

Demystifying design thinking

By [Dave Nemeth](#)

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The term “design thinking” has certainly become a buzzword with many people using it and promoting this methodology as an innovative new way of thinking. Whilst it is becoming widely accepted by many corporate companies it is certainly by no means new.

The notion of design as a "way of thinking" in the sciences can be traced to Herbert A. Simon's 1969 book, [The Sciences of the Artificial](#) and in design engineering to Robert McKim's 1973 book, [Experiences in Visual Thinking](#). Bryan Lawson's 1980 book, [How Designers Think](#), primarily addressing design in architecture, began a process of generalising the concept of design thinking. – Wikipedia.



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Design thinking has, however, been an intuitive process that has actually been around for centuries. Design thinking is solution-based thinking and is a method for practical, creative resolution of problems and creation of solutions. The core of design thinking is centered around empathy and really trying to understand the client's/project's current needs and well as future needs. It relies heavily on prototyping and testing ideas and analysing the feedback of these tests so that this cycle can continue until a suitable solution is established.

Design-focused institutions worldwide, and including Africa and South Africa, have employed the methodologies and pedagogic to support design thinking for some time now. It is also important to note that design thinking may also be referred to as service design as well as ideation and one shouldn't get stuck on the word but rather the process of design thinking. Even the process is pliable and depends on the task and problem at hand. One version of the design-thinking process has seven stages: define, research, ideate, prototype, choose, implement, and learn, the process is then repeated until the best solution is formulated.

Having been involved in using the design-thinking methodology in consulting to companies for the past six years has exposed us to a host of other companies and organisations who employ the methodology. Institutions like Inscope Education Group have intentionally taught critical thinking coupled with business strategy for over 30 years. What many people and companies don't know is that Inscope started offering a Bachelor of Design specialising in Ideation in 2015. This three-year accredited degree programme will realise its first cohort of graduates in December 2017. The qualification addresses the very exciting concept of bringing design thinking to business. Similarly, the UCT School for Innovation applies this thinking.

I caught up with Helen Buhrs, the CEO and owner of Inscope, who feels that: *"It is not enough to tack design thinking onto existing business approaches. Design thinking is an intuitive process embedded in each and every facet of the learning process. Innovation and design thinking are often confused. Design thinking is a way of life, not a tool that can be applied as a solution."*

There are other great business-focused education institutions who offer design thinking within their curriculums, including Henley Business School as well as GIBS Business School and there is even talk in the industry of a dedicated design thinking MBA.

Helen left me with the following thought:

If design thinking is human-centric problem solving, then any business who puts the customer at its core is intuitively implementing the methodologies of design thinking. It is understanding the purpose of the business, the WHY...

ABOUT DAVE NEMETH

A leading blue chip international company recently identified Dave as one of the top creative influencers in the country. Dave Nemeth is a qualified designer who has held a variety of senior as well as executive positions with some of the countries leading retail groups, spanning a career of twenty years. Email Dave at daven@worldonline.co.za, follow [@davenemeth](#) on Twitter and connect on Facebook.

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