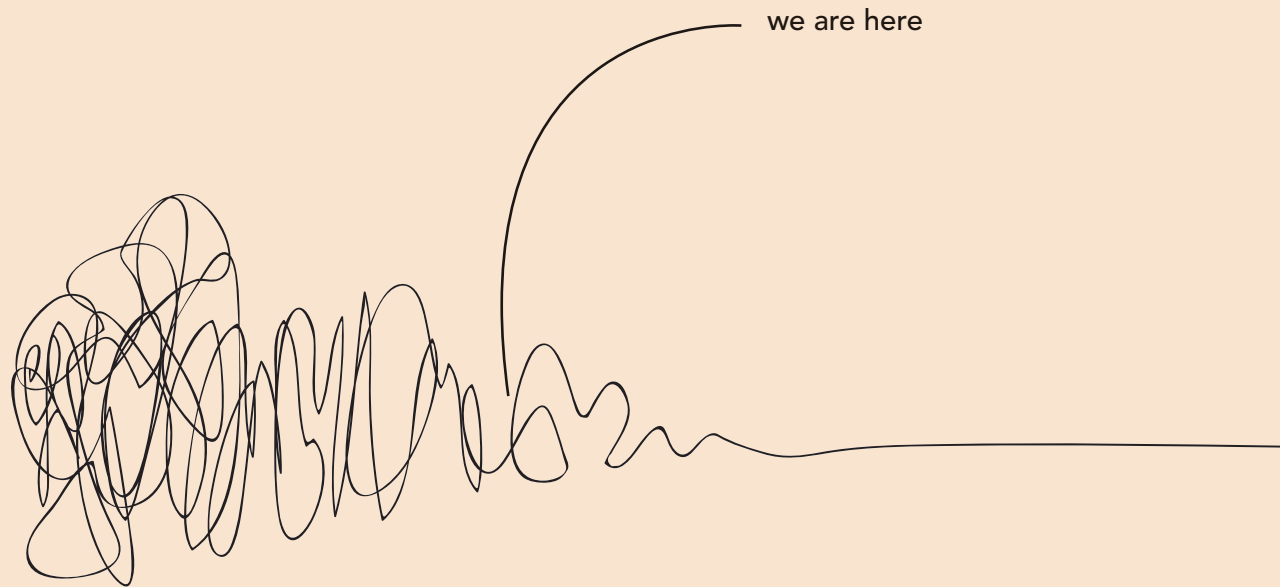


A short introduction to
Design thinking.

Prepared by Central
for the Future of Fish project.
Monday August 31st, 2009



Design thinking.

Design thinking is a mind set used in problem solving that is open to anyone. We've identified six characteristics of this way of thinking that make it a unique approach to solving problems.

Collaborative

Empathic

Integrative

Subjective

Optimistic

Experimental



Collaborative

We work in diverse teams of thinkers, both internally and externally, who represent a wide range of disciplines, collaborating on every activity within the process.

For this project, we organized a two day workshop in Sausalito for a range of participants including social entrepreneurs, writers, designers, and seafood industry experts. Having the opportunity to bring together a disparate group of creative agitators allowed us to explore the problem-solving stage in wildly different ways than we would have by ourselves.

Inviting collaboration and approaching the process with this in mind helps us to always look for inspiration and influence that enables us to arrive at a better solution and prevents us from falling into the trap of thinking our ideas are the only ones worth pursuing.

Collaborative
Empathic
Integrative
Subjective
Optimistic
Experimental



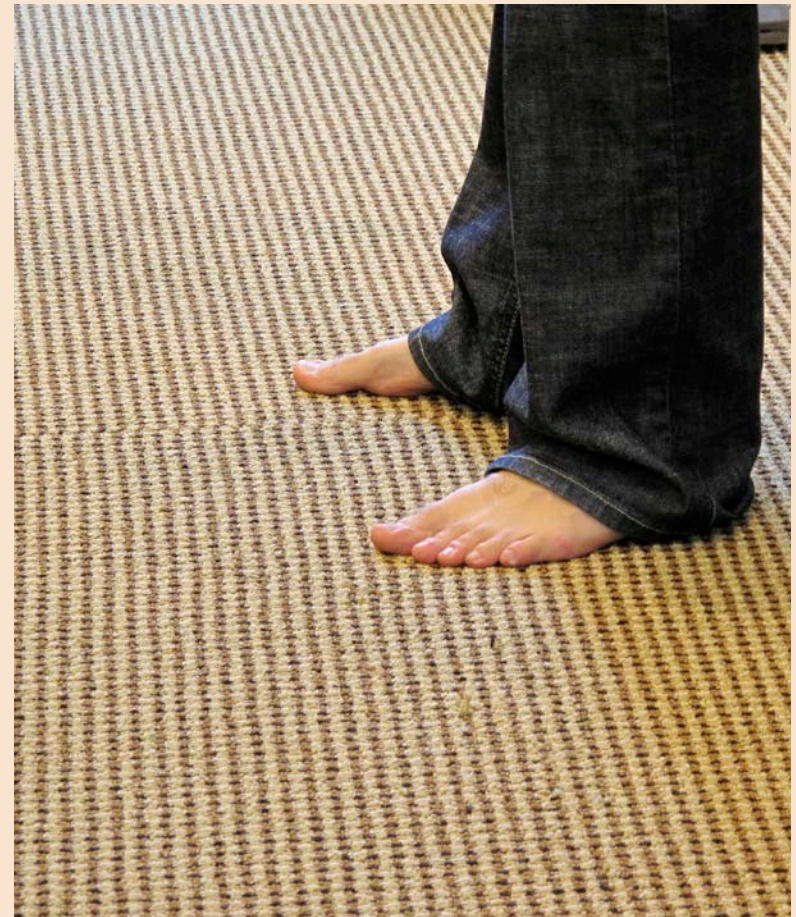
Empathic

Trying to truly understand the feelings or values of the people we're designing for is vital to our process. This allows us to derive insights about the needs of the person and focus on designing for those needs.

For this project we spent a lot of time in the field observing and spending time with people all along the fishing supply chain who we felt we could learn from. Empathy also helps us understand the larger context of the arena we're designing in. In this case, we're trying to understand things like how legacy can create a mind set that we're observing in individuals. So we spend time interviewing and reading as much as we could to better get a sense of the entire system and how each piece worked with the next.

Having empathy can also stop us from creating something that we think is "cool" and instead enable us to return to the stories of the people we observed and ask ourselves how we're going to meet *their* needs, not ours.

Collaborative
Empathic
Integrative
Subjective
Optimistic
Experimental



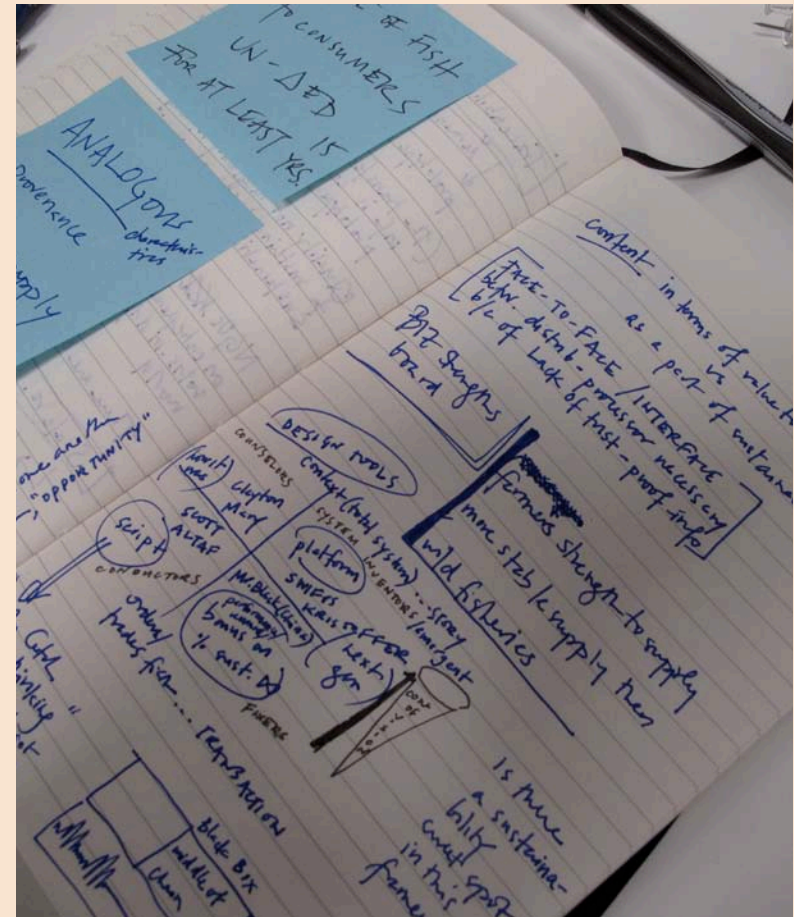
Integrative

Another characteristic of design thinking is being integrative of other types of thinking. It is highly likely that in an analogous situation, someone has already done a lot of critical thinking about a similar problem to the one you're working on.

For us, we didn't just look at other food systems, but constantly searched out how other disciplines, fields, and industries might be tackling similarly thorny problems.

We also invited expert analysis and thinking along the way to gain relevant insights in a particular field without having to actually spend the decades it took them to learn what they know. For this project, that help ranged from business people who had to simplify the industry for their companies, so that they could create a more efficient and productive program, versus many scientists who have very different view of the complexities within the same space.

Collaborative
Empathic
Integrative
Subjective
Optimistic
Experimental



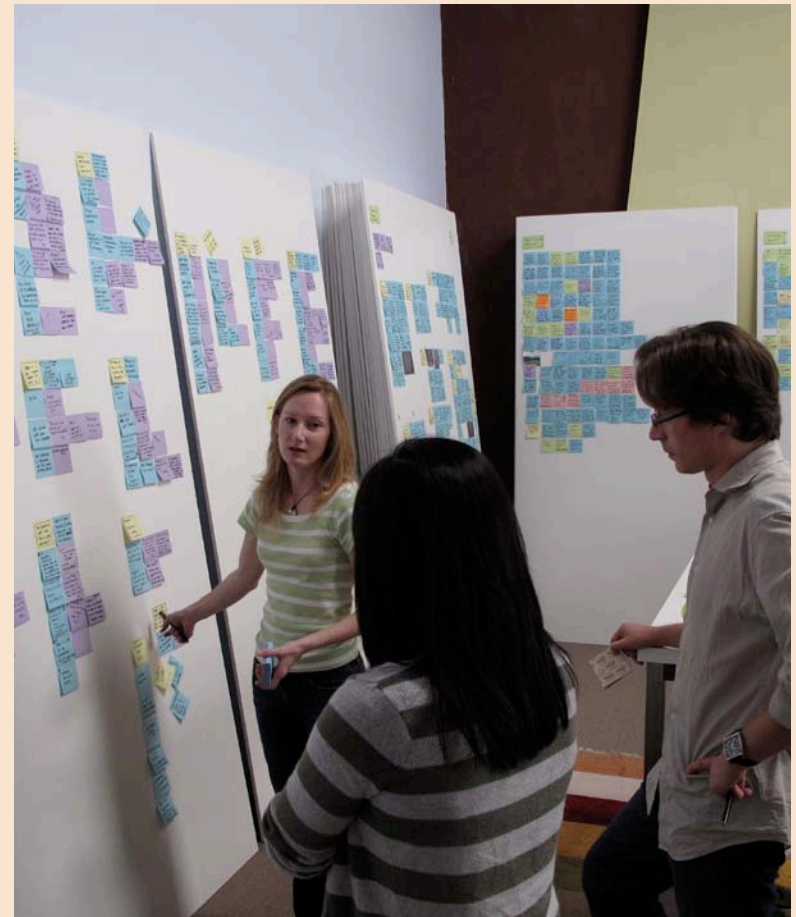
Subjective

What ultimately makes the design process different from other problem solving approaches is that there is a larger quantity of subjective reasoning that is involved in making progress. So it will often be the strength of the story told that will determine whether the issue is resolved enough to proceed.

Part of having a subjective point of view is also having the ability to clearly articulate your reasoning behind a particular observation, or the conceptual model you've created around what you see.

Being in a small team, working closely together, you can build the trust needed to be able to voice your ideas and present your views. It can be hard to do this in a room of forty people, some of whom you believe might not share the same thinking as you. We tried to foster the right kind of environment that allowed people to feel safe about being subjective.

Collaborative
Empathic
Integrative
Subjective
Optimistic
Experimental



Optimism

Problem solving is inherently about believing there must be a different or better way than what exists.

As designers we're inherently optimistic about our ability to find ways to tackle any given problem (even if we are critical about a company's logo or letter spacing in signage). The process of design is about uncovering the tensions, barriers, and hurdles that we can design for, in order to overcome the problems that currently exist.

Without an optimistic frame of mind in approaching problem solving, we'd get dissuaded immediately and perhaps never find a solution. For this project, we've encountered plenty of times where we felt somewhat overwhelmed by the scale of the problems we're tackling, but have usually been able to overcome them by trusting the information we're observing (and sometimes just going outside to get some fresh air and throw the ball around).

Collaborative
Empathic
Integrative
Subjective
Optimistic
Experimental



Experimental

“Fail often to succeed sooner”, as David Kelly from IDEO would tell (some of) us. Part of being design thinking minded, is having the urge to try it. See how it would work. Prototype it. Be fond of saying “like this?” and learning from the responses.

Prototyping is a major part of the design process, and having the mind set that you’re going to experiment before achieving perfection is necessary in order to get feedback early enough. As a design team, we like to test our theories and solutions as early as possible, encouraging feedback from the right sources who may give us valuable insights that will allow us to continuously iterate the design solution as we progress.

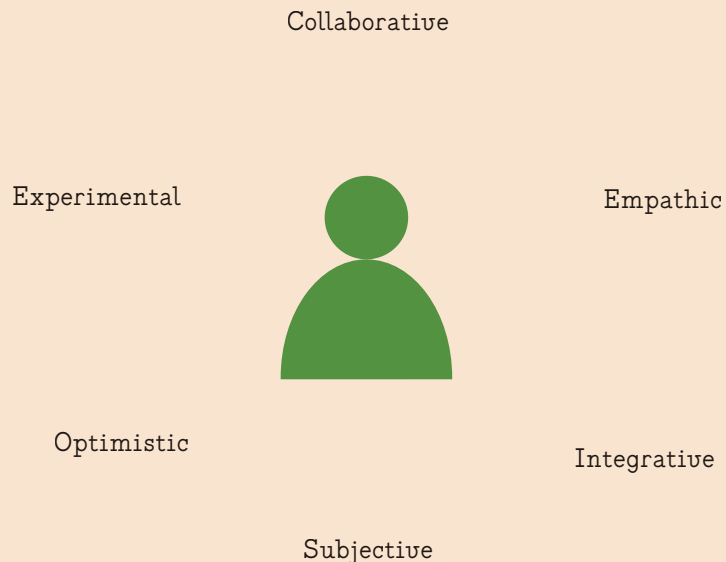
Part of being experimental is allowing something to be put out to a small group of relevant stakeholders to see if that part of your idea would work. If it fails, you can learn why in a helpful and productive manner. All this is faster and less expensive than if you crafted the final design solution, implemented it and ultimately discovered it wasn’t successful.

Collaborative
Empathic
Integrative
Subjective
Optimistic
Experimental



Design thinkin'

Put all together, these six characteristics make up the design thinking mind set. Interestingly, we found that these six things were also amplified in all the social entrepreneurs we profiled and interviewed in our Phase 1 report. This helped to reinforce that design thinking isn't peculiar to the trade or discipline of design but found everywhere in problem solving.



Some resources for further information:

Design Thinking Blog by Tim Brown, IDEO
<http://designthinking.ideo.com/>

Tim Brown, IDEO's CEO has also been writing a book on how Design thinking has been used inside organizations, it can be ordered at the end of September 2009 and is titled:

Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation

John Thackara, the author of *In the Bubble*, and organizer of the Doors of Perception conferences also publishes a blog which doesn't focus on design thinking but covers design and innovation:

<http://www.doorsofperception.com/>

Some other blogs of interest might be:

Noise Between Stations:
<http://noisebetweenstations.com/personal/weblogs/>

NextD (which is being redesigned at the moment)
<http://nextd.org/>