Experiential learning and Integrative/ Design thinking  
– a perfect match?

Charlotta Windahl

The research
Prologue: some years back, receiving polarised student evaluations I found myself at a cross roads - content deliverer or facilitator of the learning experience? Determined to make the latter succeed, I implemented some radical changes and continued on the experience-based learning road, which focus was: integrating theory and practice through a real-life design-thinking challenge in cooperation with industry.

For the last four years I have been exploring the practical activities and tools linked to the process of design thinking, as well as its epistemological and cognitive foundations. The process dimension emphasises the importance of working iteratively, and combining abstract and concrete, divergent and convergent, activities (Brown, 2008). The cognitive dimension provides a deeper understanding of how knowledge is created (Martin, 2009). Organisations and individuals need to make sure they balance analytical and intuitive thinking to achieve both reliability and validity. Design thinking emphasises the importance of using both abductive reasoning - the ‘logic of what could be’ (Peirce, 1994) - and reflective practice (Schon, 1983) in order to achieve this.

This presentation focuses on how the use of design thinking tools and techniques (explicitly used in the course to address service design and innovation for the future) became invaluable when addressing the student’s learning experience. Throughout the four years of course development, four key insights and concepts emerged (closely related to Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory): 1) ‘theory-in-use’; 2) iteration; 3) action and 4) reflection. In this session, we will explore these concepts further and discuss how (and if) it is possible to create assessments and a course structure around them.

The importance
With an increasing trend in online content delivery, Business Schools as well as Universities around the world need to rethink their teaching methods. Arguably, design thinking can help with addressing some of the key issues facing management teaching, learning and research; for example, through emphasizing inquiry based learning, guided discovery and interdisciplinary skills (c.f. Starkey and Tempest, 2009).

Quoting Salman Kahn (NZ Herald, June 2014): "In my mind, the ones that will thrive are the ones that can articulate what is special about what happens when the human beings get together...And right now, for better or for worse, at some of the top universities in the world ... you are in a room with 200 or 300 people and someone is lecturing. I think institutions that continue to do that in 10 years are going to be in trouble...The ones that instead take those students and bring them into an
equally large-sized room and they create simulations or projects or team things for them to work on, I think they are going to do very well."

**How the session will be run**

In this session, we will first watch a 15minutes ‘documentary’ about the course. Following this, we will have an interactive discussion around the following four themes (please note that participants will get to choose which theme they want to discuss):

In our courses:

- How might we engage students in a positive team-working experience?
- How might we create a mutually meaningful interaction between academia and industry?
- How might we balance analytical and intuitive thinking?
- How might we capture both content and process?

The aim of this session is for the participants (including myself) to leave the room with the sense that they (a) did get to discuss an area important to them with people facing the same types of challenges (and opportunities) and (b) have some new ideas around how to address the students’ learning experience.