



Why Design Thinking Won't Save You

Blog post on HBR.org by **Peter Merholz**, October 2009

If you want to provoke people, slam a hot business concept, as Peter Merholz does: “Whenever I see a business magazine glow about design thinking, as *BusinessWeek* has done recently...and which *Harvard Business Review* did last year, it gets my dander up. Not because I don't see the value of design (I started a company dedicated to experience design), but because the discussion in such articles is inevitably so fetishistic, and sadly limited.” Replacing “the spreadsheet crowd” with creative types is no panacea, he says.

Actually, you are setting up a bit of a straw man, and a false dichotomy, and not giving design thinking a fair shake. The straw man is the right-brained, turtleneck-wearing, prolifically ideating design thinker who spurns “business thinking.” (You forgot the shaved head.) This sounds more like some caricature of a “new economy” guru from 1999, and smart people who think and write about design thinking would never pose design thinking in binary opposition to business thinking. To the contrary, most would agree that design thinking involves an interdisciplinary and synthetic approach to problem solving and innovation.

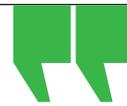
Posted by HBR Group senior editor **Jeff Kehoe**

Reply posted by Merholz *If design thinking is interdisciplinary and synthetic, then “design thinking” is a disingenuous term. Design is only one component among many to be considered. Part of my point is that the phrase “design thinking” is simply*

marketing—marketing for design firms. The kind of interdisciplinary thinking we seek is not simply the purview of designers, and shouldn't be considered as such.

I believe there is a form of thinking—analytical thinking—that dominates thinking in business. It is deeply rooted in the past; it seeks to extrapolate the past into the future using deductive and/or inductive logic. In opposition to analytical thinking is not design thinking but rather intuitive thinking—knowing without reasoning. Intuitive thinking imagines the future. It is about invention, the most disruptive and unsystematic form of thinking. To me, design thinking is the productive combination of analytical thinking and intuitive thinking. I see design thinking in a different light than does Peter.

Posted by **Roger Martin**, dean of the Rotman School of Management and author of *The Design of Business*



The U.S. Can't Manufacture the Kindle, and That's a Problem

Blog post by **Willy C. Shih**, the HBR Debate, October 2009

A powerhouse roster of strategy experts joined our online debate on U.S. competitiveness. One, Willy Shih, thinks the U.S. has lost critical manufacturing capacity: “Though the Kindle's key innovation—its electronic ink—was invented and is being made, at least for now, in the U.S., Asian manufacturers are capturing the vast majority of the value added by manufacturing the e-reader itself. Even more worrisome, the U.S. is almost certain to lose control of the e-paper display technology and the future innovations that spring from it.”

I'm not sure why manufacturing of hardware is seen by business school people as overwhelmingly important. Perhaps because it is easier to measure hardware manufacturing? Doesn't the success of Microsoft, Oracle, and Google suggest that control of software is more important than the manufacturing of hardware? It's the software, stupid!

Posted by **David A. Patterson**

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exists and have decided to focus on it. But if the information isn't producing the burden, what is? It must be us, or more accurately, it must be our own habits. The fact is, they produce the burden that the author describes, including the problem of e-mail.

There is nothing inherently burdensome about getting a lot of e-mail, any more than there is anything inherently burdensome about being a manager. It all depends on the quality of habits that are



used to perform the job. Some of us are effective, while others get caught up in habits that continually create a mess.

Mark Twain said, “A habit cannot be tossed out the window; it must be

coaxed down the stairs a step at a time.” Unfortunately, in our world of instant gratification, most of us just don't have the time and patience to develop new habits that are better suited for this new age.

I firmly believe that the best professionals will find ways to surf the ever-increasing volume of information, and they won't be the ones who “blame it on the e-mail.”

Francis Wade, President, Framework Consulting/2Time



Reply posted by Shih *I agree that in many cases, the hardware matters less. I think the iPod is an excellent example of such a set of circumstances. The issue I am worried about in the Kindle is that it signals that the locus of innovation around future display technologies is probably no longer sustainable in the United States. I believe that it is in the nature of global competition and comparative advantage that countries like the United States must constantly push forward into new frontiers. What worries me is when I see some parts of those frontiers becoming increasingly inaccessible.*

A couple of the contributors to the HBR debate just do not get the value or contribution that comes from the manufacturing process. They have separated economic forces from cultural ones. I know this view is fairly common, but if we follow it to its logical conclusion, we become a society of consumers, service providers, and marketers. This is patent nonsense. We are a richer society when we recognize the creative contributions that can occur at every stage and level of the making and delivery of products, including manufacturing.

Posted by **Ed Catmull**, President, Pixar

The returns on trading have crowded production out of the market for capital. If a trader at Goldman can make 20% plus returns, that is where the money, cheap or otherwise, is going to go. It is not going to go to capital-intensive manufacturing, which will struggle to get higher than a 5% to 7% return.

Posted by **Matthew**

What happens when these overseas manufacturers of critical value-adding components decide to increase the price? In five to 10 years Amazon will be making very little from this product as more and more value is captured by those in the value chain who have the economic power.

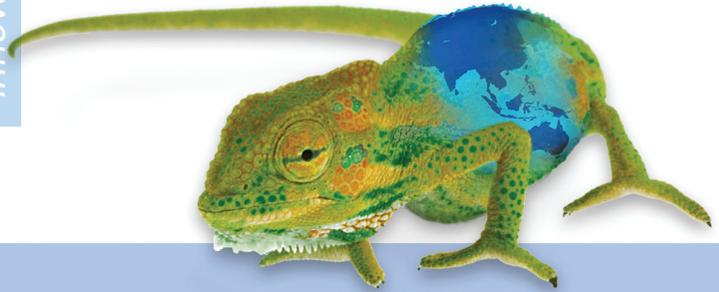
Posted by **Graham McManus**



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—CHARLES DARWIN



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