Rethinking Your Business with Human-Centered Design

How might leaders take a human-centered approach to rethink how they engage their customers, employees and partners during this unprecedented time?
The COVID-19 pandemic has quickly changed human behavior. As requirements to combat the spread have moved from extra hygiene to “social distancing” to shut-in restrictions, the implications for businesses have been sudden, forcing managers to make real-time decisions to adapt and respond. Managers of many businesses, small and large, have been laser focused on how they can pay bills, support their workforce and customers as best they could, and redeploy existing assets and capabilities — think of airlines reconfiguring their planes to move more cargo, clothing companies producing masks, or universities switching to online learning. As many of these businesses have stabilized as best they could in response to the shocks, the next set of challenges begin to emerge: how much of this change and new behavior will stick? What are the implications to the long-term viability of our businesses? There is no playbook for this, no one body of data to provide insights and no time for prolonged analysis and contemplation. As in other ambiguous situations, leaders may turn to human-centered design to better understand needs, test and build new offerings as they begin to recover in the short term, and set-up their businesses to thrive in the long term.

Let’s start with going to the grocery store—a basic activity that, now, less than a third of Americans feel safe doing.¹ In just a few weeks we went from a simple routine trip to our local store, to searching online to discover wait times at nearby markets (see Italian start-up Filaindiana²), to finding grocery vending machines in our apartment buildings (see Farmer’s Fridge³), to buying groceries at restaurants (see Leon restaurants in the UK⁴, or Panera Bread selling bread, milk and produce⁵), to doing it all online (see explosion of growth by Instacart in the US⁶). In this latest iteration of the behavior, we save the trip to the store, but still take time to “clean” the goods before we store them, with dedicated methods, tools and spaces.
Instead of doing things as they have always been done, managers should return to the north star of listening to the people they serve and studying new behaviors that have emerged, as the COVID-19 crisis has affected the way that people go about their work, their interactions with others, their expectations of several services, and their outlook on the world. We expect that many new behaviors and needs will stick through and past recovery, and that some habits will become engrained. We also believe that thoughtful new models will develop that can not only allow businesses to recover quickly but can also help them thrive in the future. It is imperative, therefore, to understand and redesign our businesses for this “new normal.”

We see innovative, human-centered adaptation in several areas today and expect to see more in the coming weeks. As an example, fine-dining restaurants — such as Canlis in Seattle — that offered tasting menus are opening drive-through services and selling different menu items, such as burgers and veggie melts. Could the drive-through be an enduring part of these restaurants’ businesses even after the outbreak ends? Perhaps some of these restaurants will grow as fast casual chains in their own right. As another example, seventy-two hours after the French government called for help filling key gaps in hospital supplies, LVMH became one of the first of many to switch to producing COVID-19 supplies when they repurposed their perfume and cosmetics factory outside of Orleans to produce hand sanitizer. Regardless of whether a line of hand sanitizers with high quality fragrances is in LVMH’s future, the company’s swift action to help the cause will likely be remembered going forward.

Other businesses may follow suit. For example, how might the ride sharing companies participate in the at-home-care trend? Imagine a ride share service that drives a certified nurse to you, to take your vitals in the morning to inform a consultation with your primary physician via telemedicine in the afternoon — your annual physical from your living room. And how might a hospitality company reframe the concept of at-home-vacation? Reversed hotel HomeSuiteHomes in Amsterdam offered an Easter package that included a virtual check-in, a curated locally sourced welcome box delivered via mail, live online entertainment by local artists and performers, and even a virtual concierge.

All these examples are rooted in deep understanding of new needs, bold enough to challenge current orthodoxies, and turn new behaviors into new offerings.
A human-centered design process, properly structured and executed, including a series of “sprints” that build on each other, can help provide managers and their executives confidence in the new directions they chart, while establishing a new core innovation capability in their organization. Sprint timelines can be scaled up or down depending on ambition, tightness of the problem frame, availability of resources and sense of urgency.

This work can be very illuminating and inspirational at painting new possibilities, in a relatively short time frame. In the illustration below, as an example, we describe a 10-day initial design to develop a rich set of ideas to test. When executed well, the approach will uncover an array of different solutions, which should be considered, prototyped and tested with real users.

Leaders can act now by considering the following steps:

- Stand up a team with the objective of finding new ways to meet the needs of customers, employees, and partners
- Resource the team with a multidisciplinary group of 3-5 collaborative, lateral thinkers
- Give the team permission to explore new areas, removing existing business orthodoxies and leaving the door open to multiple types of innovation
- Follow a rapid human-centered design process, via a series of sprints that build on each other, to identify, develop and test new business models with method
- Instill this discipline in the organization, defining the attributes needed of your innovation teams (i.e., empathy, diversity, willingness to challenge the status quo), setting expectations for this approach to be part of the day to day operation of the firm
**10-Day Design Sprint**

**Frame (2 days)**
Identify user segments to design for. You may choose the segment based on relative importance to your business and/or degree of need or change in their behaviors.

Ensure the framing is tightly focused so you can identify patterns and insights over the course of a compressed discovery period.

Specify the parameters which will be used to identify the right users to study during discover phase and begin setting up the research.

**Discover (3 days)**
Put yourselves in the shoes of your customers and users, anticipating what they might need.

Inquire about and observe how the crisis is affecting users' lives — in context of your business and beyond.

While there is no magic minimum sample size, you can begin to conclude a research phase when you start hearing similar patterns and sentiments across users (often in 7-10 remote interviews assuming tight framing of target users.)

**Analyze (2 days)**
Spend time to make sense of the data, clustering observations into groupings that reveal new patterns of behavior, then drawing implications from those patterns.

Document insights so they can be shared around the organization.

**Create (3 days)**
Dive deeper into the implications of what you learned — What does it mean for how we deliver / message our existing value propositions? What does it mean for new models we might adopt?

Develop specific actions that you can take now to better serve your ecosystem and document other ideas that you can return to as you iterate toward a new offering.
Want to learn more?

Francesco Fazio
Principal
ffazio@deloitte.com
312 203 9306

Francesco Fazio is a principal at Deloitte Consulting LLP and a member of the Doblin leadership team.

Patrick Kuehnle
Manager
pkuehnle@deloitte.com
844 360 7604

Patrick Kuehnle is a manager at Deloitte Consulting LLP and a member of the Doblin practice.

1 Deloitte Center for Consumer Insight
2 https://tecnologia.libero.it/come-funziona-filaindiana-it-il-sito-per-scegliere-dove-fare-la-spesa-34702
5 https://techcrunch.com/2020/04/10/instacarts-hiring-spree-continues-as-it-faces-unprecedented-demand/
7 https://www.ft.com/content/e9c2bae4-6909-11ea-800d-da70cf6e4d3

As used in this document, "Deloitte" means Deloitte Consulting LLP, a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP. Please see www.deloitte.com/us/about for a detailed description of our legal structure. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.

This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

Copyright © 2020 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved.

As used in this document, "Doblin" means an innovation practice of Deloitte Digital within Deloitte Consulting LLP, a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP. Please see www.deloitte.com/us/about for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte LLP and its subsidiaries. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.