Design Thinking

Design thinking is an approach that can be stand alone or a critical part if an agile delivery approach. It is at it's heart, about inspecting and adapting, using iterative approaches to build value. The approach offers a number of great benefits, to include:

- Quicker Starts – Since there does not need to be a robust final design spec prior to starting the iteration process, the team can get to real value much more quickly, focusing on the priority items as opposed to everything at once.
- Clarity on purpose / objective – as the team starts the design process, the iterative and testing nature will help the group and owner try and discard multiple ideas and approaches, honing in on the highest value and driving clarity on what is important, as well as what is urgent, meaning a priority for initial value focus.
- Needs driven development / investment – This is really an outcome of the prior value. As clarity and priority is achieved, the team will focus on what is next in line, and delivering the most value to the target outcome.
- Reduction in "pet features", meaning the ability to iteratively add value, and not have to have everything you MIGHT need defined up front prior to requirements lock allows product owners to be more selective in what they allow into the development cycle.

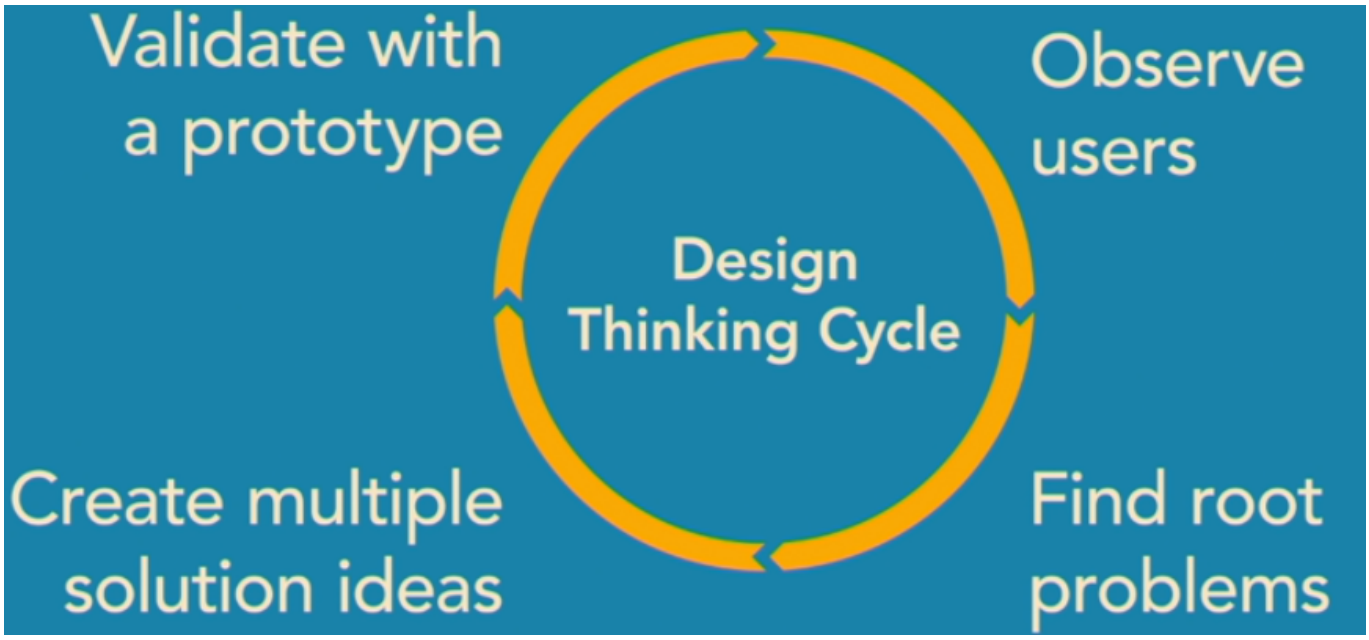

Image Source: Presentation from Chris Nodder

To be successful, the product owner and lead needs to set clear goals as well as success, or acceptance criteria for these. As these are declared, the team must measure the results, early & often. This feedback on results loop will allow the team to test the ideas and have value stories to tell, with real world feedback that is incredibly powerful.

Having led teams and worked in large enterprises for a couple of decades, I see many people who are a bit jaded and do not see themselves as creative. What I have found though, is that most people are creative when properly stimulated and often welcome the opportunity to contribute and be a part of a solution and ideation process. As a design thinker, it is important to learn to harness this process and enthusiasm. The white board

and sticky note approach, as well as sketching on paper provides safe ways to start the ideation, and can open the door to creative thinking.

The low fidelity ideation drives collaboration and conversation, while also saving money and time. Paper prototypes are a great way to do an idea walk through and pressure test User Interface (UI) or work flows.

The risk of the waterfall mentality, meaning the standard step wise life cycle methodology is real, but can be mitigated to some level but following a lean / agile approach with an iterative startup phase.

The value of failing fast, applying learnings is tremendous, as described previously. You can expect to see results such as:

- Clearer cost estimation – ideas are tested and thought through
- Reduced risk – fast failure is much lest costly failure
- Improved Communication – the high collaboration required for design thinking forces good communication from the start, creating a solid foundation for a team to interact across levels.
- Faster time to market, with the highest value elements. – there is still a long tail, but the work is now focused on the value elements as opposed to the waste, and the team can terminate once the target value or capability has been met, as opposed to building, debugging and testing features that are no longer useful.

Getting started does not require a large enterprise commitment, or even a strong management endorsement. Just start – don't make it a big deal or seek to justify, let the results do the speaking / marketing for your team. People are attracted to success, and success breeds more success creating a "pull through".

As the thinking and process takes hold, you can work on the organization sell through.

- By identifying key influencers from each group you work with, you can make them part of the process, and part owners of the success.
- Meet face to face and explain the process, as well as the value. The face time allows you to pull out some paper and a pencil, and walk through the approach, demonstrating the design thinking in your message!
- As you engage, explore the dominate challenges with the current process that your team or stake holder are familiar with. There are usually a number of clear pain points around start up time, risk incurred, long "dark windows" of development time, and long tails of debugging and delays.
- The conversation opens the door to explain & explore how design thinking removes or mitigates those issues by providing much tighter engagement, ownership and communication as well as a value focus!

There is so much more that can be said on this topic, as well as the clear intersection with the agile world and approach, but this is a good initial exploration to get you started on the journey.