



d.confestival
Cape Town 2022



HASSO PLATTNER
d-school AFRIKA

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A truly global GDTA

Design thinking matters now more than ever because we are challenged more than ever. Its processes encourage us to move collaboratively in non-linear ways, which allow for the endless branching of human creativity. As our global landscape becomes increasingly difficult to navigate, design thinking is a vehicle for accessing our boundless collective potential, dissolving the usual barriers between disciplines and their patterns of speaking, thinking and moving. As old paths vanish or become untenable, a new direction is increasingly urgent – we look to design thinking as a roadmap to apprehend the moment.

The Global Design Thinking Alliance (GDTA) has been on the forefront of advancing and mapping the design thinking mindset and movement for the past five years, and the d.confestival was the perfect opportunity to celebrate half a decade with its partners and collaborators. With 35 member institutions on five continents, our network is vast and varied – from the London School of Economics to the Design Thinking Innovation Center at CUC Communication University of China in Beijing, to the d-school Afrika at the University of Cape Town. But also partners like OpenLab in Stockholm and Genovasi in Kuala Lumpur have been involved from the very beginning. Each one has helped shape design thinking as a dynamic, culturally inclusive practice.

The virtual infrastructure of GDTA enables us to exchange, debate and explore best practices in design thinking education from truly global angles. As we strengthen our collaborative ties between educators and practitioners, we grow and refine our

tools so we can aim higher and reach further in our problem solving. We do this through annual conferences where we bring together delegates from 30 countries, and through monthly Spotlight Sessions, which highlight design thinking practices in different cultural spaces. We coordinate a Coaches Exchange Program, which enables in-depth learning and teaching across international boundaries.

The 2022 d.confestival was the third of its kind, first time hosted by the Hasso Plattner d-school Afrika at UCT. Every five years we make a point to gather with our global partners to celebrate and harvest insights, inviting friends old and new. It's an affirmation of our bond and an investment in new alliances – it's also an opportunity to reflect and make critical adjustments.

That the d.confestival was hosted by our African partners was one such critical adjustment. It represented a decisive step away from the familiar ground of Europe and the Global North, and toward a global region that has so much to offer and so much to teach us. We wanted to see how we would move, think and act in a different latitude.

Our carefully curated three-day programme was built around the themes of celebrating, interrogating, and anticipating the future of design thinking. We invited a multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-disciplined line-up of speakers and design thinking practitioners from all professions and walks of life. We hosted design thinking veterans and newcomers to the field.

The quality of the conversation, learning and connection that occurred in Cape Town, South Africa at the newly minted home of the d-school Afrika has given the GDTA new momentum. And, crucially, reinforced a new lens from which to look at ourselves and our movement.

— Uli Weinberg

**GDTA president and director of the HPI
D-School Potsdam, Germany**



Foreword



Design thinking is rooted in the question, 'What ought to be?' It's forward-looking and, crucially, forward-moving. It has its origins in the design discipline, but it has since evolved past innovating clever products and creating novel solutions – it's now taking aim at society's thorniest challenges – from education and poverty to gender-based violence.

If you start looking around on the continent, you quickly see how Africans are taking on the most morally ambitious version of 'What ought to be?'. Recently, we've seen it in human-centric designs like mobile-based financial services, which enable micro-finance and allow the rural and unbanked to access services they otherwise wouldn't. But, dig a bit deeper and we see Africa has a strong heritage of design.

Since the first d.confestival held in 2012 at the HPI D-School in Potsdam, Germany, we've been able to witness powerful social innovations and we've begun to thread a network of movers and shakers across the continent; we've taught and nurtured a design thinking approach in people and organisations across sectors – business, education, urban planning – as a vehicle for creating these innovations.

For the first time the d.confestival took place in the Global South. More specifically, it took place on African soil, at the newly built home of the Hasso Plattner d-school Afrika at the University of Cape Town, with the generous support of the Hasso Plattner Foundation. This was an opportunity to tell the stories about design thinking from a radically different perspective, and to recognise the truly global nature of this movement. Hosting this international event alongside the opening of the d-school Afrika's new home, says a great deal about just how serious we are about recognising this movement beyond the West.

That our venue hopes to be the first 6-star green-rated academic building on the African continent, holds symbolic power as an embodiment of design thinking values and what it can achieve. But we recognise, too, the very real, material power of this phenomenal physical space to act as a catalyst for design thinking – just like our sister schools at the University of Potsdam and Stanford University have in the Europe and the US. And now we're here, operating in this multi-cultural, multi-lingual emerging-market context.

The d.confestival brought together well-established and lesser-known voices from five continents that reflected different worldviews, languages and disciplines. The array expressed a core principle of design thinking, which is the strength of diversity and co-creation. It was a rare, richly layered chorus.

We didn't want to conduct the chorus too carefully, but to help guide its expression we built the framework for this gathering around the notions of celebrating, interrogating and anticipating what is next in design thinking. We wanted to acknowledge what has been, examine and unpack what is, and imagine the possibilities of this powerful tool for innovating toward an uncertain future. As you read this magazine, I think you will find we managed to do this.

We have carried the spirit of the previous d.confestivals, but with our uniquely African flavour. Anyone who attended would tell you how this was sensed palpably through the variety of traditional languages they would have heard, the music performed, the foods that were shared. But – at the risk of raising eyebrows – I can tell you there was a vital essence of interconnectedness that permeated too, best encapsulated in the concept of ubuntu – the African philosophy that says: "I am, because we are."

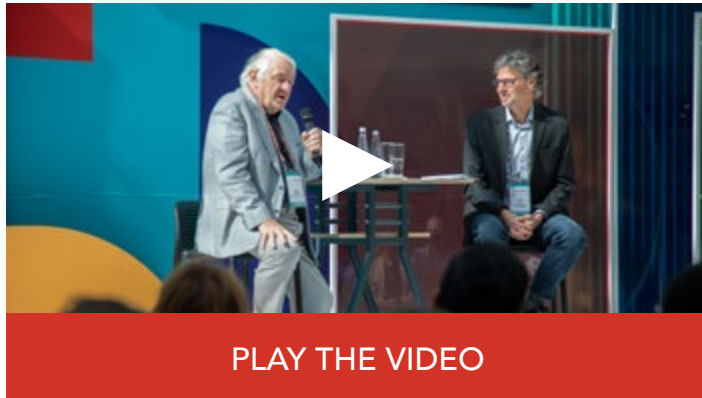
In these pages, you will read about tech innovations that allow farmers to access markets they could never reach before. You'll learn about apps that are supporting refugees on their journeys toward making new lives. You will discover how rural youth are co-creating platforms that give them training and experience and plug them into job networks. You will discover new conversations, and new language.

And, suddenly, through the lens of ubuntu, the expansion of the design thinking movement – as it shifts from prioritising the individual need to confronting complex social challenges – starts looking a lot more myriad, a lot more African.

— **Richard Perez,**
director of d-school Afrika

Great minds that think unlike

Training design thinking as an agile cross-discipline



Hasso Plattner has been a central force in driving the development, spread and accessibility of design thinking around the world for decades. After co-founding information technology giant, SAP SE, his passion for human-centred design cued his interest in what were then the little-known concepts of design thinking. He began spending time at Stanford and meeting with various software companies in Palo Alto and soon helped found the world's first school dedicated to design thinking – the d.school at Stanford.

He believes a new way of thinking is necessary to meet the challenges we see around the world; changing our approach to problem-solving could help us innovate our way past the planet's most pressing problems.

So what are his thoughts regarding why Africa is the next frontier for design thinking innovation?

"A key outcome of the school would be to help students learn to trust themselves on how to innovate," said Plattner, at the d.confestival's official opening. He believes that although Africa is not known as a great engineering continent, with good user orientation, Africans can shape relevant, forward-thinking and human-centred infrastructure and systems to help enable the continent to flourish.

Design thinking schools cannot take the place of raw engineering, but can train and develop a new breed of thinkers to tailor processes and solutions that place the user at the centre of framing problems and shaping solutions. To help facilitate this, the d-school in Cape Town is building an African network with universities, thinkers and practitioners on the continent, capitalising on the immense talent and local knowledge for context-sensitive approaches to challenges in Africa, by Africans.



Plattner stressed the point: "Even brilliant engineers have to understand how humans behave." Porsche was built by engineers as a car for men. The company never asked women about the handling of the car. This is why Plattner saw the need to start a d-school in Germany: "Although they have a strong engineering culture, it's not necessarily designed for the end user." This is key in design thinking.

It's a challenge, however. Design thinking is so difficult because you have to flip your thinking towards understanding *what the project is for* and articulate a point of view in one sentence, not a whole page. For example, Tesla's one sentence is: to control all functions of the car with a touch screen *while driving*. All of what they do is orientated around that point of view.

Africans can shape relevant, forward-thinking and human-centred infrastructure and systems to help enable the continent to flourish.



The d-school Afrika aims to train students in this mode of lateral thinking, which compliments other skills and experience, ensuring that whatever qualification or focus a student already has can be maximally relevant for the world we live in. Teamwork is critical to this; the d-school places collaboration front and centre, leveraging the power of diverse perspectives in creativity, innovation and responsibility . Here, performance is not driven by marks, but by designing exciting solutions for business and society and the world's most stubborn challenges, going beyond the importance of other disciplines like entrepreneurial studies – it's so much more than this.

***d-school places collaboration
front and centre, leveraging
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perspectives in creativity,
innovation and responsibility.***

Plattner, like many of the speakers that followed, spoke warmly and passionately about how Africa is open for success; design thinking may hold the key to unlocking that potential, creating new ideas to meet user needs. It will require a bold and innovative approach. This is why Richard Pérez, director of the d-school Afrika, was excited to end the opening keynote by summing up his one-sentence design thinking mandate for the Hasso Plattner d-school Afrika, handed to him by the school's founder: "Think visionary. Think 100 years. Think iconic."





Design thinking and interdisciplinary approaches for sustainable solutions to global problems

Keynote speech by Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, UCT vice chancellor at the time of our d.confestival, explored the parallels between interdisciplinary academic research and design thinking. Each offers “a landscape that disrupts the traditional patriarchal patterns of academic and industrial knowledge,” she said. “The landscape replaces the competitiveness of individual researchers with what Hasso Plattner says is an ‘essential cultural change’ that incorporates habits of cooperation such as creative confidence, curiosity, collaboration and a trial and error attitude.”

And by inviting diverse perspectives we not only reframe our challenges, we rephrase them too. And since some theories of communication posit that language itself determines thinking, words and speech could themselves be powerful tools for transformation, said Prof Phakeng. In giving different cultures, disciplines and languages a seat at the table, and lending their voices equal credence, we can newly comprehend how to approach even the world’s most wicked problems.

“If we say that design thinking has to include all voices, we have to be aware that some people might not be fluent in the European languages... In this context of design thinking, introducing or welcoming other languages is important because it will introduce us to different world views.”

“Design thinking methodology can help to expand the focus of science to incorporate not just knowledge but also the attitudes that guide how we use that knowledge.”

“As educators, we need to prepare our young people to lead in a time of change and uncertainty. We need to instil in them the same kind of mindset that design thinking encourages: curiosity, team work, an appreciation of diversity and a focus on leading change to unleash their own talents and those of other people to help build a fair and just society.”

“Bringing the d-school to Africa opens the possibility of developing a more diverse application of design thinking and seeing how design thinking translates in different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic applications.”



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Tracing design thinking as a global movement

At our version of a fireside chat, some of design thinking's foremost proponents reflected on their own journeys within the global movement. Describing their first encounters and the shifts they witnessed, Bernard Roth, Uli Weinberg, George Kembel, Claudia Nicolai and Richard Perez traced design thinking throughout the decades.

'50s and '60s – Engineering focused predominantly on the product, not the user in this era. There was little sense of design for a person – with feelings, predilections and emotional complexity.

- Dr Bernard Roth is exposed to Robert H. McKim's need-finding and visual thinking methodology to harness the human imagination in problem-solving. Roth starts driving 'human-centricity' as an approach to product design at Stanford.

"In those days, you weren't supposed to deal with people in the sense of the human being with feelings and emotions...Half my teaching was equations on the board, and the other half was about designing for people's needs and worrying about feelings and interacting with others." - Dr Bernard Roth, a founding member of the Stanford d.school, d.school Academic Director and a Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Stanford



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'80s – The rise of computers exposes designers to working in multidisciplinary teams.

- Art and design student Ulrich Weinberg collaborated with engineers, IT professionals, musicians, designers and 3D artists to create art.

"It was my first encounter with collaboration between different disciplines, teamwork, thinking with both parts of the brain and connecting all the creative spirit." - Ulrich Weinberg, founding director of the HPI School of Design Thinking

- Before HPI, Ulrich Weinberg work as an expert in computer animation and games, holding a professorship at Potsdam Film University and a visiting professorship at the Communication University of China, Beijing. On his journey to China, he encountered the opportunity to collaborate with the HPI to create the School of Design Thinking.

"The intersection of computers and film was not considered legitimate at the time, and [Ulrich] had to follow his curiosity. These things come from inner acts of daring; when you have something in you that you can't help but bring alive. Don't be surprised that at first you meet some resistance. That's usually a sign you're

onto something. When you look at the intersection now of computers and film, it's dominant. It goes from something that is not considered as legitimate to changing the world." - George Kembel, co-founder and executive director of Stanford d.school

'90s – Thanks to the expansion of design thinking, principles of harnessing empathy and imagination make their way into new contexts.

- Dr Claudia Nicolai, academic director of HPI D-school, comes across an article, "Spark innovation through empathic design", and begins to consider how companies can leverage principles of empathy and imagination to innovate across multiple organisations in multiple local contexts.
- Richard Perez first studied industrial design and later encountered design thinking after he began working as a designer.

"I got frustrated by those who didn't really understand design and its value. When I was in business, I struggled to get companies to understand the true cost of design. I went to business school to understand how accountants and lawyers think and why they don't see design in the way I do. It was at business school that I was introduced to design thinking. What intrigued me is that this is how the world packaged it. All my life, I was sitting on the other side of the fence, passionate about showing people the true value of design but in a language they understand." - Richard Perez, founding director of d-school Afrika

2000s – Formal schools are established, dedicated to developing and teaching principles of empathy, iteration and cross-pollination, expanding design thinking's reach.

- In 2005, The d.school at Stanford University is established with a mandate to make the human element as important as technological and business elements.



- George Kembel is an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley when he attends a design lecture in Stanford with Bob Kim, Matt Khan, David Kelley and Bernard Roth, where he got inspired to formalise and create a bigger design thinking school.

"Design could be something bigger than this tiny little programme because many of the people who've done the programme went on to change the world because of this way of thinking."—George Kembel

"[The programme] went from designing products to innovation to how we innovate in everything. Organisations need it; governments need it. How do we invite more people into the conversation than just the engineers and artists, but for everyone to wake up and recognise they have creativity in themselves?" - Bernard Roth

- George Kembel co-founds and leads the Stanford d.school, scaling it from an idea on a napkin to a world-renowned institution for innovation impacting hundreds of millions of lives, generating billions of dollars in economic value and ushering in a wider global design thinking movement.

"I ended up being an entrepreneur from inside a university. The d-school was another startup and a chance to experiment with what leadership meant and pour my heart into other people." - George Kembel



“Design thinking on its own is almost nothing. It has to be married to something. It’s about moving in a creative way, understanding the humans, questioning our questions and coming up with unexpected options, experimenting to figure out what works and what doesn’t work, and bringing diverse perspectives to the table. It’s a way of moving that needs to be applied to other things. Design thinking and education can bring new ideas to education. Design thinking and healthcare can lead to new innovations in healthcare. Design thinking in film can lead to new innovations in the way we think about entertainment. It asks each of us to honour our inner diversity and that help you honour the diversity of the teams that you hold. - George Kembel

- 2007, The Hasso Plattner Institute at Potsdam University establishes the first d-school in its computer science department based on the model of the Stanford d.school. Ulrich Weinberg becomes the founding director.

“At the beginning, we were like a very colourful and nice appendage. More and more, we became an integral part of the institute.” - Ulrich Weinberg

“One of the first experiments I ran was an experiment with a business school and the university of design to work together. It was nice, but what was missing was engineering. You need people in your team who know the tech stuff and how tech will look in the future. The change brought about by design thinking is not just trying to make it [tech] nice at the interface level, but also thinking about how we will interact and use technology.”
- Dr Claudia Nicolai joined the HPI D-School and became academic director and lead programme designer

- In 2016, Richard Perez launches the d-school at the University of Cape Town in South Africa with the aim to instill a mindset of finding innovative ways to solve real-world problems.

“The d-schools are about bringing people through an experience to show them that we all have the capacity to be creative; we all are part of and need to be part of the creative process. Design is too important to be left to the designers. We all need to be part of that, but we need to be taught how.” - Richard Perez

“At a societal level is where I really think we’re going to see the impact. The vision for this d-school is to first get every university student through the school in some form, but then start to spread out across the continent and to start working with partners and really make this a movement across Africa.” - Richard Perez

- In 2017, the Global Design Thinking Alliance is established. This is a network of institutions that teach, research and further develop the methods and mindsets of Design Thinking. This world-wide network of institutions promotes excellence in Design Thinking education and research.

Bernard Roth intersected design from an engineering background

George Kembel intersected design from an entrepreneurship background

Claudia Nicolai intersected design from a business background

Richard Perez intersected design from an industrial and product design background

Uli Weinberg intersected design from a film background

Mapping design thinking DNA

Design thinking draws from a multiplicity of tools and perspectives. Diversity is at the crux of what makes this such a dynamic problem solving approach.

Panellists from all over the world reflected on the ways design thinking has been shaped by their indigenous languages, cultural contexts and socio-economic conditions, and how they have used it in their own fields. They discussed how design thinking is opening new ways to enrich, diversify and democratise solutions in education, public life, design and business.

Felix Ofori Dartey, a design researcher with a background in graphic design, began the session by rooting design thinking in the African continent. He emphasised that design was a way of relating and co-creating practiced well before colonisation. Dartey interrogated our notions about who the original authors of design are. "We see design as a European thing," he said. "When

you go beyond South Africa, the understanding of design varies. It is seen as only graphic design. We need to teach the concept in the local cultural context."

Focusing on her home country of Egypt, **Prof Hoda Mostafa**, director at the Center for Learning and Teaching at the American University in Cairo, described how Egyptians use storytelling as a way to challenge power and endure adversity. They are wonderfully generous in their ability to draw others into their own culture and story, using narratives as a means of creatively transforming their situation. "In Egypt, out of adversity comes the natural ability to problem solve," said Mostafa. "Egyptians use humour a lot."

Innovation strategist at IBM Technology in Sao Paulo, Brazil, **Lilian Sanada** spoke about design thinking from a corporate social responsibility perspective. She reminded the audience of business' potential to connect and facilitate meaningful social progress.



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As an intercultural communicator and design strategist, **John Lam** spoke to the challenge of designing across languages and cultures. As an example of effective cross-cultural design, Lam mentioned China's rise in creativity and innovation in the '90s. "How do we reinforce culture into our companies?" he asked.

Dr Mana Taheri, educator, researcher and illustrator, looked at the use of design thinking for social justice ends, reinforcing the importance of incorporating people's lived and learnt experiences. Adapting methodologies to fit each person's cultural context will help get the message of design thinking across to more people, she said.

Sharing their insights openly and honestly, panellists simulated how design thinking can unite cultural traditions for creative problem solving and innovation. They also reflected on issues of power and privilege and the importance of acting and working with a strong ethos of social justice.



Design thinking: intersections Moving forward, mapping new paths

You can't generate original solutions using the same well-worn routes of problem solving. Different results demand new pathways – alternative ways of collaboration and ideation that get people thinking and moving differently.

Some design thinking champions are embedding design thinking in company culture through games and exercises that have people practising out-of-the-box solution exploration. Some are putting their own design thinking values to the test, practising deeper listening in their commitment to developing

human-centric technologies. And others are cross-examining design thinking as a theory and practice, applying a critical lens make sure it is delivering on its promise of tackling our most complex problems.

In four different sessions, change-makers share lessons from their experiences of putting design thinking to the test out in the world.

Serious design at play

Launchlabs is a global entrepreneurial development platform that embeds design thinking into its coaching and mentoring curricula, but it does this in a playful, off-kilter way. In a breakaway session, Launchlabs facilitators hosted a game that challenged participants to reach a defined endpoint on a board – but without the safety and structure of prescribed rules. Instead of mastering a single skill and progressing down a linear path, teams worked together to interpret the rules as the game evolved. Completing tasks and advancing meant practicing cross-functional teamwork, customer focus, innovation culture and experimental mindset – principles inherent in taking a design thinking approach.

Innovating agriculture and entrepreneurship

In their effort to apply research to real-life challenges, the D-School at the Universidad Mayor in Chile stretched their own out-of-the-box approaches. The programme set out to use design thinking methodology to help equip 20 entrepreneurial rural farmers with business and financial planning skills and train problem-solving methods for their equipment challenges. Then Covid-19 stuck and the project planners had to rethink their training approach. Instead of face-to-face encounters, they created videos and design booklets with information; they used radio stations and local municipalities extend their reach. Ultimately, the impact of the project spread beyond its original scope.

Global youth designing for mental wellness

The World Design Organisation's Young Designers Circle (YDC) harnesses the creativity and ambition of young designers across



Design thinking for Complex, Systemic Challenges

Keynote dialogue between
Scott Weiss and Jeanne Liedtka

Gearing up for a complex world

How can design thinking help us decipher and deal with complexity in its many manifestations – whether it's in a public, social or business environment – and how does it need to evolve? This keynote dialogue between global design thinking innovators explores the many applications of design thinking for a future that's yet to be imagined.

Future solutions are unfolding

Examining the intersections between design thinking and complex problem solving, Jeanne Liedtka, UTC professor of business at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business, described two characteristics they have in common: decentralisation and emergence. "You can't see the solutions as you begin the conversation," said Liedtka. "Solutions are emergent in real-time conversations."

For those hoping to not only discover new outcomes but to inspire goodness, both decentralisation and emergence are essential characteristics to foster. In the business world, pulling apart the pieces of the design thinking puzzle requires sensing when to seize a moment for transformation, said Liedtka. For individuals who embrace design thinking holistically, however, it goes even deeper: it means recognising we're all part of complex systems and our actions ripple and rebound.

Better equipped

Although design thinking is not a necessary condition to successfully solving complex challenges, good design can help accelerate and manage change while supporting the resilience necessary to sustain it, said Liedtka. The power of this kind of thinking is deceptively simple, but the conversations around it are highly complex. Providing a practical toolkit is essential to more effectively engaging people; without it, discussions about complex challenges can lead to division and polarisation, rather than consensus and collaboration.

In a business context, design thinking can be harnessed to shift perspectives: moving away from designing 'for', to designing 'with'. The process may feel uncomfortable and counterintuitive at first, but this starting point provides upfront alignment, asking questions such as: who is the design thinking for? And: what are the qualities of a great solution?

Solving for x, y & z

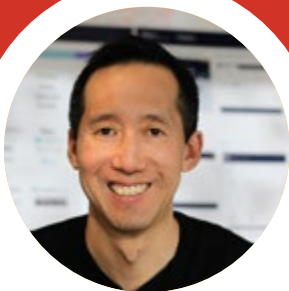
Despite the promise and potential of design thinking, it must continue to evolve in order to deepen its role in navigating complexity. It can do this by harnessing its data-driven DNA, said Scott Weiss, co-founder and chief creative officer of Catalest, a global design firm focused on helping the public sector solve systemic challenges related to innovation and modernisation. Complex data are required – both quantitative and qualitative data. "But they must be merged more eloquently to provide meaningful solutions", said Weiss. Data can be used to inspire – it's not only for stats and testing and providing evidence.

Weiss went further to say that design thinking conversations require many iterations, and should therefore have more practical timelines. A twelve-week assignment may be unrealistic given an enormous challenge. We need to be realistic – it's not a quick-fix, silver-bullet solution.

Most pressingly, design thinking tools need to adapt to the current barriers of: 1) the use of language; 2) the way we reframe concepts in data; and, 3) the role leadership plays in all of this. In time, as the discipline grows, design thinking can go further in solving complex, systemic challenges.



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Sam Yen

Chief innovation officer for
Commercial Banking at JP Morgan Chase & Co.

"The way we approach problem-finding and solving in large organisations is very unnatural. My niche area is navigating that complexity. In fostering a design thinking mindset in a large organisation, it's less about becoming a design thinking expert and more about persuading other people and learning from your own setbacks to be able to push forward and slowly transform an organisation."

"Innovation success is part creativity and part execution. This is where design thinking can help, and it's all about showcasing and championing its proven efficacy in solving problems for complex business settings. In addition, linking executive remuneration to innovation further helps legitimise initiatives."



Jeanett Modise

HR executive and business coach

"My view has always been that people are the business. As a result, people can make or break a business. The challenge in my domain is ensuring that the organisational culture evolves in such a way that it becomes an enabler for achieving – or even, exceeding – expectations. It's crucial to take all stakeholders along on the journey because it's impossible to define or solve a problem effectively for anyone unless they're on board."

"To successfully integrate design thinking, and to fully reap its benefits, an organisation needs to be willing to be iterative in its applications and vulnerable with and among each other. Therefore, culture lays the foundation. In applying design thinking, it's even more impactful when there's a clear link between an organisation's culture, purpose and values."

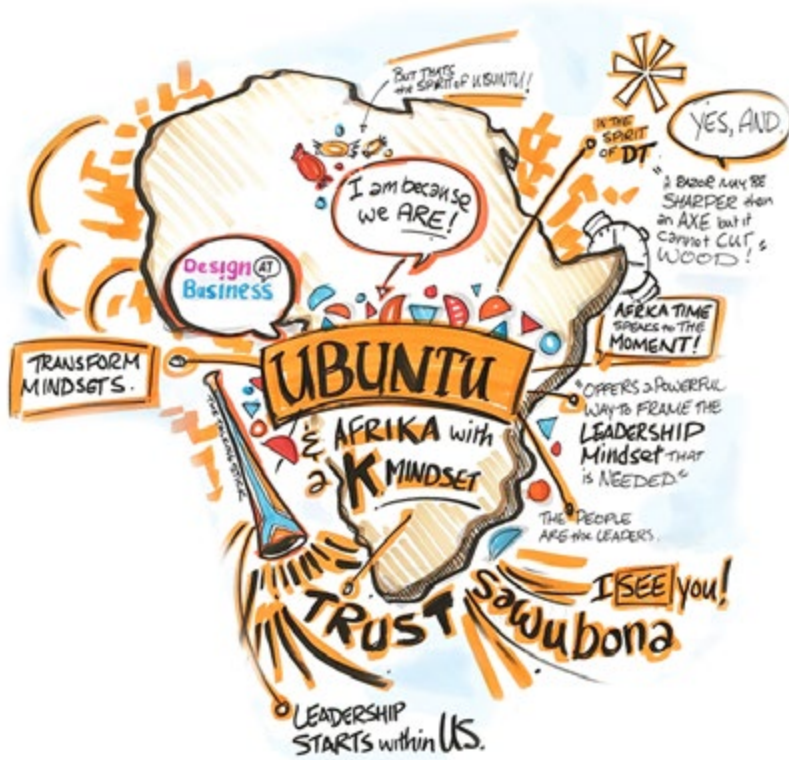


Paul Steenkamp

Founder of Jack Frost

"It's essential to have a senior executive carry the flag for design thinking in larger organisations. When it comes to integrating its application in our current business leadership structures, however, line managers are the toughest nut to crack. In practice, this business community is the most influential, and their buy-in is imperative in getting things done in new, more innovative ways."

"The notion of design thinking being associated with redistribution of power is absolutely true in complex organisations. In my experience, the execs think they have the most position and power, but they really don't. The line managers really determines what's actually going to happen...it's very important to engage them as early on as possible."



I am because we are: charting an ubuntu- inspired roadmap for inclusive, responsible design leadership

an interactive discussion
with Phumzile Mmope,
Mugendi M’rithaa, Ulrich
Meyer-Höllings and Joern
Bruecker

Design thinkers from around the world unpacked the African humanist ethos of ubuntu and explored how a life-centred leadership mindset impacts design, innovation and entrepreneurship activities to produce better results for all stakeholders. They examined the values underpinning the Design at Business Ubuntu Manifesto, which was co-created in workshops leading up to d.confestival.

Starting where all conversations grounded in mutual-respect should, this session began with participants greeting one another with a simple ‘hello’ – in South Africa’s 11 official languages.

Wielding a colourfully-adorned vuvuzela – the ‘talking stick’ – **Phumzile Mmope**, leadership coach and business school lecturer, used this simple hello exercise to get delegates interacting, setting the tone for a multicultural, multilingual dialogue. The hope was to chart a new course for design thinking inspired by the African concept of ubuntu.



Prof Mugendi M’rithaa, current senator and past president of the World Design Organisation, underscored the commonalities between some of design thinking’s core ideas and the ubuntu way of life: both look to others for creative inspiration; ubuntu demands that we suspend judgement, and

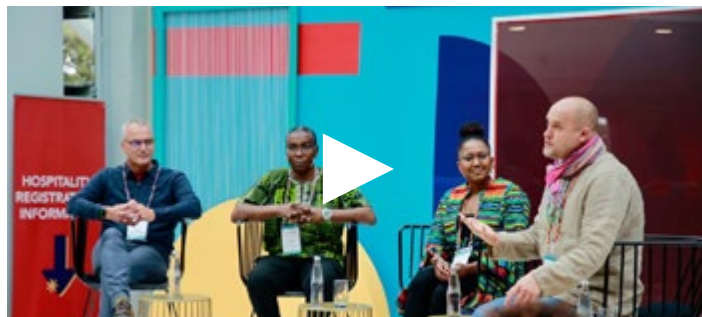
design thinking requires deferring judgement; both ubuntu and design thinking are context specific; they both focus attention to the moment – understanding the value of now. The final point, M’rithaa explained, is often the reason for misconceptions about the flexibility of ‘African time’. “If I meet someone that needs my help, and I had an appointment, that person that needs my help takes precedence – ubuntu is oriented around the urgency of the moment.”



Joern Bruecker, referencing various projects within his context of the business world, spoke of how difficult it was for him to grasp this concept of African time. “Being Swiss means that I have the beat of time keeping in my heart,” he said. But engaging with the importance of now, being in the moment, was

a powerful lesson for him. The spirit of ubuntu opened his eyes, inspiring him to ask: “How can we unite ourselves in difference, and bring the value of different experiences together?” He noted that this is key for business.

The panellists agreed that connecting ubuntu and design thinking looks like trust, leadership and enablement, where leadership starts within us. We are all leaders of ourselves – how can we translate this understanding to others to stimulate transformation in an organisation?

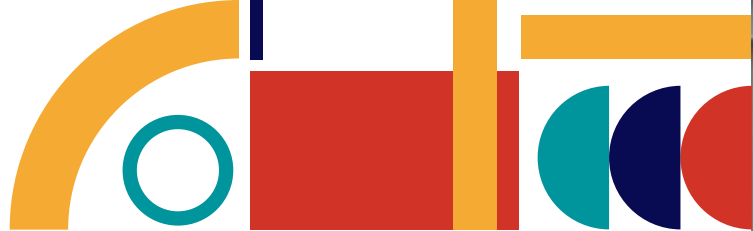


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This rich conversation, which began in discussions prior to the d.confestival, resulted in the distillation of a set of beliefs for Design at Business Ubuntu Manifesto for better design thinking.

1. I believe that changing times calls for leaders to transform their mindset to see different needs, more effectively and with more meaningful impact.
2. I believe that the values of ubuntu encapsulated in the expression, "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", meaning, "I am because we are, and, because we are, I am universal."
3. I believe that an ubuntu mindset will help us move from a 'winner takes all' world into a world where no one is left behind.
4. I believe that an ubuntu-inspired approach to leadership is a pathway to frame the leadership style we need to move into new ways of design thinking, co-creation and innovation.

5. I believe that if I lead with an abundance, ubuntu-inspired mindset, our organisations will become more compassionate places where creativity will flourish.
6. I believe that an ubuntu mindset will allow me to embrace and practice shared leadership values and behaviours focused on humanness and leading from the heart space.
7. I believe that an ubuntu mindset will allow me to create a more participatory leadership style that acknowledges the value of every stakeholder's perspective.
8. I believe that an ubuntu approach to design leadership and innovation will lead to the creation of more sustainable solutions to the real problems of our time.
9. I believe that an ubuntu leadership mindset creates a culture of innovation that will unleash the talents for sustainable business value and success.



Design thinking in practice: parallel sessions

Design practice for a new world

Interactive parallel sessions explored the ways design thinking is subverting the habits of status-quo thinking to transform problem solving in diverse settings. From spaces dedicated to educational re-training to farms in Africa and South America, new approaches are sparking powerful new innovations.

It's important that design thinking concepts are grounded in concrete practices – habits that shift the problem-solving exercise away from a top-down, expert-driven mode to an inclusive approach. The d-school Afrika is attempting to find this new centre of gravity, bridging the world of research and expertise with real-world contexts, mindful that the old way of doing things has fostered tunnel vision – limiting solutions to a single discipline, while excluding the most likely sources of those solutions. From rural Africans adapting farming practices to weather a changing climate to refugees trying to navigate a journey to safety, the communities on the end of these tools are integral to the equation.



The body as a design tool: big-screening the innovation process

For design thinking trainer **Colin Skelton**, the tools of the trade are storytelling, improvisation and that most essential machinery: the body. Skelton's work aims to restore our awareness of the unity of mind and body, highlighting a paradox at the heart it – that design thinking isn't really thinking at all.

"We're constantly receiving information from the outside world into and through our bodies which is then processed by our brains through logical thinking," said Skelton. "We then act on the world by how our bodies have interpreted and responded to this consistent flow of information."

Skelton's workshops translate design thinking principles into experiences that demonstrate how effectively the body, with its various ways of perceiving, can be applied as a design tool to uncover new, innovative perspectives that can inform solutions design through deepened insights and, more notably, deepened empathy.

Throughout the session, the audience participated in several guided exercises. In one instance, Skelton illustrated the

differences between linear and nonlinear thinking through an instinctive 'walking experiment'. Reflecting on these exercises, and bringing it back to the realm of logic, he shared a four-domain application model based on his research and experience.

Birthing through the d-school Afrika

The d-school Afrika is on the verge of expanding partnerships throughout Africa. But since 2016 we've been empowering students and professionals on the continent to use design thinking to solve problems. Here are a few of our most impactful stories of design thinking in action.



Esona Makinana, social entrepreneur and innovation coach, shared his journey that took him from rural KwaZulu Natal to the d-school Afrika as a coach. “From a very early age, I had to collaborate and work with others,” he said. “Growing up in a remote village, we had to work with our neighbours to grow food so we could eat – that was my initial experience using design thinking concepts.” He credited the d-school staff for supporting his journey. “The coaches created an enabling environment for people who usually remain invisible. Without them, my journey would have been different.”

Makinana is looking to take design thinking to the grassroots level and open it up to more people. He put the questions back to the audience: “How do we start taking design thinking and handing it over to the people? How can we use more inclusive language? How can we give it back to the people so they can figure out how it works best for them?”

Dr Nailah Conrad, lecturer at the University of Cape Town, shared how she uses design thinking in the Health Innovation and Design course within the Biomedical Engineering Master of Philosophy programme at UCT. The course includes partnerships with organisations in the health sector to co-develop innovative solutions in the space. She shared an example of a project she’s worked on with Ackino Technologies, which explored redesigning how healthcare workers in rehabilitation practices understand, assess and measure forces related to the movement of patients and sportspeople. After undergoing the iterative design thinking process, the organisation was able to implement solutions for research, testing and diagnostics in sports and teaching tools for OTs, physios and biokinetics.

Ntsako Mgiba, technopreneur and d-school Afrika alumnus, shared his journey of using design thinking to help solve safety challenges in townships. In 2015, he participated in UCT Upstarts, a social innovation challenge launched by the university to support students in developing novel business ideas. He developed Jonga, a home alarm system tailored to township



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residents. “We went on this journey to try and understand the unique challenges and constraints of this environment and build the solutions ourselves,” said Mgiba. “Design thinking is a tool that we could leverage to do this. It was through the process of humbling ourselves, going down to communities and engaging them that we made the decisions that we’ve made to design this product.”

Read more about Ntsako Mgiba’s story here:

<https://dschoolafrika.org/dscover/trends-features/how-design-led-thinking-can-take-you-to-new-heights/>

D-thinking tools for farming in rural Africa

Over half a billion Africans living in rural areas with a mobile broadband network are not using mobile internet. The internet

is one of our greatest social levellers, but for reasons that range from digital literacy and infrastructure to data affordability, it remains out of the hands of those who might benefit from it most.

Yux is a pan-African research and design company whose mission is to create digital products and services that are adapted to the African context and accessible to all on the continent. They set out to develop an agri-tech solution that would help farmers in Senegal improve efficiency and profitability – but to do this, they had to understand the farming community.

Through the work of African-based researchers who gathered data from local farmers, and alongside a team of UX/UI designers, product managers and developers, Yux designed a solution to help farmers access markets and digital advisory through financial education, while introducing them to fertilisation apps, and digital procurement.

Flipping the story: from survivors to solution-holders

When talking of the global refugee crisis, we often use numbers to underscore the urgency of the problem. The numbers are dramatic, but they can also distance us from the reality – these are not numbers, but individual lives. Even when searching for scalable solutions to human crises, empathy is key.

Raj Burman, CEO of Techfugees, reminded those gathered at the rapid challenge reframing exercise to always keep the people who are most affected by a problem at the heart of any solution-finding exercise. The session started with the stories of three refugees, told in their own voices: Olga from Ukraine; Jon from South Sudan; and Nowar from Syria. Though united the common experience of fleeing conflict, each story highlighted different challenges.

Those participating in the hackathon-inspired breakout session discussed several aspects to the refugee experience: separation from family, the journey to a new country, conflict along the way, the limited supplies and resources and the social stress of integration into a new country. Looking at the long-term survival and well-being of refugees, participants discussed the importance of education and obtaining relevant skills and experience to start a new life.

In this work of solution-exploration, humility is vital. Practically, this means looking to those most affected by tragedy as the possible solution-holders. Nowar exemplified the reframing potential through her own story: when she fled from Syria to Lebanon she started her own business helping refugees through various integration and training projects – transforming her own tragedy to give others a better chance.

D.Safari

Participants explored what design thinking looks like in practice and travelled to different neighbourhoods in Cape Town to encounter businesses, entrepreneurs, innovators and makers, thinking and doing things differently.



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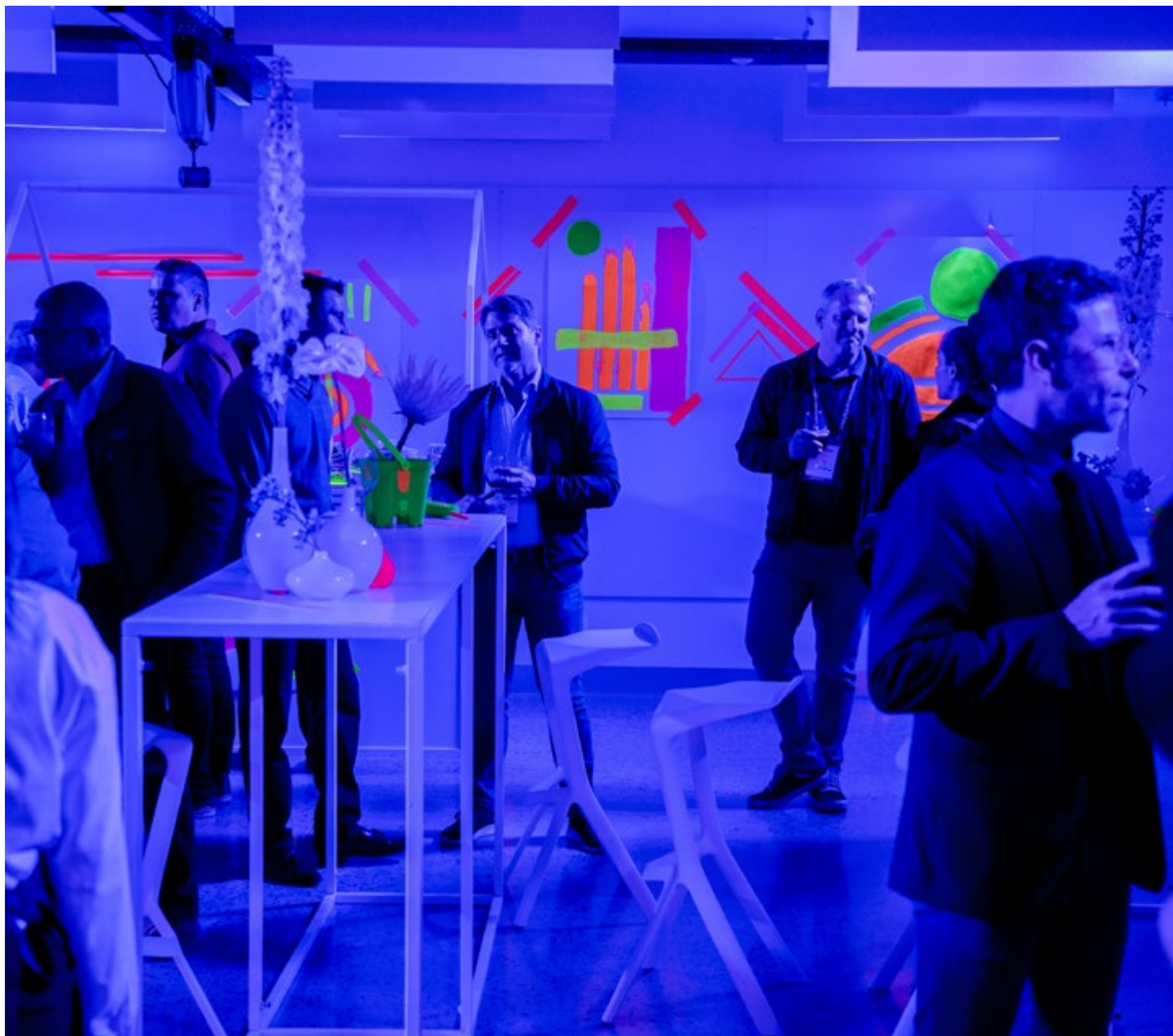
Official opening ceremony

On its second day, d.confestival goers celebrated the opening of the HPI d-school Afrika building in style. Following a panel discussion with Dr Hasso Plattner, Prof. Mamokegethi Phakeng, Founder and Director of the HPI d-school Afrika Richard Perez, and German Ambassador-Designate to South Africa Andreas Peschke, everyone was invited to partake in a culinary safari, where different foods and courses were served in different rooms of the building. "It's a chef's way of inviting you to explore the building," said MC of the evening, Africa Melani.



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Moving to mastery

Keynote speech by George Kembel

George Kembel, global design thinking leader and founder of Stanford University's d.school, reflects on the deeper layers of design thinking as a way of embodying that goes beyond the intellect, inviting audiences to discover their own natural way of moving.

"Did you feel that?" George Kembel asked the auditorium as he took the stage on day three of the d.confestival. He was referring to the short guided exercise just moments before – a stomping, clapping, snapping storm-making exercise that had the audience using their bodies to generate rain sounds together. "If we're talking about moving to mastery," he said, "that is what it's all about."



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At the core of his message was the importance of using more than our minds to be and create in the world. He invited people to tap into their bodies and intuition that which goes beyond our strictly rational selves. Kembel recalled the moment from twenty years before when he was able to trust his own felt intuition about the bigger possibilities of design thinking. "I felt a ping inside," he said. "It as the moment I realised design could be something so much bigger. And now we stand here."

The Industrial Era has severed our rational minds from our emotional being and that inner creativity to express who we really are, he said, and rationality is the smallest horsepower we have. Over time, we take on layers of our surroundings: traditions, views from our parents, political beliefs, but finding ourselves involves stripping these away to uncover the tremendous dimensionality contained within.

How we learn may be adding to these layers. "Are the disciplines we study that which encumbers us?" he asked. If so, it is up to design thinking to help us create the conditions to allow people to discover new ways of dealing with complexity and change. This will help us move in our most natural way.

Tuning into the present moment, Kembel said he felt compelled to share a few scenes from the children's story that was taking shape in his mind over the past few years. It was a story about challenging the established traditions of who holds knowledge and power in the world, and thus the potential for mastery. This was design thinking in action – improvisation, exploration, co-creation, the principle of drawing in diverse perspectives.

As evidenced through proverbs and wisdom traditions, it is clear that design thinking existed in Africa long before its modern contextual meaning. This made it especially meaningful to participate in the first d.confestival on the continent, said Kembel. "If we can find a way to harness that African ability to go beyond the linear to think and feel more holistically, we all can make the move to mastery."



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Design thinking and data

They emphasised the need to look at the phenomenon from two perspectives: social science and data science, with design thinking as the unifying framework to synthesise the qualitative and quantitative datasets they gather through both disciplines' methodologies.

On the other hand, according to the Morassi Sasso, data science approaches tell us about frequency of an occurrence and severity of a reaction. "In this domain, we use topic modelling, decision trees, and natural language processing to inform our findings," she said.

Teaching design thinking in African cultural contexts

Sharing their learnings from the last few years, head of the YUX Academy Caroline Grellier and YUX Academy alumna, Sasha Ofori, stressed the importance tailored programmes that understand the complex learning environments of African students, and provide grounding in professional settings. The academy's first short-course, which focused on design thinking, UX research and UX-UI design, trained 200 African students, and went beyond skills development to help place graduates in jobs.

“We are not training designers,” said Ofori. “We are training design thinking ambassadors.” This is perhaps the most marked distinction between conventional Western design methods that are still taught in African universities and this brand of design mindset training YUX is championing.

Grellier drove this point further by quoting Amoilo Ambole, African design thinking researcher and writer who has studied closely how Western methods fail to capture the reality and needs of the growing informal sector in African countries. She



also reminded us how central culture is in shaping perceptions of what the big problems in Africa even are. With an Afro-centric approach to teaching and training design thinking, energy and resources are moving toward the people and problems that matter here and now.

What matters for empathy to drive significant change?

“Knowledge without empathy means nothing,” said Dr Katherine Train, a researcher who studies the intersections between empathy, well-being and professional development. In fact, “the academic journey, the knowledge we gain, and the anxiety around knowing it all and holding it all in our head inhibits us from being able to hold the space for another person.”

Train’s work peels back the layers of human interaction to understand how empathy works – the ability to hold the space for another person – whether it’s a doctor in a healthcare environment, a teacher in a classroom or an architect designing a building. In interrogating empathy, Train is looking at what it takes to be most relevant and effective in this world.

How can design thinking practitioners elicit real and significant change through empathic practices? Train, whose PhD examined empathy in interactions emphasised the importance of internal work as a starting point, “those who have done self-examination are more likely to be able to hold the space for others,” she said. She went on to discuss how empathic practices mirror design thinking principles, which also teach us to embrace our holistic selves as beings of thinking, feeling and willing.

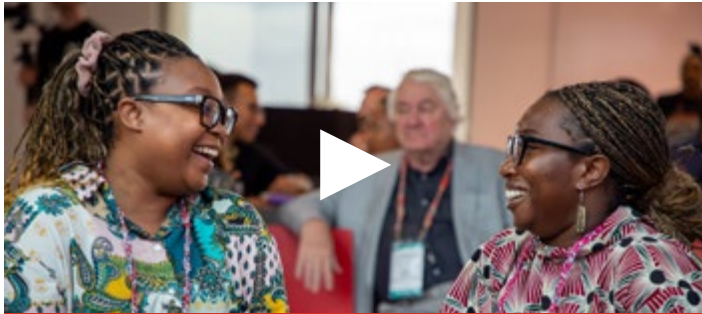
To be able to leverage empathy in practical settings, Train and co-founder Dr Lidewij Niezink of Empathic Intervention have spent seven years drawing from neuroscience, social psychology, philosophy and the arts to develop a tool for practising it. She broke down what she called integrative empathy into five core elements:

- Self-empathy – intention setting
- Kinaesthetic empathy – connection with others
- Reflective empathy – information gathering or listening to ensure individuals reach a mutual understanding
- Imaginative empathy – enquiring and finding out another individual’s perspectives
- Empathic creativity – actionable outcomes

The session ended with Train inviting the audience to share their thoughts on what they would need in order to hold space for other perspectives. What would you need to hold empathy?

What are you seeing, and what are you inspired to do?

What are the design thinking possibilities in your everyday space? This was the question posed by Dr Jakatarina Rindt and Dr Radka Newton, curricula re-designers and so-called ‘good place innovators’ from Lancaster in the UK. The duo began by sharing pictures of seemingly normal situations – an elderly couple walking down a flight of stairs; photos of coffee shop store fronts and bicycles chained to a storage railing. “What are you seeing?” asked Rindt and Newton. “And what are you inspired to do?”



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This simple exercise prompted participants to look more critically at their environment to imagine the possibilities through better space design. Participants began asking questions like: How could accessibility be improved for the elderly walking down stairs? Does coffee make the economy go round? What would happen if there were no more Costa or Starbucks cafes in the world? Is there a better way of storing bicycles than having riders chain them up to metal bars?

Economic, social, technological, ecological and physical factors shape the world around us, and living and learning effectively within their impacts requires innovation. This can be harnessed through revolutionising how we teach, and embracing a reimagined curriculum design.

Rindt and Newton shared a model mapping different approaches to learning along practice-based teaching and stakeholder involvement metrics. Design thinking has the power to facilitate regenerative learning that is practice-driven, immersive and co-creative, they said.

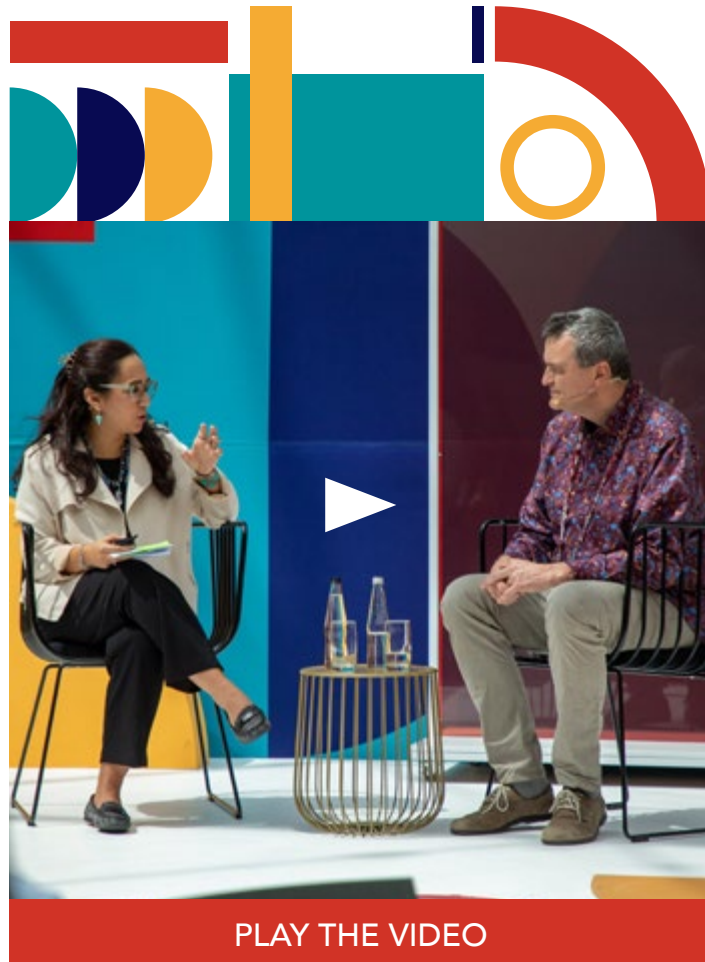
Most participants – made up of both educators and students, of academia and life – confirmed that they had experienced what Rindt and Newton termed a ‘degenerative’ mode of learning, shaped by a one-way delivery of teaching in lecture theatres, with a heavy reliance on university resources. By incorporating



and investing in place as a resource – the environment in which people learn – Rindt and Newton believe that design thinking can help utilise community inspiration, and reimagine curriculum design with local stakeholder engagement, facilitating a mutual learning exchange.



Teaching, learning and doing design thinking in Africa



How can we connect those advancing design thinking research and insights with those most likely to benefit from its potential? The posture that advocates of design thinking take when entering communities matters as much as how they present their tools – especially when it comes to Africa, with its deeply fraught history of power imbalances.

Ahead of the World-Café Harvest sessions, **Johannes Wedenig** and **Hoda Mostafa** discussed the importance of approaching different communities and sectors mindfully – whether it's youth development, business, or the social and public sectors – challenging representatives from these sectors to consider how they enter, teach and encourage communities to take up design thinking tools.

“You learn when you engage and exercise all of your rational, emotional and physical elements,” said social entrepreneur Johannes Wedenig, who shared how his organisation, Yoma, is working alongside youth to develop smart tools that help them navigate employment, matching skills with opportunities.

Hoda Mostafa echoed the message of co-creation and experiential learning. As the director at the Center for Learning and Teaching at the American University in Cairo, she works on the forefront of re-imaging education through digital learning that supports creative and critical thinking.

And at the crux of these partnerships and approach is teaching design thinking to young people: learning in action.

This might manifest in three dimensions: impacting your community by linking what you do to your surrounding environment; growing by practicing what you learn and learning from what you practice; and, thriving by means of collaboration with peers.

What does this look like outside of the traditional learning environment? The answer is that much of it must happen beyond traditional means of one-way delivery. Regenerative learning design is practice-driven, immersive and co-creationary, embracing the value of stakeholder engagement and exchange.

Mostafa and Wedenig said it is important to build these design thinking skills and competencies within real-life situations while still maintaining relevance in terms of servicing and meeting the demands of the business world.

This is especially important in the African context as new pathways are emerging, like the opportunities in the green economy, which will determine change on a global scale. Wedenig said it would be Africa, and in particular, Africa's youth that make this impact.

It is time to create a space that empowers this impact. How can different sectors cultivate design thinking in their particular contexts?

World Café highlights:

An interactive dialogue using World Café methodology harnessed the insights and experience of more than 300 participants in the room as well as online to explore this question:

How might we make the skill, the values, the mindsets of design thinking more accessible beyond the academic classroom, and most importantly, in symbiotic relationship with other sectors in Africa?

Veteran and novice design thinking practitioners from four contexts – youth entrepreneurship, corporate business, social development and the public sector – broke into small groups in four rooms to discuss how they could be most effective in catalysing change using design thinking in their sectors.



Participants cross-pollinated ideas across changing tables of conversation, sequentially exploring these questions in relation to their sector of work:

1. What needs our attention and care if we want to create accessible opportunities for learning and doing design thinking in Africa, particularly in X sector?
2. Who / what are the people, institutions and spaces who would care the most to get involved in teaching, learning and doing design thinking in Africa, particularly in X sector?
3. In an ideal world, what could an accessible design thinking learning experience look like within a win-win partnership between academia and X sector, and what steps are needed to foster this?
4. From what is emerging here, what seed might we plant together today that could have the greatest chance of bringing the skills, mindset and impact of design thinking to partners in X sector?

The d-school coaches hosting the dialogue in each room synthesised the key insights from each sector as follows:

Youth entrepreneurship

- Listen and empathise before doing.
- Start planting seeds early, and within yourself.
- Mentorship is critical, connections are essential, to ensure critical mass is achieved.

Focus questions to carry design thinking forward in the youth entrepreneurship sector:

1. What are the specific examples that are relatable in the African context that design thinking can help in addressing social and environmental issues?
2. How can we explain the impact of what design thinking can do to encourage local government support?

3. How can we encourage a culture of young people who are driven by solving problems from an elementary education level?
4. How can we integrate design thinking into different curriculums?

Corporate business sector

- Transparency and common vision are key: break down hierarchy to hear other voices.
- Be action-learning orientated to solve real problems: communities of practice must exist among academia and corporations.
- Break down the barriers of jargon and skill deficits to communicate the mutual benefit of design thinking.
- Bring more people without formal qualifications into design thinking to benefit from its knowledge.
- Establish more collaboration between academia and business where universities provide frameworks and guidance and work in a pipeline model.
- Establish a safe space to meet and experiment with design thinking – emphasising that failure is ok in a corporate space.
- Give incentives to applying design thinking in the corporate sector.

Social development sector

- Remember to listen and acknowledge and tap into the inherent genius and intelligence of the place you're working in.
- It is good to identify the local champions, but also to identify the local gatekeepers; often they are not whom you expect them to be. Get them on board and you may be amazed.
- Point out the relevance of design thinking mindsets for communities. Give them tangible examples of its value.
- Just get started, but move at the speed of trust.

Three core themes came up:

1. Training is believing. Train youth and social development institutions into believing design thinking is a human-centred design. This is what will build empathy and partnership.
2. Accessibility. Make places that teach and train design thinking easier to reach, considering physical location and barriers to technology and finances.
3. Academia and real-life bridging. Academia needs to connect students to real-world environments. This is where partnership with social development comes into being.

Public sector

- Find people who want change. Look for where that change is sprouting.
- Find your champion in that space – someone that will nurture and drive – whether that's the flagbearer or the lone soldier.
- We can understand the benefits of process through success stories of design thinking. These stories should be accessible and told in ways that are easy to connect with. They should be used to amplify the voices of communities and civil actors.
- Change and challenge hierarchy – the very idea of what the government and public sector should look like. We can do this through leveraging the lessons of the pandemic, such as how it unearthed a severe need for change.
- Use more accessible language in academia – especially, when we are talking about design thinking.
- Use real-world challenges from the public sector in research for graduate and undergraduate student theses. Have students connect around these public challenges to help define solutions.





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Africa is sounding a new way

The 2022 d.confestival was a success by any ordinary metric – attendance, which exceeded our expectations; the quality of the engagement, as we witnessed through the rich discussions and break-aways over the three days; and the learning that took hold, as evident through participants' own accounts of the lessons they're applying in their spheres of influence – classrooms, offices, studios and laboratories. Thanks to everyone involved in making this event happen – from those who prepared for months behind-the-scenes to those active at the three-day gathering – it will live far beyond its finite moment.

The conversation continues and expands to operate in broad and broadening contexts. In Africa, for instance, we are asking how we are to prepare and motivate our rising youth population to reach their potential as individuals and members of society – in an era of rapid change to work and technology, where the access and digital literacy assumed in the West may not be a given here. We know the challenges humanity is facing are too huge for any individual sector – climate change demands the contribution of scientists, politicians, educators, artists and business to work together to reverse our course. We recognise that solutions, which are manifold, lie in collaboration, diversity, listening, co-creation and iteration.

We've heard the stories and seen the data about how design thinking can help us navigate complexity, now we must put the

tool to the test. Perhaps this is what emerged most strongly from the d.confestival: design thinking practitioners must start to operate in the arena of the world's thorniest challenges.

As of early 2023, the d-school Afrika is one of just two GDTA members on the continent, along with the American University in Cairo. Following on from the d.confestival, however, where we met with diverse role players and possible partners from throughout the continent, already this is changing. To accelerate the change, we are establishing an African Collaborative Network – a community of practice of like-minded institutions of learning and development, with a focus on design thinking that is reflective and responsive to the African context

We are laying the groundwork for building further networks, knowledge and capacity around design thinking, starting with creating a glossary of design thinking terms in different African languages. We want a broad range of cultures and backgrounds seated at the problem-solving table, and we know that language has the power to both connect and alienate.

With the support of our global partners and the Hasso Plattner Foundation, we are rising to the call that was so clearly articulated at the d.confestival and truly leveraging design thinking against the world's wickedest problems. We are excited to help champion traditionally unheard voices to participate in this conversation – we think it's time for these voices to sound out a new way.

— Richard Perez,
director of d-school Afrika



d.confestival
Cape Town 2022