

## School of Design Thinking (SoDT), along with Ratan Tata Innovation Hub (RTIH), brings together Andhra Pradesh's Brightest Innovators through “*Design Spark Challenge 2026*”

*The 48-hour innovation challenge brought together a total of 15 startups shortlisted from across the state to design a human-centric learning and innovation ecosystem using the “Design The Thinking®” methodology*

**Chennai (India), June 4, 2026:** [School of Design Thinking \(SoDT\)](#), a global leader in human-centric innovation, in collaboration with **Ratan Tata Innovation Hub (RTIH)**, hosted the “**Design Spark Challenge 2026**”, a 48-hour design-led innovation challenge that brought together a total of 15 startup teams shortlisted from across Andhra Pradesh to address one of the state's most significant opportunities: building a future-ready digital learning and innovation ecosystem.

Commenced at the RTIH campus in Mangalagiri on June 2, the challenge offered participants an opportunity to apply Design Thinking to a complex public-sector challenge. Unlike conventional hackathons that focus primarily on coding and rapid prototyping, Design Spark Challenge was anchored in SoDT's proprietary “**Design The Thinking®**” methodology, which places stakeholder understanding, strategic inquiry, and problem-solving at the heart of innovation. Participants applied the **L.O.R.D.Q.® framework** (*Listen, Observe, Research/Read, Dialogue and Question Assumptions*), enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of stakeholder needs, challenge conventional thinking, and uncover insights before progressing to solution development.

The challenge sought to conceptualise a comprehensive digital ecosystem that extends beyond a traditional Learning Management System. Participants were tasked with envisioning a unified platform that seamlessly integrates learning, mentorship, opportunities, innovation support, startup enablement, and industry engagement, serving students, entrepreneurs, mentors, educational institutions, and government stakeholders across Andhra Pradesh. The programme commenced with an immersive Design Thinking masterclass conducted by SoDT, introducing participants to key frameworks, strategic tools, and methodologies designed to help them navigate ambiguity, uncover stakeholder needs, and address systemic challenges through structured innovation.



**Photo Caption:** (From L to R) Anand Babu Pushparaj, Madan Mohan Mohapatra, Dr. Hari Baabu, Dr. Anbu Rathinavel, Rahul Reddy, Lt Cdr Nikhil A and Ramnath Prabhu

Over the course of the challenge, teams translated stakeholder insights into solution concepts and working prototypes designed to address the needs of learners, mentors, educational institutions, startups, and government stakeholders. The structured design process enabled participants to move beyond surface-level solutions and focus on scalable interventions rooted in real-world needs.



Speaking about the significance of the initiative, **P. Dhatri Reddy, Chief Executive Officer, APIS & RTIH**, shared her perspective that the initiative aligns with the Government of Andhra Pradesh's vision of building a globally competitive startup ecosystem and accelerating digital transformation through innovation-driven governance. She noted that the Design Spark Challenge has the potential to generate pilot solutions that can be integrated into the state's broader innovation, education, and digital governance frameworks.

Highlighting the critical importance of problem immersion, **Dr. Anbu Rathinavel, Co-Founder and Head of School of Design Thinking**, noted, *“At SoDT, we believe that innovation begins long before solutions are created. It begins with understanding people, immersing ourselves in their realities, and asking better questions. Through our Design The Thinking® methodology, participants were encouraged to spend time with the problem, understand the ecosystem, and challenge assumptions before moving into solution design. What emerged over these 48 hours was not just a set of prototypes, but a deeper appreciation of how empathy, systems thinking, and human-centred design can unlock meaningful and scalable innovation. The quality of ideas presented by the teams demonstrates the power of staying with the problem before rushing to the solution.”*



The initiative underscores Andhra Pradesh's broader vision of leveraging innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaborative problem-solving to strengthen public infrastructure and digital service delivery. By creating a platform where startups can engage directly with public-sector challenges, the programme encourages the development of solutions that are scalable, inclusive, and aligned with the evolving needs of citizens and institutions.

The event concluded with participating teams presenting their concepts and prototypes before an eminent jury comprising experts from innovation, technology, design thinking, academia, and public policy. Solutions were evaluated on parameters including user-centricity, scalability, feasibility, security, and long-term impact.

Design Spark Challenge 2026 reflects the School of Design Thinking's mission to help institutions, governments, entrepreneurs, and educators solve complex challenges through human-centred innovation, systems thinking, and purposeful design.

**About Ratan Tata Innovation Hub (RTIH)**

The Ratan Tata Innovation Hub (RTIH), situated in Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh, is a premier state-backed institution dedicated to fostering disruptive innovation, cross-sector collaboration, and future-ready talent development to accelerate the state's digital economy and build sustainable technology pipelines for governance.

**About School of Design Thinking**

School of Design Thinking (SoDT) is India's first institution dedicated exclusively to nurturing the Design Mindset transformation as a life skill. Founded on the principle of 'Design The Thinking®', the School offers a range of programs for educators, students, institutions, and enterprises, with a strong emphasis on contextual, human-centred innovation. Its unique frameworks and immersive pedagogy have made it a strategic partner to progressive academic institutions across India and beyond. To learn more, visit: [www.d-thinking.com](http://www.d-thinking.com)

SoDT was founded by Arun Jain, Chairman and Managing Director of Intellect Design Arena, a global leader in AI-First, enterprise-grade financial technology. Rooted in the principles of Design Thinking and First Principles Thinking, Intellect has fostered a culture of continuous innovation and problem solving, inspiring the creation of SoDT to help individuals, enterprises, educational institutions, and governments address complex challenges with clarity, empathy, and purpose.

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