Design Thinking Bootleg Deck

Idea In Short

Use the Stanford d.school bootleg deck to bring design thinking into consulting workshops. The deck covers five modes, empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test, with 30-plus practical tools. Embrace lateral thinking alongside decision-tree rigor to unlock creative solutions.

The Gold Standard for Design

Stanford d.school is the gold standard for experience, design and cool. What do you expect when you combine smarts, engineering, a meritocratic culture, venture capital money and graphics? The d.school bootcamp bootleg deck is a free PDF about design thinking. Think IDEO on the cheap. 1

Consultants who have conducted executive workshops and dozens of projects will recognize many tools in the deck. They will also appreciate the approach. The d.school methods are much less linear and more lateral than what decision-tree-driven engineering types typically use.

Some of the hardest problems require open space. Some problems need new, diverse and cross-functional membership. Some problems are not meant to be solved but embraced. Some problems need redefinition. Some problems are not problems at all.

Creative Commons and Abundance Mindset

The d.school thinks differently from the monopolist. They share. This reflects Seth Godin's abundance mindset and Gary Vaynerchuk's approach of giving before asking. The bootleg deck contains their most used tools, with graphics from d.school files mixed across versions.

The deck evolves constantly. The creators describe it as a set of tools and methods kept in back pockets. Anyone interested in design can use it for inspiration when stuck or to generate new ideas. The five modes of design thinking, empathize, define, ideate, prototype and test, organize the tools.

Five Modes of Design Thinking

Empathize means understanding it is not about you. You design for someone else. This is harder than it seems because MBAs filter through business brains and struggle to see what consumers actually experience. The mode calls for observing, engaging and immersing.

Define means narrowing down the topic. You create a common baseline by sketching the edges of the puzzle. The d.school describes this as understanding the meaningful challenge to address and the insights you can leverage. Traditional consultants tend to make this too mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, too constricted and too robotic. Remember, this is early in the process and efficiency is not the goal.

Ideate means generating diverse, radical and unexpected solutions. You move beyond the obvious and know when you are generating ideas versus evaluating them. Evaluating comes later, not during ideation.

Prototype brings talk to life with physical samples, visualizations, storyboards, drawings or soundtracks. You extract ideas from the thought bubble into something material. Prototyping tests functionality while also learning, solving disagreement, starting conversation, failing cheaply and breaking problems into smaller parts.

Test is the counterpart to prototyping. You learn about the user, refine the prototype and refine your point of view. The critical question is whether there is willingness to pay. 2

Seven Design Mindsets

The d.school summarizes seven mindsets that underpin the tools. These include showing rather than telling, focusing on human values, being mindful of process and showing don't tell. The mindsets encourage radical collaboration and a bias toward action.

Consultants can adopt these mindsets to complement their analytical rigor. The combination

of structured analysis and creative exploration produces stronger outcomes than either approach alone. The mindsets remind practitioners that design thinking is as much about attitude as technique.

Key Tools for Consultants

Assume a beginner's mindset comes from Tom Kelley at IDEO, who advised thinking like a traveler. This means approaching problems with fresh eyes and curiosity rather than expertise and assumptions.

The empathy map captures what users say, do, think and feel. You list these out and reflect on needs expressed as verbs. The marketer's question is when the user's words do not match their actions. Seth Godin echoes this idea about authentic engagement.

The journey map traces the user's activities, sequences, timelines, interactions, emotions and environment. A process consultant asks where the process slows down. A marketing consultant asks where the user disengages and abandons the purchase. These maps reveal friction points invisible in spreadsheets.

The composite character profile addresses the user's persona. Marketers think in terms of segmentation, targeting and positioning. There is no such thing as average, and average gross margin is a myth. Working with specifics produces sharper insights.

Powers of ten uses exaggeration to test assumptions. What if it cost $1 million instead of $100? What if this had to be done in 24 hours instead of three months? This flares the discussion toward radical ideas, trade-offs and outcomes. It makes the process more fun.

Structuring and Selecting Ideas

The two-by-two matrix is a consultant favorite. Founder's Mentality, the BCG Growth Matrix and SWOT all use this format. The d.school applies it to design challenges with similar flexibility.

The why-how laddering technique uses why questions to elevate customer needs toward higher-level, abstract goals. It uses how questions to narrow toward specific tactics. This may outperform the five whys that operations consultants learn, because it lets you move

both general and specific.

Point of View reframes a design challenge into an actionable problem statement that launches generative ideation. It can take the form of a Mad Lib or a fictitious want-ad scenario. The POV checklist ensures the team's framing is valid, insightful, actionable, unique, narrow, meaningful and exciting.

How might we questions create seeds for brainstorming. They fall out of the point of view, design principles or insights. The facilitator's art is choosing questions that are neither too broad nor too narrow. Great examples appear in the deck.

Brainstorming and Prototyping

Brainstorm facilitation creates an environment where people offer wild, wide-ranging ideas. The facilitator gets headlines, whiteboards and makes things visual. This is a craft. Keep teams on topic without judging or ruling out ideas. Go for quantity, then group ideas only after generation.

Brainstorm selection warns against narrowing too quickly. Methods include voting with dots and a four-category approach. The categories are rational choice, darling choice, delightful choice and long-shot. The facilitator holds enormous power to influence the breadth of choices and favored outcomes.

Bodystorming is exactly what it sounds like, acting out scenarios physically. Adding constraints is counter-intuitive but deliberate. Constraints can increase creativity. What if you had to build it for under $100, for the blind, or with only picture instructions?

Prototype for empathy means using prototypes early to generate reactions and evoke more empathy. This differs from the traditional measure-twice-cut-once approach. User testing lets users try prototypes, talk through reactions and answer follow-up questions. Think agile development. 3

Storytelling and Innovation Portfolios

Storytelling recognizes that everything is storytelling. How you frame the problem, present the solution and engage stakeholders determines whether ideas survive.

The innovation portfolio treats innovation like any portfolio. You need to know what you have and continually prioritize. Clayton Christensen distinguished between disruptive and sustaining innovation. You identify what is shallow versus deep insight.

The d.school also provides a six-page summary for running a design session. This practical guide helps facilitators structure workshops from start to finish. The deck represents solid work from a team that practices what it teaches.

For consultants, the bootleg deck is a treasure trove. It complements analytical frameworks with creative techniques. The best problem solvers combine both, using structure to organize thinking and design thinking to discover what structure alone cannot reveal.

- 1Stanford D.School Design Thinking Bootleg
- 2Stanford D.School Design Thinking Bootcamp
- 3IDEO Design Thinking Methodology

Summary

The d.school bootleg deck gives consultants a free, practical toolkit for design thinking. Its five modes and 30-plus tools encourage lateral thinking, empathy and rapid prototyping. Combine these with traditional consulting frameworks to solve harder, messier problems.