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BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY OFFICE

# Applying design thinking across the business:

## An interview with Citrix's Catherine Courage

**Catherine Courage champions user-centered design—not only for the benefit of the software company's customers but also for its employees.**

**Hugo Sarrazin  
and Hyo Yeon**

As senior vice president of customer experience at Citrix Systems—which develops a range of cloud-computing and enterprise-software solutions—Catherine Courage is in her fifth year of permeating the company's products and functions, such as IT and sales, with the user-centered approach known as design thinking. In this interview, she shares lessons learned during the ongoing transformation.

**McKinsey:** *What is design thinking?*

**Catherine Courage:** It's interesting: when we really started to pursue design thinking four years ago, one of the biggest hurdles was that people tend to think of design as

being about aesthetic qualities—colors, pixels, fonts, and the like. Absolutely, the aesthetic appearance of products is important, but design as a “big D” word means more than that. So we've invested a great deal of time to help people understand that design is about simplicity and delighting customers and other users. It's about an absolute focus on the user, and it's about constant innovation.

Traditionally, many of our product organizations would start with a problem and then—based on intuition about what our customers want—race toward a solution. Today, they actively engage customers along the way, with an iterative process of failing

## Takeaways

Design is about more than aesthetics—it's about keeping things simple, pleasing the customer, constantly innovating, and adopting a user-centered approach.

Design thinking pushes companies to understand customers and create products that focus on meeting their needs.

In this interview, Catherine Courage explains that for design thinking to succeed, it needs to be part of all company processes. Employees across the organization must consider how they can contribute to the customer experience.

and learning fast as part of the journey. Getting to this point has required big process changes and a new mind-set across the company.

**McKinsey:** *Why did you choose the design-thinking approach to get closer to your company's customers?*

**Catherine Courage:** The main purpose of my team's charter is to ensure that we're delivering a great experience across all customer touchpoints—from the website to trying our products, using them, and all the way through to support and renewal of contracts. This requires a company-wide focus on the customer.

Design thinking is an ideal framework for us to use because it focuses on developing deep empathy for customers and creating solutions that will match their needs—as opposed to just dreaming up and delivering technology for technology's sake.

**McKinsey:** *How did you get started?*

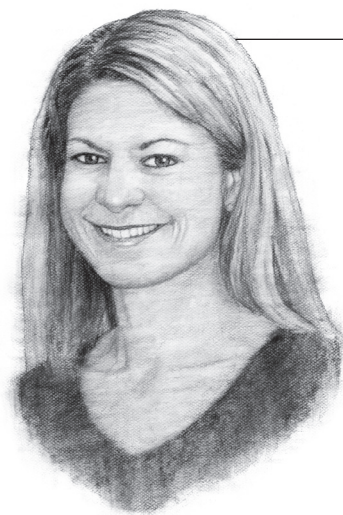
**Catherine Courage:** We started by training our product organizations and built a team of design professionals and researchers who could go out and understand what was on our consumers' minds and the opportunities that we had in the areas where we compete. However, we soon found that a customer-centric approach was applicable to everything we do, and we wanted to scale it across the business. As we started to do that, we realized that Citrix, like many companies, has different subcultures, and the approaches that we tried in the product-development area

didn't necessarily apply to other parts of the organization. This was an important lesson as we started working with different teams across the business. To date, we've trained almost half of our 9,800 employees in a customer-centric approach to problem solving that makes design thinking meaningful and relevant to everyone, regardless of division.

**McKinsey:** *IT is often not that used to experimenting to deliver new enterprise applications. How did you get the IT function on board?*

**Catherine Courage:** It's important to bring design to life by giving people many examples of how it works—not just the principles but also examples throughout the company where colleagues are exhibiting design-thinking behavior. What helped us be successful with IT was that we did have these proof points where IT staff could see the successes their colleagues were having. As a result, IT was quite keen to engage in this new approach.

For example, when we're choosing what products to procure and deploy to our users, IT does trials and proof of concepts. That's critical, because IT can't simply deploy technology. It needs to understand its users. Our IT department has also taken to heart that design thinking is not only about products and services; it can be about processes as well. For example, IT has transformed the way it does project retrospectives. The department now has a redesigned process that uses a different framework than before. There are subtle changes in how questions are framed that



## Catherine Courage

### Vital statistics

Born in 1974 in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

Married

### Education

Holds a master's degree in applied sciences, specializing in human factors, from the University of Toronto

### Career highlights

#### Citrix Systems

(2011–present)  
Senior vice president of customer experience

(2009–11)  
Vice president of product design

#### Salesforce.com

(2004–09)  
Director of user experience

#### Oracle

(2000–04)  
Principal usability engineer

### Fast facts

Coauthor of *Understanding Your Users: A Practical Guide to User Requirements—Methods, Tools, and Techniques* (second edition, Morgan Kaufmann, March 2015)

Executive sponsor for the Citrix Women's Informal Network and the Institute of International Educa-

tion's Women Enhancing Technology initiative

Selected by the *Silicon Valley Business Journal* in 2011 as one of Silicon Valley's "40 under 40" technology leaders and in 2013 as one of Silicon Valley's "100 most influential women"

Appeared on *Forbes* list of "10 rising stars at the world's most innovative companies" in 2013

Board member of California College of the Arts and the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

reflect empathy for the person next to you—who may have given the project his heart and soul even though things didn't go as planned. This approach has made a positive change in how team members learn from mistakes and do a better job the next time. Being open to failure, learning, and iteration is a critical part of the process.

**McKinsey:** *How does design thinking affect the role of the CIO?*

**Catherine Courage:** Design thinking is key for CIOs today. Consumerization has raised the expectations of all users. They are exposed to a new breed of technology that is more powerful and more intuitive.

They want to be delighted with the applications, tools, and devices they use—which need to be simple and should not require a lot of training—just like the technology experiences in their personal life. The good news for CIOs is that the design-thinking principles that product organizations have adopted can also be used by IT organizations. IT should think of its users not as stakeholders but as customers, and the department needs to move from building applications that meet functionality requirements to designing intuitive user experiences that empower customers. The move to agile development is a parallel evolution in IT that is reinforcing many design principles. IT organizations apply agile work through

sprints and rapid iterations. Design thinking is similar; you rapidly iterate with customers to get a better product or application. The focus is on the user experience and on building deep customer empathy for what makes these experiences delightful.

**McKinsey:** *What have been the biggest obstacles to adopting design thinking at Citrix?*

**Catherine Courage:** Change is always hard, and it can be scary if you're not sure if your executive team supports the changes. When we started working outside the product organizations, we discovered that many teams were very risk averse. They would come up with great ideas for different ways to do things, but when the rubber hit the road, they would revert back to their old ways. However, some teams found it easier to embrace change, and what they had in common was that they received explicit support and encouragement from their executive managers. It didn't require much to make a difference—just that an executive on the team would come in and say,

“Guys, fantastic ideas. This is the behavior I want to see. Keep pushing forward!”

Another challenge has been that some teams simply haven't been ready to embrace change from the start, despite our best efforts, which taught us to be patient when there isn't traction. In one case, it took a year until a team that hadn't been interested before called on us for help on a project. We've learned to help fuel the team with relatable examples of success for sources both internal and external.

**McKinsey:** *Selling change to sales teams can sometimes be a challenge. How did it go at Citrix?*

**Catherine Courage:** The sales organization, with its natural focus on meeting sales quotas and numbers, was the last area we touched because we thought it would be the hardest to engage. We were wrong. Sales leaders very much embraced design thinking. When we described what it can do with respect to innovation and problem solving, they realized that there were many



“You need to make [design thinking] part of all processes and not just something you do on select projects. Starting by looking through the customer lens has to be ingrained in everything you do.”

problem areas in their own world. The systems they used, for example, were getting in the way of them understanding how to sell to their customers. We created a team of sales leaders empowered to define their own problems and solutions within a design-thinking framework, and we made participation optional. It was surprising how many leaders took part and came up with solutions that we want to scale across our sales teams.

**McKinsey:** *How do you make design thinking stick?*

**Catherine Courage:** You need to make it part of all processes and not just something you do on select projects. Starting by looking through the customer lens has to be ingrained in everything you do. Developing that foundation and creating that cultural change across all projects and initiatives is what it takes.

**McKinsey:** *How do you monitor and measure the traction and results you're getting from design thinking?*

**Catherine Courage:** We look at a variety of facets. One is the adoption of design thinking across the company. We haven't made this a mandate. We've made it something that we want people to organically embrace. In fact, it has become a viral movement; our classes and seminars fill immediately. In addition, starting this year, we've made

“design driven” one of our leadership blueprint competencies. Now, every employee needs to describe, at the end of the year, what she or he did to contribute to the customer experience. In other words, everybody in the company needs to be thinking about this and measuring themselves against it.

Another metric is to look at how our products have changed over the past four years. The answer is that we're releasing products that are of better quality, and we're releasing them faster and receiving more customer and industry awards than before. We're also seeing improvements in our customer feedback—customers are noticing and acknowledging our end-user focus.

**McKinsey:** *What metrics should a CIO consider if he or she is embarking on a design-thinking journey?*

**Catherine Courage:** It depends a little on the business that you're in. But the CIO should always be looking at a variety of metrics—ones that come from the customer, as well as internal productivity and efficiency metrics—to understand if you're really making improvements by taking this approach. Benchmarks of customer satisfaction, such as Net Promoter Score, are important. Talking to employees about their satisfaction and productivity is helpful as well. Time to market is also an important component.

**McKinsey:** *Do you have any final thoughts?*

**Catherine Courage:** One additional thing that we've learned along this journey is to not go it alone. There are many companies embracing design thinking today, and even though there is no single blueprint for success, it's been helpful to hear the stories shared in that open community to understand what worked and what didn't work for other companies. We've tried to return that favor by letting companies visit us to understand what Citrix is doing with design thinking. I'm more than happy to do that. I learn just as much from these organizations as they may learn from us. ○

