover what is already happening in other countries, where I think that there is still a lot to do.

FLAVIA

There really is a lot to do! We have already indulged in some wishful thinking with regard to our outlooks.

JOHANNES

A wishlist …

FLAVIA

In the near future: how can we further advance the development of design thinking so that is becomes a long-term part of corporate and societal strategy? At

the moment, design thinking is a kind of test balloon. Our focus must be on enabling people to consistently innovate much more often in the long term.

JOHANNES

Absolutely, so I would also say that we should continue to get involved with design thinking and everything it entails. Personally speaking, I would like to ensure that we don't repeat ourselves. In this sense, there is no … legacy or heritage to come to terms with. Rather, it's about making sure that those of us involved in design use strictly user-oriented methods and that we aren't afraid to upset the applecart when we have the feeling that it isn't suitable for the problem that needs to be solved. And what's more, I think that a lot of progress has been made here in the last few years because even if the fundamental structure process remains the same, so much in terms of fine-tuning tools, methods and approaches have come to the fore. This has seen some aspects fall by the wayside, but I think this is something very positive and so we will continue along this path in future.

Design Thinking ——— "It's a method based on common sense" (Hasso Plattner). Design Thinking is a methodical approach aimed at developing target-oriented, creative solutions and innovations which is taught and researched in a variety of ways at the Hasso Plattner Institute (HPI) in collaboration with Stanford University. Multidisciplinary teams adopt an iterative approach and concentrate on the end user in order to achieve viable solutions for all spheres of life. At the Hasso Plattner Institute, Design Thinking forms part of the creative, entrepreneurial tradition which consistently embraces the human perspective.