

Ross Garner 0:08

Hello, you're listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast developed to help you build your leadership and management skills. I'm Ross Garner,

Nathalie Nahai 0:15

and I'm Nathalie Nahai.

Ross Garner 0:17

This week, we're asking how can we solve problems with design thinking? What does it mean? How do we apply it? And can design thinking also help us solve larger issues playing social injustice or climate change or COVID? So it is a big challenge for our guests today.

To answer these questions, we're speaking to Nick Stanhope, founder of Shift, a UK nonprofit that brings together design thinking and collective ways of working to help tackle inequalities. How are you doing, Nick?

Nick Stanhope 0:45

Hello, yeah, very good to join you. Thanks for having me.

Ross Garner 0:48

Good to have you here. I wonder if you could get us started with a description of what design thinking is unconsciousness might be a new term for a lot of our audience.

Nick Stanhope 0:58

Design thinking, I think is probably I mean, I just did little bit of context I didn't, I didn't kind of start out as a designer, I worked as a community and youth worker for about 10 years.

And then kind of gravitated towards design, as a bit of a response to the fact that kind of as a collegiate youth worker, you're very much at the mercy of, of quite a lot of kind of systems and processes and kind of forms of management, and that don't have much to do with kind of any sort of kind of, I don't know, rigorous or systematic way of kind of learning and adapting and improving.

You know, so you're constantly learning things from your work, and there's nowhere for those to go, the systems never improve the ways of working and everyone seem to get better.

Ross Garner 1:47

And there's a contribute in terms of like, funding and bureaucracy work together. And so yeah,

Nick Stanhope 1:53

it's so many different ways. So in different ways. So So I mean, for example, the what tends to happen with the vast majority of the work that I was doing, is it the grant funded, or commissions, there'll be a series of deliverables, a series of outputs and outcomes that will be promised within that funding grant, were within that funding proposal, or within that commission, and they would be kind of essentially the Bible truth through which you have to plough regardless of whether or not they continue to be right continue to be what people and communities actually wanted or needed.

There was there was no scope for any sort of failure, even though everything basically failed. In in terms of what had been promised to the commissioner or funder, there was very little home to, to kind of have a said to learn and adapt as you went.

And I think that, so So for me, I kind of gravitated towards design, thinking by being exposed to it in different ways, as you know, essentially a set of mindsets that, within that context were very appealing, you know, they embraced a failure.

And they, they allowed you to kind of exist within ambiguity and complexity. And in often very dysfunctional systems, the you know, that was that was really appealing, that was really attractive, the likeness of prototyping and testing, which is, again, a key part of design thinking, this idea that you, you know, you develop some sort of insight by building up an understanding of people's lives, or, you know, how a particular service works, or how a particular system works.

And then you you, you know, take these experimental leaps with prototypes, you test them, you see how they work, you were to rate them, that idea of lightly holding a kind of partial solution was really attractive compared to very strongly. I'm holding a kind of complete solution and, and never allowing, you know, failure or, or ambiguity, or nuance to flow into that. The use of data to learn and adapt, again, you know, hugely appealing again, when you're doing that kind of work when you're, you know, really faced with a lot of just, you know, very subjective, strongly held views from those in power, etc.

The centrality of humans and their stories and experiences within the design process, obviously, also very appealing. You know, humans can often feel very distant from decision makers, from commissioners, from funders from those who are kind of running and delivering services, the kind of surfing community services I was working on. So, so that that was kind of way I found my way.

That's how I find my way into design. And so I guess in summary, design thinking, you know, it represents kind of meeting point of lots of different disciplines which will have a different flavours of this, but fundamentally, I think it makes sense as a set of mindsets. So things like empathy, and curiosity, kind of ease with ambiguity and open mindedness about failure and a set of processes This. So processes like kind of user centred research that that idea of kind of learning in a very, in a very human centred way, by in terms of how PII how why people make particular decisions when within particular contexts, processes of Gorgui described as divergent and convergent thinking.

So this idea of really opening up the process or the design space to all sorts of different, you know, possibilities and opportunities, and then, and then kind of narrowing that more convergently by exposing them to feedback or exposing them to testing or cycles of prototyping, testing and learning iterating, you know, that fundamental kind of process of hard design, thinking, and then kind of processes of implementation, and then, you know, things like data driven continuous improvement as jargony as that sounds idea of essentially politely some sort of product or service into, you know, into a way of continuous to see how it's working, and see how it can be improved and adapted. So I haven't been

Ross Garner 6:04

there. Yeah, yeah, just because so there is a lot in there, he has had to design data, rapid prototyping iteration, these are words that I think have filtered through to a lot of leaders and managers and just business speak in general. And it can tiptoe towards, of course, bullshit. Bollocks. But that's only that's what you're talking about.

So I wonder if you could give an example of applying design thinking to maybe put some structure around what that looks like, when it's when it's brought together? It? Just,

Nick Stanhope 6:40

I just, I mean, there was heaps and bullshit and bullets, right. And those are mainly what I'm here to talk about. Because I think I lay it over. I mean, we will, we'll come back to that well, where I kind of how deep the bullshit goes.

But I think that I still maintaining the idea that design thinking can be very useful, but there is absolutely in the way it's framed in the way it's described. And in its actual the kind of overall role it plays. There is heaps and heaps of bullshit and pseudoscience and all that kind of stuff. So but so but taking it back down to the well, what are we talking about?

I mean, I'll give you an example of of a kind of design process that would have that would be common at shift. We've kind of I mean, this is an example of some of our work within food. And, you know, one strand of our work over the last 10 years has tried to understand and respond to the problem of the relationship between diet and in particular fast food problems, such as obesity and type two diabetes, that's one that we've particularly amongst children kind of living in, in areas with kind of, you know, low income, high levels of poverty.

And obviously, we you know, the nature of that, and complexity, that problem is relatively well understood. Now, about 20% of 10 to 11 year olds are classified as obese. And that's, that's twice as high in areas. And prevalence is, is nearly twice as high in areas of have the lowest income, and it's a growing problem.

It's doubled over the last 20 years, massive NHS kind of bills attached to it massive kind of costs, in terms of standard of living, and as we saw during the pandemic, you know, when the kind of mortality rates were significantly higher amongst those who were kind of overweight or obese, so so, you know, lots and lots of layers of, of, and costs related to this relationship, this unhealthy relationship that we have with food. So how do we bring in design process that what did that look like?

How did we apply some of those mindsets and processes that I just described? So first of all, it's I guess, starts out with the idea of, of empathy, and building an understanding of how people live their lives within these communities, how they are affected by and how they affect something like a food environment. So to say a little story that because we we worked a lot in Birmingham, South Birmingham and in East London, to share kind of one of those stories.

We spent a lot of time on Soho Road in Handsworth in Birmingham, where there's like a real glut of of chicken shops and other fast food outlets. There was a boy that we would see every day there. And about four o'clock every day, he would come in after school with his mum and his two brothers, they'd order a massive bag of chicken, loads of chips, and Coke, all clearly had some health problems associated with poor diet. And at that point, there would be a kind of an instinct to be quite judgmental of that mother.

That's the kind of public health instinct sees her as kind of lacking in information or skills or motivation, you know, that they're all of that judgement kind of flow. was through. But the more time that you spend kind of empathetically and neutrally understanding the kind of constraints and pressures of how that family lived their lives. And we know that can be described as a kind of ethnographic process, sometimes within design as well. So the more you understood, and the more sense everything made, the boys mom had two jobs, she had little or no support, she had significant financial problems, the boys boys had behavioural emotional issues.

She had a kind of partners, who, who wore no help whatsoever with that, and one of whom had been abusive. So within that context, this decision to go and

spend 30 minutes, you know, with a big bucket of chicken and chips, and Coke was by far and away the best, the most sensible decision you could make, for seven quid in no time at all the boys were happy, settled, quiet, full, all the near term and most important, practical and emotional needs were met within a very kind of low bandwidth day.

And that is something that needed to be kind of deeply empathetically understood. By putting that, you know, that family, that boy, that mom at the heart of the heart of that, and so out of that, learning how that empathetic learning came, you know, with some insights and design insights or opportunities, in order to basically any effort to reduce the risk of obesity, and the lifelong health issues that can come with that either had to fit within that very, very low bandwidth, it's in terms of time, and money, and relevance and ease, you know, the all those constraints and pressures and stresses and pressures that that man was facing, or they had to increase that bandwidth, right.

So they had to take on quest says, you know, questions like child care and living wage and access to better housing and transport. And, and then obviously, that, you know, relate strongly to issues of kind of, you know, structural inequality and, and the way in which, the way in which, you know, different groups are kind of regarded and judged, and the way in which that they're the environments they live in is kind of a result of that.

So, yeah, so any, any, any, any kind of response had to had to kind of understand and fit within those, those, like, those kinds of insights. And so our response to that was, you know, we had a role in it, because of our previous experience, and because of the nature of the project, to help try and bring more fast food services to market to essentially try and populate that environment with forms of, of kind of fast food that was equally, you know, cheap and relevant and accessible, but would be considerably healthier. And so that's gonna

Ross Garner 12:56

be radical idea, though, right? Because you're, you look at that and think, Oh, the problem here at CES to many fast food outlets, and your solution was to

increase the number of fast food markets, but you're sort of squeezing out the bad ones. Right. And,

Nick Stanhope 13:08

yeah, I think that's a really interesting response. I think you're right. In some ways, I think, though, that fast food isn't the problem, right? I mean, the, and certainly the way the government or public health would look at it as they're not talking about kind of Leon or pret when they say there's a fast food problem, they're talking about poor people's fast food, right?

So they're the, you know, fast food in and of itself, or something, which is cheap, convenient, fits into a busy day, can be picked up and eaten quickly, you know, brilliant, like, well, what you know, there's not that's not it's the, it's the fact that the only way the market can behave or based on commercial incentives is to push, you know, a seven quid vegan route up and wanting to the market which is healthy and ethically sourced and the rest of it and kind of one pound chicken and chips with like a day's worth of, you know, fat and salt and in in, in one serving.

So how do you the Radek, I think it is radical, because it's extremely hard to then compete against that extremely low cost, low quality, fast food, which are also like, you know, those businesses running those which are very often independent are also hugely constrained themselves, you could do a version of that view of the mum through the eyes of someone control, I'm trying to run one of these outlets so it's no judgement of them but so so we then you know, that then unlock the next stage was working through a series of cycles of prototyping and testing, starting with very lightweight local and online tests that were very cheap and failed very quickly.

And, and, and we ran a whole series of mobile outlets in different areas because we could move them around and see where the demand was and how that relates to kind of local tastes and culture and preferences. And we ran you know, kind of, we sold food online without actually having to sell food online. It says you can use Google ads and Facebook ads to kind of run services very quickly and see what kind of uptake there is a particular audiences in particular areas.

So very, very rapid cycles of testing on particular solutions. And then, and then, you know, over the last, we've launched a number of kind of different healthy fast food brands, from that kind of on street services, through to kind of online services, with any with in, you know, partners, particularly in South London. So, and then obviously, you've got kind of ongoing cycles of kind of, you know, continuing to iterate and improve that, based on what we've always taught what I just described, it's very hard, right?

Because what very often happens is, you can find ways of making those services more profitable and more scalable, but then they lose their, you know, the kind of impact that you're gonna have. So So then you've got an ongoing balance to strike, which wouldn't be true in a commercial setting, where you're trying very, very hard to hold on to, and deepen the impact and benefits for health. And for issues, you know, like access to kind of healthy food within very inequitable kind of landscapes.

Nathalie Nahai 16:09

So it seems to me like there's this really wonderful psychological lens that you're bringing to the issue to understand the nuance of it. The complexity, the ambiguity, you know, it's very human centred, as well as bringing in the design thinking and the technological know how kind of like the Lean Startup method being able to respond in an agile way.

But then there's also this question of how do you incentivize people, when it's questions that are connected to systemic inequality, systemic problems that need a longer term solution in order to change, some kind of have the opinion that you need to be able to approach a problem from various different perspectives, in order for us to make progress? So you need to do the grassroots stuff, the immediate needs? Now?

How do we shift the needles for people whose lives are affected on a day to day basis that you talked about, for instance, the example you gave with the mother and her children? But at the same time, how do you apply design thinking on a much larger scale, whether it's at a social level within

communities, within businesses and organisations so that you can get that larger kind of change? Where you're moving the ship slightly, but you're getting the trajectory to a better direction?

Nick Stanhope 17:18

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I know. So. So there are two kinds of massive doubts and limitations I have about the processor just described. And one would be the one that you just described, which is I mean, I'll come on to the response to this, because there is this kind of branch of design called systems design, which is potential response to that, but also got its own limitations. But essentially, they said, well, the product, the approach I just described.

You know, it's you would, the ideal would be that that team of people, the team that I was part of, was kind of making its greatest possible contribution to the efforts of many, many, many, many others who have and are working on a similar question with similar ends. However, baked into that design process, and that human centred learning there is there's very little emphasis on how you acknowledge and have a kind of mutual awareness of and an interdependence with all of those other kinds of, you know, sources of learning. And very often learning gets repeated very, very often. I mean, we'll get briefs through for the same research projects, talking to the same groups of people about the same questions.

Which, because there is, you know, the way in which learning gets done, it's not very open, it's not in format, other people can access, it's not designed to be a contribution to collective learning, it's designed to be of contribution to like, and I'll come back to this as to what within design thinking is supposed to do this? And what is, you know, because design thinking comes from a commercial setting, where that knowledge and understanding would be part of your IP, right. So it's not about concrete neglected progress.

It's about winning a slice of a kind of very competitive market. So So anyway, come back to that, but But yeah, it also potentially seeks glory, via innovation a bit too readily kind of new solutions for the end user, where design is often where design leads you and again, how much of that is inherent, because of its commercial heritage, where innovation is king and how much of it is, you know, I

guess just human ego,

Ross Garner 19:28

you just want to know something novel and new,

Nick Stanhope 19:30

exactly, exactly that. So, but yes, this idea of focusing on users understanding their world, yes compassionately, empathetically, but creating new solutions for them, I mean, that may or may not be what was needed of you and your resource and the team that you bring at that moment within that very complex system that you described.

So and either so I think that the, you know, if you look at each stage of the design process, it is inherently quite poor. by being aware of and working in a connected or interdependent way with with many others that is being, you know, we just done a big review of all sorts of different collective methodologies of which there are more and more all the time around collective, you know, collective impact systems design, kind of running these connected portfolios of experiments.

So there are methods emerging, there are approaches emerging, I'm a bit unsure, you know, there's always this question as to where the, where design is, and thinking is at its best, I guess I do feel like it is at its best within that commercial environment where you are trying to generate and hold on to kind of ownable IP and and and commercialise that.

And so and it does there is a 10 should have implied in the Vironment I talked about, it doesn't mean it can't still be useful, doesn't mean it can still work within that complex kind of environment. But when we've we've thought a lot about moving away, we've moved quite a lot away from products and services, like the ones I've described, towards more how use design thinking to connect lots of actors working towards similar ends within what can be described as kind of ecosystem.

And that is, that is still that is, you know, that those cycles that describe those mindsets described as still useful. So it can be adapted and extended. But But yeah, that lack of mutual awareness, that lack of kind of intention to contribute to collective progress, as you describe that, to me would be a real issue with with the kind of process I that we work through

Nathalie Nahai 21:32

different tools for different things. Yes,

Ross Garner 21:35

let's, let's stick to the grubby commercial world just for five minutes, because I think a lot of our audience will work in that commercial world. And probably what's happened over the past 20 minutes or half an upswing of 10 minutes of super excited about design thinking. And then this kind of, really, is it not actually as good as we thought over the next few minutes.

But I think in the commercial context, you have, there's, there's a smaller ecosystem, right and more centralised control of it. So you don't have the same level of and lots of different agencies doing different things that you do have in the social space.

So assuming that our audience are excited about the prospect of design thinking, one of the things they're going to have to do probably is go budget to pursue these projects unconscious, you have to get budget for your projects, and you have to convince someone to give you money, with ill defined outcome under promise of repeated failures.

So I think probably what you're trying to do is the same as for, you know, a minute seeking approval for a budget is trying to do putting together a business case. So how do you get money in order to pursue Design Thinking projects?

Nick Stanhope 22:41

Ah, good question. I mean, I think that so I think the challenges we face in that are very, would be very, I mean, I've also worked in, you know, we've we've, you know, spun out commercial startups, we've worked in that environment with our

commercial partners. So we're obviously not naive about or unaware of those, that context of those pressures.

And I also think they're very similar, because you normally have managers or commissioners, or funders, or budget holders, or Finance Directors who want clarity and surety, they want to say, right, this is the money we're putting in, what did we get out of that.

And, and whether that's in terms of deliverables, or outputs and outcomes, or then that, you know, they're normally looking for a normally the higher you go within that decision making change. So the boards of trustees of foundations, and notoriously kind of narrow in the way they look at value for money, and they want to see numbers of kids, you know, affected for x pounds, and that's really what they're, so you're facing that.

And the way in which you overcome that is by a very waterfall style plan of saying, you know, we'll do this, and then this, and then this, and then this and, and it all looks very neat. And it produces a kind of predictable, and resolve some kind, whereas design is saying, we don't know very much beyond a set of intentions and a set of constraints.

So what do we want to achieve? And why? And what are our constraints? You know, what was the environment we're working in? What kind of resources do we have available, and a process where you're saying we'll learn, we'll identify, you know, some insights will create some opportunities, we'll test those, we'll hold them lightly.

You know, we'll iterate we'll pivot as in meaning we'll move from, you know, one, I guess, opportunity to another one having learned whether that worked or not, and we will follow our noses will follow the design process towards, you know, solutions or contributions or refinements that are better than what we have now. And that is, that is a that's a really hard thing to sell into, you know, budget holders or managers or directors or funders or commissioners who don't have any experience of working like that. And that is a massive problem.

This is why your question really comes back to organisational culture. And I would be a big believer that design thinking is really the fundamentals of a good kind of represent the fundamental components can be reflected in the fundamental components of organisational culture.

So what you've got is the need to trust and empower teams to be able to learn, identify kind of improvements or solutions, test them, mess it up, improve it, you know, that they need to be able to do that need space, and trust skills and resources in order to be able to do that. And quite often, when you hear about the best organisations who are commercial organisations who are seeking kind of marginal gains in every area of their business, they normally have that kind of culture.

So and, and then and then of course, around that comes, you know, the need to build other elements of a kind of really positive design friendly culture, where different voices and perspectives and people with different backgrounds and people different experiences are appreciated and valued and included, which is a massive contribution to a good design process, because you have to be able to hear from and value those different perspectives and understanding an environment where where there can be really honest reflection, and you can say upwards, downwards sideways, whether or not something is working or not, you know.

So I think that the short answer is that you have to do a bit of a magic trick of trying to reassure people who've got one way of looking at the world, that a design process gives you more gives reduces risk. And, and there is a narrative of framing that can say, we're not going to make one massive bet on this, this, you know, final outcome, we're going to kind of gradually learn and adapt and work towards that.

And there is a way of presenting that as reducing risk. It still requires trust, because you can't constantly be coming back for kind of a sign offs at every point, wherever. So but the Yeah, the short answer is there is ways there are

ways of kind of bringing these two mindsets, these two ways of looking at wealth together.

And I think risk management is one a kind of open, transparent process into which you know, those people can look and participate and be part of there is a harder one, which is there a deeper cultural transformation transition that needs to take place to become really designed, friendly, and design ready.

And organisations. And I would say, as I said that those those kinds of often those commercial organisations, you know, like Toyota and apple and Mercedes and others who are regarded as continually seeking, you know, these marginal gains and finding the best advantages have a very design friendly culture.

Ross Garner 27:34

So I think what you're describing is, if you're trying to seek our budget for Design Thinking project, it's not just cuz you're wanting to indulge your interest, it's like there is like a defined problem that everyone can agree needs to be solved. And what you're seeing when you're asking for funding, and this is more of a commercial or public or third sector, whatever it is, is, here's a problem.

And we want to, we don't know enough about it. Yeah, neither does anyone else, everyone else, that's promising stuff. They don't know, either. They're going to do one thing, and they're going to keep doing it, whether that thing works or not.

We're going to experiment, learn, and then gradually iterate towards the outcome that you've set. So it's not like the outcomes completely undefined because though cameras solving the problem in some way. We just don't know how to do that. Yeah. Yeah, key thing is, neither does anyone else.

Nick Stanhope 28:23

Yeah, I think that's right. I think that's right. I think there's the there's, and I think they did particularly works with what are described as a kind of maybe slightly jargony is kind of wicked problems, where it's particularly complex, right?

Where there are, despite the fact that maybe everyone's been following the same path for coming up with the same kind of solutions, there is something there is some complexity, there is some nuance that requires a deeper understanding, more empathetic engagement with, you know, people and families and consumers and requires more experimentation, you know, there could be out of that learning multiple ways in which you could, you could better meet needs better meet preferences and priorities.

And therefore, that deeper learning, more empathetic learning that that greater experimentation, that more ready kind of embracing of failure on the way to something which works better. Yet, all of those would be ways of, kind of, you know, finding new and better ways of doing things within within particular markets that might be a bit stale or things we've done a particular way. I think, as well as that there is also at its best, it's a much better way of bringing the best out of the resources you have available and the people you have available.

You know, I'm a massive believer in creating an environment in which in which people can be trusted, have space to make decisions, space to try things out space to fail, to learn and adapt to take responsibility for that and have agency and ownership of those processes, where different voices and perspectives and experiences are valued. And that there's so I think the benefits from a kind of Human Resources perspective, and a kind of, you know, loyalty and longevity of, of kind of team members.

I think, again, these kinds of processes, these kinds of approaches are very conducive to more motivated, more productive. Team members who take more ownership, pay more ownership and have more agency. So

Ross Garner 30:37

to take an advantage from the, the organisation that I work for, so we launched a performance management tool. So the purpose of this was to help people set goals and the purpose of having goals was to get people focused on what they're working on and help them build their skills, their development goals, as

well as lots of other teams in the organisation who want to improve people's skills.

So the IT team, for example, they have like certain like training they want to provide. There's like the I&d team, the Talent Team, you know, they'll have like your leadership development programmes, and so on. So these are all kind of studied different competing demands on people that they go and learn something. So what are some of the techniques that you've used to try and focus all of these different demands towards a singular vision?

Nick Stanhope 31:21

It's a really good question. And really hard. And there's a lot of words already. Yeah, no, no, no, but it's an important one, I think there's a lot of this lot has been talked about, or written about the relationship between kind of design and, and that kind of wider collaboration.

So from from experiences that I've had, I think that there are, I think, you know, they're, they're, they're, they're, I would say, it's quite distinct, if your design team is looking to kind of plough on and accelerate innovation towards particular, you know, new solutions, or new ways of doing things, the need for that team to be quite, you know, focused and have that just have the resources and people it needs to.

That's kind of one, that's, that's one version of design, which can be very effective. The kind of process that you're talking about, will demand a whole load of different methods and approaches in order for many different teams and many different actors to be participants in that design process. And I think so a few a few. I mean, I think that there's a few different ways of approaching that.

One is where you have to kind of some continued independence of those different teams working on different elements or angles, or kind of versions of their problem. But you kind of connect those, you kind of have a series of connected experiments. And so you've got a central lab or hub, these often get run through design labs, or, and you've got a central design team who are

creating the kind of structure and framework for multiple teams to be able to embark on, you know, that, as you said, different angles have a kind of shared problem. And so

Ross Garner 33:07

the learning that might be a leadership team, I guess, could

Nick Stanhope 33:10

it could be leading people that like that, yes, I'll kind of often leadership team to power and sell these kinds of design labs or design hubs or like, you know, the, so that it's not quite so power driven? It's No, there isn't there isn't quite so much hierarchy flowing through those because you need to be supporting and working alongside these different experiments, rather than, you know, kind of the control field as well.

Like, yeah, absolutely. I'd be reluctant to do so if it's the leadership. Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. So So quite often, it is supposed to be a kind of more mutual set of relationships running across these little experimental networks, where so? So yeah, so So and then and that, that design process, that design team does things like if there's learning going on in different things in that, for that learning to be shared, you know, obviously, you know, sharing in a form that other people can access through hit Open events.

That podcast, for example, excellent channel for sharing learning, with lots of teams. And, yeah, so and then when it comes to, you know, identifying particular prototypes, and testing them, again, those that's done in a very open and connected way, sometimes it gets, you could even, you know, they're all come back from the different teams and work together on a variety of different prototypes. And then, you know, obviously, ideas can be shared different prototypes can be tested in different environments.

So that's one where you've got a kind of series of connected experiments with some central resource and capacity to kind of tie these together via a structure or framework that allows them to kind of bring the best out of each other essentially, then there are more more kind of oak very open design processes, which I quite like where you are, essentially trying to create a space where all of

those different teams, all those different voices, can contribute to to learning could contribute to prototype development content country to testing country to iteration.

So again, that's it there's quite a a different set of design skills to those which is more kind of head down, pursue the innovation type, but and needs a lot of, you know, terms of creating space where people can meaningfully participate and feel like they're a valued part of that is really hard, but really, really valuable. And, and doing it very openly, transparently, and equitably inclusively, you know, is the, is the kind of recipe for that one.

But, I mean, both of those, I think one issue, when I've seen or been part of this in the commercial settings is that one thing that I think senior leaders often get wrong, is things like design and innovation. And, you know, digital, to some degree as well, or obviously, that's more baked into so many organisations as arriving as a kind of alien invasion. With a whole lot of people like me, probably who come along, and, and are asthmatic, if I do use slang language.

And talk about processes that feel very excluding and very undervaluing of the work that's already been going on. And I'm hugely suspicious of, of kind of those things. I think that, you know, when when, if there's a design or renovation, or these kind of processes are being introduced, or Accelerated or invested in, it has to feel has to feel like it is deeply kind of cognizant of valuing of the people and the knowledge within that organisation.

And that is not trying to replace or challenge and I think leadership get that wrong a lot, right, there could be a Korean innovation hub or a design hub. And it just be this stream of ideas that sound like they're looking to get rid of half of the staff or cut half the cost, whatever.

Ross Garner 36:43

I'm conscious of time. So I think we're gonna have to wrap up there. Now, attentive listeners will have noticed that Natalie was almost entirely absent through this podcast, she has had a devil of a time with the tech. That being said, Natalie. What will you be taking from this conversation and applying in

your life this week?

Nathalie Nahai 37:05

So I think what I take from this conversation is that design thinking and especially Nick, the way that you apply, it is a great tool for helping to ferment positive change, but it has to be considered within a wider context. So what I'm taking away today is being able to broaden the lens and look at the tools at your disposition, so that you can use the ones you have most effectively, and then adjust and adapt as you need to as you go on.

And also, what you've mentioned a few times is making sure that you're learning from the people in the context that you're working with, and not repeating the same thing, time. And again, wherever it's possible. Obviously, it's not always possible, but having the humility to go back to people who've been working in that context and area, and finding ways not to repeat what's been done before, but to build on knowledge, and the wisdom that's already there. Yeah. How about you, Ross? What have you learned from this conversation that you're taking away?

Ross Garner 37:58

I think one of the things that really struck me was the example you give, Nick of the EU had been taken an empathetic approach to understanding their family who were buying, you know, cheap chicken, fast food.

But then also, you said, you could do the same thing to people who are selling that because of when you were talking about at first I was thinking in a sort of us versus them mentality, we're going to solve this problem by tackling the people who are causing the problem.

And actually, understanding why that and by the broader system exists, I think, is gonna be a much more valuable exercise than trying to assign blame. Is there anything from this conversation that you've taken, Nick, anything you would apply this week?

Nick Stanhope 38:37

Um, I think that I, I mean, I like being it was, I was really interested. And it really

resonated, that kind of nearly immediately responded to, you know, talk about that kind of pro heads down product design process was sort of saying, How will surely change has to happen to be taking place across you know, every node of a network, every part of a system.

And I think I'm just, I guess, just renewed. I guess, excitement that that is much better, and much better and more widely understood. And that is a kind of instinctive response to this kind of ripe let's innovate the crap out of everything in a minute changes only really meaningful when it happens in a much more interdependent collective way, which is, which is right in my heart or when it comes to the best use of design.

Ross Garner 39:32

All right, great. Let's move on now to a regular feature. One thing I've learned this week where we share something we've picked up over the past seven days or so Natalie, do you want to go for it?

Nathalie Nahai 39:42

Yeah, so they actually prepared in advance for this one, so I wouldn't be caught short again. So I've been reading this really wonderful book called *The Entangled Activist*, which was gifted to me by its author, Anthea Lawson.

And it's not a book I would normally pick up because I don't think of myself as an activist, which is precisely why why it's been so insightful to be reading this. And one of the things that she touches on is how we can get information about our enmeshment and entanglement with the systems we're trying to change.

One of the elements she talks about is disgust and how we project it on to others. And she explains that, according to Jonathan Haight, who is an academic psychologist that looks at this, Disgust can be triggered by moral violations. And he says, if we had no sense of disgust, I believe we would also have no sense of the sacred.

And so it's this idea that sanctity and disgust are on the same spectrum, which I find super interesting. So amid doing any kind of activism work, whether we

name it that or not, it's useful to think about our investment with a system for trying to change what provokes the strongest emotional responses, and what it means about what we'd like to change in ourselves that maybe we disowned by projecting on to others. So that was a super fascinating book, and I definitely recommend reading it if you're interested in that area. How about you, Ross?

Ross Garner 41:01

So I was chuckling earlier on, because Nick said something about he criticised cost benefit analysis. Somehow he's basically said the claims were nonsense.

And that's exactly what I was learning about was, I was reading an article from Tim Harford, who writes as the undercover economist for the Financial Times.

And the article was called the hidden cost of cost benefit analysis. And he basically argues that it never works, its costs are always underestimated, and the benefits if you can ever measure them at all really mount up to the kind of optimistic projections of those who are trying to get their projects funded.

But then he goes on to point out that the only real saving grace is that alternative decision making techniques like going with wherever the highest paid person thinks, or making public funding decisions based on polling, or even worse. So for the for our audience who are looking at putting together a business case, yes, cost benefit analysis is terrible. But every other approach is even worse still. So just something be critical of your claims, while still trying to be persuaded

Nathalie Nahai 42:02

that's a light note to end the conversation on!

Ross Garner 42:07

Who doesn't read about cost benefit analysis in their spare time? Nick, what have you learned this week?

Nick Stanhope 42:13

So I have been learning a lot from a really simple design, kind of area, not that that's the only thing I think or talk about, but the project's kind of spin out of

Shift called the relationships project. And they've been doing a lot of work on the the kind of the, you know, the descent into much more in all the kind of dominance of very transactional interactions between people where you know, whether it's access and commercial services, or public services, or as part of their community, and how the kind of you know, deeper, more consistent, more human relationships have kind of been a bit extracted out of our lives.

The pandemics obviously had an interesting effect on that in both directions made us a bit more remote, but also made us a bit more focused on things like local and family. So the specific thing that I've been learning from them, is this idea of you know, as a designer, you spend a lot of time talking about user centred design, and how it's about understanding the needs of individual users responding to those, we'd like improvements that make their life better, it's very individualistic.

What what this team have been writing and talking a lot about, particularly this week is this idea of relationship centred design, which is maybe by tweaking your kind of the your, the your kind of framing the kind of principle of the hub design saying, how does the design of this product or service or experience, improve and deepen relationships between those who are between those who are using it between those who are kind of providing it and using it?

Between those who are providing it, you know, how do because fundamentally, human connection, human understanding, compassion, you know, trust, all of those ways in which we connect with others are absolutely fundamental to the human experience.

And if you're purely designing for kind of the optimization of the individual's experience, you're probably pushing away from something pretty important. And so I've really been struck by and loved this idea of relationship centred design and, and feel like it's relevant in every context, whether you're designing a, you know, a cafe or, or a financial service, or some sort of kind of, you know, community support for new moms. And that's kind of challenged my assumptions about the centrality of user. And I'm really loving thinking about that.

Ross Garner 44:36

Relationships keep coming up on this podcast, I isolation and lack of human connection. In this podcast series. It comes up almost every week. It's interesting. Thanks very much for your time today. Nick, is there anything you want to mention before we say goodbye?

Nick Stanhope 44:50

I don't think so. If you want to look at more of kind of examples of of the work they've been talking about, then have a look at shifts website [shifts.org](https://www.shifts.org) She's sorry. She's designed to org. And, and, yeah, thank you so much for the time and space to explore this stuff. It's been really fascinating.

Ross Garner 45:09

Well, thank you. Hopefully it links to some stuff in the show notes. And that's it. You've been listening to the future talent learning podcast with me Ross Garner and Nathalie Nahai.

Our guest this week was Nick Stanhope. Until next time, bye for now.