Design Thinking
in
Product Development

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Objective: To Propose a framework for integrating design thinking in Product Development

Introduction

Think of a situation where you have worked on a client project, gathered requirements, collaborated with the various stakeholders and now are ready to show the product to the end customer.

And they suddenly respond with "this is not what we were looking for".

You are back to square one and feeling deflated and defeated.

Einstein was certainly right - we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. We need to develop new ways of thinking in order to design better solutions, services and experiences that solve our current problems.
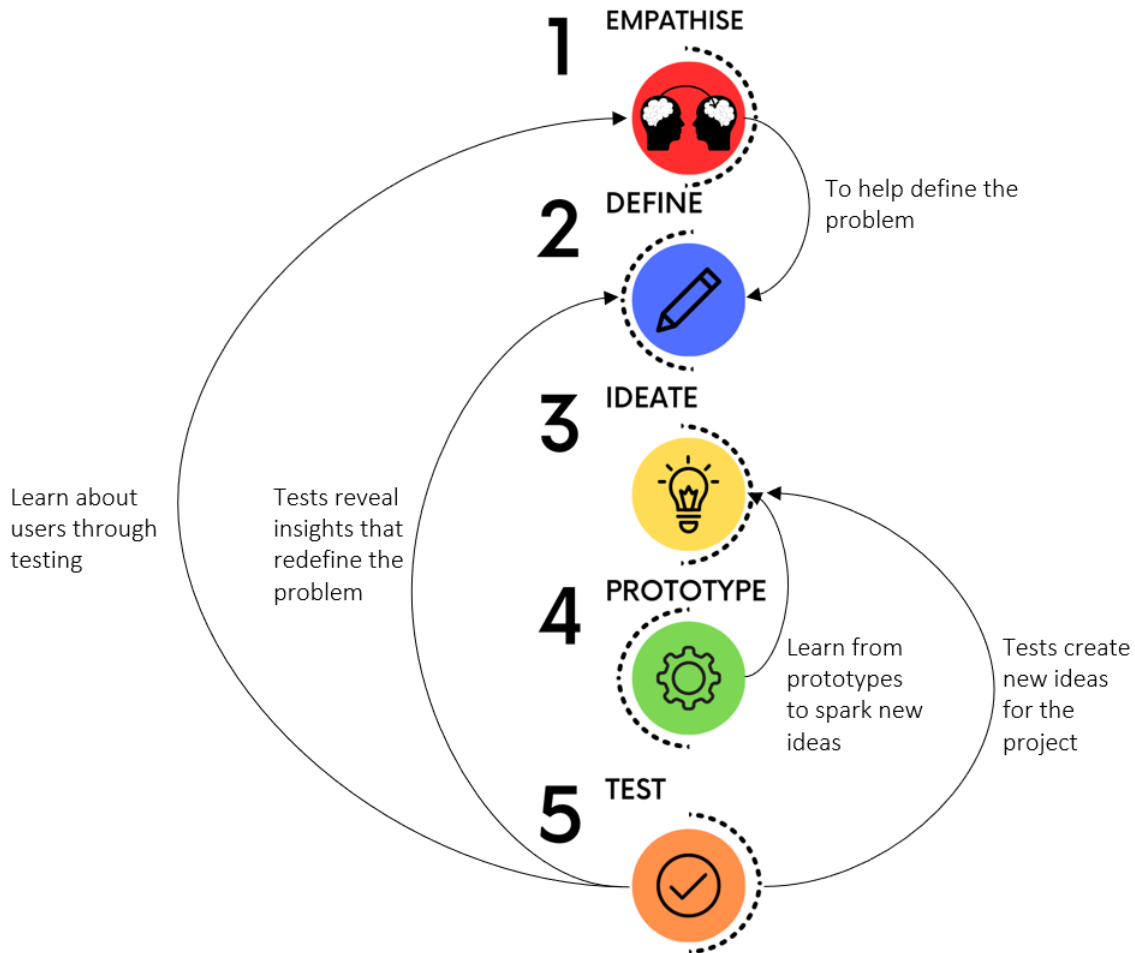
In this blog, we will understand what 'Design thinking' is all about, how to apply it and how it can fetch us an value-added outcome for any complex problem.

Framework

Design thinking requires you to do away with conventional creative processes and instead use an iterative approach which is non-linear.
What is meant by a non-linear iterative process is, whereby the output of one stage is reinforced as an input to the previous stage to help innovate, improvise and shape the final product which adds a value to the end user.

DESIGN THINKING

1 EMPATHISE

2 DEFINE

To help define the problem

3 IDEATE

Learn about users through testing

Tests reveal insights that redefine the problem

4 PROTOTYPE

Learn from prototypes to spark new ideas

Tests create new ideas for the project

5 TEST

Following are different stages of the Design thinking framework:

1. **Empathize**

During this stage, we seek to understand users' or consumers' needs, expectations, and desires. The first step here is to put yourself in the end user's shoes. That is, to understand what is truly relevant to them. It is crucial to research the target audience, market and grasp a user's situation. The more you are able to put yourself in their shoes, the easier it is to understand them. At this stage, you can use different techniques, such as interviews, surveys, observation, and data collection to understand the user pain points.

A Classic example of this is Slack (an acronym for "**S**earchable **L**og of **A**ll **C**ommunication and **K**nowledge"
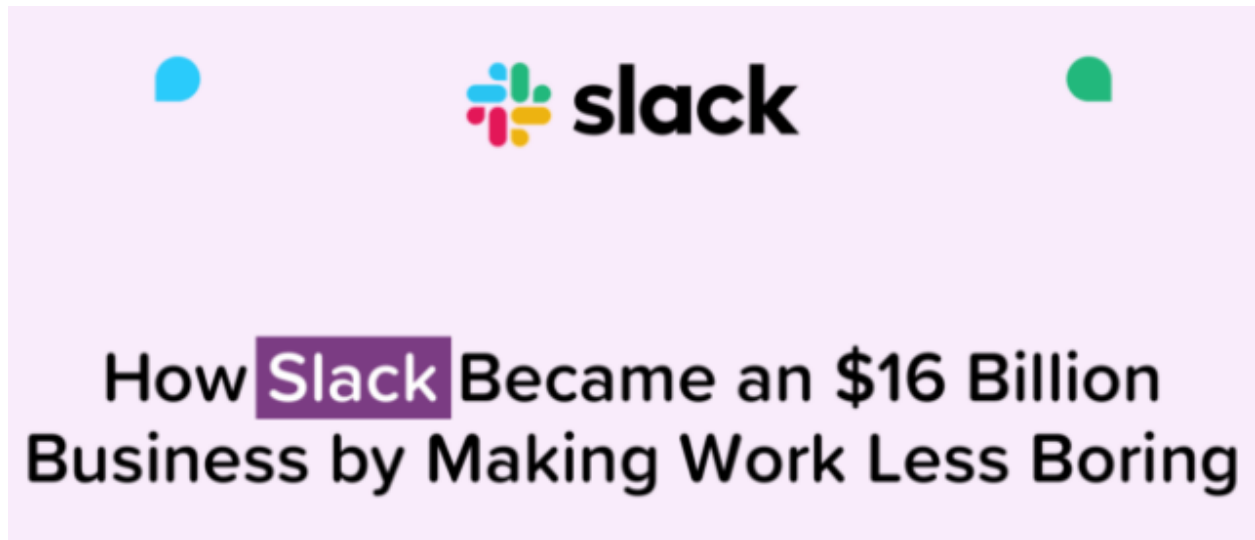
To overcome the challenges of communicating across multiple time zones and geographies, Slack founder Stewart Butterfield and his team deep-dived into understanding user pain points and they came up with two prime problems:

A. **Lack of Transparency**: There was no way for an employee to see what other people on other teams were working on, besides getting up and walking over to a colleague in another department.

B. **Lack of Centralization:** Centralizing communications while sheathing users from distractions. For e.g. using Dropbox to share files, Outlook to send email, Figma to draw mock-ups, there was a need for a solution to offer all of these in one, to eliminate the distraction of switching between multiple programs and limiting notifications to just one app.

2. Define Your Idea

This stage is clearly about defining the problem you are trying to solve. This is only possible once you have gathered data about your customers. During this stage, you will want to come up with a statement that outlines, in as much detail as possible, the pain points you are seeking to address with your product.

For example, if you are creating a collaborative tool (like slack), you could define the problem like this :

"Users at all levels need to collaborate on a common platform, with an intuitive UI to surf through, which enhances their productivity and efficiency at the end of the day."

This sets a clear goal to work towards and a statement to remember throughout the process to steer you in the right direction.

C. Ideate to define Feature List

In this stage, the aim is to generate as many ideas and solutions as possible, regardless of their quality. In the previous phases, you focused on understanding and solidifying the information obtained. It is crucial to approach this stage with creativity and without judgment. Think of different possible features you can come up with and at least being a moonshot. Use the concept of 'lateral thinking' to think outside the box.

Like Slack had a list of features to be developed, but they focussed on core to lead the game with at first:
1. Messages
2. Search: Basic, Advanced
3. Channels: private, public, shared.
4. Notifications: In-app, Bot
5. Quick Connect
6. Profile
7. In-app Integrations

D. Prototyping to develop MVP

Once you have spent time developing ideas and shortlisting those most likely to satisfy your problem, it is time to single out the best solution for prototyping. During this stage, you will create a working prototype that will put your ideas to the test and see if it makes for a minimum viable product (MVP).
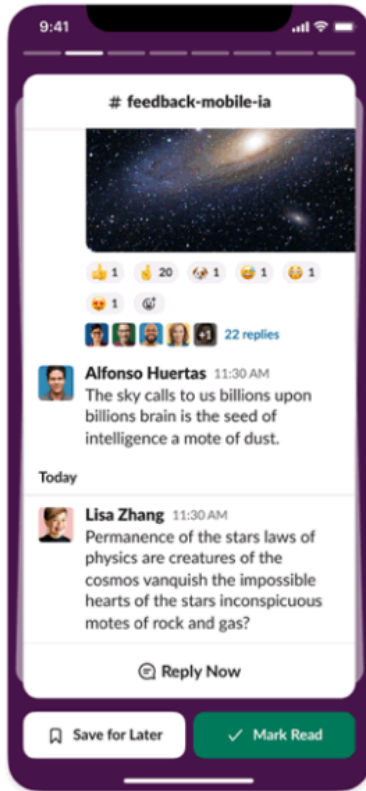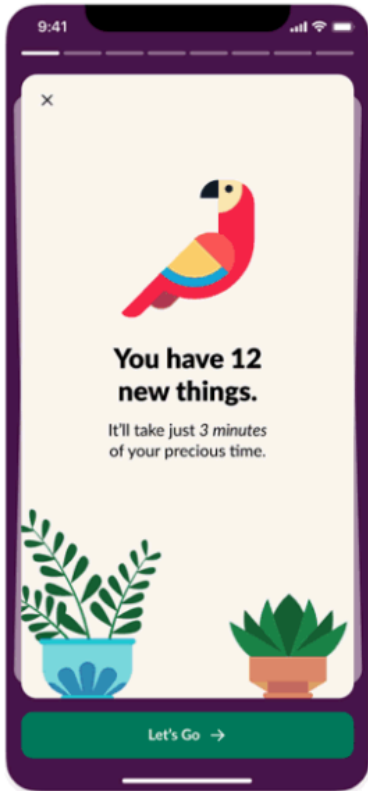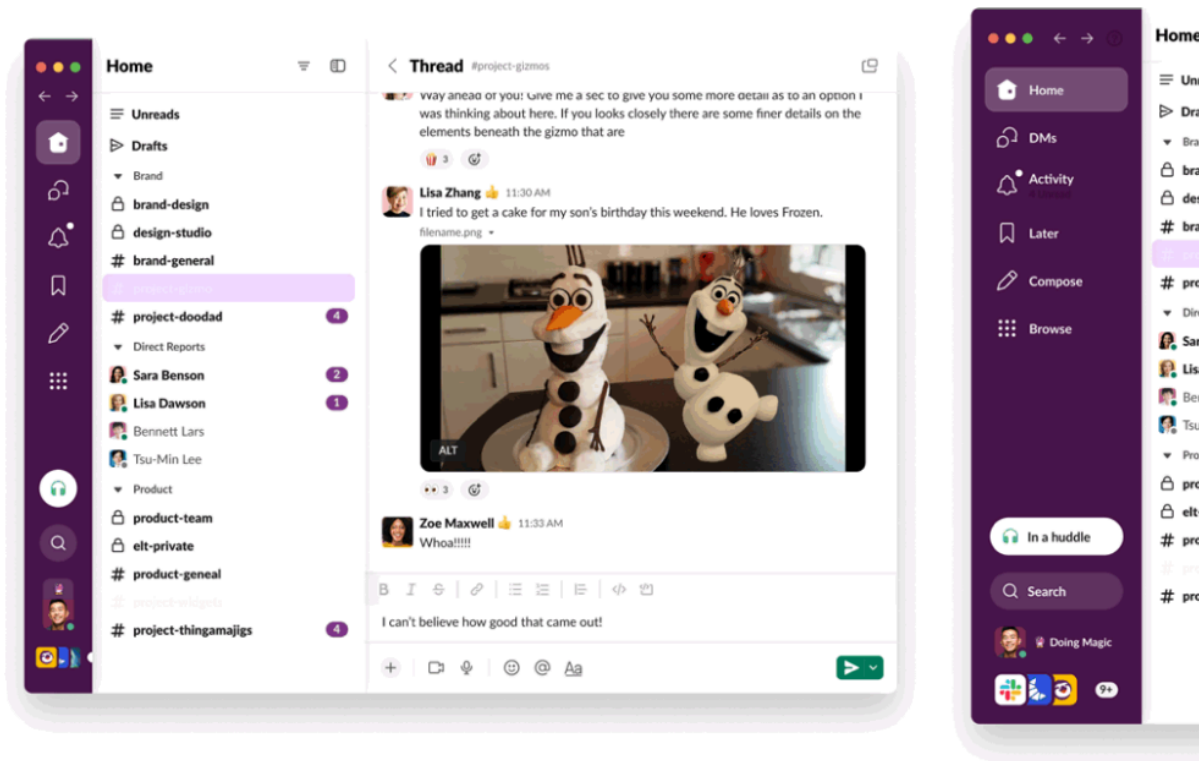
E. Test and Iterate

Finally, you will need to put your product through its paces to ensure optimal quality. If you are building a new product, test it with Beta users (a sample set), take back their feedback and repeat the cycle. If you are working on an enhancement, plan to either do a user acceptance testing with a team of end users before you release that for general access (GA).

A lot of startups focus all their energy on growing as rapidly as possible. By contrast, Slack focused on growing steadily. Each time the company received new feedback on Slack, they would not only address or implement changes based on that feedback, but they also invited more large teams to try the product. This iterative approach to development helped them build a solid product based on how people were actually using it and progressively expand its user base. Below is a snapshot of how the company made sure, they consider each and every feedback to improvise on their product.

Setting metrics (quantifiable) at this stage helps in improvement, as those can help track the usage and engagement with any feature. For e.g. slack uses Daily Active Users (DAU), messages sent, files shared etc…

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Slack
Making your working life simpler, more pleasant, and more productive

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Several People Are Typing— The Official Slack Blog
Updates from Slack

Following ∨

It's like an infinite brain for your whole team.

"We were looking for something to help with team communication, and nothing really stuck until we started using Slack. It looks good, feels right and search just works: being able to trust that I can find things again when I need them is good peace of mind."

M Medium
Dustin Senos
Design and UX Lead

Medium is a new place on the Internet where people share ideas and stories that are longer than 140 characters. It's simple, beautiful, collaborative, and it helps you find the right audience for whatever you have to say.

One search box for everything.

"To create a strong emotional experience that touches our audience, it requires the whole development team to work as one voice. To make that possible it's essential to have strong communication between each team member. Therefore Slack is essential to us."

thatgamecompany
Jenova Chen
CEO

"We're most excited about Slack's emphasis on integration and search. The big problem we have with our current communication tool is all the history is local – it makes it impossible to share conversations as a team. We need to be able to reference files and get them into the search index so they're assets the whole team can work on. With Slack, that happens automatically."

rdio
Justin Tulloss
Senior Software Engineer

Rdio is a groundbreaking digital music service reinventing the way people discover, listen to, and share music.

Make better decisions, faster.

"The biggest thing is nobody thinks about Slack – it just always works. The tool itself gets out of our way so we can get work done. Any good tool makes it so you don't think about the tool but the things you want to get done. I never think about it – that's perfect."

Cozy
Gino Zahnd
CEO

Cozy is a San Francisco-based startup that makes renting easy for both landlords and renters. With world-class customer service and first-of-their-kind products for rent payments, applying/screening, and personal security, Cozy is the best way for small landlords and renters to get things done.

Benefits of using Design Thinking:

1. **Helps meet customer needs**: Iterative model helps ingest continuous feedback and release faster.
2. **Supports Imagination with a framework to innovate**: You can think out of box, but with a framework, you are able to put it on paper and bring it to a shape.
3. **Helps define delighters:** Delighters can bring an 'Aha' moment while users use your product. This ensures retention of your customers.
4. **Establishes measurable criteria/metrics for product definition:** The framework helps establish metrics each time an improvisation is done. This helps implementation teams to understand what and how much to achieve to hit the target.

Conclusion:

"Design thinking is all about thinking creatively and innovatively, and when supported with a framework, brings value to the end user."