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Editor's Note

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It may be instructive, as this special three-part series of *SIGNED* draws to a close, to look back at the origins of the practice that inspired it, what has come to be known as Design Thinking, which is posited on applying the practical way in which designers create their work to other fields and disciplines.

The actual term “Design Thinking” was coined by David Kelley (who conceived the Apple computer’s first mouse) when he founded a company called Ideo. When asked to help a healthcare foundation to re-structure its organisation and a university to create alternative learning environments to the traditional classroom, he realised that he was dealing with a fundamentally new kind of design challenge.

To distinguish this new kind of challenge, he began to refer to it as “design with a small d”, but increasingly found that when asked to define what designers do, he was inserting the word “thinking”. This is how the term “Design Thinking” emerged.

We decided to take a look at how three types of studio operate: the one-person band, a duo and a medium-to-large-scale outfit. Then to draw comparisons with the world of sport. The solo artist was juxtaposed with an individual cyclist, the couple working together with a fencer duelling against an opponent, and the bigger enterprise with a rugby team.

This latter pairing was perhaps the most surprising. Far from being the somewhat

chaotic, often violent clash of two groups of muscle-bound men that it can appear to the casual observer, rugby in all its many manifestations was found to be a game of high strategy and on-the-spot inspiration that has a great deal in common with a studio full of specialists seeking a successful route to a common goal.

Among the larger organisations with which parallels can be found with sizeable creative agencies are those pertaining to government and the service industries. The former, though adhering to the same Design Thinking principles, is usually a more straightforward challenge, revolving around a more efficient method of organisation with more effective outcomes.

Delivering better service — be it to do with health or nutrition or a more equal spread of opportunities — is a far more amorphous subject and therefore prone to a greater variety of solutions. Which is precisely what makes it so amenable to a Design Thinking approach and so influential in the entire DT ethos.

At the end of the day, what we hope to have proven throughout this hopefully fascinating series is that the key factor in Design Thinking is “testability”. In contrast with conventional top-down lines of action, DT relies on actual feedback from actual people. Does it work? Is it what those it sets out to help really want? If not, why not? In the immortal words of the medieval Scottish warrior-king Robert the Bruce: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try and try again.”

A SPORTING CHANCE: “TESTABILITY” SETS DESIGN THINKING APART

