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Not what you expected: Implementing design thinking as a leadership practice

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Abstract

Changing user needs have created new opportunities for libraries, requiring evolving leadership practices that support innovation and rapid change. Design thinking can provide leaders with a concrete process to move toward action. The authors – one an executive administrator at a large, multi-branch public library, the other an academic librarian who leads a small team – share how design thinking has positively influenced their leadership practices. The benefits of implementing this flexible process have included improved user experience, more creative solutions, wise investments, staff empowerment, increased transparency and trust, and employee learning and development. Both leaders experienced these benefits even though they are in different positions on their hierarchical organization charts. The authors propose that implementing design thinking as a leadership practice has a place in the evolving role of libraries and can shift organizational cultures to become more user-centered and embrace innovation. In addition to these benefits, the chapter discusses specific project examples, challenges, and tips for library leaders to successfully implement the process. Design thinking is translatable across library types and throughout private industry. Discussing design thinking as a leadership practice can benefit the profession and communities by giving leaders a common language to use when learning from and sharing with each other in conversations about innovation.

Keywords: design thinking, innovation, user experience, leadership, public library, academic library

Technological advancement in libraries has changed the nature of user needs. These changes have subsequently created new opportunities for public and academic library spaces and services, requiring evolving leadership practices. Library administrators and managers must employ leadership practices that effectively support rapid change and integrate innovation into organizational culture. Two trends particularly relate to these emerging necessities: user experience (UX) and design thinking. Libraries are increasingly allocating resources to UX work by creating UX positions and teams. There has also been a rise in libraries implementing design thinking to solve complex problems and to create new services, spaces, and initiatives (Peet, 2016).

This chapter discusses the experiences of two library leaders implementing design thinking in their respective libraries. M. Boisvenue-Fox is the Director of Innovation and User Experience at Kent District Library – a large, multi-branch public library – and regularly leads design thinking teams. K. Meyer is the UX Librarian at Grand Valley State University Libraries and leads a small team, employing design thinking primarily as a way to improve physical spaces and services. For both authors, implementing design thinking has resulted in enhanced UX through creative solutions and tangible improvements to library spaces and services. Adopting these techniques has also had the unexpected benefits of fostering collaboration, empowering staff, and narrowing the gap between frontline staff and executive decision makers. Design thinking has improved the authors' own leadership practices, and they suggest that when library leaders adopt this approach, it can shift organizational cultures to embrace innovation.

Background

Kent District Library

Kent District Library (KDL) is comprised of nineteen branch libraries in a suburban system in Kent County, Michigan but does not include, the Cities of Cedar Spring, Grand Rapids, Sparta and Solon Township. Branches vary in size and each community branch is unique in the user demographics it serves. KDL began to adopt the design thinking process four years ago when searching for a better way to implement changes and to support staff innovation and problem solving. Library leadership was first introduced to design thinking through Craig Wilson, a library board member and Steelcase Education Director of Market Development. Steelcase is an international office furniture manufacturer that embraced design thinking years ago. Wilson introduced this process to library leadership as a way to change the library's frame of reference when approaching problems or opportunities (Boisvenue-Fox, 2017b).

What was not immediately evident was how this process would effectively bring together more diverse perspectives, which was a priority consistent with KDL's leadership goals. KDL's leadership team had already started to focus on more inclusive decision making, and design thinking has allowed the library to build teams that represent many aspects of its multi-branch library system. Working together on these teams levels the playing field between staff and administrators, leveraging the diversity of their experiences, perspectives, and knowledge. After the initial introduction to design thinking by Steelcase employees, Boisvenue-Fox took an *Integrating for Impact* workshop on design thinking at Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Grand Valley State University

Grand Valley State University is a Carnegie classification Master's Large public university serving approximately 25,000 students in western Michigan. The University Libraries' UX Team was designed in response to Grand Valley's student-centered mission (Meyer &

Fisher, 2017), and a core function of the team is to understand, anticipate, and respond to student needs and to continuously improve library spaces and services (Rodriguez, Meyer, & Merry, 2017). As the UX Librarian, Meyer leads the UX team, which includes six support staff members from what would traditionally be known as access services and approximately twenty-five student employees. This team takes the lead at the service desk of the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons.

Grand Valley has a campus-wide design thinking initiative that includes a for-credit design thinking course and an extra-curricular design thinking academy for undergraduate students (Grand Valley, n.d.). This initiative started with the recognition that employers are looking for employees who are prepared to work in highly collaborative, team-based environments and who have the ability to work with others to solve complex problems (J. Berry, personal communication, January 10, 2018). The initiative seeks not only to give students a competitive advantage when applying for future employment, but also to benefit the community by providing a pool of applicants who have the skills employers' desire (J. Berry, personal communication, January 10, 2018).

The campus-wide interest in design thinking evolved alongside Meyer's own exploration of how to best carry out the work of the UX team, and design thinking became an important tool in her toolkit as a UX librarian. Meyer started implementing design thinking with her team primarily as a way to collaboratively solve specific UX-related problems. While she did not initially view her implementation of design thinking in terms of its impact on her leadership, it has become an integral aspect of her leadership practice, has improved her ability to lead the team, and complements her strengths-based leadership style.

Design Thinking

While there are numerous definitions of design thinking, the authors prefer this one: “Design thinking is a process for creative problem solving. Design thinking utilizes elements from the designer’s toolkit like empathy and experimentation to arrive at innovative solutions” (IDEO, 2018, para. 1).

Design thinking is not a new concept. Rowe’s *Design Thinking*, situated within an architectural context, was published in 1987 and references much earlier work. The term likely became more ubiquitous after the publication of the popular *Change by design: How design thinking transforms organization and inspires innovation* (Brown & Katz, 2009). The process has been spread through teaching with the Stanford d.school Institute of Design and IDEO, who are particularly well known for this dissemination. Design thinking is also frequently discussed in the context of business leadership and management (Kolko, 2015; Martin, 2011). Libraries are increasingly implementing design thinking processes (Peet, 2016), and IDEO teamed up with the Chicago Public Library and the Aarhus Public Libraries in Denmark to create the *Design Thinking for Libraries toolkit* (Toolkit, n.d.). However, there has not been much discussion in library literature specifically linking design thinking and leadership, and the authors believe this is an important conversation.

Implementing Design Thinking

Design thinking is a flexible process that can be implemented in a variety of ways to accommodate unique library cultures. Design thinking experts vary in articulating the steps of the process, and even the authors discuss and implement the process differently. The steps the authors suggest for the purpose of this chapter are: 1) Research/Understand/Empathize, 2) Define, 3) Ideate, 4) Prototype, 5) Implement & Evaluate (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017;

Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2018). This approach is related to steps defined by the Stanford d.school Institute of Design, Ambrose and Harris's *Design Thinking* (2010), and IDEO's Human-Centered Design Process (Design Kit, n.d.) and merges how the authors have implemented the process separately in their libraries. While the following overview is brief due to the many resources available to understand design thinking, the context is important for the subsequent discussion on using the process in a leadership practice.

Step 1: Research/Understand/Empathize

This step focuses on techniques that allow a team to better understand a problem from the user's perspective, which is critical, because people often jump into problem solving before taking the time to ensure the user's perspective relating to the problem is fully understood. There are a variety of user research techniques that can be implemented in this step. One-on-one interviews, observations, physical usability tests, cognitive mapping, user diaries, and questions posted on public whiteboards are examples of techniques the authors have implemented at their respective libraries (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017; Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2018; Meyer, 2017); details about these methodologies are prevalent in UX-related literature.¹

The work in this phase is powerful in developing empathy. When staff observe users struggling to complete library-related tasks or hear users talking about their challenges, it naturally increases empathy. John Berry, the former Director of Grand Valley's Design Thinking Academy, believes that empathy is the most significant difference between design thinking and other forms of leadership-related thinking. "And it's not just about problem solving, it's also about problem discovery because when you start with empathy, you discover problems you didn't know you have" (J. Berry, personal communication, January 10, 2018).

¹ The authors recommend *User Experience in Libraries* (Priestner & Borg, 2016) and *User experience (UX) design for libraries* (Schmidt & Etches, 2012)

Step 2: Define

This step involves using the insights gained in the previous step to pull together the who, what, where, when, and why of the problem or opportunity. This step also includes filtering insights into one clear statement that the team hopes to solve. For example, Meyer's team defined this statement: *How might we help students find seating that meets their noise-level preference (as well as their other preferences) when the library is busy?* In this step the team also articulates why solving the problem is important to users, and the discovery of this why often leads staff to the "a-ha moments" that further expand their empathy. At the end of this phase, the team needs to articulate design principles, which are short statements that describe what success for the project will look like (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017; Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2018). Establishing design principles before ideation is important so that the team can later filter the ideas generated and choose which ideas to prototype.

Step 3: Ideate

Ideation differs from and is more effective than traditional brainstorming. The purpose of this step is to explore a myriad of ways to solve the problem statement and then filter those ideas to one or two ideas to prototype (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017; Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2018; Meyer, 2017; Meyer & Psych, 2017). Various ideation techniques can be implemented to expand the potential of ideas generated and ensure contributions from everyone on the team. An example of an ideation technique is brainwriting, which involves everyone writing an idea on a notecard and passing it around the table (Gray, Brown & Macanuso, 2010, p. 82-83). Team members add new ideas or build on an idea already listed, and at the end of this process, the team considers the ideas and stars the ones that fit closest to the design principles (Gray, et al., 2010). Adding ideation techniques to their leadership practices has been especially beneficial for the

authors. Generating ideas as a group can often be challenging. Sometimes one person monopolizes conversation while others are hesitant to share their ideas; people often start criticizing ideas; and the group often strays from the original purpose. Implementing ideation techniques mitigates these challenges, creates a positive experience for staff who participate, and empowers staff to play with ideas and point of view. Frankly, ideation is fun and is one of the authors' favorite parts of design thinking.

Step 4: Prototype²

Prototyping is creating a “quick and dirty” visual representation of an idea and then sharing and testing it with library users for their feedback (Boisvenue-Fox, 2018; Merry, Meyer & Minnis, 2018; Meyer & Psych, 2017). Prototypes can take various forms, including a role playing skit to demonstrate a new service; a model or cardboard mock-up of a new space configuration; a hand-drawn flyer advertising a new event (Toolkit, n.d.); or sticky notes to demonstrate how a theoretical app or software might work. The best prototypes are inexpensive to create – office supplies, recycled materials, and craft supplies are commonly used.

When staff get ready to test their prototypes, they need to think about the types of users who will need to be consulted, how they will present their prototypes to users, and what specific questions they will ask (Boisvenue-Fox, 2018; Merry, et al., 2018). At the end of prototyping, the team typically has three choices: 1) to implement the idea as is; 2) to make improvements based on user feedback; or 3) to reject the idea and go back to ideation (Merry, et al., 2018).

From the authors' experience, libraries typically do not prototype ideas. This is unfortunate because prototyping can save libraries time and money by giving staff an

² The authors completed this free, online course on prototyping and found it to be foundational to their work in this area: <https://www.plusacumen.org/courses/prototyping>.

opportunity to improve – or sometimes reject – an idea before it is implemented and money is spent (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017; Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2018). Because prototyping includes testing an idea with users, it also leads to better and more purposeful solutions.

Step 5: Implement/Evaluate

When the team decides to implement an idea, staff may want to first map out how the idea will impact the full user experience. This includes identifying stakeholders, determining how to communicate the change or idea, and considering the impact on other users. Once the idea is implemented, the team will need to evaluate success based on the design principles established earlier in the process. After implementation, the team should still look for ways to improve the idea. Sometimes implementing one solution allows staff to identify a new user problem; in this way, the process is iterative.

Teams and flexibility

When implementing design thinking, carefully consider the design thinking team. At KDL, Boisvenue-Fox strategically tries to include as many new people on teams as possible to expose an increasing number of staff to the process. Teams are not always composed similarly but are usually capped at twelve people and include staff with different job types, staff from different sized branches, and staff from support departments. Staff can join a design thinking team by invitation, by volunteering, or by being nominated by a supervisor (Boisvenue-Fox, 2017b). Based on his experiences at Steelcase, C. Wilson advises exposing new employees to design thinking as soon as possible (personal communication, December 21, 2017).

Boisvenue-Fox has altered the design thinking process from what was originally presented to her. With a high number of part time staff and multiple locations, pulling a team together is logistically challenging. KDL adapted the process so that team members often engage

in user research before the group meets. Members bring their homework, and the team synthesizes the findings and collaboratively looks for insights at the meeting. The meeting also includes defining the problem, forming design principles, ideating to find multiple solutions, matching a solution to the design principles, and then planning the prototype. Prototyping and testing often happen after the meeting (Boisvenue-Fox, 2017b).

At Grand Valley, Meyer primarily facilitates the process with the UX team and involves others throughout the library depending on the project focus. Although the same UX student employees are not typically involved in the project from start to finish, at least two students are often asked to participate in portions of it. The work is also parsed out in various ways. For example, the entire team might be involved in ideation while just one staff member and student employee take the lead on prototyping and reporting findings. Although ideally the team would complete the entire process together, this is not usually feasible.

This flexibility in process is not unique to the authors' experiences. Wilson (2017) mentioned that at Steelcase, "the process has also evolved and is now dependent on the group using design thinking. What the company now enjoys is a common language to break down differences in our work." Steelcase's approach most commonly includes the following steps: 1) Think. 2) Point of view. 3) Plan. 4) Implement. (C. Wilson, personal communication, December 21, 2017). The authors highly recommend that library leaders alter the process to fit their own unique institutional contexts.

Design Thinking as a Leadership Practice

It is important for leaders – library leaders included – to continually expand and refine their leadership practices. Design thinking is a process that can be used as a part of a leader's practice. However, like other leadership tools, it is neither necessary nor prudent to implement

design thinking for every decision, challenge, or circumstance (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017; Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2018). The authors specifically recommend using this process for problems that are complex or to test ideas that may be initially based on staff opinions, rather than documented user need. In some circumstances, it may be more practical to implement pieces of the process rather than leading a team through every step; just as the process is flexible, so too is the way that leaders can choose to apply it to their leadership practices.

With that context in mind, the authors offer the following tips for library leaders who are interested in adding design thinking to their leadership practice:

Start small

If design thinking is new to you, start by choosing an ideation technique to try when your team needs to brainstorm. If you are in the middle of implementing a new process or service, think about how you could prototype it before implementing. Further, before leaping into a full design thinking process for a large initiative, tackle something smaller first – ideally a project that will take a few hours or a day to complete. Building on your success will build momentum and excitement for the process.

Identify a design thinking project

Boisvenue-Fox works with the KDL Leadership Team to approve design thinking projects that will take more than one design thinking session, since those require more staff resources to complete. The discussion of which design thinking projects to pursue happens at the administrative level where decisions are made based on user benefits and impact, as well as how the project relates to the library's strategic endeavors. Part of Meyer's responsibility at Grand Valley includes reviewing chat and text transcripts and questions recorded at the service point. She often discovers opportunities from this data that lead to future design thinking projects. Also,

the UX team often conducts user research on one topic that uncovers insights about another topic that leads to future design thinking projects.

Create a plan

Before facilitating a design thinking project, plan out the course of action, but stay flexible. Boisvenue-Fox creates a lesson plan that helps her stay on track for every process the library starts. This lesson plan includes the design thinking framework (or steps) with approximate times for each step laid out – sometimes over multiple sessions – with specific questions to focus on as well as different techniques to use. [See **Figure 1: KDL Lesson Plan Template**] Meyer creates a user research plan each semester that helps her keep track of what new user research the team will be conducting, as well as the status of multiple projects.

Move to action

When the team starts to gain insights from user research, shift the team's focus to *doing something* about those insights rather than getting stuck in the research phase. Included in this tip is the recommendation to bypass training staff on design thinking and instead move to action by completing a design thinking process. Boisvenue-Fox conducted a mini-workshop before starting a design thinking project, but that approach caused confusion. Team feedback improved when she simply started by leading teams through the process.

Ongoing reflection

Whenever you implement design thinking or an element of the process, take time afterward to reflect with your team on what went well and what you could improve next time. Doing so will help you continuously improve your ability to facilitate this work. If a step did not go smoothly, consult additional resources to continue your own learning.

Leadership benefits

The authors have discovered numerous benefits of adding design thinking to their leadership practices – some expected and some unexpected – including tangible impact and improved UX, more creative solutions, wise investments, staff empowerment, increased transparency and trust, employee learning and development, and an organizational shift to a more user-centric culture. These benefits have inspired the authors to continue using the process as a regular aspect of their leadership practices.

The authors both started implementing design thinking to improve UX and to positively impact their communities. A project with especially high community impact is one that Boisvenue-Fox facilitated involving KDL's Tyrone Township branch. The project focused on issues with after-school teens. Library staff needed to balance library usage for all users and, in this small library, the teens were overwhelming the library space both physically and audibly. The initial focus of the team was to determine how to better engage the teens by rearranging the physical space. The team consisted of a mix of library staff, community members, and school leaders. One result of this process is a documented need for increased library space for this community. If the team had not included members from the community, the community would not be considering a new building project.

Typically, fiscal responsibility must be a priority for library leaders, and design thinking can lead to wise investments. Conducting user research, exploring many possible solutions, and prototyping help ensure that ideas are the best ones before the ideas are implemented and money is spent. For example, users outside of KDL's service area indicated that they were interested in paying for a library account to access KDL's digital collection. Before developing this initiative, the library conducted user research to determine what users might be willing to pay and

discovered that the amount was too low for the service to be viable. The initiative was not pursued and the user research conducted up front ended up saving significant staff time in developing a service that would not have been sustainable. At Grand Valley, user research regarding furniture use and the subsequent prototyping of potential furniture solutions has led to evidence-informed investments (Rodriguez et al., 2017, p. 330).

Finding creative solutions is central to an innovative organizational culture, and design thinking often achieves this more effectively than what an individual or group can produce on their own. For example, a KDL team focused on how to improve the online library card application form. Through the design thinking process, staff identified that the experience for someone who did not qualify for a library card was frustrating because users would not know they were not eligible for a card until after completing the online form. As a result of this insight, the library will implement a new online process that includes a series of simple questions aimed at discovering where users should get their card and directing them to other libraries as needed (Boisvenue-Fox, 2017a). This is an example of the team discovering a problem staff did not realize existed and developing a solution far better than initially expected. At Grand Valley, the UX team developed a customized seating service that allows students to text the library for seating suggestions when the library is extremely busy during final exams. During a second ideation session, someone on the team suggested partnering with an adjacent building to reserve extra seating space, exemplifying how ideation often leads to building upon and enhancing ideas.

Implementing design thinking gives staff an opportunity to be part of decision making – determining what direction to take and how it will be taken. Zak (2017) found that employees in high-trust organizations are happier, more collaborative, and stay at their jobs longer. One of the leadership actions that promotes trust is to give staff some control over how they work (Zak,

2017). Involving staff in the design thinking process allows them to influence how ideas are developed and implemented, and it makes decision-making more transparent. While the authors did not set out to use design thinking as a way to build trust, this has been an unexpected benefit. Additionally, when a leader can empower staff to use their expertise and frontline experience, it leads to better solutions and narrows the gap between executive decision makers and on-the-ground work.

Staff surveys at KDL indicate that staff are highly satisfied in serving the public. This satisfaction translates to the design thinking process, where staff serve in a different way. The work staff do as part of design thinking lets them continue their engagement with library users through user research and testing. Staff hear directly from library users, and solutions are informed by those insights. The empathy staff develop and their participation in the process contributes to their buy-in to project outcomes, which is an important component of positive change management.

At Grand Valley, the employee development component of design thinking has been just as valuable as other tangible outcomes. Staff and student employees alike have been empowered to implement various user research techniques, expanding their knowledge of how to test their hunches and move from assumptions to evidence. For student employees, this knowledge may be useful in their careers and gives them first-hand experience in how to collaboratively solve complex problems – a skill that is transferable and one that employers particularly value. One of Grand Valley's UX students was first exposed to design thinking in his work at the library. This sparked his curiosity, and he ended up taking Grand Valley's design thinking course, *Design Thinking to Meet Real World Needs*. Supporting the institutional mission is at the heart of academic libraries (Meyer & Fisher, 2017), and providing rich, experiential opportunities for

student employees is an often-overlooked way that libraries can support student learning (Meyer & Torreano, 2017).

Finally, when leaders implement design thinking, it can shift their own lens and deeply influence organizational culture. The authors have both recognized this shift within themselves and their teams. Design thinking is a process that centers on the user and, by implementing the process and involving others, a leader can visibly model user-centered action. The process allows leaders to continually frame ideas and solutions around why users might need a problem solved or why a new opportunity might improve user experience. This “why” lens can ultimately lead libraries to move forward relevant and user-focused ideas and solutions. Leaders in other industries also recognize a user-centered shift when implementing design thinking. C. Wilson said, “You are modeling behaviors. As a leader, you can help show staff the path and get them back to the user” (personal communication, December 21, 2017).

An important element of this benefit is that leaders must focus on the user throughout the process and within their day-to-day interactions with staff by continuously asking the hard questions: *What is the problem? How do we know this a problem? How can this be improved? Is this service needed or wanted? Why do users always ask this question or do this? When a majority of library staff begin to ask these questions automatically, it demonstrates that a library is moving to a user-centered culture and embracing design thinking and innovation beyond individual projects. By modeling this approach, library leaders can influence their library cultures.*

Challenges to Overcome

A surprising component makes the design thinking process challenging for many staff: discomfort. Staff typically enjoy a high level of competence in their work. When teams dive deep into design thinking, staff often hit a point in the process where they feel lost. The process is meant to remove people from their own perspectives and adopt someone else's viewpoint and, if done correctly, this "out of sorts" feeling is normal and acceptable. Leaders should expect to support teams through this uneasiness.

Design thinking can also be uncomfortable for leaders. It can be challenging for leaders to not know ahead of time what the outcomes of the process might be. C. Wilson shared that at Steelcase employees focus on these behaviors: committed, curious, and connected. "It is in the curious behavior that allows us to not have an answer" (personal communication, December 21, 2017). J. Berry similarly said that design thinking is "not ego driven. It's passion driven to find a good answer" (personal communication, January 10, 2018). For both Boisvenue-Fox, who had eleven years of library management experience before implementing design thinking, and Meyer, who had only a few years of management experience before trying this approach, it was important to get comfortable with giving up a certain degree of control. Design thinking requires leaders to embrace the fact that staff might have insights and ideas that are better than theirs.

Similarly, the solutions users prefer might not be what you expected. In addition, the problem you thought was the problem may change as new information is learned and a new perspective is adopted. For example, Boisvenue-Fox and the staff at KDL initially assumed users would want library cards available to pick up at the branches after users completed an online library card registration process. Instead users wanted the option to have library cards mailed to them or to not obtain a physical library card at all.

Design thinking can be challenging and takes time. Staff must typically fit this work alongside other tasks and responsibilities. While conducting user research can be comfortable, it is important to not overly bog down the process. Having too much research to analyze is not an efficient use of staff time and can make the research difficult for the team to use effectively. Boisvenue-Fox likes to approach this part of the process by asking the team to start with what everyone can reasonably complete in one to two hours, then waiting to see if there are still missing pieces or questions that are not yet answered. This approach provides an achievable time frame that can be reasonably accomplished alongside other staff work.

Meyer's team often tries to complete user research within a semester. When the team wanted to learn more about the student desire for more quiet space in the library, the team implemented three user research techniques within the semester: one-on-one interviews, a question students responded to via text message, and card-sorting combined with physical usability tests. Although their time frames tend to be different, the authors suggest that teams do enough research to identify insights and remember that teams are not trying to prove anything.³

Conclusion

As leaders who are on distinctly different levels within their organizational charts and who work in different types of libraries, the authors have found that implementing design thinking has benefited their work as leaders. The “Not what you expected” part of this chapter title refers to how design thinking can help leaders discover problems they did not know existed

³ To learn more about how much user research to conduct, the authors recommend *Just enough research* (Hall, 2013).

and create solutions that have never before been explored; it also refers to how the authors did not expect that this process would significantly enhance their abilities to lead.

Implementing this process in the context of a leadership practice also provides a common language for library leaders from different types of libraries to discuss issues, problems, and challenges, and to inspire each other in continuing to foster innovative cultures. One of the authors is a public library administrator; the other is an academic librarian and manager. The authors work in different library cultures with different communities of users. However, this work has united them: they repeatedly come together to share their projects, their successes, and excitement. The authors' conversations often include one of them sharing challenges while the other offers tools, resources, and ideas to work through those challenges. Their collaboration has been rich and beneficial, fueled by the common language of design thinking.

Further, the authors have each reached out to design thinking professionals outside of libraries who easily related to their work and process. These professionals supported and understood the authors' viewpoints and contributed to their continued learning by offering professional advice. This kind of outside support can be uncommon, because libraries are often unique in their community ecosystems. Design thinking has allowed the authors to provide leadership in the community outside of their libraries. What better value can libraries bring to the community than by participating in others' success? When the authors talk to community members about their work with design thinking, community members are initially surprised to realize that their libraries approach innovation in ways that are similar to those leading the way in other industries. This common approach becomes a new way to demonstrate relevance.

Finally, the need for libraries to focus on innovation will likely persist, but it can be challenging for leaders to know where to start. Design thinking – with its steps to serve as a

roadmap, along with its flexibility and emphasis on collaboration and empathy – can provide leaders with a concrete process to move toward action. The authors' hope is that library leaders implementing this process will continue the conversation by learning from and sharing with each other while reaching across the lines that often divide the profession.

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