EMPOWER - Social Enterprises' Sustainability Tools

Project Result 1

Training Package for Sustainability in Social Enterprises

Module No. 5 Design Thinking and Social Causes

Developed by Sweden Emilia Romagna Network

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Project Information

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Introduction

Social innovation is the process of developing and applying effective solutions to global issues, putting the needs of people and the planet at the centre. This process brings together different actors such as public authorities, citizens, universities, and not least social enterprises, creating social and environmental value for the communities and contexts in which it operates. Design thinking underpins social innovation and is used as 'an approach to innovation'[1] and helps social enterprises to address and solve the local and global challenges that modern society poses every day. Indeed, social enterprises can make use of Design Thinking when confronted with social causes. In facts, Design Thinking is a creative approach to solving practical problems that are raised by users of social enterprises.

A social cause, on the other hand, is identified as a design problem that could be solved by the creation of services, models or experiences developed through design thinking[2].

Thus, through design thinking a social enterprise is able to develop services that are tailored to its users, as it focuses on people and their needs, with the aim of finding effective solutions to meet them. It can be applied in any field, from product development to service planning, in fact, in any field where strategic decisions need to be made.

The solution that design-thinking produces must follow three criteria, i.e., it must meet the user's needs, be technologically feasible and economically sustainable for the social enterprise. This approach consists of several stages at the end of which a creative and sustainable solution will be produced. Moreover, the process of elaborating ideas due to design thinking is not linear, but flexible, as each new discovery implies a redesign and redefinition of what was done in the previous steps.

There are four principles that form the foundation of design thinking, as listed by C. Meinel and H. Leifer[3] of the Hasso-Plattner-Institute of Design at Stanford University and are:

1.   **The human rule**: activities must be of a social nature and any proposed innovation must follow a human-centred point of view, regardless of the context in which this idea is to be implemented.

2.   **The rule of ambiguity**: ambiguity is a fundamental aspect of design thinking, as it is based on the concept that every problem can be interpreted by adopting different points of view: therefore, when we design an innovative idea in response to a social cause, it is important to recognise and admit as a conditioning factor the individuality of the subjects adopting this approach.

3.   **The rule of redesign**: according to this rule, the basic needs of human beings remain the same in the face of potentially redefining technology and social circumstances that may evolve. Therefore, the needs remain the same, but the tools and ways to satisfy them may change.

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[1] Polito R.M. (Master Thesis 2019-2020) Design Thinking come leva strategica per il digital marketing aziendale: il caso Fjord http://tesi.luiss.it/28935/1/214341_POLITO_ROBERTA%20MARIA.pdf

[2] https://www.transform-project.eu/citizen-engagement/design-thinking-for-social-innovations/

[3] Plattner, H., Meinel, C., & Leifer, L. (Eds.). (2010). *Design thinking: understand–improve–apply*. Springer Science & Business Media

4.   **The rule of tangibility**: it is crucial to create prototypes, making the ideas produced concrete and tangible to facilitate the work of designers, who will share the ideas and proposed solutions more clearly, while highlighting the aspects to be optimised.

Design thinking consists of 5 essential phases, according to Brown (2008) which are Empathise, Ideate, Prototype and Test.

- *Empathising: defined by Polito (2020) as getting in touch with users, putting oneself in their shoes and understanding their values in order to clearly understand what they want and what they really need. In this phase, the designer/designer observes and listens to the users' needs and emotional behaviour and engages them, putting aside his or her own antagonism in order to obtain real information about the user.*
- *Define: it is necessary to identify the problems (the social causes) by clearly pointing out the user's difficulties and obstacles underlying the problem.*
- *Ideate: this is the phase in which solutions are designed, so it is here that all the ideas of the designer must be collected, because the more ideas are created, the greater the chance of finding the right idea[4]. In this phase the designer can adopt strategies such as brainstorming in order to develop ideas and then select those considered most suitable to answer the user's problems.*
- *Prototyping: after selecting the best idea, this idea is transformed into a tangible product, i.e., a prototype is created to be tested by the end user to receive feedback. In this phase, problems and shortcomings of the identified solution emerge and allow the designer to improve the idea, redesign it and modify the prototype.*
- *Testing: Finally, in the prototype testing phase, solutions are put to the test to see whether they are effective in solving the problem or whether changes need to be made, perhaps drawing on solutions that had previously been discarded by the designer. Thus, this phase is not the last, but it is decisive for the designer to decide whether to move forward or to take a step back and put everything to the test.*

To learn how to make use of the Design Thinking approach to the social challenges that a social enterprise faces in implementing its activities, the following training activities related to the development phases of this process of elaborating ideas are reported below.

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Aims

[4] Polito R.M. (Master Thesis 2019-2020) Design Thinking come leva strategica per il digital marketing aziendale: il caso Fjord http://tesi.luiss.it/28935/1/214341_POLITO_ROBERTA%20MARIA.pdf

The aim of the Module is to understand the process of the Design Thinking applied to social causes, by acquiring the tools needed to implement it.

Knowledge	● *Recognize the main elements of design thinking applied to social causes.* ● *Describe the five phases of design thinking useful to plan services in a social enterprise*
Skills	● *Plan a social service by starting off with the needs of the user* ● *Build an Empathy map* ● *Conduct brain storming sessions*
Attitude	● *Apply both critical thinking and design thinking in parallel to solve problems* ● *Apply some design thinking concepts to their daily work* ● *Present the results obtained during the brainstorming process*

Learning Outcomes

In this module, participants **will learn to:**

- Understand the main concept of Design Thinking applied to social causes
- Recognise the criteria and values that the learner has to consider when using design thinking.
- To identify the needs of the users of the service a social enterprise may offer, by considering the user's perspective
- To learn how to use approaches and tools of design thinking (empathy map and Walt Disney's approach)

Module Outline

UNIT 1 Discovering the tools of Design Thinking	
Activities	Duration
Activity 1.1 How to build an Empathy Map	30 min
Activity 1.2 How to Brainstorm an Idea through the Walt Disney Approach	65 min

Content description

Taking into consideration the needs of the community and people for whom you are creating and defining the problem.

Activity 1.1 How to build an Empathy Map

Implementation	*This activity is designed for face-to-face training but can be adapted to be provided in an online format*
Objectives	The objective of the Module is to understand how to identify the needs of the users towards a social cause by implementing the main steps for building an empathy map
Competences	

	The learner will understand the main steps to take to build an empathy map that is the first task to complete in the development of a service responding to social needs of a community.
Duration	60 min
Main resources required	Whiteboards, markers, sticky notes if the training is face to face. Alternatively, you can use Padlet or other co-working tools like Miro (app online)

Activity Description and Training Content (training material - theory)

This activity aims to stimulate and deepen the knowledge of the users for whom the service and purpose on the market is built. Before starting the activity, each learner will have to find out about both the type of user they want to work with and the social cause to be addressed.

The exercise proposed here serves to identify the social cause, putting him/herself completely in the shoes of the user and thus trying to recognize his/her needs and points of view.

The trainer prepares the materials and divides the sheet into four quadrants, labelling each quadrant with the following terms: what the user sees, says, does and feels/thinks in relation to the social cause he/she has to deal with, the group of learners works together to complete the empathy map under the guidance of the trainer. They start by analysing the quadrants that relate to the external dimension and then move on to those quadrants that analyse the internal dimension of the problem at the centre of the analysis. At the basis of this activity, each learner must have prior knowledge on the topic/issue addressed. The quadrants should contain the following information

Outside dimension:

What does he/she see? What does he/she encounter in their daily experiences? It can be people, activities, or things. What do the people around them do? What do they observe, read, and see in their environment or marketplace that might influence them?

What do they do and say? How do they behave? What is their attitude like and what do they say? This can change depending on where they are, who they are with or who is nearby. Attitude can be represented by actions towards others or the way they convey something.

What do you listen to? What does the user feel and how does it influence them? Consider personal connections with family, friends, and colleagues, as well as what is being said in the media by bloggers, social media influencers and industry experts. Focus on things that have an impact on their thinking, not on superfluous streams of information. Influencers should focus on the people, things or places that influence the way you act

Inside Dimension

In this phase learners explore the user's thoughts and feelings, which are not observable, but will be inferred with direct quotes during the research. Participants try to imagine what it feels like to be in someone else's head.

What do you think and feel? What matters to the user who is thinking about it? Consider the positive and negative sides of thoughts. What makes you feel good or bad? What do they worry about or what keeps them awake at night? How do they feel? Scared?

At the end of this activity, the empathy map will be formed, and participants will have a clearer and more defined perception of who the user is for whom they want to build a new service and what they need. There will be a final debriefing moment in which summaries of the learning experience will be drawn.

Instructions to trainer(s)

The trainer should prepare the material and the empathy map, trying to stimulate the learners to fill in the tool. The trainer should prepare a set of guiding questions that can help the learners to fill in the map. Furthermore, the trainer will have to conduct the final debriefing which will serve to summarize the training results achieved (what did we learn about this experience?).

Activity 1.2 How to brainstorm an idea through the Walt Disney's approach

Implementation	*This activity is designed for face-to-face training but can be adapted to be provided in an online format*
Objectives	The aim of this activity is to support learners in developing tailored services they would like to offer as social entrepreneurs to the local community to tackle social challenges.
Competences	- Develop cultural awareness and expression - Build Entrepreneurship competence
Duration	65 minutes (5 minutes for the preparation, 45 minutes for each phase, 10 minutes of debriefing)
Main resources required	Notepads and pen to write the action plan and the ideas, paper boards for the trainer if needed

Activity Description and Training Content (training material - theory)

Among the Design thinking tool, a youth worker can use to stimulate the learner's creativity in finding innovative solutions to the social challenges he/she faces, the Walt Disney 's Approach comes of help. It is inspired by Walt Disney, who used to say to his co-workers on the heels of a business meeting, "There were actually three different Walt's: the dreamer, the realist, and the spoiler. You never knew which one would come to the meeting," and is used to bring up innovative ideas and make them practically applicable, even outside the realm of creative people[5].

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[5] Dr Rafiq Elmansy, *Disney's Creative Strategy: The Dreamer, The Realist and The Critic*
https://www.designorate.com/disneys-creative-strategy/

Actually, this tool was developed in 1994 by the expert Robert Dilts who, according to the article of the Design Thinking Scholar Dr Elmansy, he "stimulated a group of people in using a specific thinking flow which builds parallel thinking … used to generate, evaluate, critique ideas and solve problems"[6].

However, Dr. Elmansy also points out that although this strategy succeeds in unlocking the imagination of the individual, who devises creative solutions to real challenges, often the proposed solutions are not easily applicable in realm and cannot in fact be considered as a strategic plan to be followed step by step. Therefore, the scholar continues, this tool must be used to find a viable way-out, a bridge that connecting reality and imagination: in short, a practical and creative compromise to solve real everyday challenges[7].

The activity starts with the learners split into three different groups and, on the basis of the social challenge to be addressed, they try to hypothesize an idea to be field-tested through the approach devised by Walt Disney. Each group will have to develop an idea, which will later become a prototype to be tested in the field, following the three phases below:

 1) Phase 1 - Dream: each learner freely thinks of different possible ideas to tackle the social challenge proposed by the trainer, without criticism or limits. (15 min)

2) Phase 2 - Be realistic: Assuming that what they have dreamt is possible and admitting the possibility of realising the dream, learners try to construct all the necessary steps to turn the dream into reality: learners try to imagine how to make this idea applicable, drawing up a simple action plan (three or five points will suffice). (15 min)

3) Step 3 - Critique: starting from the action plan, learners examine all the potential critical aspects of the plan. They ask what the risks, weaknesses and obstacles to implementation might be. (15 min)

At the end of the activity each group of learners present their action plan to the other groups. The trainer will moderate this final debriefing moment, stimulating the learners' collective reflection on what they have just experienced. The trainer will elect the most convincing action plan and invite learners to discuss the weaknesses of their own action plans.

 The objective of this activity will not be to come up with an idea or an action plan, but rather to transfer to the learners a creative working methodology that they can adopt in any entrepreneurial context, particularly in the development of services designed to help local communities face every day social challenges.

Instructions to trainer(s)

The trainer's role will be to introduce the essential elements of the Disney approach, guide the learners through each phase of the training activity, without interfering but leaving them the necessary space to develop creative ideas. He/she will also pace the activity, distributing the materials needed for implementation such as notepads and pens. Finally, they will collect the action plans, elect a spokesperson for each group, and ask him/her to present the action plan that was drawn up,

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[6] Ibidem

[7] Ibidem

stimulating debate among the groups. In the end, he/she will elect the most convincing action plan, giving reasons for his/her choice and analysing the critical aspects of the other action plans.

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