Seven statements about social innovation (without using the words "social", "innovation" or "social innovation")

Social innovation is a way of thinking and working about complex, long term social challenges that is built around these seven propositions:

We have to try something different

1. There are lots of difficult social issues we need to tackle that haven't improved much over many years, despite plenty of hard work and money. We have to try doing things differently, or sometimes try different things, to find a new angle and a new way of working that might give us better results.

You can't solve a problem you can't see

2. It's hard to pick the right solution or idea that might work for people from too far away or without really getting to know the full story of what is happening, and why. Given the complexity and difficulties of the problems that governments are being asked to solve, it is hard, and unwise, for policy and senior management to try and specify the precise configuration of possible solutions.

You won't know where you will end up when you start

3. That's why "every design project extends beyond the brief". No matter how straightforward and discrete a project seems at first, it will unfold in the context of a complicated, networked, and messily human organization. *(Ideo – see article attached)*

People are experts in their own lives

4. People know their lives and situation pretty well and have a realistic sense of what they want to achieve and the kind of life they'd like to have for themselves, their children and their families.

With and by, not to and for

5. The best solutions to problems tend to be designed, tested and built with and by the people and communities involved. By the same token, the least successful solutions tend to be things done to and for people (often with very good intentions) which don't factor in their close and direct involvement every step of the way.

Experiment, test, learn and adapt. A lot…

6. The best way to solve complex problems is to try out different things in controlled, low risk experiments, keep a close eye on how they actually work using a range of light-weight and rapid evaluation techniques and be prepared to change direction or try other things depending on what happens.

Solving problems, shifting structures and systems

7. Solving problems is one thing, but often the real challenge is to change the underlying systems and structures that give rise to those problems in the first place. If you do it the right way, solving problems and realizing opportunities in these complex social challenges becomes a powerful way to change the systems and structures too.

How IDEO designers persuade companies to accept change

Ashlea Powell 17 May 2016

Every design project extends beyond the brief. No matter how straightforward and discrete a project seems at first, it will unfold in the context of a complicated, networked, and messily human organization. That means that part of a designer's job must be to design tools, conversations, experiences, and environments that help the organization embrace innovation and change. At IDEO, we think of this as designing interventions.

We approach intervention design in a variety of ways, depending on the shape and scale of the organization and the innovation we are working to enable. But every intervention involves designing experiences for a project's stakeholders that go beyond logic and engage the emotions inherent in the question "Why should we change?"

Here are the three main tools we use:

Transformative empathy

When stakeholders are having trouble imagining things being different than they are, or when they are extremely removed from (and even judgmental of) their customers, the experience of being wholly immersed in somebody else's perspective can free up their thinking. The desired outcome is that stakeholders come away from the experience in agreement about the challenge we are solving and with a felt understanding of why things need to change.

More than any organization I've worked with, Weight Watchers employees are in tune with their customers' needs and feelings. That's because so many of them are members. But even for them, over time, it's easy to lose touch with the intimidation and anxiety new members feel the first time they cross the threshold of a Weight Watchers meeting.

A few years ago, Weight Watchers engaged IDEO to create a vision for the future, which often implies a digital future. However, our early research pointed to some real value in taking a hard look at the meeting, the central feature of the Weight Watchers experience. With that in mind, we designed an intervention for our client team: a visit to a megachurch in Dallas, TX. A megachurch shares qualities with a meeting – convening people with a shared goal, while also triggering similar insecurities: "Do I belong? How should I behave?" We hoped it would remind our team of New Yorkers what it feels like to arrive at a Weight Watchers meeting for the first time.

Our hypothesis proved correct. The IDEO and client teams looked for every excuse possible to get out of attending the service at the megachurch. "There's so much traffic, is it really worth it?" "We can just stream it on our phones!" We all but turned around on our way there. But we made it, and were surprised by how embraced we felt as we crossed the threshold. Even though we were late, parishioners greeted us at the door, provided us programs for the service, and guided us to an available pew – with no questioning looks, which was our unspoken fear. We all left with a new perspective, and without saying anything to each other, we knew we had to redesign the experience of showing up at a Weight Watchers meeting.

The transformative empathy intervention shifted the focus of the design challenge to not only include Weight Watchers' digital future, but also the meeting room.

Co-design

When stakeholders don't feel capable of changing the way things work today, and when there are naysayers among them, we involve them throughout the design process — in questions, prototypes, and iterations along the way. The process of co-design should make everyone responsible for approving and implementing the new vision feel invested and confident in the design.

Interbank, a Peruvian retail bank, engaged IDEO to design a more accessible banking experience for the emerging middle class in Peru. One pivotal moment of codesign occurred during a day of live prototyping in a retail branch.

Our prototype was based on a question: Will customers trust a linefree experience of waiting? In other words: if I'm not physically in line, do I trust the line? To answer this question, we worked closely with Interbank staff, including senior leaders and tellers, to transform the bank from a room full of stanchions and queues to a lounge area with soft seating and a digital queuing system. We then watched the day unfold together, testing our hypothesis that people would welcome a break from standing in line.

Customers not only appreciated the new experience, but also used the time to talk to each other and to look at the educational materials on the coffee tables. They were less agitated and even friendly to tellers once it was their turn. At the end of the day, Interbank leaders, our core team, and the bank staff debriefed about the day.

The codesign intervention built momentum for a new retail experience centered around a social lounge space where customers could learn from each other. The intervention gave Interbank staff personal stories to tell that helped the new direction spread throughout the organization.

Shared vision

When we need the support of a large and disparate group of stakeholders – perhaps more than we can involve in a transformative empathy experience or in co-design – we create a vision of the future that brings stakeholders together around where they are going and helps them imagine what it might look like. A compelling shared vision fosters a sense of belonging and inspires a group of people to create change together.

Connecticut Public Broadcasting Network (CPBN) came to IDEO in early 2014 to create a future vision for their organization. As they approached their 50-year anniversary, they looked out at the next 50 years and knew they needed to make some big changes – but what, and how?

While CPBN is a relatively small organization, they sit within the national web of public media, and have multiple businesses from radio to education, each with a complex funding model. This makes it easy to get lost in the logic of what it will take for CPBN to embrace a future vision but also all the more important. A shared vision is key to building a more resilient organization, one that's primed to keep pace with an increasing rate of change.

During our project, we turned an open space at CPBN headquarters into a gallery that displayed work-in-progress components of the vision, including quotes from Connecticut residents, a draft purpose statement, and an audience promise. We invited everyone in the organization as well as board members and outside partners to walk through the gallery and participate in creating the vision. This led to a healthy dose of debate and discussion, enabling the organization to arrive at a strong and shared stance for its future: to be the bravest public media organization, exploring topics in ways no private organization can, and empowering its audience to make the world a more extraordinary place.

As you try out these approaches, remember that no single intervention is likely to change a system. You'll need to employ different approaches at different stages of any project, depending on the stakeholders and the challenges involved. And don't forget that intervention design is about emotion as much as logic; when we are creating something new to the world, by definition there isn't enough evidence to get us where we want to go. Successful interventions are felt experiences, above all, so identify the emotional outcomes you hope to achieve, and then design a way to reach them.

https://hbr.org/2016/05/how-ideo-designers-persuade-companies-to-accept-change