

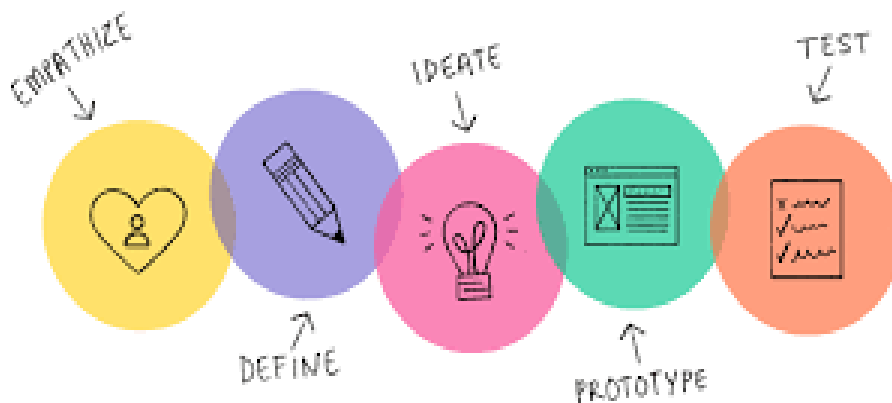
DESIGN THINKING

UNIT – I

Design thinking is a non-linear, iterative process that can have anywhere from three to seven phases, depending on whom you talk to. We focus on the five-stage design thinking model proposed by the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (the d.school) because they are world-renowned for the way they teach and apply design thinking.

The five stages of design thinking, according to the d.school, are:

- **Empathize:** research your users' needs.
- **Define:** state your users' needs and problems.
- **Ideate:** challenge assumptions and create ideas.
- **Prototype:** start to create solutions.
- **Test:** try your solutions out.



The Five Phases of Design Thinking

These five phases are not always sequential, in that they do not necessarily need to follow any specific order and can repeat iteratively to hone and refine our solutions through the process. Avoid the perception that phases are innately hierarchical or linear; rather, they are a journey, sometimes with side stops or shortcuts, but with direction and a destination in mind.

The short form of the design thinking process can be articulated in five steps or phases: empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test. Let's briefly explore each of these phases in relation to a practical design process.

Phase 1: Empathize – Gather High-Quality Consumer Understanding

As marketers, we think that we have our finger on the pulse of our business. But often in reality, we are talking to ourselves first, and framing the problem with myriad assumptions that aren't necessarily true or correct, particularly about our users and consumers. Empathy is the critical starting point for successful design thinking solutions, with the first order of business to know who it is you're solving a problem for; and despite the importance of strategic business objectives, it isn't your client. This may sound harsh, but deeply understanding the consumer is the most important input to assuring business success.

Understanding consumer needs, barriers, attitudes and aspirations is the only way to unlock new solutions that identify whitespace and uncover emergent opportunities for brands. This means observing and engaging with human beings to truly internalize their experience on an emotional and even psychological level. During this phase, every stakeholder must seek to set aside their assumptions and gather real insights that are relevant to the challenge and actionable for the design team. In designing for CPGs, it's also crucial to consider the culture that our consumer is immersed in—are there seismic culture shifts happening? What does the visual language of our culture or category look like? How are they responding and coping? How can we help them navigate it?

Phase 2: Define – Create a Brilliant Design Brief for All Stakeholders

The second stage in the process is about clarity, focus and definition. Gather all the insights you've collected— consumer need states and barriers, lifestyle realities and cultural influences—to begin to make sense of the landscape of solutions you're exploring. What themes or patterns are bubbling to the surface? What unmet needs came out of left field? What unexpected barriers might shift our focus? Are we asking the right questions, and do we need to reassess our assumptions about the task at hand?

A great creative brief, built with both strategic focus and creative inspiration, is the key to unlocking the best solutions and building consensus along the way. Internally, a strong brief allows guidance and actionability for our design teams, but it also brings early thought leadership to the table with clients to gain consensus and build momentum.

Once we've formulated the challenge into a clear articulation, we can move into the ideation phase with confidence and inspiration.

Phase 3: Ideate and Collaborate

With a deep understanding of your consumer and a focused, well-articulated challenge to solve, it's time to start developing potential solutions. This phase is where creativity is unleashed on the intelligence—where the rubber meets the road. Prior to the granularity of executional options, a multi-stakeholder team (led by design) must establish the creative or design “pathways” that might offer solutions. Before sketches or computer designs happen, we must align on where the challenge could take us and assess the creative legs and longevity of the opportunities we see in the landscape.

Brainstorming, mind-mapping, landscape mapping and Post-it Notes are all viable tools to fuel this brilliant but messy phase. The key is to create an environment where divergent and provocative options are embraced and assessed, with the eventual goal of converging on a few strongest pathways to pursue. Leverage your intelligence and your defined brief as your yardstick, and do a S.W.O.T. (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) assessment to build confidence in the strategic viability of all pathways.

Phase 4: Prototype – Hold Inspirational Rapid-Sketch Sessions or Design Sprints

The fourth step is all about experimentation: transforming ideas into tangible “artifacts.” These artifacts may be a packaging design system, a retail experience, a new structural innovation or a customer journey. Regardless of the task at hand, rapid iteration and even prototyping is a crucial step in quickly breathing life into the work. Don't be afraid to bring the solution to life in unexpected ways that consumers will understand. Consumer understanding is key in putting each solution to the test, in order to highlight any gaps, barriers constraints or flaws in the concept.

Throughout this stage, proposed solutions may be improved, redesigned or rejected through a series of reviews and critiques from the broader team. This rapid iterative process does many beneficial things: It allows creatives to be imperfect and detach from their work in healthy ways, it embraces collaboration by “piggybacking” ideas from different sources, and it depersonalizes the delicate process of creativity in a way that empowers teams.

Phase 5: Test – Get Fast, Productive Feedback From Human Beings

After your iterative creative development and prototyping, find ways to test fast and organically with consumers. Although design testing is often relegated to quantitative “benchmarks” or eye-tracking, a qualitative sharing session with consumers can go much deeper on the “why” of the feedback. If budgets are tight or clients are uncomfortable with breaking free from their traditional corporate methodologies, engage a “friends and family” approach. It’s important that the consumers you speak with have a vested interest in the problem you’re solving.

Questions to ask should be open-ended and solutions-focused, such as, “What problem could this solve for you?” “How could this solution impact your experience?” or “What might make it an even better solution?” This line of questioning avoids answers that shut down iterative improvement and encourage consumers to build on the concept or solution in productive ways. Avoid yes/no questions or “Which do you like?” and focus on solving the problem at hand the very best way you can. At this point, the stepwise aspect of Design Thinking comes into play—insert your new learning back into the process and optimize your concepts until you’ve solved the problem.