# Basics of Design Thinking

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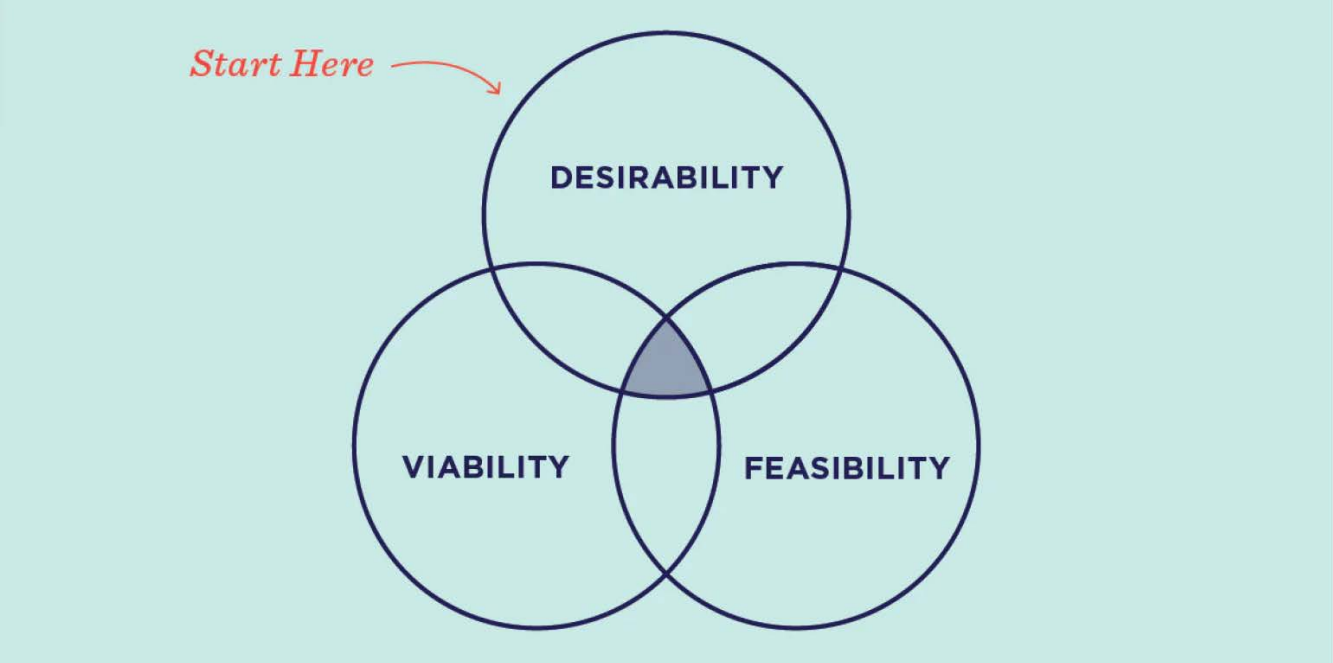
## What is Design Thinking

The purpose of design thinking is to approach a problem uniquely and innovatively while working within a standardized process, allowing designers to develop creative solutions to problems with the user and their needs in mind. Design thinking is a process that focuses on solutions to highly complex problems rather than solely focusing on the problem itself. This user-centered approach to problem-solving considers human values, needs, concerns, and motivations to create innovative solutions.

## How Does Design Thinking Work

As explained by **Ideou**, design thinking considers what is desirable to the user, what is feasible and what is economically viable.




(Image from Ideou)

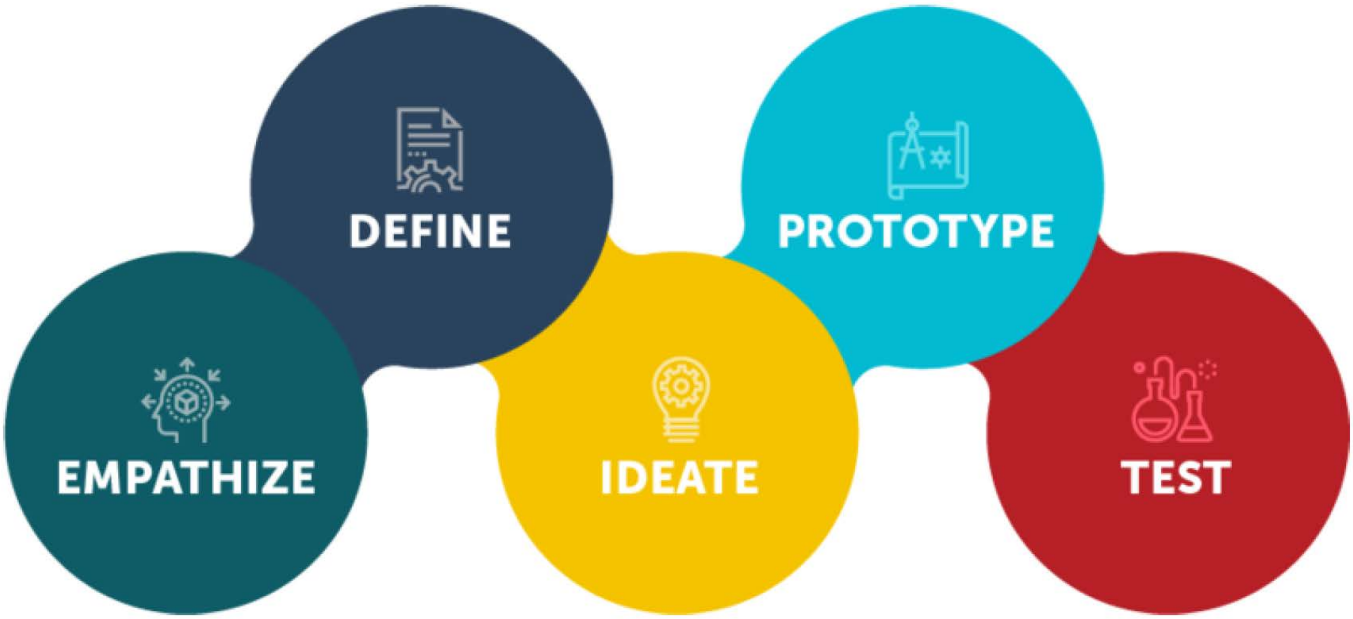
**Desirability:** What makes sense *to* people and what makes sense *for* people?
**Feasibility:** What is actually feasible and accomplishable within the foreseeable future?
**Viability:** What is likely to be most sustainable within the current environment?

This critical overlap of need, time, energy, and effort creates effective outcomes and manageable next steps in design thinking.

## What Does Design Thinking Looks Like

There are a variety of design thinking models that range from three to seven steps, all of which are non-linear and allow for the designer to go from concrete thinking to abstract thinking and back again as the process adjusts, reverses, repeats, and loops.

We utilize Stanford's Design Thinking Model, which is made up of five steps:




(Image from CX Network)

### Empathize

- **What:** Designers first build empathy for their users by engaging and observing them.
- **Why:** Learning more about them allows designers to gain a deeper understanding of their users needs, experiences, values, problems, concerns, and motivations.
- **How:** The empathize step can be carried out through surveys, interviews, or observation sessions allowing designers to build user empathy.
- **Example:** You are addressing turnover in student employees on campus, so you invite as many student employees as possible to be interviewed about their experiences and thoughts on their employment on campus.

### Define

- **What:** After learning about the user and their needs by listening and empathizing, designers create a problem statement.
- **Why:** Creating a problem statement allows designers to focus on the root problem or challenge and will guide the ongoing process.
- **How:** Designers organize the information gathered in the Empathize stage and determine the core problem from the user's perspective.
- **Example:** A common theme heard in interviews was student employees did not see connection of their current campus job to their future career, so you create a 'What If' problem statement that reads "what if all student employees could articulate the transferable skills gained in their campus job".

## Ideate

- **What:** With the user experiences and problem statement as guides, designers will go out of their comfort zones and brainstorm ideas and potential solutions to the problem.
- **Why:** Creating extensive ideas that challenge and disrupt norms allows designers to think outside of the box and turn problems into questions.
- **How:** In order to focus on quantity of ideas rather than quality of ideas, designers will use a variety of ideation techniques.
- **Example:** Based on the information gathered in the empathize stage through interviews and with the defined problem statement from Define, designers think of as many ideas as possible addressing how student employees can see and articulate their transferable skills.

## Prototype

- **What:** After creating extensive ideas, designers build representations of one or more ideas they generated together.
- **Why:** Prototyping allows designers to take on a hands-on approach to problem-solving and ensures they aren't just hypothesizing but rather truly exploring potential solutions.
- **How:** Designers physically create scaled-down, inexpensive versions of products or features of the solution using supplies such as paper and markers or even digital prototypes.
- **Example:** Designers use paper and markers to ‘design’ a process where student employees share future goals with their supervisors and create plans related to specific skills they will develop in their current job and use in their future career.

## Test

- **What:** Test the ideas and prototypes you created during Prototyping.
- **Why:** Getting user feedback and directly seeing how they think, feel, behave, and interact with the prototype will help designers make changes or alter designs to best serve the user and their needs.
- **How:** Invite student employees back and have them ‘test’ your prototype. Use information gathered in this stage to go back to prototyping or ideating new solutions.
- **Example:** Student employees come and ‘test’ the prototype created and share with designers they like the idea but want it to be done at the beginning of the year and suggest it being tied in with their evaluation as a way to check in on skill development and have an organic conversation about next steps with their supervisor throughout the year.

## Reimagining Student Employment Using Design Thinking

We know student employees and working learners are more likely to experience equity, skills, and economic mobility gaps. Using design thinking as a model for innovative, student-centered idea generation, you can redesign the student employee experience at your institution, which can result in improvements in key outcomes at your institution as well as closure of equity, skills, and mobility gaps as experienced by both student employees and their supervisors (Work+ Collective, 2023).

***Design thinking can help you:***

- Understand the unmet needs or problems your student employees are facing
- Reduce the risk (time, money, and energy) associated with creating and launching new ideas, products, or services
- Generate solutions that are human-centered with large scale impact
- Learn and iterate faster and in a supportive environment
- Collaborate better and tap into the creative potential and skillsets of individuals and teams across your campus you may not interact with daily

## Additional Helpful Design Thinking Resources

**CareerFoundry – "What Is the Design Thinking Process? The 5 Steps Complete Guide"**

**Creativity at Work – "Design Thinking as a Strategy for Innovation"**

**Harvard Business School Online – "What is Design Thinking & Why Is It Important?"**

**Harvard Business Review – "Design Thinking Comes of Age"**

**IDEOU – "The Design Thinking Process"**

**IDEOU – "What Is Design Thinking"**

**Inside design – "What is design thinking, and how do we apply it?"**

**Interaction Design Foundation – "What is Design Thinking (DT)"**

**MIT Management Sloan School – "Design thinking, explained"**

**WeWork – "What is design thinking and why is it important?"**