

Design in Daily Walks of Life

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Who'd think that design thinking and South Indian kitchen's Idli batter has a connection? Arun Jain did! The Founder, Polaris Group & Chairman & Managing Director, Intellect Design Arena Limited, Jain comes with rich entrepreneurial experience with three successful ventures, the one that commenced with Nucleus Software Workshop in 1986. In 1993, he founded Polaris Software Lab, which recorded a CAGR of over 100 per cent during the seven years period – 1993 to 2000, after using design thinking strategies.

Jain is passionate about Design Thinking as a science to create the biggest impact on Individual and organizational performance and visualises it as a platform for learning and application. Jain conducts design thinking workshops under the brand Unmukt and has set up FinTech 8012, the World's first Design Center, dedicated to financial technology. Deriving from his experiences, he conducted an interactive workshop at the Leadership Unplugged event.

While most design thinking workshops feature stories of corporates, Jain delved into the South Indian kitchen to illustrate the topic. According to him, the person who conceptualised the batter to make tiffin recipes must have been a great design thinker!

By mixing lentils and rice in the 1/3 and 2/3 proportion, one has a batter that can be used to make three recipes- idli, dosa and utthappam on subsequent days. This not only saves time for food preparation but is healthy as well with its proteins and carbohydrate content, reasons Jain on his assertion. He goes on to explain that like this, design thinking is present in how we have designed our lives both consciously and subconsciously. "Design thinking for businesses is an extension of day- to-day living," he establishes.

Sources of design thinking and approaches

"To alter the way we think, we need to listen, observe and engage in dialogue," he says. Listening without judgement, observing patterns in history to come up with algorithms and engaging in dialogue where all the participants contribute their point of view are vital.

The first approach of design thinking is the desirability, feasibility, viability approach (DFV). Under the DFV approach, human empathy drives desirability, technology makes it feasible and business makes it viable. The second approach is turning

heuristics or mystery into algorithms. The third is by looking at the requirements model.

The requirements model involves four aspects: one, looking at the needs of the customer, both stated and unstated; two, observing the patterns (positives) and the anti-patterns (negatives) of the status quo; three, connecting the dots inside and outside the system; and four, unearthing blind spots by realising what we don't know and meeting lots of people to trigger new thought processes.

“By using these models, entrepreneurs at different stages- be it starting up, establishing operations or scaling up, can utilise design thinking to make better choices,” says Jain.

Stage 1: Starting a business

An entrepreneur has to start by visualising the customers' need and translating it into an economic value the venture can provide. The next step is to decide whether to have a leader model or a follower model, i.e., to innovate or take up an already existing method and do it better.

Jain points out that very often there is a lot of anxiety to innovate. But there are numerous examples of the followers competing with the leaders such as Flipkart and Amazon, Samsung and Apple and in the auto industry, Japan competing with Germany and United States.

The mindset should be to find role models and then compete with them to become the best-in-class, he notes, stating that “this would work here” attitude is a compromise.

He draws insights from Polaris. He says, “The mandate to the research and development team was that just because we can produce cheap doesn't mean we need to sell cheap.”

This mindset of thinking about monetisation right from conceptualisation of the product is vital for scaling. The market for the product should also be targeted accordingly. Take the case of Silicon Valley, they see the market size as the entire global population of 7 billion and not a subset demography.

Stage 2: Building operations

Every entrepreneur has to keep in mind the six faces of business. These are brand capital, execution capital, leadership capital, intellectual product capital, end-customer capital and finance capital. For an entrepreneur to juggle all these six faces would no doubt be difficult, which is why Jain suggests that it is important to build a core founding team where 2-3 people get together and focus on two of the six areas each.

His next point is that entrepreneurs need to prioritise. Instead of the ABC model of prioritisation, his company follows the weightage system. Each action point is categorised with a 10-gram, 100-gram or a 1000-gram weight and prioritised accordingly. This is because the ABC model is linear whereas the weights are exponential in nature. Jain illustrates saying, “When a one-inch cube grows to a 3-inch size, the volume is increased 27 times.”

Along with theoretical knowledge, adding tactical measures like physical objects denoting the weights and stickers, helps to establish common vision. Jain also set up the FinTech 8012 Centre for design thinking in a 30,000 sq ft space facility. “We need mandirs along with spiritual gurus to ensure anchoring,” reasons Jain.

Stage 3: Scaling up the venture

At this stage the entrepreneur needs to hire people smarter than him/her and be ready to pay twice the salary for half the work done. Further, when the entrepreneur needs the employees to share the vision, he/she should also be willing to share the equity.

Jain recounts how in 1993 the company’s turnover was Rs. 2 crore and on a team outing they fixed a target to hit Rs 100 crores in 7 years. With this vision in mind, the company set up the Konark Trust employee stock option scheme for 40 employees.

In 1999 when the company went public these employees were immensely benefitted. Further, in 2000 they exceeded their target and hit Rs.260 crores in turnover. “We didn’t lose a single employee as we had a shared vision,” says Jain.

Future of design thinking in India

Jain is optimistic about the adoption of design thinking in the country. “It is only a matter of time. Silicon Valley adopted this in 1965 while we came to know in 2012. But we have made good strides,” he adds. “Actually, if you look back, our scriptures mentioned design thinking – darshan gyancharitra,” he concludes.

Profile

Arun Jain is the Founder of Polaris Group and Chairman and Managing Director of Intellect Design Arena Limited. Intellect is a specialist in applying true Digital Technologies, the world’s first full spectrum Banking and Insurance technology products company, across Consumer Banking, Central Banking, Transaction Banking, Risk, Treasury and Markets and Insurance. With revenues of Rs. 1,087 crore and an employee base of over 5000, Intellect powers over 240 leading Banks and

Financial Institutions around the globe with its suite of Products. He commenced his entrepreneurial journey by setting up Nucleus Software Workshop in 1986.

Jain, an electrical engineering, evangelizes Design Thinking through public workshops, branded as UnMukt. He architected the creation of FinTech 8012, the World's first Design Center, from Concept to Execution.

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award to Jain at the India's premier ICT Event, Connect 2016. He was also conferred the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' at the 4th edition of the Design Thinking Conclave & Awards 2018.

Best Takeaway

The mindset should be to find role models and then compete with them to become best-in-class.