Understanding the Impact of Design Thinking on Organizations and Individuals

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Organizations are investing billions on innovation and agility initiatives to stay competitive in their increasingly uncertain business environments. Design Thinking, an innovation approach based on human-centered exploration, ideation and experimentation, has gained increasing popularity. The market for Design Thinking, including software products and general services, is projected to reach 2.500 million $ (US-Dollar) by 2028. A dispersed set of positive outcomes have been attributed to Design Thinking. However, there is no clear understanding of what exactly comprises the impact of Design Thinking and how it is created. To support a billion dollar market, it is essential to understand the value Design Thinking is bringing to organizations not only to justify large investments, but to continuously improve the approach and its application.

Following a qualitative research approach combined with results from a systematic literature review, the results presented in this dissertation offer a structured understanding of Design Thinking impact. The results are structured along two main perspectives of impact: the individual and the organizational perspective. First, insights from qualitative data analysis demonstrate that measuring and assessing the impact of Design Thinking is currently one central challenge for Design Thinking practitioners in organizations. Second, the interview data revealed several effects Design Thinking has on individuals, demonstrating how Design Thinking can impact boundary management behaviors and enable employees to craft their jobs more actively.

Contributing to innovation management research, the work presented in this dissertation systematically explains the Design Thinking impact, allowing other researchers to both locate and integrate their work better. The results of this research advance the theoretical rigor of Design Thinking impact research, offering multiple theoretical underpinnings explaining the variety of Design Thinking impact. Furthermore, this dissertation contains three specific propositions on how Design Thinking creates an impact: Design Thinking creates an impact through integration, enablement, and engagement. Integration refers to how Design Thinking enables organizations through effectively combining things, such as for example fostering balance between exploitation and exploration activities. Through Engagement, Design Thinking impacts organizations involving users and other relevant stakeholders in their work. Moreover, Design Thinking creates impact through Enablement, making it possible for individuals to enact a specific behavior or experience certain states.

By synthesizing multiple theoretical streams into these three overarching themes, the results of this research can help bridge disciplinary boundaries, for example between business, psychology and design, and enhance future collaborative research. Practitioners benefit from the results as multiple desirable outcomes are detailed in this thesis, such as successful individual job crafting behaviors, which can be expected from practicing Design Thinking. This allows practitioners to enact more evidence-based decision-making concerning Design Thinking implementation. Overall, considering multiple levels of impact as well as a broad range of theoretical underpinnings are paramount to understanding and fostering Design Thinking impact.