



Becoming a Design Led BA Team

By Blair Loveday, Chief Culture Officer, Redvespa

Design lifts a company beyond ordinary. Bring to mind design-led companies like Icebreaker, Air New Zealand and Apple.

But how do you help turn YOUR company into a design-led one? (Rest assured, the process doesn't have to involve donning a red cape and having to wear your undies on the outside).

A realistic and great place to start, is encouraging your BA team to become design-led. In doing so, you can lift them, and your company, beyond ordinary....

Over the years I've developed an insatiable curiosity for design and design thinking. A curiosity sparked by a well-respected local senior BA telling me that BA's don't design. From my friendship and discussions with BA/Designer John Davidson, our Redvespa CEO, Sarah Gibson, and Kitty Hass, Thought Leader in the BA profession, we've embarked on a journey that is bringing design to our BA profession.

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What makes becoming design-led so relevant is the realisation that we are living in the age of the customer. The power has shifted from companies to customers, and the expectations have never been higher. You can no longer get away with having “just ok” products or services. Well, at least not for long. A bad product or service

review will eat a clever marketing campaign for breakfast every day of the week. And it is this kind of thinking that is attracting organisations and teams to look more closely at the world of design.

Distinct from analysis, design generates curiosity, optimism and connects us back with our customers. It puts forward, fresh techniques and approaches that complement and extend our BA profession, such as divergent thinking, need finding, customer journey maps, empathy maps, visual story-telling, going beyond brainstorming, prototyping and infographics to name just a few. For leaders and management, this is exciting and provides hope for new insights and fresh ideas.

A design-led team believes that design and design thinking are at the heart of value generation and sustainable competitive advantage. Being deliberate about design is about creating an experience that your customers love. Right from the first moment they connect with your team, to their realisation that you have left them in a better place. A simple statement but more often than not, easier said than done. So where do you start?

Encourage a curious culture within your team.

When developing your people or hiring new team members, look for people who have a sense of curiosity, openness and empathy for the world and for the people whose problems they are trying to solve (essential for innovation). Having set the design thinking wheels in motion please don't feel that you have to come up with

all answers. Trust me, your team will have plenty of ideas and you need to listen. At our place, we have people coming up with ideas all the time and as a result, our design-led story is one of collaboration and creativity rather than one driven from the top.

Collaboration should already be in your team's DNA, and as design is a collaborative process, it should not be done in isolation. I believe design has the greatest impact when it's taken out of the hands of 'designers' and put in the hands of everyone. So, encourage your team to get involved in defining your design-led mojo, practices and techniques that will complement and extend your existing business analysis capability.

Place the customer at the heart of your world.

I share the view that you don't have to be an expert to capture the voice of your customer – just committed. And I'm talking about commitment to get out of your office and get out amongst your customers, watch them work, capture insights and listen with an open mind.

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This may sound obvious, but when the project gets underway the voice of the business and IT can often get very loud and as a result drown out the voice of the customer and lose sight of their needs. Now I like to use the word "customers" to define the end-users of the product or service you're building. This could mean that they are external consumers for services or products or internal users such as other teams using an internal IT application.

It's important to note that capturing the voice of the customer isn't a tick box exercise at the start of the project. Often teams will go through the process of doing a thorough requirements gathering session at the beginning of a project, however rarely does the customer's voice and

level of interaction continue through the project life cycle. Good design and requirements management practices encourage and support communication with customers. Failure to do this runs the risk of delivering a product or service that doesn't engage the end users and rest assured, they will not be shy about sharing their voice or determining its fate.

Did I mention risk?

Teams tend to design out as much risk as they can from their practices and processes. To rise above ordinary, you have to create a space where trust can happen and risks can be taken. To innovate well, you need to take risks and to be successful, you have to create trust within your team. I'm talking about trust that allows you to not be frightened of not following the pack (just like when someone told me that BA's don't design), to push the envelope and in the process, know that there is a possibility of failing. Because, it's this type of failure that can be the most useful as it's often where we learn the most.

Finally, please remember no two design-led teams are the same.

When defining your flavour of design mojo, keep in mind that your approach can be compared to that of human beings, no two are exactly the same. As you explore and collaborate it's likely that your design influence, thinking and approach will be made up of similar design elements that can be found in other teams or organisations. However, the way you apply the sum total of these parts will be distinctive to your team.

Our roots are in business analysis. So Redvespa's design-led flavour is a mix of our expertise and passion for business analysis, with a multi-disciplined design thinking approach. This enables us to work with our customers to not just realise solutions, but design them. Our design message is simple: combine creative problem solving with a human-centred focus to turn great ideas into tangible business outcomes.

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