

Learning to fail with Design Thinking

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Training and continuing education mean very much to us. It is central to the development of each individual, but also of an entire company and beyond. Here at Zühlke, we also put this ideal into practice - for example last week in Manila, capital of the Philippines.

What a week! The first Zühlke Innovation Academy in the Philippines lies now behind us. Our six mentor team was the perfect representation of the various range of specialists working at Zühlke: from business analysts to web developers and finally me as a recruiting specialist. This diversity mix was definitely a magic mix for success. The week required not only huge flexibility, but also a broad range of skills.

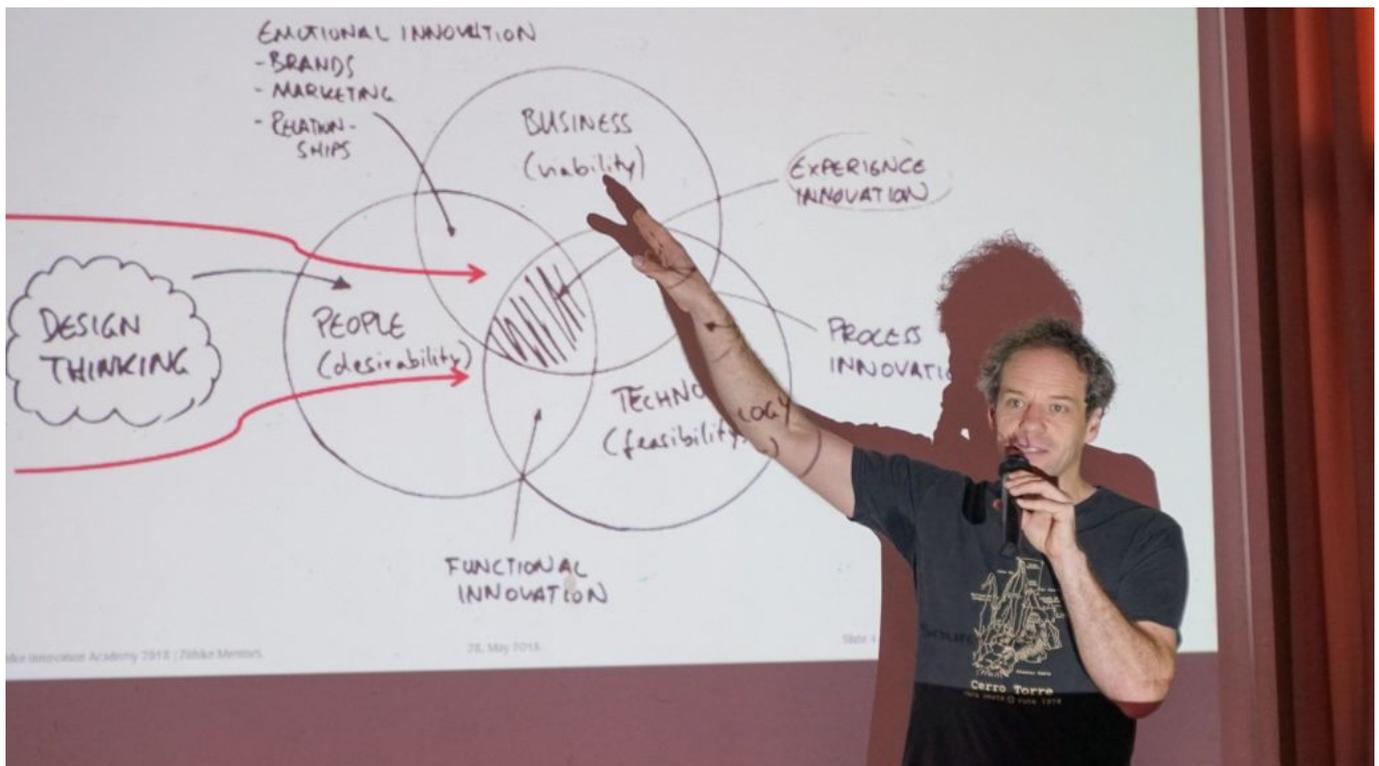
Education for young people

In line with the social commitment of our company, Zühlkians decided to embarked into organizing an Academy week in the Philippines. Since last year, Zühlke and its partner organization [Aiducation International Switzerland](#) have been committed to training young people in Kenya and in the Philippines. In general, we provide students with ongoing education support but also organize the Zühlke Innovation Academy with local participants. The event took place last week in Manila.

Together with Aiducation and their local partner [Pathways to higher education](#), we spent a great amount of time planning a detailed teaching schedule for the week in advance. The 42 participants originated from very disparate backgrounds: ranging from philosophy students to prospective architects. For this reason, we wanted to tailor our agenda to everybody's interest.

Failing forward

During the week we decided to focused on [Design Thinking](#) topics. Our partner enlightened us on the local teaching system: education in Philippine schools is extremely structured in nature and this impacts students' ability to deal with mistakes. According to Zühlke's culture, we see things from the opposite perspective. In fact, we are used to seeing mistakes as an important component in the continuous improvement of a solution - they are part of the innovation process. It is important to recognize mistakes as early as possible and to learn from them.



Design Thinking was the focus of Aiducation Week. (Zühlke)

The design-thinking process generally forces individuals to constantly improve themselves: You generate new ideas, reject them again, deepen ideas, create prototypes, improve solutions, reject them again and constantly gather feedback through tests. We applied the the process to familiarize students with the fail forward concept: making mistakes, learning from them and subsequently “failing better”.

Learning to criticize

We agreed on a mindset of continuously challenging each other from day one of the course. The coffee table, which was initially reserved for mentors, quickly turned into a coffee table for everyone. We restructured the seating plan on the first day and asked the students to set it up themselves allowing for optimized communication. It soon became evident how participants were unfamiliar with critical discussion as we know them.



The mentors of the Zühlke Innovation Academy. (Aiducation International)

At the beginning, the majority of students refrained from expressing own opinions or to critically question others' ideas, because they were afraid to offend them. This is why we started the "Steve Jobs roll" on the second day. It required owners to scrutinize ideas, inputs and statements of team members. By virtue of this ploy, we were able to show participants how discussions led to better results.

One of my personal highlights is the retrospective on the fourth day: The post-it "Challenging each others" on our inspiration wall found its way under the umbrella concept "Keep doing". After a couple days, the students reported they were discussing much more frequently within their teams. They also realized how this was not a personal attack, but a solution to tasks itself.

Karaoke and Fondue

Throughout our days at the camp, we also had various input sessions on topics such as global citizenship, global trends or cross-cultural skills to show students the importance of global skills and international relations.

We spent our evenings getting to know each other on a personal level through common activities. We organized a Philippine evening with a dance group and spent several hours singing karaoke. It quickly became clear to us: Philipinos sing everywhere, at any time, with full devotion. We gave our best performing "W.Nuss vo Bümpliz" and "99 balloons".



A week in the Philippines would not be complete without an evening of local folklore. (Zühlke)

We also hosted a Swiss-themed evening. We presented locals with insights into our culture and played “Lueged nöd ume, dä Fuchs gaht ume”. To everyone’s surprise, we were able to find Emmi’s fondue cheese for dinner – the students loved it!



On the Swiss evening there was fondue for everyone – even if the temperatures were not right. (Zühlke)

Farewell tears

The other mentors and me are still amazed by how quickly our students internalized our course's takeaways. This outcome has been the goal and biggest accomplishment of the whole initiative. I have never experienced such a committed pursuit of top performance and positivity anywhere else.



In just a few days, thanks to Design Thinking, highly developed prototypes were created. (Zühlke)

The open and warm-hearted culture we have encountered surely facilitated the whole process and made it a pleasure for us to teach students day after day. To our greatest surprise, our students had planned a surprise farewell evening. They showed their appreciation with personal thank you cards and other gifts. All in all, the evening was incredibly moving. Who would have thought that after just one week of class we would have all been shedding tears when saying goodbye?

We are extremely satisfied with the accomplishments achieved during this Academy week. We have clearly shown students the benefits of critical thinking raising their mistake acceptance. Furthermore, all of us have significantly sharpened awareness of cultural differences. It goes without saying, that we are pleased to further deepen such commitment in cooperation with "Aiducation International Switzerland".

We look forward to further knowledge exchange occasions with more ambitious young talents across cultural borders!