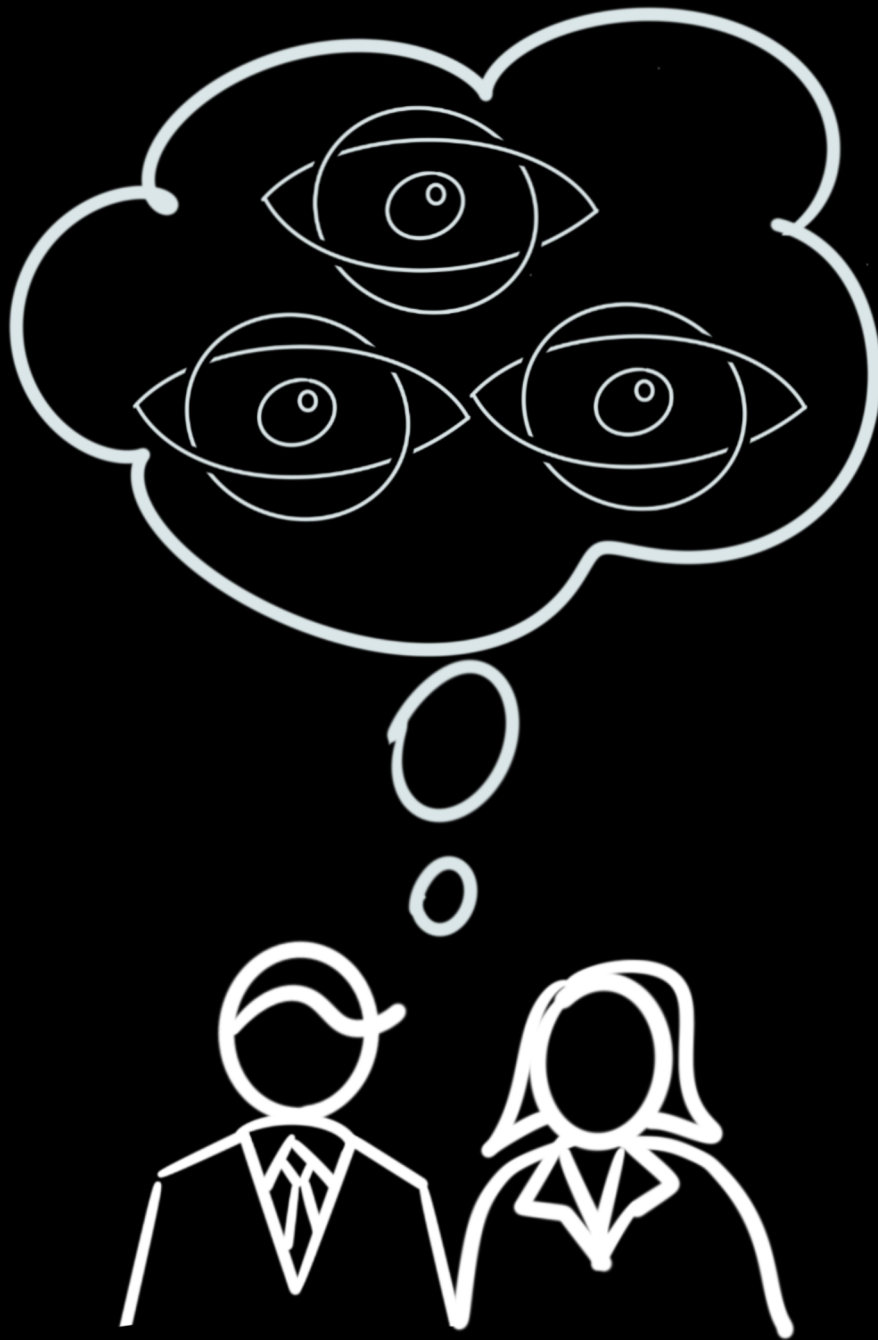


Design Thinking Insights for Technology Leaders



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Preface

Over the years working in strategy, innovation, design and change consulting, I have come across the same challenges over and over again facing technology leaders.

Mostly they default to an “inside-out” technology-led solution, traditional, comfortable, but doomed to disappoint or fail. The opportunity spaces for taking an “outside-in” human-led approach reads like this:

- How do we guarantee successful transformation for our organisation?
- How do we get our IT team to better serve the needs of our business?
- What is value mining, and how do we go about it?
- How does using design thinking reduce the risk in every project?
- How do we know which design capabilities we need?
- How do business analysts and designers working together give us better outcomes?

Setting up Cool Kids Innovation (a few like-minded colleagues) resulted in the opportunity to have a really good go at answering these questions. Published individually on LinkedIn over the first few months of 2023, the response we got inspired this e-book collation.

Dr Amanda Keenan - 30 Jun 2023

Meet the authors



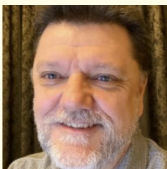
Author
Dr Amanda Keenan

Dr Amanda is a design evangelist who finds time between inspiring/being inspired by design and change folks, and a rigorous program of lifelong learning, to innovate in the emerging discipline of social technology.



Co-author
Patrick Stapleton

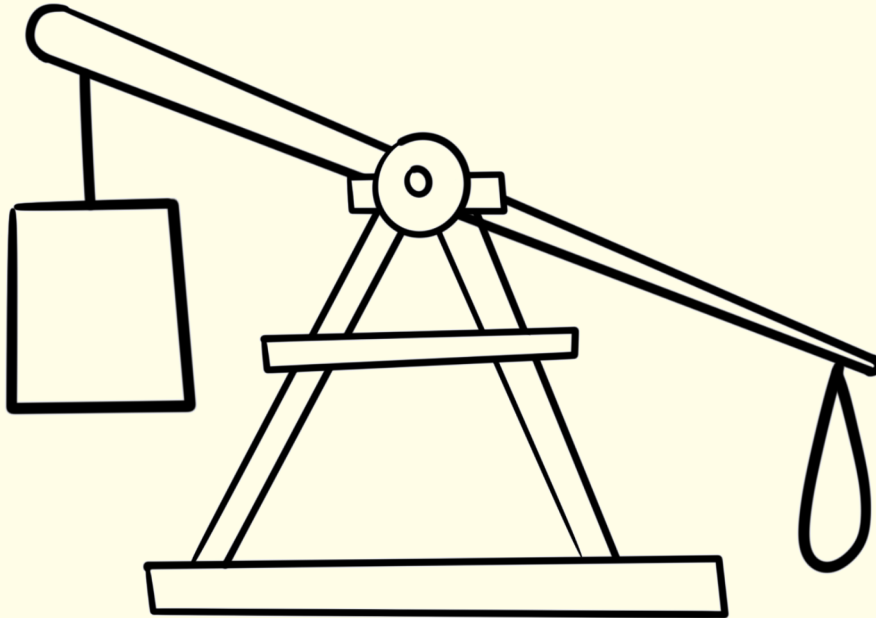
Patrick is a design impresario, trombonist, and videographer who between tours, rehearsals and holding down a day job, enjoys nothing more than transforming concepts into attractive narratives and experiences for beings, in order to create a brighter future.



Co-author
Alan Harrison

Alan is a Business Analyst, partly because he found programming too boring, but mostly because it's around problem solving. His passions these days involve passing on what he has learned over his 35-year career, playing tabletop games, and tormenting Dr Amanda with his nit-picking.

Lifting the siege of Fortress IT



Everyone knows an organisation with Fortress IT. Maybe you've worked in one. Maybe you run one. A place with Fortress IT is where the CIO and his team seemingly inhabit their own kingdom, surrounded by an invisible moat complete with crocodiles. The drawbridge looks permanently rusted in the "up" position; occasionally arrows will be fired out into the rest of the business, then everyone withdraws back in.

Fortress IT tends to emerge where there is a misalignment with an organisation's strategic direction and the business reality of the wants and needs of users. The IT business unit is an easy target in these situations as so much depends on them. The natural response to continual attack (criticism) is to fortify. Thus, the emergence of Fortress IT.

For everyone outside Fortress IT - the humans dealing with customers, people and culture, operations, finance, marketing and strategy - Fortress IT is a huge frustration. They're IT's customer's, right? Why is it so hard to get them to act on requests or explain their decisions? A culture of "NO" pervades such organisations. Projects are painfully delayed or abandoned altogether. The dreaded and debilitating Shadow IT* emerges and spreads. Everyone blames everyone else.

Common responses to Fortress IT are:

1. Restructure every two years (in the hope that new people will fix the problem)
2. Wait for the inevitable critical failures in IT operations or infrastructure (perhaps start looking for another job, too)
3. Prepare to come up with really good answers when your board/shareholders/regulators come knocking (in the hope that you can save your job when they look for who's to blame)

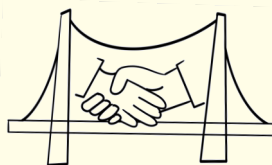
Meanwhile, your organisation sheds customers and your employee retention number start to look very sad.

Happily, there is an easier and more effective way to deal with Fortress IT. A tried-and-true way. Here's the secret in three easy steps:



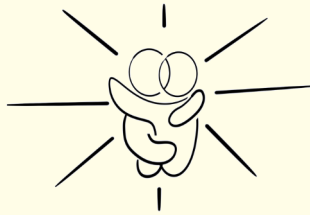
1. Provide an evidence base for change

Design research planned and undertaken with rigour delivers a strong, independent, and empathetic evidence base for change. This means equitable engagement at all levels of an organisation, from the frontline doers to the executive, through interviews by independent, unbiased, professional researchers that deliver an agreed transformation “playbook” that defines the change that is desired, and how to get there - together.



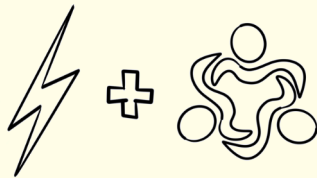
2. Establish a trust bridge

The very act of investing in understanding people's needs in an evidence-based way, rather than relying on the opinion of a few HiPPOs**, signals to the entire organisation that IT is sincere, sees the need for a different approach, and wants their help. Yes, there will be scepticism, and some people won't want to play. But when relationships are broken, continual changes in leadership or twiddling with processes & technology, is pointless.



3. Embrace leadership catharsis

For an IT leader, asking people what they think of you and your team is hard. Criticism? It's emotionally risky and your team doesn't deserve to get pummelled through a survey or random feedback. But this is how we got to Fortress IT in the first place right? Rather, a research professional will listen to your needs and concerns first, will support and coach you, and focus on generating insights for positive change. They'll give you benchmarking metrics so you - and everyone else-can see your progress clearly.



4. Emerge stronger - and united

For an IT leader embracing this approach it can be career changing. It shows flexibility, bravery, and empathy. Not just innovative thinking, but innovative doing. Maybe you're not at the Fortress IT stage yet; maybe you hope never to be. Yet every technology leader out there has a business, customer and employees demanding more and more from them, and their people. Time to share the load and create true transformation.

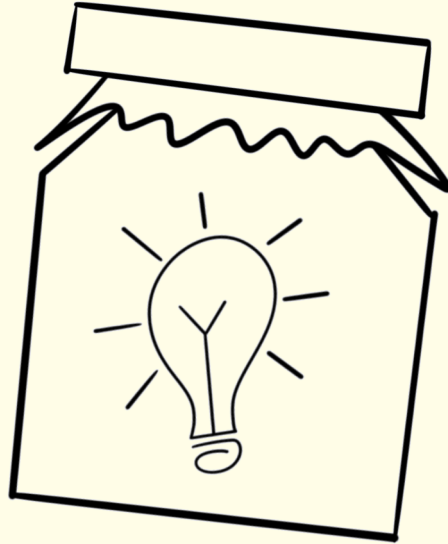
*Where IT's systems and processes are augmented or undermined by another business unit

**Highest paid person's opinion.

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/lifting-siege-fortress-dr-amanda-keenan>

Bottling innovation through social technology



It could be you're reading this in the hope that you find awesome insights into social media marketing or growth strategies, in this case we're sorry, you've been misled.

Please keep reading if you're interested in leveraging human behaviour as a way to innovate and build a bridge of influence between tech leaders and the people they serve.

IT leaders live in a world saturated with hardware & software technology, presented as the best options to deliver innovation. Innovation is a difficult beast to capture and keep. Even with the best intentions, innovation programs and initiatives often get derailed by those pesky human behaviours - politics, agendas, disagreements - that dissipate precious creative thinking sooner or later. What if there was a way to “bottle” this innovative thinking, so it's always at hand, and didn't evaporate under the pressure of conflict and lost momentum?

There is! It's called social technology. Very simply, social technology is a term that re-frames design thinking* in a way that aligns with organisational needs to surface and harness all the innovative thinking trapped in human brains.

In her article *Why Design Thinking Works*, Jeanne Liedtka gave us a compelling case for human-centred design to be the enabler of choice for positive change when we deploy it as social technology.

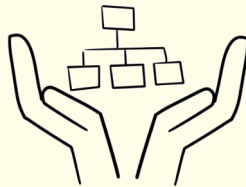
Professor Liedtka makes three key points about why design thinking is so effective in getting tech leaders who want to be innovators, and the humans they serve, to the best place possible.

Design thinking emphasises engagement, dialogue, and learning. Designers recognise organisations as collections of human beings who are motivated by varying perspectives and emotions.

Design-thinking processes counteract human biases that stifle creativity while addressing the challenges typically faced in reaching superior solutions, lowered costs and risks, and employee buy-in.

Design thinking helps innovators collaborate and agree on what is essential to the outcome at every phase. It does this by bringing structure to the innovation process.

Remember Fortress IT? Social technology can lift the siege. This is how it's done:



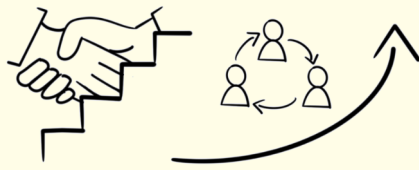
Structure gives support

Managers of technology teams aren't used to researching user needs, getting deeply immersed in their perspectives, co-creating with stakeholders, and designing and executing experiments. Structure and linearity help everyone try and adjust to these new behaviours.



It's safe to innovate

Most humans are driven by a fear of mistakes, so they focus more on preventing errors than on seizing opportunities. They choose inaction rather than action when a choice risks failure. But there is no innovation without action – so psychological safety is essential.



Collaboration grows as trust is built

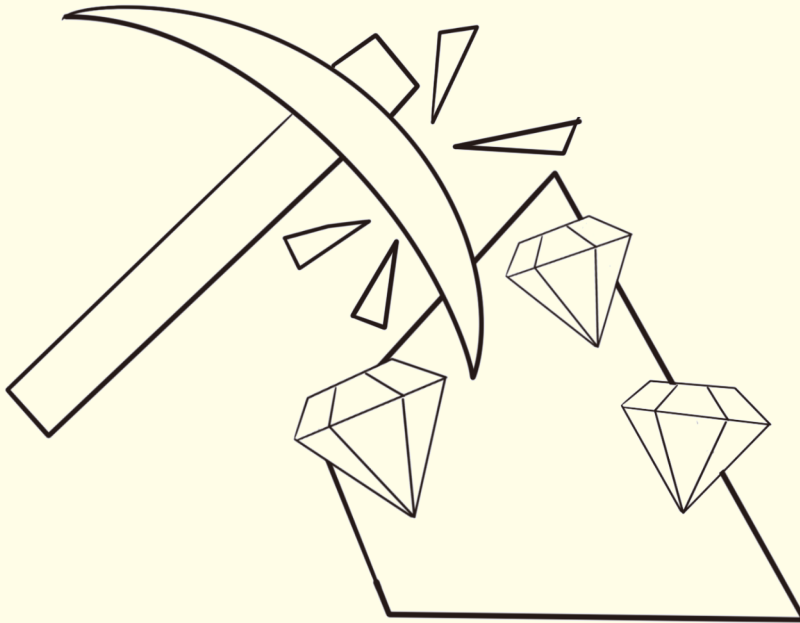
The framework, artefacts and tools of design thinking deliver that sense of security, helping people move more safely through the discovery of user needs, idea generation and concept testing.

*A non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test.

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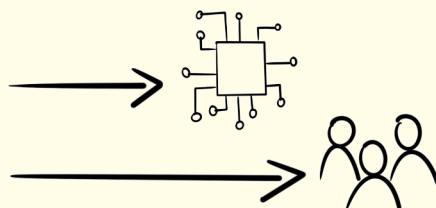
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/bottling-innovation-through-social-technology-dr-amanda-keenan>

How technology leaders can embrace value mining



The technology required to design, implement, and deliver products and services at scale is commodifying rapidly. As a result, new providers are popping up providing more choice, placing uncomfortable pressure on incumbent players. Think ride share services over taxis, as one example.

With the value of organisations being increasingly measured by the quality of the experiences associated with the products and services that they deliver, it's time for technology leaders to flip the switch to value mining.



From technology-led to human-led

Today, we by and large, take a technology-led approach to serving our internal and external customers. We end up with more technology than we can ever effectively leverage. We tread a well-worn path to solving problems. Consider this example:

Your organisation feels the pressure to innovate. In response a business case is created for what you (or your organisation) believe is the most important problem to solve. You form a team to negotiate with stakeholders, to understand/develop a solution architecture, upon which the final solution is implemented.

In this example, once live, it is not uncommon that:

- the solution turns out not to be the real priority
- the solution is not a perfect fit for the problem to be solved
- as a result of 1 or 2 or both, the expected value is not realised

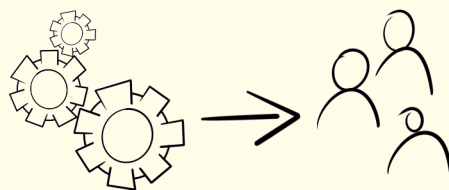
Sound familiar? Now contrast this with a human-led approach.

Your organisation feels the pressure to innovate. A business case is created, and you form a team to do research, focusing on the people involved, and their relationships.

From this research, insights emerge that point to the most valuable problem to be solved (value mining). In response a business case is created to solve the highest value problem (based on evidence). You form a team to negotiate with stakeholders, to understand/develop a solution architecture, upon which the final solution is implemented.

In this example, once live, it is not uncommon that:

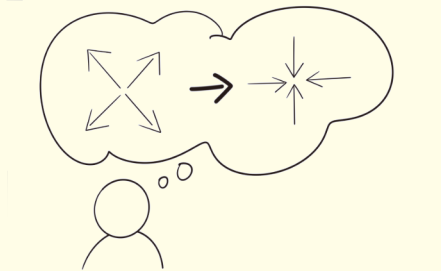
- the solution is more likely to be the actual priority
- the solution chosen fits the problem to be solved
- the expected value (or more) is realised



From systems & processes to people & relationships

If the first example represents business as usual at your organisation today. In this respect you are far from alone. Technology leaders tend to view products and services in terms of systems and processes which in turn leads to a tendency toward shortcuts to solutions that replace or update those very same systems and processes.

When you reframe your products and services as experiences (which is increasingly the way your customers & employees are perceiving them) the change of focus to people and relationships enables the most significant needs to emerge. Critically, those problem nuggets can be weighed for value before solutions are considered.



From inside-out to outside-in thinking

Inside-out thinking is the tendency to view problems in context of what is possible as it relates to an internal context - the business status quo. Inside-out thinking impacts the variety and number of individuals consulted during the innovation process, with a knock-on effect of severely limiting the range of possibilities you consider.

With such a restrictive outcome, why would anyone subscribe to inside-out thinking?

As a technology leader you know your organisation, and on a daily basis you leverage this context by making decisions based on it. This knowledge, combined with the pressure to act, and the power to decide often influences technology leaders in innovation scenarios to shortcut to the problem to solve before the “magic” of value mining can take place.

Alternatively, by driving innovation through experiences, technology is removed as an influence in the “how should we innovate” stage, providing a new freedom of discovery outside the business status quo - outside-in thinking.



With change comes magic gifts

To top it all off, if we do make the change to lead with humans instead of technology, we get to unlock some wonderful gifts:

Human-led approaches significantly reduce the risks associated with any outcome-based engagement. The reduced risk can be passed back to the business in the form of reduced cost.

Human-led projects reduce the potential to miss the mark, significantly increasing the potential to deliver outcomes that meet and exceed the expectations of our stakeholders.

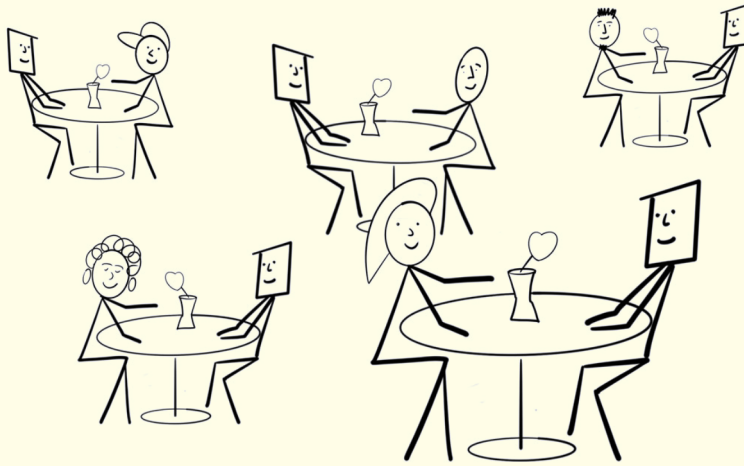
Human-led projects, by solving for the real priority, significantly reduces time wasting rework, increases time efficiency and as a result faster delivery for the business.

Human-led projects increase the potential for technology leaders to develop long lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with happy stakeholders.

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-technology-leaders-can-embrace-value-mining-dr-amanda-keenan>

Design speed dating for technology leaders



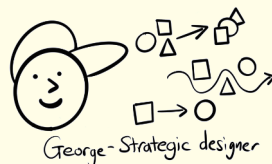
A human-centred design approach focuses on understanding people and their experiences, before coming up with solutions.

For businesses, this often means moving from “inside-out” thinking to “outside-in” thinking, leading with the experiences people want, rather than systems and processes. As a technology leader, you need to deploy the type of design capability you need to move everyone to an “outside-in” view and power up your innovation program.

All designers are adept at research, finding the right problems you need to solve, co-design, solution prioritisation, prototyping, testing and moving shiny new innovation into the business-as-usual world. So, every designer can add value and bring business aspirations to life.

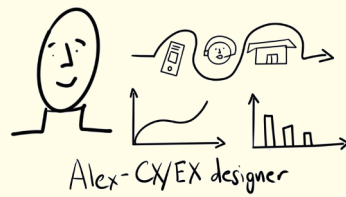
But within the discipline of design thinking, we have a continuum of capability - most of us specialise in one or two areas, so we can focus on honing our skills even more.

Not sure who is right for you? - we’ve made it easier for you. Let’s meet the designers!



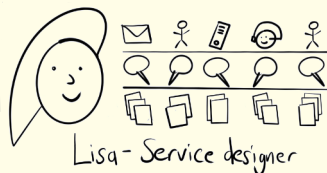
Meet George - strategic designer

If your focus is on your organisation - defining, aligning & implementing vision, mission and innovation strategies, organisational transformation and driving cultural and environment change, you need a Strategic Designer! You need George!



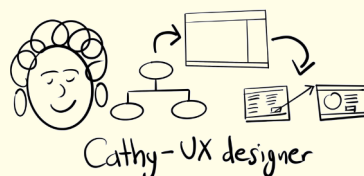
Meet Alex - CX/EX designer

If your focus is on your brand - designing the experience customers & employees have of your organisation, based on interactions across all touch-points, people, and technology over time, and then measuring experience, advocacy & retention - you need a CX/EX Designer! You need Alex!



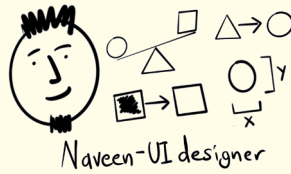
Meet Lisa - Service designer

If your focus is on your services - designing a cohesive experience flow between the business itself as well as the end users, that pulls from many different sources to create and optimise powerful experiences that can be delivered seamlessly - you need a Service Designer! You need Lisa!



Meet Cathy - UX designer

If your focus is on your digital world- creating products or services that provide meaningful experiences for users, involving many different areas of product development including branding, usability, function, and design - you need a UX Designer! You need Cathy!



Meet Naveen - UI designer

If your focus is on digital interfaces - designing interfaces with which users engage e.g., buttons or widgets, text, images, sliders, ensuring that every visual element, included within a product or service is setting the stage for a fluid, positive experience - you need a UI Designer! You need Naveen!

If your focus is on all of the above - you need a Design team!!

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/design-speed-dating-technology-leaders-dr-amanda-keenan>

The power of the partnership



How designers & BAs unite to supercharge innovation

As a strategic designer I use principles, tools & human-centred design methods to influence strategic decision making. I focus on aligning people on the business and experience vision, surfacing opportunities, undertaking deep research into people's needs & co-designing value propositions. My preference is always to work closely with a Business Analyst like the wonderful Alan Harrison, not just because they are super-capable and skilled collaborators, but they add a layer of value I can't deliver on my own.

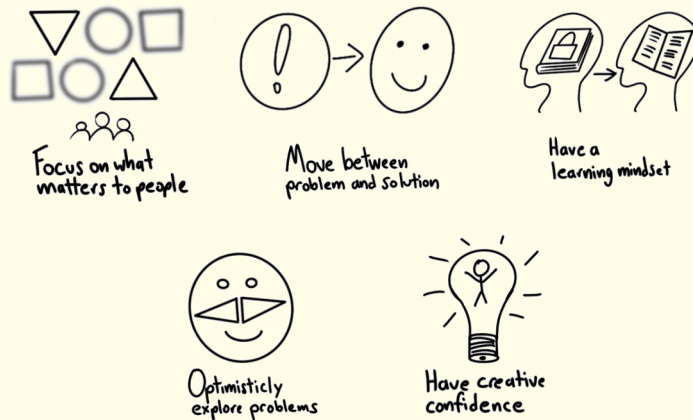
It's not just a matter of Outside-in vs. Inside-out

Business Analysts are not just focused on the business need (or outside-in focus). Designers are not just focused on the customer/employee/citizen experience (inside-out focus). Both perspectives complement each other and, when working together, they provide a holistic, deep & human-focused understanding of how an organisation can bring its aspirations to life.



What Designers do

We all know that design thinking is the discipline of creating solutions in the service of people. The role of the Designer is to connect people and ideas. We do that through applying a mindset (ways of thinking), and a framework (ways of working).



Ways of thinking (mindset)



Ways of working (framework)



What Business Analysts do

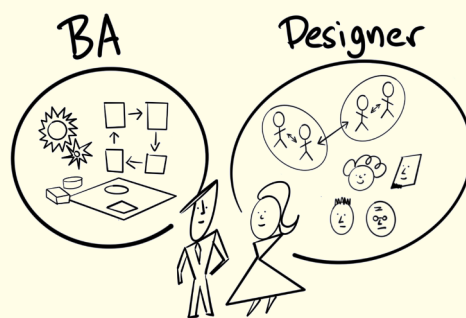
It depends.*

Ask someone who isn't a BA, and they may say "requirements gathering" or "process modelling" and these are certainly activities that BAs specialise in. But there's a lot more they can and do bring to a project.

Business analysis is all about understanding a problem, figuring out the starting point, working out whether a solution (be it IT-based or otherwise) might actually solve the problem, and working out what needs to happen in order to affect the changes the solution will bring. These all fall within a broad definition of “business analysis”, but you’ll recognise some of them as activities that other disciplines (such as Designers, Change Managers etc.) excel at.

In our view, the key skill that a BA brings to a team is the ability to articulate what is achievable. It may seem like they want to inhibit the creativity and innovation of the others in the team, but it’s actually the polar opposite. It’s about increasing the chances of the success for a project by ensuring that the needs (for both the business and the customer) are met by the design and can actually be delivered within the timeframe and budget.

* A standard BA answer.



How we do it together

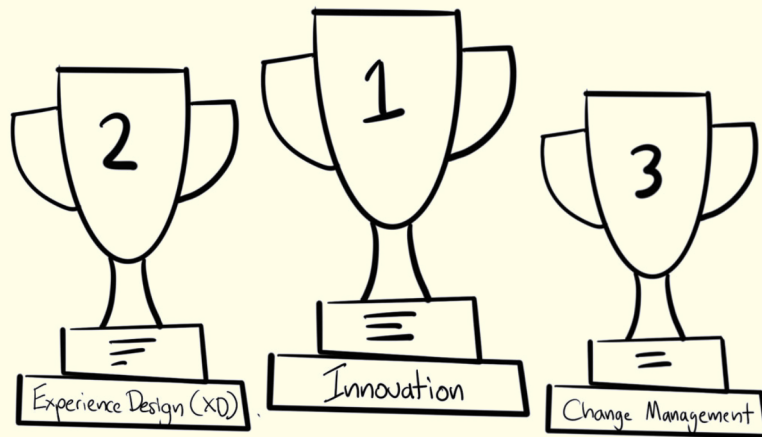
As we work together, we set out to co-design solutions that are desirable, feasible and viable. The Designer's focus is on desirability - what people want. But without an analytical lens on viability and feasibility (what is technically & organisationally feasible, what is financially viable and sustainable) solutions will fail.

The “power of the bundle” comes in leveraging the lenses, skills and capabilities of both Designers & Business Analysts. So, if you're really looking for supercharged innovation, transformation and sustainable change you should be partnering your BA's with a Designer.

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-partnership-how-designers-bas-unite-innovation-keenan>

Win big with the transformation trifecta!



The term transformation is used a lot in relation to information technology these days. More than a buzzword, it has become the mantra for business resilience. Yes, we all want to reduce risk, lower costs and ensure employee buy-in, all at the same time. But it's tricky, so where to start?

We have written before about using a social - human centred design (HCD) - as a methodology to underpin how we think about innovation and transformation. From this we learnt that change (transformation) does not begin or end with a new business process, digital solution, or technology - rather it begins and ends with people, with humans.

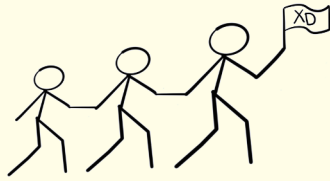
With a view to guiding you further on your HCD journey, we'd like to introduce you to the transformation trifecta - innovation, experience design (XD) and change management.



1 - Innovation-driven

Innovation starts with:

1. outlining the vision and collective ambition of the people involved,
2. a maturity assessment of the current state,
3. the implementation of an innovation approach and
4. how to move from now to wow!



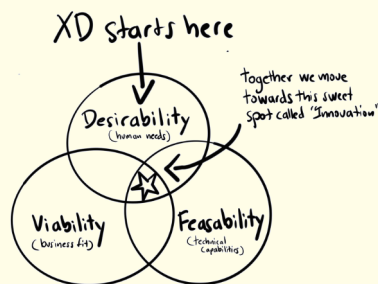
2 - Experience-led

XD strengthens the strategic approach, unlocking the path to better employee experiences and adds value by giving businesses and teams the opportunity to apply practical ideas, test how they actually work, and then make adjustments.



3 - Change supported

Change professionals expand on the XD work by fleshing out the strategy, structures, processes and workflows. By working with those impacted by the change, to minimise any negative effects on business as usual (BAU), while at the same time up-skilling all stakeholders in preparation for the next implementation.



Combining change & XD

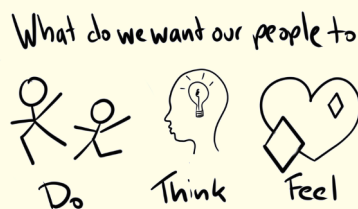
The key principle of change management is focusing on the people who are affected. Whereas XD emphasises how change empowers people, engages, trains them, and increases adoption to realise this change vision.

XD is about designing a solution or product with the user in mind. The key principle is that the people who face the problems, or use the product, are the ones who can provide the most relevant insights and solutions.



Applying the XD lens sharpens our focus to the human side of change practice, taking us back to the very heart of helping people adopt the change. With this view, XD becomes a valuable part of the toolkit when developing change plans, and a capability needed to build.

The methodology of XD is often applied for developing empathy, personas and experience maps. The same thinking can be used to plan and introduce change. Consider impacted employees as internal customers who can provide deep insights.



Applying an experience design lens to change looks at three elements before and after the implementation - what do we want our people to do, think and feel?

How you win big

Increased adoption - Employees are being asked what they want to see take place before implementation to support adoption, so a collaborative approach starts early in the change planning.

Empowering people - Asking employees to play a meaningful role in imagining a successful future state.

Measurable results - We can measure after the change is implemented, through the lens of the same three human elements of doing, thinking and feeling.

Future forming - Change practitioners gain insights into what a desired future state looks like from a user's perspective.

Three capabilities for the price of one!

Experience designers are innovators - they have a powerful mindset and framework at their fingertips to guide people through successful innovation programs. Change professionals understand that successful adoption of new ways of thinking and working takes place one person at a time. Experience design and innovation are part of their emerging toolkit to support transformation. They are out there - go and get yourself one! Sign up for the Transformation Trifecta - you'll win big!

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/win-big-transformation-trifecta-dr-amanda-keenan>

The logo for 'coolkids' is displayed in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: 'c' is blue, 'o' is yellow, 'o' is orange, 'l' is green, 'k' is light blue, 'i' is pink, 'd' is purple, and 's' is red.

Coolkids are a group of smart and curious designers, change professionals, and business analysts who working together to solve problems. We're all about creating a more human-led environment where people and businesses can thrive, with the goal of making the corporate world more empathetic, productive, and fun for everyone.

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