EFFICIENCY UNLEASHED

How to master the art of doing more with less

ALLEN + CLARKE

When you're asked to do more with less, you need to do more than balance the numbers.

Delivering better outcomes at reduced costs requires clever and sustainable approaches that avoid unintended consequences.

Financial scrutiny can be a positive lever for change, but it can also create an uncertain environment for your team and can risk your impact and effectiveness. Many organisations are being asked to do more with less, but it can be difficult to effectively optimise when you do not have a clear grasp on your business's goals, values, and spending.

This guide contains our top tips for making strategic decisions that enhance productivity and increase your impact whilst reducing costs.

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Understanding the challenge

A clear understanding of the challenge at hand is critical to finding ways to increase efficiencies in that space. Often, we assume we already know what the challenge is and jump straight to solutions. However, a solution is only as good as the problem it is aimed at, and an unclear or poorly defined challenge does not position you to create an effective and targeted solution.

A design thinking approach can be a useful way to tackle your challenge. It is well worthwhile to invest time at the beginning of your process to clearly define your challenge and what you aim to achieve.

A basic tenet of design thinking is that the people best placed to solve a problem are those experiencing it first-hand; thus, inviting stakeholders with lived experience to help you define the challenge ensures you create a holistic and accurate definition of the challenge you are trying to solve.

Additionally, framing the issue you are facing as a challenge instead of a problem invites open-mindedness and innovation when brainstorming solutions. This frame of reference helps maintain a neutral point of view, which is essential at the early stages of defining your challenge. This frame also acknowledges that while your solution is primarily being implemented to solve a problem, it can illuminate other opportunities and invite improvements beyond the scope of the initial challenge.

For a better understanding of how to implement design thinking, watch our Design Thinking Webinar

Click here to see the video
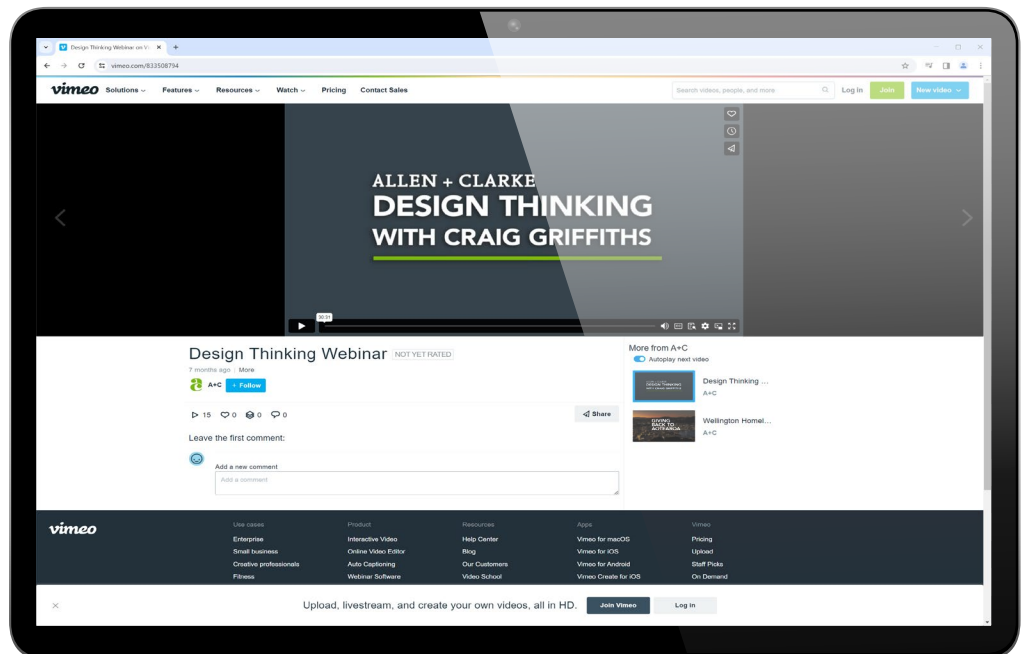
Implementing solutions under time pressure

Tight timeframes don't mean compromising on thorough solutions. The key to implementing successful solutions under hard deadlines is being strategic in your approach. For example, a national-scale problem may demand consultation with 50 people across the country, but timeframes and budgets only allow consultation with 20. Despite these limitations, the same diversity of perspectives can be achieved with a strategic consultation process that targets stakeholders from a wide variety of backgrounds and demographics to paint a holistic picture. Being intentional with selecting your stakeholders allows fruitful results whilst saving time, resources, and money.

Close-mindedness and bias are the assassins of innovation. Gathering insights from stakeholders is useless if you are wedded to a particular approach or have a predetermined outcome in mind, limiting ideas and approaches to solutions. Remaining open-minded involves continually challenging your assumptions. Ask yourself whether your assumptions are based on opinion or experience, and whether circumstances have changed since you first developed your assumptions that now make them irrelevant or unreliable; consider how these factors impact the challenge you are facing now. Deferring your judgement and not shutting down ideas immediately allows for innovation and positively impacts your engagement with stakeholders.

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Understanding your purpose, impact, and business

Once you have clearly defined your challenge, the next step to driving efficiencies is a clear understanding of your business and its purpose. Refining your purpose requires interrogating who you are as a business and what you aim to deliver, and how these aims are reflected in the reality of the services you offer.

Money is often perceived as the main reason behind the inability or failure to deliver a work programme. By understanding and analysing your business, you can start to unlock opportunities which may help you realise money is not the issue and that you can work within your current budget.

This analysis can be achieved through asking the following questions:

- **Do you understand** what is driving the work of your business?
- **Do you understand** the dependencies between the work?
- **What is the value** your customers want from your business?
- **Do you understand** the costs of your activities?

It can also be useful to ask your clients what they want and need from you, and whether what you are providing meets their expectations.

Prioritisation

Prioritisation can be difficult if you do not understand your business, costs, and where you are heading and why. However, these factors are the foundation for any prioritisation discussion.

There are many prioritisation tools that can be used to help support the prioritisation conversation and consider options for trade-offs.

Exercises in prioritisation allow your business to make effective trade-offs that increase efficiencies without compromising on your core services

The 'MoSCoW' framework is one tool that can help you examine your activities:

- *Must do* – At the highest level, a 'must do' is only what your business needs to do to survive – these are the activities that are necessary for your business to meet its legislative requirements and continue to operate.

- *Should do* – 'Should do' priorities are those that are important but not necessary to the survival of the business.

- *Could do* – 'Could do' priorities are those that are desirable but not necessary.

- *Won't do* – 'Won't do' are the lowest-priority activities. They add no value to the business or customers, and some may consider these activities as 'wasteful', such as rework.

In an ideal world, your business would be able to implement all its priorities. However, timeframes and budgets mean it is impossible to do everything, which is why exercises in prioritisation allow your business to make effective trade-offs that increase efficiencies without compromising on your core services.

Practical improvements

Implementation of improvements is often easier said than done, and this is made more difficult by the inherently complex and dynamic nature of a business. If just one wheel in the mechanism is broken, it drags down the whole machine. Thus, it is important for everyone in the business to be on the same page and understand what changes need to be made. This is critical to preventing fatigue and maintaining enthusiasm and engagement.

Continuous improvement (CI) is an often-undervalued approach, and there is more opportunity for CI in a business than you may initially think. You may find that your organisation is working in silos, or that there may be opportunities from frontline staff that haven't been captured; but simply creating the space to explore and question facilitates the discovery of areas for improvement.

Top Tips

1 Create space to understand the challenge.

Take the time to thoroughly reflect and define your challenge and your intended outcomes – it pays off.

2 Maintain a curious mindset.

Frame the issue you are dealing with as a challenge and opportunity, rather than a problem, and be open-minded when it comes to brainstorming solutions.

3 Understand your work.

Understanding your business and its operations is essential for both understanding the challenge and potential areas of opportunity.

4 Effectively prioritise what you will do and won't do.

Use frameworks to support trade off conversations, such as the MoSCoW tool, to distinguish what services/products/activities are essential and where you should and can be directing your efforts to provide maximum value.

5 Remember the power of people.

The people in a business are a valuable source of insight to identify opportunities to be more efficient, and they are the ones who will help implement any improvements. Developing mechanisms for feedback and considering how to effectively engage others will pave the way for developing a culture of continuous improvement.

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