Book Review

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Images of Design Thinking – Framing the Design Thinking Practices of Innovators
by: R. Valkenburg, J. Sluijs and M. Kleinsmann
Published 2016
by Boom Uitgevers Amsterdam
Postbus 15970, 1001 NL Amsterdam, 160pp
ISBN: 978-90-587-5602-2

In short, in this book, 30 innovators discuss how they apply and what they value in design thinking.

The title suggests some maybe mental or even visual images of what design thinking is or how it can be viewed. This was not exactly the case. Rather, the 'images' or the sections of the book provide a useful entry point for a reader if he or she is new or somewhat new to design thinking and wishes to find examples that are relevant to themselves. For example, a person in a more traditional engineering field may wish to start in a section about value-driven innovation and read how design thinking was applied at, e.g., Festo or Siemens, and what the innovators selected from those firms value or emphasise during a project. A service designer might find a section on experience-driven innovation more approachable and enjoy reading how for example service design agencies view design thinking and what they value in their projects.

Once I got over my own misconception about the content and took the 'images' as four application areas or industry types in which design thinking is being applied, I enjoyed the book. It takes a broad view on what all can be considered design thinking and it is full of practical examples. It interviewed 30 people from many industries and types of companies including design agencies but also more traditional engineering design firms. Most of the examples apply also outside the section they are introduced in, which is a reason to read the entire book and only start in the section that may be most relevant to one's own industry or approach. For example, an expert engineer discusses a large-scale tunnel project where they talked to clients of clients of clients, even if not originally listed as a stakeholder, including fire brigade who would have to approve the tunnel for safety. In another section, one key principle under experience driven innovation is a very similar in engaging all stakeholders. Similarly, a key insight from a service designer applies to all of design: sense of not knowing something is far more important than knowing something.

Visually, the book is organised in colours, which makes for an easy navigation and is especially useful when referring back to a particular section of the book.

Few of the examples are quite local and to fully appreciate I feel one may need more local knowledge, but the authors do try to introduce each firm and project briefly to give proper context to each expert view.

The book is suitable for those looking for practical examples of design thinking. It can be useful to those trying to apply it themselves or trying to gain understanding of the abstract concept. It also provides a long list of real examples and makes an interesting quick read also for those in academia.

Overall, I find this book full of tweet-worthy inspirational quotes and tips. For example, "Our purpose in life is not to create profit, but to create products that add value to people's lives" @Philips; or "You have to make sure that everyone has the same idea about what you put on paper" @SiemensNL.