Social Entrepreneurs and Social Designers: Change Makers with a New Mindset?

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Abstract

Economic and social problems are becoming increasingly complex. Meeting global challenges, such as climate change and an aging population, requires people who focus on creating social value rather than profit. This paper will demonstrate that social entrepreneurship and social design have gained momentum in recent years. The purpose of this paper is to explore particular design methods, such as co-creation and design thinking, which are used to facilitate collaboration to generate fresh thinking and provocative ideas in the social innovation context. Social entrepreneurs and social designers often collaborate in the process of social innovation. The role that design thinking can take as part of business and design higher education is examined. As a result it is suggested to integrate design thinking in existing curricula to educate social entrepreneurs, social designers, and graduates who are able to navigate within a shifting economic, social, cultural and technological landscape.

Key Words: social entrepreneurship, social design, design thinking, co-creation, collaboration, business education, design education

1. Introduction

Economic and social problems are becoming increasingly complex and are often part of larger systems. As Sanders and Stappers (2008) highlight 'we are designing for the future experiences of people, communities and cultures who now are connected and informed in ways that were unimaginable even 10 years ago' (p. 10). Meeting global challenges, such as climate change and an aging population, requires people from diverse disciplines to engage in bottom-up actions and idea generation (James, 2001). This not only changes the role of various disciplines, such as design, but also how they interact and what work methods they apply. In this context, social entrepreneurship, although not new, has gained momentum in recent years (Jegatheeswaran, 2013). 'Social entrepreneurs are celebrated as transformational leaders whose accomplishments create opportunities for those less fortunate' (Renko, 2012, p. 1045). Well-known and often cited examples of groundbreaking social entrepreneurship, such as the Grameen Bank[1] in India, also known as the bank for the poor, have drawn attention to and shown that people can create spectacular social change.

Likewise more designers want to engage in solving global problems (Robertson & Sobol, 2011) of health care, inequality, poor education and challenges to the environment. Social designers are increasingly working with business experts or social entrepreneurs because 'successful ideas require a mix of talents that is rarely found in one person' (Light, 2006, p. 48). Key in the process is to learn from and with others, to work in inter-, multi- or transdisciplinary teams and to involve the people who would benefit from the product, service or process in the social innovation process. To facilitate collaboration across disciplines and stakeholder groups in this process, design methods such as co-creation and design thinking are often used. Furthermore, co-creation and design thinking are special cases of collaboration in that 'the intent is to create something that is not known in advance' (Sanders & Simons, 2009). Already successful in the business innovation sector, co-creation and design thinking are also increasingly utilized in public and social sector innovations.

Despite its growing attraction 'the field of social entrepreneurship continues to struggle to gain academic legitimacy' (Abu-Saifan, 2012, p. 22). The introduction of collaborative practice in curricula in higher education is commonly discussed in terms of educating graduates who are generalists or specialists when entering the workplace. To what extent design thinking is valued and can be used in business and design higher education is examined.

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[1]Grameen Bank. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grameen_Bank.

2. Social entrepreneurs

Social entrepreneurs are creative, practical, use resources wisely and seek out opportunities, hence have similar qualities to all entrepreneurs (Elkington & Hartigan, 2008). However, a social entrepreneur is focused on creating social value and social improvement (Dees, 1998; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Abu-Saifan, 2012). The practical use of new ideas is to create innovative services or goods that address social needs (Dees, 1998; Elkington & Hartigan, 2008). Social entrepreneurs are usually not focused on generating financial profit (Dees, 1998), although the spectrum of outcomes reaches from entirely charitable to entirely commercial (Hartigan, 2008). According to Schumpeter social entrepreneurs are 'reformers and revolutionaries, …but with a social mission' (in Dees, 1998, p. 5). Dees (1998) explains the distinguishing characteristics of the social entrepreneur:

> 'For a social entrepreneur, the social mission is fundamental. This is a mission of social improvement that cannot be reduced to creating private benefits (financial returns or consumption benefits) for individuals. Making a profit, creating wealth, or serving the desires of customers may be part of the model, but these are means to a social end, not the end in itself. Profit is not the gauge of value creation; nor is customer satisfaction; social impact is the gauge. Social entrepreneurs look for a long-term social return on investment. Social entrepreneurs want more than a quick hit; they want to create lasting improvements. They think about sustaining the impact' (p. 6).

Social entrepreneurship is not new and some have long proclaimed 'the time is certainly ripe for entrepreneurial approaches to social problems' (Dees, 1998, p. 1). Martin and Osberg (2007) see the 'growing amounts of talent, money, and attention' in the attraction that 'social entrepreneurship signals the imperative to drive social change, and it is that potential payoff, with its lasting, transformational benefit to society, that sets the field and its practitioners apart' (p. 1). Making a difference by approaching important topics such as improving educational opportunities for children, protecting the environment, assisting elderly people to live with dignity or helping the poor attracts people worldwide to become social entrepreneurs. Networks such as Ashoka[2] (a global network of more than 3,000 social entrepreneurs founded in 1980 by Bill Drayton) or SIX Social Innovation Exchange[3] (a network of more than 5,000 individuals and organizations launched in 2008 in Australia) continue to grow.

3. Social designers

Similar developments can be observed in other areas, such as design. A growing number of designers 'have shown concern for socio-ethical issues and pondering the impacts of their work on the planet and its peoples' (Ramirez, 2011) and thus engage in social innovation activities. Nevertheless, the popular understanding of what designers do is largely connected to creating products and taking care of their visual aesthetics (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Ramirez, 2011). This is despite the fact that the social aspect of design and designers' social responsibility have long been articulated, most notably by Victor Papanek's book, already published in 1971, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*. Many designers have engaged in creating environmentally responsible design (sustainable and green) which was most visible in public for many years. Working for not-for-profit organizations and pro bono for a good cause is common among practicing designers across all design disciplines (for example, industrial design, communication design and fashion design).

However, the emergence of the 'social designer' as career path and its appeal to a growing number of designers and design graduates is rather recent. Although as Burkett (2012) points out that at the heart of any good design is the 'search for ways to create a better world', designing for social impact is what describes the social designer:

> 'Design is about finding solutions, practical innovations, and making improvements that enhance people's lives, address problems or open up possibilities for a better life. When you think about design like this, 'social design' is about applying general design principles to our social realities and "designing" ways to address social issues (such as poverty or social isolation), and ultimately creating a more just and sustainable society' (Burkett, 2012).

Well-known projects have drawn attention to social problems and the role of design and designers in the social innovation process.

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[2] Ashoka.www.ashoka.org.
[3]SIX Social Innovation Exchange. http://www.socialinnovationexchange.org.

These projects include One Laptop Per Child[4] that aims to empower the world's poorest children through education; the inspiring and groundbreaking Liter of Light[5] project by MyShelter Foundation, which turns a soda bottle into a solar light and provides light to underprivileged families that cannot afford electricity. There are also initiatives by IDEO, a global design and innovation company, such as Living Climate Change[6] that aims to support conversations beyond policy and national sacrifice in order to point toward new possibilities.

In this process intersections and collaborations among social entrepreneurs and social designers are increasingly common (Stamatiou, 2013; Vastbinder, 2013). Sebastian (2013) states:

> 'It's great that business is cultivating its creative potential, and that design is understanding its place in the economic landscape. Neither can really provide holistic solutions by themselves, and can certainly learn to offer better and more informed ideas by adhering to each others' credentials'.

Design methods and tools have already found their way into the business and public innovation sectors. Design thinking, for example, as one such method, was first embraced by businesses to build competitive advantage, to innovate and renew products, services and processes and is now also increasingly used in the social innovation sector (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Another method is co-creation, the 'act of collective creativity that is experienced jointly by two or more people' (Sanders & Simons, 2009, p. 1) which can involve interactions among communities, companies, organizations and people who will benefit.

4. Co-creation: a participatory mindset

Co-creation, as a strategic business tool to develop better products and improve brand communication, has been utilized in the business world for many years. Involving customers to participate in value-creating activities, such as user-test products, inviting them to contribute slogans or tag lines for commercials and advertising campaigns or asking them to submit innovative packaging suggestions (for example, Henkel, 2011) is not a new practice. Although some of these activities do not purely classify as co-creation and are rather user-centered in their intent (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Co-creation is at its core

> 'about involving a community outside your company in the ideation phase of the new product or service development. With co-creation, the participants—which may include customers, suppliers or the general population—are made aware that they are contributing towards the development of ideas and concepts? Through a series of steps, people are invited to contribute, evaluate, and refine ideas and concepts' (Benson, 2013).

Co-creation or participatory design has become increasingly popular in the area of social innovation. This is in particular the case because the people who benefit from the service, product or process to be developed or improved are actively participating in the creation process. It is different from user-centered design, where the end-user or customer is the subject of observation as a source for development or improvements (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In the co-creation process, the end-user or customer becomes an equal partner and is actively involved throughout the creation process.

The end-user or people who the product or service is created for receive expert status in the creation team along with social entrepreneurs and social designers, for example. Co-creation requires all who are involved to develop empathy, to share and to accept equal partnership in the creation process. This requires a particular mindset and the development of participatory thinking. Social entrepreneurship and social design have become a 'thriving global movement with Gen Y in particular' (Jegatheeswaran, 2013). This might be related to 'new generations . . . having an easier time in distributing and sharing the control and ownership' (Sanders & Stapper, 2008, p. 9) hence it is easier for them to develop a participatory mindset.

5. Design thinking as a tool for social innovation

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[4] One Laptop Per Child. http://one.laptop.org/about/mission.

[5] Liter of Light project. http://currystonedesignprize.com/#node/59; http://aliteroflight.org/;
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liter_of_Light.

[6] Living Climate Change. http://www.ideo.com/work/living-climate-change/.

Design thinking is described as a 'human-centered innovation process that emphasizes observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis, which ultimately influences innovation and business strategy' (Lockwood, 2010, p. xi). Sørensen and Leerberg (2010) argue that design thinking 'both stems from a humanist paradigm and represents an abductive way of reasoning that makes designers think in a radically different way and far removed from traditional causal reasoning in business' (p. 11). As a tool for driving innovation, design thinking is best used in teams of people who bring different ideas, methods, experiences and discipline cultures together (Brown, 2010; Lockwood, 2010; Curedale, 2013).

Design thinking has increasingly been introduced into areas beyond traditional design in order to accelerate the process of inventing a product or a service that sets the enterprise apart and ultimately makes it more competitive (Brown, 2010)[7]. Design thinking can, however, also 'play an important role in strengthening the public sector's capacity to be an intelligent customer as it involves bringing together different perspectives, including industry and users of a service or product, to understand needs' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011, p. 86). Increasingly design thinking has been identified as an especially valuable tool for social entrepreneurs (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Soule, 2013). This is because the nature of design thinking is intrinsically human-centered (Brown, 2009). Developing empathy for user groups is central in design thinking during the process of developing a product or service. In the various steps involved in the design thinking process (see Figure 1) the steps 'observe', 'understand' and 'test' and all involve the end-user or customer[8]. This allows the researcher to 'pay close attention to what is visible and articulated, while sensing what is below the surface and unarticulated' (Fraser, 2010, p. 43).
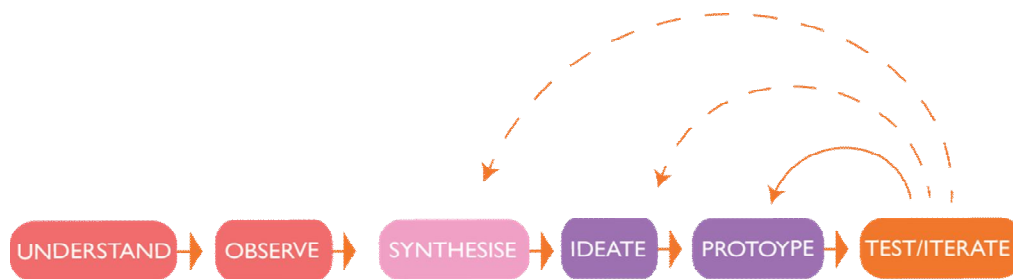

Figure 1: Design thinking process

For social entrepreneurs and social designers who set out to approach a social problem to make a difference, design thinking is a highly valuable tool. Design thinking is an inclusive process that involves the end-user or customer from the beginning development to the end testing and iteration of the developed services or goods. This includes developing ideas based on understanding the end users or framing the problem according to their needs.

It can include the discovery of needs that are hidden and have been unarticulated (Fraser, 2010). End-users might get interviewed, engaged in the design process and usually will test the prototype and provide feedback for iterations of the service or product. Although designers traditionally had the users in mind when designing products or services (Brown & Wyatt, 2010), the user was, nevertheless, often removed from the creation process and remained abstract (McGinley & Macredie, 2011).

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[7]The term 'design thinking' has become ambiguous in its use, referring either to traditional research on design thinking or to a recently emerging innovation strategy. For a discussion on this issue refer to Badke-Schaub, P., Roozenburg, N., & Cardoso, C. (2010). Design thinking: A paradigm on its way from dilution to meaninglessness?" Paper presented at the 8th Design Thinking Research Symposium (DTRS8), 19–20 October, Sydney, Australia.

[8] For a detailed description of each step, see, for example, Skaggs, P., Fry, R., & Howell, B. (2009). Design thinking. In *ICSID World Design Congress.* Singapore; and Scheer, A., Noweski, C. ,and Meinel, C., 2012. 'Transforming Constructivist Learning into Action: Design Thinking in Education.' Paper presented at Research: Uncertainty Contradiction Value; Design Research Society (DRS); Biennial International Conference, Bangkok, Thailand.

According to Brown and Wyatt (2010)

> 'Design thinking incorporates constituent or consumer insights in depth and rapid prototyping, all aimed at getting beyond the assumptions that block effective solutions. Design thinking—inherently optimistic, constructive, and experiential—addresses the needs of the people who will consume a product or service and the infrastructure that enables it' (p. 32).

According to Brown and Wyatt (2010), when designers work closely with end-users, design thinking will let high-impact ideas come from the bottom and flow upward rather than from the top.

6. Social entrepreneurs and social designers: the higher education context

Future graduates need to be able to navigate within a shifting economic, social, cultural and technological landscape. Developing curricula that allow graduates to become social entrepreneurs or social designers need to be further developed. Despite its growing attraction 'the field of social entrepreneurship continues to struggle to gain academic legitimacy' (Abu-Saifan, 2012, p. 22). In a recent survey that involved 37 business schools in which 5,365 prospective students, current students, alumni and employers responded (Crisp, 2013), more than 70 percent agreed that business models need to change to better engage with society, while more than 80 percent agreed that ethics and sustainability should be a part of business programs (Crisp, 2013). This 'new survey on the future of business education suggests demand from students and employers is growing for a more sustainable, international and technological future' (The Future, 2013). Although substantial advances have been made in social entrepreneurship education (see, for example, Brock & Kim, 2011), Pache and Chowdhury (2012) point out that students not only need to be taught '"about" social entrepreneurship [but also] to allow them to acquire the knowledge and expertise required to successfully engage in social entrepreneurial activities . . . [hence to] educate students "for" social entrepreneurship' (p. 494).

Similar to business education, the way that designers are educated must change (Davis, 2012; Barnett, 2012; Welch, 2011; Vukić, 2011). Barnett (2012) argues that current design education 'fails to deliver critical minds' because the university 'instead of being an institute for the pursuit of knowledge, has become a business-like institute for the pursuit of a career' (p. 2). Subsequently, universities fail to provide space for exploration and experimentation (Barnett, 2012). Welch (2011) and others (for example, Davis, 2011; Norman, 2011; Vukić, 2011; Poggenpohl, 2012) request rethinking design education because it continues to educate for the past instead of for the future. Vukić (2011) suggests that a 'new curriculum should promote comprehension and awareness of the global context that designers must work in' (p. 137). Welch (2011) supports this view, adding that design students 'need the mental set that will position them to embrace the social, political and economic challenges' and they must develop 'creative thinking skills essential in developing the resilience needed to survive—and even thrive—in this volatile and uncertain future' (p. 2).

According to Rothstein (2002), Vining (2007) and Bennett (2009) there are only a limited number of institutions of higher education that experiment with new models. 'Some university design programs immerse students in developing countries and disadvantaged neighborhoods to learn to co-design appropriate solutions with communities. The professional design industry has also been supportive in engaging and contributing to this new area of social innovation' (Ramirez, 2011, p. 1). An example is the School for Visual Arts in New York, which offers a Master's of Fine Arts (MFA) degree program in 'Design for Social Innovation.'[9] Students in this program approach a variety of issues, including health, food and agriculture, poverty, social justice, fair trade, women's rights and education and community revitalization. They study and learn at the intersection of design, social innovation and enterprise.

7. Promoting collaborative practice in higher education

Integrating collaborative practice in higher education programs has been identified to have its challenges (Fleischmann 2010; Fleischmann, 2013), such as overcoming silo mentality and practical issues connected to the complexity of organizing such endeavors in an academic environment. In general formulating new programs in design and also business education are often part of a wider discourse about the kind of graduate to be educated.

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[9]See http://www.sva.edu/graduate/mfa-design-for-social-innovation

Bhana (2010) argues that 'the question between specialised disciplines versus a more generalised interdisciplinary approach remains an inherent debate open for discussion' (p. 4). Views favoring one approach over the other exist; Bhana (2010), for example, argues:

> 'Whatever lays ahead, those students who have developed and attained an elevated conceptual skill base, and who have been more broadly educated through an interdisciplinary pedagogy, will be better equipped to adapt and respond to such changes more readily.

Others see the need for specialization. Bley (2003), for example, states that at the 'undergraduate level the specialization may be necessary to prepare prospective designers to be able to perform in a particular work environment'. On a broader level these discussions are connected to and influence the kind of collaborative practice to be introduced to students.

When reviewing the extant literature on collaborative practice in undergraduate business and design education, interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity are discussed to a similar degree. It is noticeable that the terms 'multidisciplinary' and 'interdisciplinary' are often used interchangeably (Wilson & Pirrie, 2000; Design Council 2010). 'Both approaches—multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity—answer the need for teams to work across disciplinary boundaries in the service of certain kinds of problems or goals' (Blevis & Stolterman, 2009, p. 48). However, data, content, methods, concepts, tools and theories from two or more disciplines interact or integrate differently in both approaches (Blevis & Stolterman 2009; Klein 2009). According to the Design Council (2010) '"multi-disciplinarity" describes situations in which several disciplines cooperate but remain unchanged, whereas in "inter-disciplinarity" there is an attempt to integrate or synthesise perspectives from several disciplines' (p. 3). Interdisciplinarity founded on disciplinary depth, also referred to as true interdisciplinarity, is, according to Rogers, Scaife and Rizzo (cited in Blevis & Stolterman, 2009), 'very difficult to achieve and more often than not remain[s] an illusive goal' (p. 49). In undergraduate business and design education interdisciplinary subjects are arguably often based on interdisciplinary breadth 'as students will be unlikely to have a sufficient disciplinary base' (Golding, 2009, p. 6).

Two approaches to collaborative practice in undergraduate design and business education can be found:

1. The interdisciplinary approach where 'students explore and integrate perspectives from different disciplines, sub-disciplines and areas of expertise' with the goal of a deeper understanding or to make a more balanced judgment (Golding, 2009, p. 3).
2. The multidisciplinary approach where students 'focus on complementary procedures and perspectives . . . learn about each other and develop professionals' understanding of their separate but inter-related roles as members of a multidisciplinary team' (Wilson & Pirrie, 2000 p. v).

Each approach is valuable in engaging students in collaborative practice and to facilitate the development of interpersonal skills required in the contemporary workplace. Depending on the kind of graduate to be educated (generalist or specialist) one approach might be better suited than the other.

8. Design thinking in higher education

Design thinking has become increasingly popular in higher education. In the academic environment, design thinking is best known from the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University (United States) and the University of Potsdam (Germany). Another example is the relatively new masters program in Multidisciplinary Design Innovation at Northumbria University (United Kingdom), which is built around the principles of design thinking. Design thinking is increasingly integrated in higher education curricula across a vast variety of disciplines (for example, anthropology, behavior analysis, information sciences, marketing, hospitality, management, philosophy, psychology, see Ligon & Fong, 2009; across design and information technology, see Fleischmann, Visini, & Daniel, 2012; nursing, see Ishii, Kato, Sugawara, Suzuki, & Sakuma, 2012). This is because the effectiveness of collaborations in design thinking is often independent of disciplinary depth or breadth. Everyone can apply design thinking to any problem (Curedale, 2013).

Design thinking is an inclusive method and it can achieve even better results when people from a variety of disciplines, at various levels, and a mix of experts and lay people are involved in the process. In fact diversity is even favored when fresh and unconventional solutions are sought (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).

Because of the way design thinking works, it offers an excellent opportunity to bring various disciplines and various year levels (undergraduate and postgraduate level) together. For this reason some of the commonly identified challenges that often inhibit cross-disciplinary collaboration in higher education (Fleischmann, 2010; Fleischmann, 2013) are rendered obsolete.

As in the real world where design thinking is applied to approaching open-ended, complex or challenging problems that are usually 'a form of social or cultural problem that is difficult to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements' (Austin Center for Design, n. a), it can focus education on the bigger picture. Design thinking can be a highly effective tool in social entrepreneurship and social design education. Design thinking helps students to focus on other people's needs (Soule, 2013), to develop empathy and to conceptualize the future, to understand a problem before attempting to create a solution, and to undertake a more considered approach to the creation of products and services (Fleischmann, Visini, & Daniel, 2012).

9. Conclusion: The change maker mindset

Social entrepreneurship has become a booming global movement in recent years, so has social design. Although both areas, social entrepreneurship and design for social innovation, are still emerging disciplines, social entrepreneurs and social designers have taken on significant roles in approaching complex social problems. Their work is primarily oriented toward meeting social objectives and achieving sustainable social change rather than generating personal financial profit. Entrepreneurship and design for a social purpose can focus 'on the design of products that benefit people (for example, the design of water purifiers for people living without potable water); or services (for example, designing more inclusive financial services); or processes (for example, designing participatory decision-making processes inside organizations)' (Burkett, 2012, p. 2).

Co-creation and design thinking are design methods which have been adopted in various areas outside design. They are intrinsically human-centered methods of innovation, which facilitate generating fresh thinking and provocative ideas involving various disciplines and stakeholder groups. Most notably end-users (the people who will benefit) are involved in the creation process. Collaborations in co-creation and design thinking differ in the ways that they help create new solutions, not previously known, to respond to needs of the modern world. Co-creation and design thinking are an accessible way toward innovation, which unlocks the collective creativity of all involved in the process (Sørensen & Leerberg, 2010).

User participatory design approaches in the innovation context have grown increasingly popular, with design thinking being one expression of these recent developments. Design thinking is also found increasingly as a part of higher education curricula. Advocates of design thinking (for example, Brown, 2009) argue that teaching students the design thinking process uses their abilities to create and contribute to the innovation process (Anderson, 2012).

Engaging business and design students in design thinking is a major shift in practice away from educating merely problem solvers toward educating problem finders. As Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, explains that usually in MBA programs 'We teach a very narrow form of collaboration, which is to find somebody who thinks like you and then work together' (in Dunne & Martin, 2006, p. 514). Innovation, however, is driven by teams of people who bring different ideas, methods, experiences and discipline cultures together. Higher education must be reflective of this changing status quo and provide the opportunity for students to experience design thinking. Design thinking allows for collaboration of diverse disciplines and student groups across varying year levels. When implementing design thinking in business and design higher education it provides an enormous opportunity to render some commonly known factors inhibiting multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary collaboration obsolete.

Design thinking has been identified as an effective tool for social entrepreneurs and social designers when learning to make a difference by approaching topics such as improving educational opportunities for children, protecting the environment, assisting elderly people to live with dignity or helping the poor. Integrating design thinking into business and design curricula provides students with the opportunity to experience, in a practical way, a method to initiate change for social innovation. Instead of learning about social entrepreneurs and social designers, students learn to use tools that enable them to initiate social change and to become change makers with a new mindset.

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