Strategic Innovation and Design Thinking

Sample Course Syllabus

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Interspersed among the lectures and speakers, participants work in teams on a case exercise in alternative generation and refinement. The case allows immediate practice with the tools and techniques covered in the course.

Introduction and Defining Strategic Innovation
We discuss the value of more and better alternatives in decision-making and the role of innovation in development and execution of business strategy. We introduce a new model that recognizes and depends on the strengths of both innovators and implementers, and cycles among them for refinement of the most valuable ideas. We also define the term “strategic innovation.”

Individual Creativity and Jazz Brainstorming
We introduce the theory and practice of identifying hurdles to our own individual creativity and looking at problems in new ways. Hands-on exercises and games create a fun and interactive session to stimulate imagination and practice new ways of thinking.

Need Finding
The objective of need-finding is to identify unmet needs and areas of opportunity that, if solved, could bring value to all stakeholders. In this session, we describe need-finding and provide examples of need-finding tools.

Design Thinking Experience
We describe the user-centered and prototype-driven design-thinking process developed at the Stanford d.school, which challenges people to think broadly about problem definition, overcome constraints placed on teams too early in the problem-solving process, and consider options from various points of view. Participants work in pairs through a fast-paced exercise that take them through a full design cycle.

Design Thinking-Based Strategy
We discuss how to apply design thinking to diverse set of strategic problems, such as defining new markets, shaping corporate strategy, and transforming organizations.

Case Introduction and Exercise: Customer Perspectives
Exploring a problem from the customer’s perspective is a bottom-up approach to innovation. In this session, we introduce the case exercise that will be used throughout the course, and participants work in teams to identify and describe customer perspectives for the situation.
Case Exercise: Value Chain Exploration
Starting from an internal perspective often limits the available solution space for fulfilling customer needs. One way to create truly new solutions is to explore outside the traditional boundaries of the issue. In this session, participants explore the value chain for the case exercise to understand business opportunities and perspectives in other parts of the industry.

Framing Strategic Issues
A clear understanding of scope is critical in defining the specific issues to be addressed in any problem-solving exercise. In this session, we present a methodology to identify and separate constraints and tactical issues from the strategic questions that require our focus.

Case Exercise: Alternative Generation
Alternatives are potential solutions for meeting unmet needs. In this session, participants continue working on the case exercise, generating multiple alternative solutions for addressing customers' unmet needs.

Tour of Design Innovation Firm
We tour the main corporate offices of IDEO, the premier design strategy and innovation form in the world. We go behind the scenes and visit the project team rooms, workshops, and brainstorming labs to get a feel for how innovation happens at IDEO.

Innovation Competency Cycle and Iteration
In most organizations, creativity opposes evaluation; strategic innovation often falls into this trap. A linear process of innovation and evaluation rejects good ideas and leaves value on the table. In this session, we explore an Innovation Competency Cycle that nurtures the open-ended nature of creativity and leverages the practical nature of business analysis. In this session, we discuss the Innovation Competency Cycle and explore techniques for iterative learning and idea sharing, as well as a process and rationale for working on the most valuable or difficult parts of a problem first.

Case Exercise: Iterating for Value
Participants continue work on the case exercise, focusing on cycling between qualitative idea generation and quantitative evaluation to improve strategic options.

Organizational Realization
Many approaches exist for implementing innovation initiatives, but the most successful organizations share a common set of characteristics: they have the right people leading and participating, they have a clear and appropriate process, and they have a culture aligned with their innovation needs. In this session, we discuss innovation models and the structures required to support them. We also examine several well-known innovative companies and how they have encouraged innovation.

Building Innovation Into Your Business Model
A panel of industry speakers describes how they have built innovation into their organizations' business models.
Case Exercise: Concept Implications and Presentation
Participants synthesize and present the implications of their chosen alternative, describing their vision, why end-users and the business should be excited by the concept, and how it addresses the company’s most critical value measures.

Implementing Innovation in Your Organization
We discuss how to implement the Innovation Competency Cycle within participants’ organizations and explore how to overcome the most common structural and cultural obstacles participants may encounter.