

Work in partnership

How MROC and Design Thinking can collaborate

Leverage an online community in the innovation process? Design Thinking plus MROC? **Julia David** and **Heiner Junker** describe why this leads to a better understanding of users and how Design Thinking can benefit from this.

MROCs have become established in the world of market research, but are still found far too seldom in Design Thinking. Wrongly it would seem since MROCs are unbeatable when agility is paramount in innovation processes such as Design Thinking.

But hang on a minute, how's that again: agility in Design Thinking? If you ask around the companies, listen to the teams and even to some Design Thinking coaches, agility is mainly equated with speed. Above all else, the Design Thinking processes have to be fast and well-timed. However, if time-boxing becomes an end in itself, empathy for the user as well as creativity fall by the wayside. Moreover: many high-speed teams overwhelm the organisation with their ideas. The people who are needed for implementation but who weren't involved in the development, distance themselves from the new ideas and slam on the brakes (not-invented-here syndrome).

Design Thinking is simply not intended to churn out ideas and prototypes. Rather, it aims to create new or better solutions for the real problems of users and lay the foundations for putting these into practice. That means two things:

1. Understanding the users

In addition to speed, it takes time and space to empathise with the world of users and to make use of their feedback and inspirations during the process.

2. Involving implementers and decision-makers

The decision-makers and implementers in the organisation must see themselves as part of the development process if they are to take forward implementation of the solutions in the company.

MROCs are an excellent tool for achieving both and taking Design Thinking to the next level. Here are a few examples from practice for practice:

Empathise better with the target group

MROCS are great for getting to know the target group and its needs better. Before launching into a Design Thinking workshop, we activate the people in the online community and get them to describe, document and discuss their everyday lives, needs and problems relating to the design challenge. To make it possible for the Design Thinking teams to experience the community more closely, we bring participants from the community together with the team members in the real world. The teams interview the target group, experience them at home or while shopping. The point of this: they should not only understand the users but also be able to empathise with them.

Many high-quality solutions

To develop ideas, we need people, knowledge, inspiration, openness and time. The latter plays a major role especially for our brain since the brain needs time to be able to generate the desired brainwaves from information and inspirations. By using certain creativity techniques we can take a shortcut to the brainwave because these techniques stimulate their production.

But these brainwaves, which are so incredibly important for the creativity process, are also stimulated by MROCs. Thus, for example, the Design Thinking teams are given creative tasks before the ideation workshop and can share their thoughts with the users in the community. The team members obtain direct feedback, recognize what really matters to the users and are inspired for new ideas and solutions. The highlight of MROCs: All those involved switch into creativity mode from day one – even prior to the actual Design Thinking workshop. New connections leading to new solutions consciously and unconsciously form in their minds. This phase of incubation lasts several days. That this procedure works is demonstrated by the way the ideas flow thick and fast after the incubation phase. Furthermore: the solutions are already of a very high standard at the start of the Design Thinking workshop.

User feedback at all times

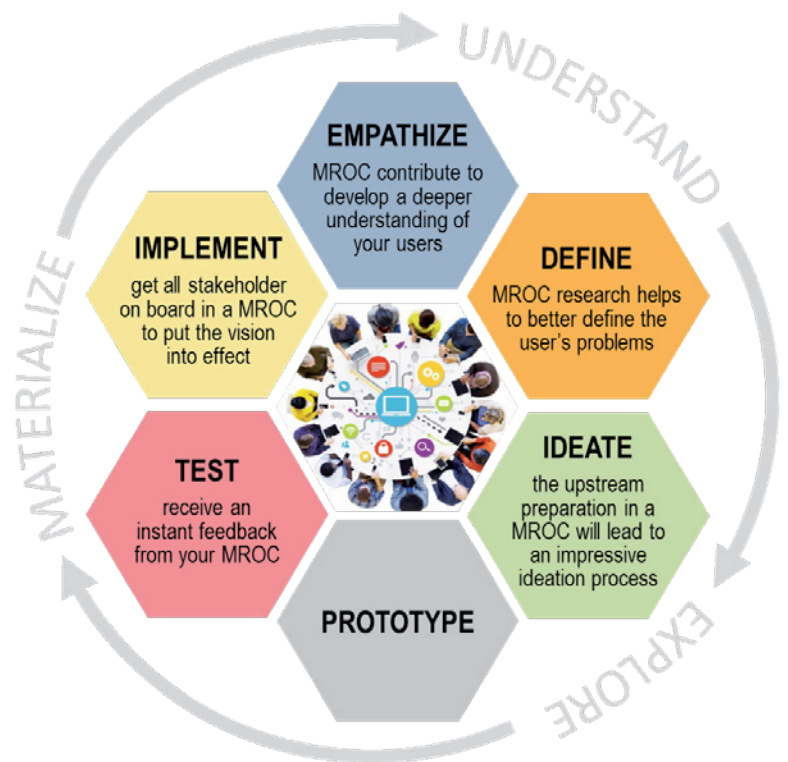
Design Thinking thrives on iteration. User feedback must hence be permanently obtained on interim results of the process as the basis for optimization. Online communities are particularly suitable for these iterations. They are available day and night and can be quickly integrated in the design process if necessary. The community participants evaluate ideas and don't need long to give their feedback, which can be promptly analysed and processed by the team. It is typical to hold three to five iteration loops with the community. Then the prototypes are mature enough to be tested with other, primarily quantitative methods, e.g. for market potential.

Integrate doers and implementers

If you ask about the success of Design Thinking initiatives in the companies, the replies are often unsatisfactory. One typical answer is: "We've implemented a few internal ideas but, to be honest, no marketable innovations yet." One reason for such difficulties is the failure to involve the implementers and scepticism among the decision-makers. MROCs are also helpful here, offering efficiency benefits particularly to companies with several operating sites or international offices. For this we allow staff members, implementers and decision-makers to participate in separate forums or invite them to observe the user community.

This doesn't only increase their personal commitment because they, as stakeholders, have an influence on the development process, give feedback and contribute their expertise. We further observe that the community leads to multipliers emerging in the various countries. They back the new solutions and support their implementation on the spot.

The aforementioned aspects show a small selection of the many uses MROCs can be put to in the Design Thinking process. But their applications extend far beyond these examples. We at Produkt + Markt repeatedly experience how the MROC method enables us to provide an added value enabling organisations to be more successful and users happier. ■



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