Applying Design Thinking to Mission-Critical Meeting Strategy

Your organization is in the midst of a massive shift. You've got an important meeting coming up. You need to transition from transactional to transformational leadership. Stimulate cross-functional collaboration. Or create a culture of innovation.

The stakes are incredibly high. You know you need more than a traditional meeting. Talking at people in a dark room for hours on end just won't cut it. What do you do? Shift away from a "content-first" approach to a "participant first" mentality by applying design thinking to your meeting strategy.

design thinking

"Design thinking is a human-centered approach that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success."
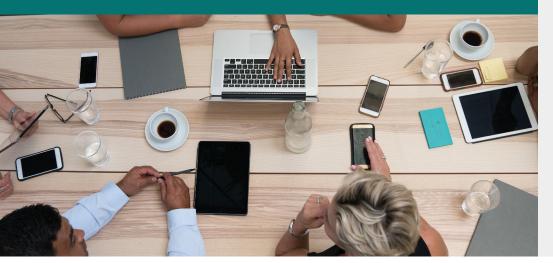
—TIM BROWN

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FOCUS ON HUMANS FIRST, CONTENT SECOND.

Adapting a participant-first mentality means moving beyond content and focusing on w hat you want your audience to understand, learn, change, act upon or feel. Design thinking addresses each of these outcomes as problem solving exercises. It taps into fundamental human needs and behavior to create solutions that are deeply rooted in participant:

- **Beliefs**
- **Motivations**
- **Emotions**
- **Cultural and social patterns**

CREATE PARADIGM-SHIFTING EXPERIENCES.

Once you've identified the human needs that will move the audience from learning to action, you need to create experiences that will encourage participants to:

- **Explore the unknown**
- **Experiment with new ways of thinking**
- **Work together collaboratively**

Design thinking doesn't settle for a breakout room and a slide deck. It thinks differently about the meeting environment to create innovative formats like:

> **"** ...a group of people from very diverse disciplines is more likely to achieve breakthroughs...**"**
>
> — HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

simulators
to test new ideas

practicums
to apply new skills

games
that incorporate real world risk and reward

think tanks
to encourage co-creation

accountability teams
to ensure full participation

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AVOID KNOWLEDGE FADE.

Neuroscience experts urge everyone to stop treating meeting attendees as passive observers. Design thinking is calibrated to deliver active involvement. It places a laser focus on the participant experience and creates solutions to:

- **Manage the attention of attendees** by adopting a problem-centered approach to new ideas

- **Enhance memory retention** with self-directed learning techniques that require critical thinking

- **Utilize emotion to cement critical concepts** because emotion and memory are interlinked with the creation of meaning and knowledge

- **Reiterate information over a longer interval** to ensure long-term retention

- **Reinforce learning and monitor retention** with tests and feedback loops

- **Reward individuals and groups** when desired behaviors are demonstrated

You *can* move from learning to action at your mission-critical meetings. The key to success lies in applying design thinking to purposefully structure meetings that inspire, motivate and generate desired behaviors.

DISSOLVE PERCEIVED BOUNDARIES.

Traditional meetings rely on a stream of internal and external "experts" who tell participants how to think and what to do. Design thinking fosters a collaborative approach that crosses business lines and organizational hierarchy.

At its core, design thinking demands an empathetic understanding of all participants and grants everyone permission to experiment and to fail. The upside is the breaking down of departmental silos and achievement of:

- **High-performance collaboration** that builds consensus

- **Dynamic discussion** that draws participants toward a shared goal

- **Issue resolution** that accelerates the pace of decision making

- **Cross-team knowledge sharing** that reveals unforeseen pitfalls and hazards and mitigates business risk

- **Provocative sessions** that challenge deeply held assumptions and make people more receptive to new strategies

- **Group interaction** that builds rapport and trust among team members

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