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How Infosys is switching to 'design thinking'

Sikka's new plan for disruptive innovations slowly takes root

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Barely a month after Infosys CEO Vishal Sikka exposed the entire Infosys leadership team to design thinking at his alma mater, Stanford's d.school: institute of design, one of the members of his top leadership team has already reached out to a Bangalore-headquartered design and consulting firm.

According to an industry source, Sanjay Rajagopalan, who quit SAP AG where he was head of design and special projects, to join Sikka and lead product strategy at Infosys, called up the design firm from Frankfurt a few days ago, asking if they could help introduce design thinking to Infoscions. Rajagopalan was a part of Sikka's core team at SAP, where Sikka was CTO before he took over as CEO at Infosys.

Disruptive innovation

Design thinking is the new buzzword, which organisations across the world are increasingly adopting to create disruptive innovations that change the way their customers do business in a rapidly changing business environment. It involves a process of investigating, innovating and implementing, wherein ideas are taken from the mind to the market with skill, speed and imagination.

Sikka is keen on "embracing and practising design thinking and innovation" to help Infosys clients "transform themselves and be relevant in the times to come", as he said in his personal blog on September 1, 2014.

According to industry veteran Anil Sondur, Vice-President and head of the industrial design division at Tata Elxsi, there are two major components that go into design thinking – consumer insights and ergonomics. "We collect deep consumer insights that go beyond standard market research and combine it with the way they use those products (ergonomics) to create new products and solutions, and provide it at a cost acceptable to the customer."

To let design thinking permeate down to each employee, he pointed out that Infosys must create an internal incubation setup to run design thinking programmes where designers must work together with employees from across business units. When they are successful in doing it, then those employees can go back to their own business units and run it there.

Concurring with Sondur, Sonia Manchanda, co-founder and principal designer of the Bangalore-based Idiom Design and Consulting, said, "Design thinking starts from the consumer. It is a human-centred method to create a product, process or system that again is meaningful, valuable and creates a big impact in their lives."

Delivering value

She said large organisations like Infosys must build design competencies in their employees, which includes imagination, curiosity, empathy, focus and discipline and a shift from mechanically delivering solutions to creating solutions that deliver new value to their customers.

"Design thinking is more philosophy than strategy. As customers expand and move into newer areas of technology, they will look to IT services providers to deliver much more innovative, agile and speedier solutions so that they can serve both their internal stakeholders and their end customers.

Design thinking and innovation will bring in freshness and will help Infosys differentiate itself in the marketplace" said Arup Roy, Research Director, Gartner.

New strategy

For Infosys, there will be a new way of style too. Unlike the usual 60-minute call with financial analysts, this time around, on October 10 when the second quarter results will be announced, Sikka will spend an extra 30 minutes explaining Infosys' new strategy. The IT major is also holding a one-and-a-half day meet in Orlando on November 4 for IT analysts.