

COURSE: ART HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY IN ART EDUCATION

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“You have to have money these days. The roads are falling apart, so you need a Pajero or a Land Cruiser. The phone lines are erratic, so you need a mobile. The colleges are overrun with funds who have no interest in getting an education, so you have to go abroad. And that’s ten lakhs a year, mind you. Thanks to electricity theft there will always be shortages, so you have to have a generator. The police are corrupt and ineffective, so you need private security guards. It goes on and on. People are pulling their pieces out of the pie, and the pie is getting smaller, so if you love your family, you’d better take your piece now, while there’s still some left. That’s what I’m doing. And if anyone isn’t doing it, it’s because they’re locked out of the kitchen.”

— **Mohsin Hamid, Moth Smoke 1**

It's reality and most of us are indeed just doing the work, to make a living. Economically either you are doing a job for someone or you are working for yourself, like running your own business. For this purpose, the word "business" can be taken as meaning as any enterprise that requires a person or people to achieve its objectives. At the end of the day, its how much bring back to the table is what matters in this cruel world.

The business world is cut-throat, seeing is believing. At the end of the day how well you break a deal, how great are your numbers, and customer satisfaction are the goals to be achieved. How well you put across your thoughts to the other person is where you make a difference. You know the other person's mind. How well you can judge or understand.

In the Twenty-First century workplace, a person needs to develop and use a different set of skills that were not in demand a few years ago. This gap or demand is what I felt during my work experience of a decade in the corporate sector. I felt that when we were near to close the deal with the client's something was lacking. Now, what was that something which was lacking is maybe the right mix of ingredients to spice up the deal. It was not that. I felt that being an art graduate and the rest being business graduates there was a huge gap in the mindset. They were very good in numbers but not good with ideas, empathy or you know understanding the client. Whereas I, on the other hand, took every customer as a reflective art piece and understood where they were coming from, and then we worked around the problem to arrive at new business solutions.

I felt a dire urge of some missing ingredients and finally, in this course, I figured out that it is critical thinking through the application of design thinking in the business sector of Pakistan which is required the most to produce new jobs and get accelerated sales.

You know the idea of managers as designers is the innovation required. Why? Because the markets we are dealing with are all humans and humans just don't work with figures they require more than that. Especially in the digital world, we are in these days, it's a huge challenge.

So the design thinking cycle fits in the missing puzzle perfectly. As we know that designers who solve the most difficult problems do it through integrative thinking. This thinking comes from the skills of observation and inquiry. I'm proposing design thinking as the new business strategy for the Pakistan business community.

This is what great business leaders do. They enter some kind of a constrained environment where something is near impossible and they have to reach to it. Design thinking and critical thinking has been presented as a source of business competitiveness to promote innovation in new products and services. Also as a means by which managers could create new alternatives in addressing a wide range of market requirements. Design thinking is applicable no matter whatever is your role or industry. Whether you work in business, government, education, or nonprofit, design thinking can help you develop innovative solutions based on the needs of your customers.

Design thinking has a human-centered approach. It encourages organizations to focus on the people they're creating solutions for. This leads to better products, services, and internal processes. When you sit down to create a solution for a business need, the first question should always be what's the human need behind it?

Implementing a design thinking strategy is a map in which we are integrating what's desirable from a human point of view. What is technologically feasible and economically viable. It also allows those who aren't trained as designers to use creative tools to address a vast range of challenges. The process starts with taking action and understanding the right questions. It's about embracing simple mindset shifts and tackling problems from a new direction.

When presented with a problem, you should always resist the urge to find a solution right away. Shift your mindset to instead ask a question that might get you closer to the root of the challenge or support or improve etc. Turn problems into questions and then solutions.

Take the example of the IDEO team who worked with a company that was struggling with retention of their employees. Instead of focusing on improving retention rates, they asked, How can we make a better employee experience? By refocusing on the real human needs, they uncovered insights that were better able to drive toward a solution. The same happened in Google, Apple, etc.

It is a problem-based approach for organizations to achieve a balance between the tensions of exploration and exploitation. You know managers know how to do forecasting, planning, decision making but these challenging times are demanding something new. That something new is the design thinking concept being inculcated in the business schools, organizations and provide critical, practical thinking avenues to nurture this culture. Design thinking merged with

business provides a complete package of a person who can walk the talk, argue, reason, and do reflective thinking like designers and empathize with the clients. The whole concept of deconstructing a problem through questions and then solving through hands-on training.

From the historical viewpoint I position myself with the progressive education movement. Its emphasis was on learning by doing on hands-on projects, experiential learning. It placed a strong emphasis on problem-solving and critical thinkers.

Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results."

John Dewey 2.

It said that education is everyone's freedom and that freedom is to be nurtured in a child. For this to be achieved it requires an environment that fosters thinking skills. John Dewey's idea of experiential learning through hands-on training took an uphill process after World War Two and open school movements like Reggio Emilia stemmed from it. Freedom is making the mind free of all enslaving thoughts and learning to question to think about your environment, yourself, the society is what was introduced at that time. Dewey's idea of education as democracy for all and freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness is what is required nowadays. Critical theory stemming out of this and the laws made by Immanuel Kant. Critical Philosophy is the exercise of critical thinking skills to clarify problems, issues, and concepts. It can be conducted on a one-to-one basis, or with groups. It is the core service of philosophical consultancy.

Foremost amongst the techniques in Critical Philosophy is the method of Socratic Dialogue, which is a co-operative attempt to search for answers to conceptual questions, such as "When do we learn?" and "What are the limits of tolerance?". The process begins with systematic reflection upon one concrete example drawn from the experience of one of the participants.

Under the umbrella of all these philosophies, I interviewed a few colleagues working in the corporate sector. First is Maria Shamsi, She is the creative head at Synergy Dentsu. When I posed this question to her she said as follows.

Critical thinking through design thinking is the need of the hour because of the changing times ahead. The world is multifaceted and extensively urbanized. She said critical thinking eliminates subjectivity and helps businesses to arrive at a solution. Further, she said that creative thinking also aids in arriving at strategies to formulate ideas in this fast-changing diverse global reset.

She said that critical thinking constantly questions the assumptions we accept at face value. It brings in logic on whether a certain idea has substantial support to bring in a solution. It is a skill which should be groomed in students at the university level. As these people when graduate and join the workforce they should be able to enhance the system by identifying problems and providing solutions to it.

I also spoke to the marketing head and owner of Shan Foods Sammar Sultan. Her views were also similar. She said that business graduates working in her firm have a lot of difficulties thinking through reason and innovation. Whereas design graduates sail smoothly. She said that

while creating an advertisement the thinking process they go through from ideation to implementation, its very difficult with the pure business graduates to make them think other than the numbers. She said that it took her a while to make them realize that numbers or sales are also increased through other thinking factors for which the mind needs to be trained. She said that if any workshop is offered to her for her employees to earn design thinking she is ready to invest in it.

The example to be quoted here is an interdisciplinary approach by introducing MBA as an arts approach by Central saint martins and berkins business school in London. The course is for 18 months and the objective is to produce MBAs as designers. The reason for this is that in the contemporary world business schools operate in a context where rapid technological change has triggered a fourth industrial revolution, resulting in a world of ‘wicked’ problems. Understanding and addressing wicked problems is challenging because it involves exploring different interactions between human systems and processes and between natural systems and processes over time. Such problems require creativity and innovation to achieve solutions. This is why MBA graduates are considered as finance, analysts, and clever restructurers of companies, rather than creators of companies that are built to last. In my opinion, knowledge should be constructed through the activities of the learner. Effective approaches to wicked problems, therefore, require creativity and innovation, involving the ability to work effectively and productively. This leads to the birth of integrative thinkers who approach creative solutions for difficult situations. I also propose an art-based MBA approach or an Arts degree with a business approach as a solution for current times in Pakistan business and art scenario. I urge all educators to sit together and devise a plan or curriculum which can produce a generation of thinkers to tackle the current day issues and bring workable solutions to be implemented.

Considering the current circumstances, and to fulfill the immediate corporate requirements I propose to devise a short course for managers and mid-level managers, to make them able to tackle these wicked problems in a new dimension by enhancing their cognitive skills in the light of design thinking strategy.

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