

Guidebook

Upskilling for the Future: Design Thinking Intensive

Your Self-Paced Follow-Up Program

Approx. 6 hours

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Introduction

Congratulations on completing the three-day on-site workshop! Over the last few days, you immersed yourself in the principles and practices of Design Thinking. You explored how to approach complex problems creatively, worked side-by-side with diverse teammates, and learned how to put human beings at the center of your solutions. That's a significant achievement.

We know that once you return to the pressures of daily work, it can be challenging to keep the momentum going. That's why we've prepared this simple, self-paced follow-up program. It's designed to help you lock in the insights you've gained, deepen your understanding, and reinforce the behaviors that will keep you growing as a creative problem-solver.

These exercises, readings, and reflections are flexible – no strict schedule is required. Think of them as a personal toolkit to draw from, tailored to your own pace and interests. Just set aside approximately six hours total for these activities, spread out in a way that suits you best. By investing this additional time, you'll amplify the benefits of the workshop, ensuring that its lessons don't fade but instead become part of your ongoing professional practice.



Why This Matters

Human-Centeredness. Problem Exploration. Collaboration. Experimentation. These four themes are cornerstones of thriving in today's rapidly evolving work environment. Whether you're enhancing a product, refining an internal process, or tackling a strategic challenge, these principles will guide you toward more innovative and effective solutions.

- **Stay Human-Centered:** Keep the people you serve at the heart of every idea.
- **Explore Problems Fully:** Understand the nuances of a challenge before rushing to solutions.
- **Collaborate Inclusively:** Leverage diverse perspectives to build richer, more robust ideas.
- **Experiment & Learn:** Rapidly test new approaches, learn from feedback, and refine your work.

By working through the exercises and readings, and by reflecting on what you've accomplished, you'll not only remember what you learned in the workshop – you'll internalize it and use it more naturally in your day-to-day tasks.

What's included?

1. Thematic Exercises

(approx. 2 hours total)

Four short exercises (around 30 minutes each) to help you embody the key themes:

- **Human-Centeredness:** Observe colleagues or customers in their real context and note their needs.
- **Problem Exploration:** Reframe a challenge as a “How Might We...?” question.
- **Collaboration in Diverse Teams:** Plan how you’ll encourage more inclusive team input.
- **Experimentation:** Prototype a small improvement and get informal feedback.

2. Case Study Practice

(approx. 2 hours total)

Apply the Design Thinking process – Understand, Observe, Synthesize, Ideate, Prototype & Test – to a simple, real-world issue you’re facing at work. This is a step-by-step way to apply what you learned to a tangible scenario, reinforcing the mindset and methods.

3. Reading

(approx. 1.5 hours total)

Deepen your understanding with selected resources focusing on human-centeredness, problem exploration, collaboration, and experimentation.

4. Reflection Journal & Guided Questions

(approx. 0.5 hours total)

After completing the activities, take half an hour to reflect:

- How have these exercises influenced your creativity, human-centeredness, and problem-solving skills?
- In what ways have you applied the mindset of Design Thinking since the workshop ended?
- What patterns are you noticing in your approach to solving challenges differently now?

This final reflection solidifies your learnings and helps you identify tangible next steps to continue your professional growth.

Your self-paced Follow-Up-Program:

Thematic Exercises: Embodying Key Themes	Case Study Practice: Applying Design Thinking	Reading: Deepening Understanding	Reflection Journal & Guided Questions
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Approx. 2 hours

Approx. 2 hours

Approx. 1.5 hours

Approx. 0.5 hours

Tips for Getting Started

- **Be Flexible:** There's no strict sequence. Start with the theme that resonates most or tackle the case study first – whatever feels right for you.
- **Keep It Real:** Pick real tasks and real challenges from your work life. The more immediate and relevant they are, the more value you'll get from these exercises.
- **Find Your Groove:** Maybe you'll do 30 minutes each morning for a week, or one long session on a quiet afternoon. Experiment with what works best for your schedule and concentration.

Set Yourself Up for Success

You've already demonstrated a commitment to professional growth by attending the workshop. Now, by following through with these self-paced activities, you will ensure the lessons learned don't slip into the background. Instead, they will become second nature – a part of how you tackle challenges, collaborate with others, and generate creative solutions that matter.

If questions arise or you'd like further guidance, don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to support you in your continued journey toward mastering the future-oriented skills of creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Good luck, enjoy the process, and keep innovating!

1. Thematic Exercises

(2 hours total)

Overview:

You'll engage with four key themes – Human-Centeredness, Problem Exploration, Collaboration in Diverse Teams, and Experimentation. Each exercise takes about 30 minutes and is meant to reinforce the Design Thinking mindset you developed during the workshop. You can tackle them in any order and at your own pace.

Theme 1: Human-Centeredness

(30 min)

What you'll do:

Observe colleagues, stakeholders, or customers as they interact with a product, service, or process in your work environment. This can be done casually and doesn't require a formal setting. Just find a moment – perhaps before a meeting, while waiting for a colleague to complete a task, or during a customer interaction – and pay attention to what's going on.

How to approach it:

1. Identify a context:

Choose a situation relevant to your work. For example, watch how a teammate prepares for a weekly team meeting, or notice how a client navigates your company's website.

2. Observe silently & attentively:

Take mental notes of what people do, how they do it, and why they might be doing it that way. Look for emotions, subtle frustrations, shortcuts they take, or moments that delight them. Remember, this is about understanding their experience, not judging it.

3. Record your insights:

After observing for a short period (10–15 minutes is enough), jot down your key observations. Consider:

- **Needs:** What are they trying to accomplish, and why does it matter to them?
- **Pain Points:** Where do they struggle, slow down, or seem confused?
- **Positive Moments:** What seems to work well, making their task easier or more satisfying?

4. Reflect on potential opportunities:

Once you've captured your observations, think about what you've learned. Is there a simple change that could improve their experience? Is there more you'd like to understand? This reflection will set the stage for the other themes and activities that follow.



Why this matters:

By honing your ability to see your work environment and outcomes through the eyes of those impacted, you reinforce the human-centered focus fundamental to Design Thinking. This theme ensures that every idea you generate is grounded in real human needs, leading to more meaningful and effective solutions.

Theme 2: Problem Exploration

(30 min)

What you'll do:

Instead of jumping straight to solutions, you'll focus on understanding and reframing a challenge you're facing at work. The goal is to dig deeper into the problem space, uncover root causes, and capture it in a way that opens up new possibilities.

How to approach it:

1. Identify a Current Challenge:

Think of a work-related issue that's been on your mind – perhaps it's a recurring customer complaint, a slow internal process, or friction within a team. Choose something that feels important, yet not overwhelming.

2. Break It Down:

Ask yourself: What's really going on here? Write down what you know about the problem. Consider who it affects and what's at stake. Try to move beyond surface-level symptoms and look for underlying causes. For example, if the challenge is "We keep missing deadlines," dig deeper: Is the real issue unclear roles, unrealistic timelines, or a lack of resources?

3. Reframe the Problem as a "How Might We...?" Question:

Once you have a clearer picture of the core challenge, rephrase it in an open-ended, optimistic way. For instance, "We keep missing deadlines" might become "How might we better align our resources and timelines so that our team delivers on schedule?" This simple reframing shifts your mindset from feeling stuck to seeing opportunities for improvement.

4. Reflect on the Implications:

Think about what this reframed question opens up. Does it prompt new types of solutions? Does it highlight information you need to gather? This step sets you up for more effective brainstorming and problem-solving later on.



Why this matters:

By exploring a problem thoroughly before jumping to fixes, you ensure that your eventual solutions address the real issue rather than just the symptoms. This approach leads to more impactful and sustainable improvements, strengthening your problem-solving muscle for the future.

Theme 3: Collaboration in Diverse Teams

(30 min)

What you'll do:

Examine a recent team interaction and identify opportunities to foster more inclusive, dynamic collaboration. With a simple plan, you can enhance how you engage with colleagues, ensuring everyone's perspective is heard and valued.

How to approach it:

1. Recall a Recent Team Interaction:

Think back to a recent meeting, workshop, or project discussion. Who spoke up frequently? Who stayed quiet? What was the atmosphere like – were ideas flowing freely or was the conversation dominated by a few voices?

2. Identify Gaps and Opportunities:

Note any missed opportunities for broader input. Maybe a quieter team member wasn't invited to contribute, or perhaps cultural and professional backgrounds weren't fully leveraged. Consider why these gaps might have occurred – time pressure, familiarity, or assumptions about who has the best ideas?

3. Create a Simple Action Plan:

Based on these observations, commit to one or two changes for your next interaction. For example:

- Start a meeting by explicitly inviting input from each attendee.
- Use open-ended questions to draw out different viewpoints.
- Rotate facilitation roles so everyone gets a chance to shape the discussion.

4. Envision the Impact:

Consider how these adjustments might lead to richer ideas and more engaged colleagues. When people feel heard, they're more likely to contribute their best thinking and collaborate effectively.



Why this matters:

Innovation and problem-solving flourish in diverse, inclusive environments. By making small shifts to how you run meetings or engage in group work, you'll unlock more creative thinking, build trust, and strengthen team performance over time.

Theme 4: Experimentation

(ca. 30 Min)

What you'll do:

Try out a small, low-risk improvement related to your work. This is a chance to move from talk to action: pick something simple, prototype a quick solution, and gather instant feedback. The goal is to embrace a test-and-learn mindset rather than waiting for a “perfect” plan.

How to approach it:

1. Choose a Small Challenge:

It might be a recurring glitch in a process, a confusing internal document, or a communication gap between departments. The key is that it should be small enough to prototype and test easily.

2. Prototype a Simple Solution:

For example, if internal emails are often misunderstood, draft a new, clearer email template and share it with a colleague. If you find your meeting agenda too cluttered, create a simplified version and use it in your next meeting.

3. Seek Quick Feedback:

Show your prototype to a colleague, stakeholder, or end-user and ask what they think. Don't over-explain – just let them react honestly. Listen closely to their feedback and suggestions.

4. Reflect on What You Learned:

How did this quick test shape your understanding of the problem and its potential solution? What would you do differently next time? Even if the idea wasn't perfect, the act of trying something and learning from it is what experimentation is all about.



Why this matters:

Experimentation encourages you to learn by doing. It breaks down big challenges into manageable steps, reduces the fear of failure, and speeds up the path to better results. Over time, this mindset leads to more innovative solutions, as you continually refine and adapt based on real-world input.

2) Case Study Practice

(2 hours)

What you'll do:

In this exercise, you'll apply the full Design Thinking process – **Understand, Observe, Synthesize, Ideate, Prototype & Test** – to a real challenge drawn from your own work. The goal is to bring everything you've learned together in a structured, hands-on way. By carving out roughly two hours for this, you can work in manageable steps, integrating each phase into your daily routine rather than tackling it all at once. Think of this as a personal mini-project that allows you to deepen your skills and create a tangible improvement.

Steps & Guidance

1. Understand

(about 20 min)

- **Choose a Meaningful Challenge:** Pick something small and concrete that will benefit from improvement – maybe refining a team meeting format, streamlining how you handle a recurring customer request, or simplifying an internal reporting process. It could also be something that's not work-related.
- **Clarify the Context:** Write down what you know. Who's involved? What outcome are you seeking? What's currently not working as well as it could?

This initial understanding stage sets the foundation. By defining the problem space clearly, you ensure that the next steps are grounded in reality rather than guesswork.

2. Observe

(about 20 min)

- **Gather Input from the Real World:** Observe the current situation just as it is. Watch a meeting unfold, review a recent customer email thread, or ask a colleague about their experience with the process.
- **Look for Patterns:** Note behaviors, pain points, and areas of confusion or inefficiency.
- **Stay Curious:** Approach your observation as a detective – uncover the why behind what you see, and remain open to surprises.

This phase is about getting closer to the human realities behind the challenge, ensuring that any solution you develop speaks to actual needs.

3. Synthesize

(about 20 min)

- **Make Sense of What You Observed:** Review your notes and highlight recurring themes or patterns. Are there common bottlenecks, misunderstandings, or unmet needs emerging from your observations?
- **Identify Key Insights:** Turn these patterns into insights. For example: “Team members often hesitate to share ideas because the meeting format is too rigid.” Or “Customers repeatedly struggle with the same form because its instructions are unclear.”

Synthesis helps you distill raw observations into meaningful insights, revealing what’s really at the heart of the challenge.

4. Ideate

(about 30 min)

- **Generate Multiple Solutions:** Set a timer for 10 – 15 minutes and jot down as many potential ideas as you can – without judging or filtering them. From small tweaks (e.g., “Add a clarifying note to the form”) to more ambitious changes (e.g., “Redesign the entire onboarding experience”), aim for breadth.
- **Refine and Select:** After brainstorming, review your ideas. Which ones seem both impactful and feasible? Choose one or two to carry forward.
- **Keep an Open Mind:** Even if an idea feels unconventional, consider how a small test might provide valuable learning.

Ideation encourages you to think creatively, pushing past the obvious fixes to uncover more innovative possibilities.

5. Prototyp & Test

(about 30 min)

- **Create a Simple Prototype:** You don’t need fancy tools. A prototype could be a revised meeting agenda, a rough sketch of a new layout for a report, or a quick mock-up of a new form. The point is to make your idea tangible enough to get feedback.
- **Gather Feedback:** Show your prototype to a colleague, a small group, or even a trusted customer. Ask them what’s clear, what’s confusing, and what could be improved.
- **Iterate Quickly:** Based on their reactions, make simple adjustments. The goal isn’t perfection but learning through doing and refining.

By prototyping and testing, you turn your idea into something concrete and discover what really resonates – and what needs tweaking.



Why this matters

The Case Study Practice brings together all the elements of Design Thinking that you touched on during the workshop and in the thematic exercises. It’s a test-run of the entire process, giving you confidence and practice in applying these methods to your real work. By doing it step-by-step and fitting it into your everyday routine, you’ll build new problem-solving habits that last beyond this exercise.

Tips for Success

- **Keep it Manageable:** Don't pick a huge, complex issue. Smaller is better – you're practicing a mindset and method, not trying to solve your company's biggest strategic problem overnight.
- **Embrace Imperfection:** This is about learning and evolving. Your first prototype might be rough, and that's okay.
- **Stay curious:** The more open and curious you remain – about the people involved, the root causes, and the range of possible solutions – the richer your outcomes will be.

By completing this case study, you'll have firsthand experience in applying Design Thinking end-to-end, leaving you better equipped to tackle future challenges with creativity, collaboration, and human-centered insight.

3) Reading

(1.5 hours total)

What you'll do:

You've immersed yourself in hands-on exercises, explored a real-life challenge, and begun incorporating Design Thinking into your daily work. Now, it's time to reinforce those lessons with a bit of focused reading. Over about an hour and a half, you'll explore articles and resources that deepen your understanding of human-centeredness, problem exploration, collaboration, and experimentation. These readings will complement what you've already practiced, offering insights, examples, and practical tips to solidify and expand your skill set.

How to approach It:

1. Read at Least Two Recommended Papers Relating to the 4 Key Themes:

- **Human-Centeredness:**
Under the Umbrella: Components of Empathy in Psychology and Design (Study as PDF)
- **Problem Exploration:**
Are You Solving the Right Problems? (Online Article)
- **Collaboration in Diverse Teams:**
Design Thinking and Teamwork – Measuring Impact (Study as PDF)
- **Experimentation:**
Pretotype It (Book as PDF)

2. Take Notes on Insights and Practical Tips:

As you read, highlight new strategies that catch your attention. This record will become a handy reference guide when you face similar challenges in the future.

3. Reflect on what you have learned:

After reading, take a moment to pause and think: Are there any approaches or ideas you want to apply immediately? Or perspectives that might influence how you handle future challenges?



Why this matters

Reading is a critical complement to doing. The exercises and case study gave you firsthand experience; now, these articles and guides will slightly solidify your theoretical underpinnings, provide language and frameworks to communicate your approach to others, and spark new ideas you might not have considered. If you can, read more, e.g., based on our literature recommendations list or ask the coaches for their favorites.

4) Reflection Journal & Guided Questions

(0.5 hours total)

What you'll do:

After completing the exercises, case study, and reading, set aside about 30 min to pause and reflect. This is your chance to synthesize what you've learned, acknowledge the progress you've made, and consider how you'll carry these new insights forward. By writing down your thoughts, you'll transform fleeting impressions into actionable strategies and a clearer vision for the future.

How to approach it:

1. Find a quiet spot:

Choose a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted. Open a notebook or a blank document and let your thoughts flow.

2. Guided Questions:

Reflect on the four core elements of Design Thinking – **Human-Centeredness**, **Problem Exploration**, **Collaboration in Diverse Teams**, and **Experimentation**. Pick at least one of the questions for each element and note your response.

a. Human-Centeredness

- How have you improved your ability to see problems from the perspective of others?
- Can you recall a moment during the exercises or case study where understanding someone's needs led to a clearer or better solution?
- How will you continue to prioritize empathy in your daily work?

b. Problem Exploration

- How has your approach to exploring problems changed?
- Did reframing challenges as "How Might We ...?" questions open up new possibilities?
- Are you more comfortable pausing to investigate the root cause of an issue before jumping into solutions?

c. Collaboration in Diverse Teams

- What have you noticed about how diversity within teams can enhance problem-solving?
- How will you encourage more inclusive collaboration going forward?
- Did you try any new ways to engage quieter team members or bring in different perspectives? What worked?

d. Experimentation

- How has embracing a test-and-learn mindset influenced your confidence in trying new ideas?
- What did you learn from prototyping and gathering feedback, even if the solution wasn't perfect?
- How can you incorporate more iterative experimentation into your routine?

3. Identify Key Takeaways & Next Steps:

Based on your reflections, pinpoint one or two habits, methods, or perspectives you'd like to continue developing. Consider how you'll integrate them into your regular work routines. Maybe you'll start meetings by restating the user's perspective, or perhaps you'll schedule a quick prototype test next time you encounter a tough problem.



Why this matters

Reflection ensures that your learning doesn't end when you close this document. It helps you internalize the Design Thinking mindsets and translate them into everyday behavior. By consciously acknowledging what you've gained, you make it more likely you'll continue applying these lessons well into the future.

Outro

You've now completed all four parts of your self-paced follow-up program. This journey was designed to help you reinforce and expand on the skills and mindsets introduced in the three-day on-site workshop.

Moving Forward:

As you continue to face new challenges, remember the principles you've embraced: stay curious about the people involved, explore the problem deeply before jumping to fixes, bring diverse voices into the conversation, and don't hesitate to experiment and iterate. You are equipped not only to solve problems more creatively and collaboratively but also to lead by example, inspiring others to adopt a human-centered, forward-thinking approach.

Keep Evolving

The world changes quickly, and so do the needs and expectations of those we serve. By maintaining a Design Thinking mindset – rooted in empathy, inclusivity, exploration, and iteration – you'll remain ready to adapt, improve, and thrive. Thank you for investing in your growth, and here's to continuing your journey as a creative, collaborative, and effective problem-solver.

Follow-Up Meeting of the Follow-Up Programs:

If you can, join the online exchange session with the other participants as communicated in the workshop. We're looking forward to seeing you there, as well as in other upcoming formats!



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